

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 19 • Issue 1

IT'S ABOUT TIME

Full days

Choosing Less

Lesson from Tanzania

Achieving My Dreams

Make a plan.
Get results.





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SOMETHING NEW

Goodbye 2017 and hello 2018! Another year is behind us, and a brand-new year, brimming with possibilities, lies ahead. If last year was a difficult one, we may be glad to see the end of it, but there are probably many who are peering into the new year with lack of confidence, trepidation, and even worry.

Maybe we can't see the way ahead clearly—or we're unsure if our path is even leading anywhere—but as we press forward, we may very well discover that God has gone ahead and already prepared the way. Feel the anticipation in God's voice in this passage from Isaiah: "Forget what happened long ago! Don't think about the past. I am creating something new. There it is! Do you see it? I have put roads in deserts, streams in thirsty lands."¹

It's impossible to drive life's road without sometimes hitting bumps of regrets, disappointments, and tragedies, and when we do, it's easy to get stuck. But God wants each of us to move on toward the future He has planned. It's a future filled with hope²—but to get there, we have to be bold and take steps forward, keeping our eyes on Jesus, "who leads us and makes our faith complete."³

From all of us at *Activated*, may God bless you and may the coming year be your happiest and best yet.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Isaiah 43:18–19 CEV
2. See Jeremiah 29:11.
3. Hebrews 12:2 CEV

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BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

THE GOODBYE SONG

NOT LONG AGO, I worked as a receptionist in a museum. Every day, about five minutes before closing time, the sound system would play a slow, romantic song over the museum's loudspeakers. It was a signal for us employees to gather our things, turn off lights and screens, shut down exhibits, and make our way home. The lyrics were in a foreign language, but there was one English sentence in the chorus: "Let go, let go, it's time to say goodbye."

I called that song "the goodbye song," because hearing it was the signal that I could say goodbye to my work, to the colleagues I liked and the ones I didn't, to the visitors who had appreciated me and the ones who hadn't. As I'd leave the museum with "Let go, let go, it's time to say goodbye" still ringing in my ears, it

felt easy to just relax my shoulders, smile, and proceed with the rest of the evening.

When it came time for me to exchange my job at the museum for one in a completely different field, I struggled with the process of tearing myself away from a job that I loved and had invested so much time and energy into. I was wary of quitting my routine and throwing myself into another volatile mix of new surroundings, new personalities, and new challenges.

On my last day of work at the museum, I was a bit gloomy when hearing the "goodbye song." The song that had once brought peace and calm to my weary heart was now hitting my inner sore spot, as I mentally added it to my list of things I would miss from this workplace. I knew

that a better work environment and better opportunities for development and growth were waiting for me at my new job, but those facts were hardly a consolation at the moment, when all I could think of was how much I hated saying goodbye.

As I commuted home from work, it came to me that just as the "goodbye song" had once helped me to put my work behind me at the end of the workday, so now the song's calm, graceful spirit could help me to look back with thankfulness and forward with courage. God was making a way for me in the unfamiliar wilderness, and good things would happen if I could follow with a trusting heart.

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

Personal growth

POINTS TO PONDER



ALL OF US WHO HAVE HAD THAT VEIL removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.

—2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

Did Christ finish his work *for* us? Then there can be no doubt but he will also finish his work *in* us.—*John Flavel* (c.1627–1691)

I have a great need for Christ; I have a great Christ for my need.—*Charles Spurgeon* (1834–1892)

Give yourself to God without reserve; in singleness of heart, meeting everything that every day brings forth, as something that comes from God, and is to be received and gone through by you. This is an attainable degree of perfection.—*William Law* (1686–1761)

It is right to be contented with what we have, but never with what we are.—*Sir James Mackintosh* (1765–1832)

Ideals are like the stars—we never reach them, but like the mariners of the sea, we chart our course by them.—*Carl Schurz* (1829–1906)

The acknowledgment of our weakness is the first step toward repairing our loss.—*Thomas à Kempis* (c. 1380–1471)

We shall never come to the perfect man till we come to the perfect world.—*Matthew Henry* (1662–1714)

One must not always think so much about what one should do, but rather what one should be. Our works do not ennoble us; but we must ennoble our works.—*Meister Eckhart* (c. 1260–c. 1328)

I am not what I might be, I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I wish to be, I am not what I hope to be; but I thank God I am not what I once was, and I can say with the great apostle, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”—*John Newton* (1725–1807)

The strongest principle of growth lives in human choice.—*George Eliot* (1819–1880)

Let’s learn to grow up before we grow old.—*John Wimber* (1934–1997)

Growing spiritually can be like a roller coaster ride. Take comfort in the knowledge that the way down is only preparation for the way up.—*Rebbe Nachman* (1772–1811)

Sow a thought and you reap an action; sow an action and you reap a habit; sow a habit and you reap a character; sow a character and you reap a destiny.—*Author unknown*

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—2 Peter 3:18

Have courage for the great sorrows of life, and patience for the small ones. And when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake.—*Victor Hugo* (1802–1885) ■

THE MOST WE CAN DO

BY ROSANE PEREIRA



IN MY TURN-OF-THE YEAR CLEANUP, I found an old yearbook. I smiled as I read down the very long list of my resolutions for that year. I guess I had high expectations of myself!

This past year, I decided to make only three resolutions: Be more loving and encouraging, finish a major writing project I was working on and start a new one, and keep a prayer list.

To be loving and to finish projects are ongoing goals to strive for, but the decision to keep a prayer list has been a milestone. The first day I wrote all the things that were weighing on my heart. The next morning, I realized I had forgotten to include several of my relatives, and the following day, I remembered some other situations that needed prayer.

As time went on, I began adding pending events, like a driving license

renewal or a medical checkup, as well as specific requests for family, friends, and associates—all people who needed healing or comfort or better jobs or stronger faith, and on it went.

Following through with this resolution hasn't turned out to be as difficult as I anticipated. As soon as I wake up, I pick up my list and pray a few words for each point. I write new ones that come to mind and cross out the ones that have been answered. It takes less than ten minutes.

It reminds me of a poster I gave to a friend with the words: "Prayer is not the least we can do, but the most." She tacked it to the clipboard just outside her office. Every time I visit her, there it is, speaking to me.

I have always been an active person, and prayer has never been one of my strong points, but as time passes, I realize more than ever how powerful it is. When we pray, rather

than putting unrealistic expectations on ourselves, we're drawing from the greatest power there is, one that can transform lives, solve problems, and help us see things in a new light.

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

Prayer is the most powerful form of energy that one can generate. ... Only in prayer do we achieve that complete harmonious assembly of mind, body and spirit which gives the frail human need its unshakable strength. When we pray we link ourselves with the inexhaustible motive that spins the universe.
—Dr. Alexis Carrel (1873–1944)

How to grow spiritually in the new year



ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Q Many of my friends are making resolutions for the new year, most of which involve some physical change such as losing weight or breaking a bad habit. While those are good, I would like to resolve to grow in my spiritual life this coming year. Do you have any suggestions as to how I can accomplish that?

A From God's perspective, we're all a work in progress. He wants to see us make as much progress as we can and will help us as much as we let Him. "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."¹ Here are five ways to grow and mature spiritually:

1. Involve God in the decision-making process. From the time we are small children, we learn through parental instruction. Just so, we grow spiritually as we learn to follow God's instruction, as we turn to Him in prayer and apply the spiritual principles in His Word to our decisions.

1. Jeremiah 29:11 NIV
2. Proverbs 11:24–25 NLT
3. Romans 3:23

2. Exercise faith. Just as we learn through experience, through suffering the consequences of wrong decisions and reaping the rewards of right decisions, we grow spiritually as our faith is put to the test and we see that it is the solution to life's problems.

3. Give of yourself. As we focus on meeting the needs of others and making them happy, we become conduits of God's love. And as we pour out, God pours into us. "Give freely and become more wealthy; be stingy and lose everything. The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed."²

4. Recognize and work on weak areas. We all have room for improvement. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."³ It's humbling to acknowledge our weaknesses, even if only to ourselves and God. But if we can do so and show ourselves open to advice, reminders, and prayers, we find ourselves on the fast track to spiritual progress.

5. Take on new challenges. When we close ourselves off to new information and ideas, we stop growing intellectually. When we close ourselves off from other people, we stop growing emotionally. But when we close ourselves off to new challenges, we stop growing intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. We only make progress by moving forward and rising to new challenges. ■



BRIGHTER TOMORROWS

BY IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ

WHAT DOES ONE DO WHEN THEIR HOPES AND DREAMS GET SHATTERED? What should one do to move forward from disappointment on to new hopes?

These were the questions I asked myself when I heard about a disappointing setback. A friend of mine and her family were going to team up with us on some of our volunteer projects. I was very much looking forward to it, but in the end, much to my dismay, it didn't work out.

When I heard the news, a quote popped into my mind: "The future is as bright as the promises of God." That sounded nice, but what promises? I was reminded of several Bible

verses: "All things work together for good to those who love God."¹ "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."² "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."³ "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.'"⁴

As I started pondering each of these verses, new hope flooded my soul. My mind went from an array of dark gray tones to a bright and fully colored vivid image: this situation isn't the end of the road, neither for me, nor for them. God knows the big picture, and He has something wonderful in store for all.

True, the development was disappointing for me. But when I filtered it through God's promises, I was able to see a completely fresh new leaf turning for my friend and

her family—a page full of new and awesome possibilities. Excitement started welling up inside me and I couldn't wait to hear of the wonderful opportunities that would open up for them.

This incident taught me that if we allow disappointment to cloud our eyes, our outlook becomes bleak, and it is difficult to see the future with faith and confidence. But if we let the rays of God's promises shine into our minds, they create a light show that turns every shadow inside out. New hope starts forming, creating a positive blueprint for the future. Our positive, hopeful outlook enables us to see possibilities, and we can step out with confidence into brighter tomorrows.

IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER FOR PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE⁵ IN CROATIA AND ITALY. ■

1. Romans 8:28

2. Proverbs 3:5–6 NLT

3. John 14:18 KJV

4. Isaiah 30:21

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



BY TINA KAPP

IT'S ABOUT TIME

IMAGINE IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME and relive any moment in your life. What decisions would you make differently? What specific moments would you enjoy again? With whom would you spend more time?

I recently watched a movie called *About Time*,¹ where the men of a certain family had the ability to go back in time to correct mistakes or replay moments in their lives. I'm sure at times all of us wish we could have this ability. We could right any wrongs, change unwise decisions, or take our proverbial foot out of our mouth when we had said or done something awkward. We could also learn more about interesting people

and topics and have multiple tries to find out what works and what doesn't.

Unfortunately, we only get one chance to live through each day, and sometimes we forget how priceless each day is. We allow the daily problems and stress to crowd out the wonderful blessings we have—friendships, family, experiences, and the fact that we're creating memories we can keep forever.

Often, what we value is a matter of perspective. Lake Victoria in Uganda is a big, beautiful freshwater lake that flows into the Nile River. My family, friends, and I have gone swimming, boating, and jet skiing there. Since water in Uganda is abundant, the soil is very rich, and fruit and vegetables grow wild. Some friends of ours were from Libya, where petrol costs less than water. They said that if you drove a scooter in Libya, you

could fill up for free, as payment for such a small amount of petrol wasn't even worth the paper and ink for the receipt. However, a supply of fresh water like Lake Victoria astounded them. To them, water was worth far more than petrol!

They wondered why Uganda wasn't a richer country with massive agricultural exports in place. The fact is, Ugandans have all they need and aren't all that motivated to find ways to grow even more for exportation. They don't even need to stock food for a long winter, as they enjoy summer weather all year round.

We often don't appreciate something when it's always available or when we have an abundance of it. For many of us, things like electricity or running water can be so common that it's hard to imagine spending even a few hours without it, much less longer!

1. Richard Curtis, Universal Pictures, 2013

2. See Luke 12:13–21.



Teach us to use wisely all the time we have.
—*Psalm 90:12 CEV*

This reflection made me think about time. It's something you don't really appreciate until you don't have any. It's when work or life crowd our schedule, or when sickness or accidents threaten to take our life away completely that we finally pay attention to how precious our time here is.

In *About Time*, the father advises his son to live every day twice. He suggests that he live it the first time with all the tension and worries that stop him from noticing how sweet the world could be, and the second time taking time to stop and notice—to love the people around him and enjoy all the beautiful things.

Of course, we don't have the luxury of traveling back in time, but we can live each day the first time around as if we had chosen to

come back and make note of all the wonderful things in it.

I don't know who originally came up with the following analogy, but it's a great reminder of how valuable our time on earth is. Suppose your bank account was credited \$86,400 every day, but with the catch that you couldn't save any of this money. Every evening, the bank would cancel whatever part of that amount you had failed to use during the day.

The fact of the matter is that every morning, we're credited with 86,400 seconds, 1,440 minutes, or 24 hours. Every night, the bank of time writes off as lost whatever time you failed to invest. It carries no balances. It allows no overdrafts. Each day, the bank of time opens a new account with you, and each night, it burns up the records of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposit, you must take the loss.

You might think: *I'll take 86,400 in currency rather than in seconds, please.* But how valuable do you think that money would be if you've got no time to spend it?

Jesus told a short story about a rich fool who stored up all his wealth in barns, and when they couldn't hold any more, he decided to build bigger barns to keep it all for himself. It so happened that he died that very night and realized he couldn't take anything with him!²

As Mother Teresa said, "Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."

TINA KAPP IS A DANCER, PRESENTER, AND FREELANCE WRITER IN SOUTH AFRICA. SHE RUNS AN ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY THAT HELPS RAISE FUNDS FOR CHARITY AND MISSIONARY PROJECTS. ■

BY MAG RAYNE

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE DAYS when anything could make me angry. I was sad, irritable, made a big deal out of small inconveniences, and couldn't stop thinking of negative outcomes or repercussions. But the day had to go on regardless. I had work to do, deadlines to meet, and part of my job was meeting with people and being the one to brighten their day. Ever been in this kind of predicament?

That's when I decided that something in my attitude had to change. I remembered watching Joseph Grenny on YouTube¹ take the viewers on a trip through the worst slums of

Nairobi, where young girls are forced into prostitution in their struggle to survive. He goes on to explain how a successful charity manages to turn their lives around.

He lists six major influences on our psyche and behavior: personal motivation (make the undesirable desirable), personal ability or skill (surpass your limits), social motivation (harness peer pressure), social ability (find strength in numbers), structural motivation (design rewards and demand accountability), and structural ability (change the environment).²

The charity in Kenya uses all those sources of influence to help change the lives of countless women in the slums. Reflecting on the talk, I decided that, besides applying those principles in my line of work (also connected to charity and influencing people in a positive way), I could

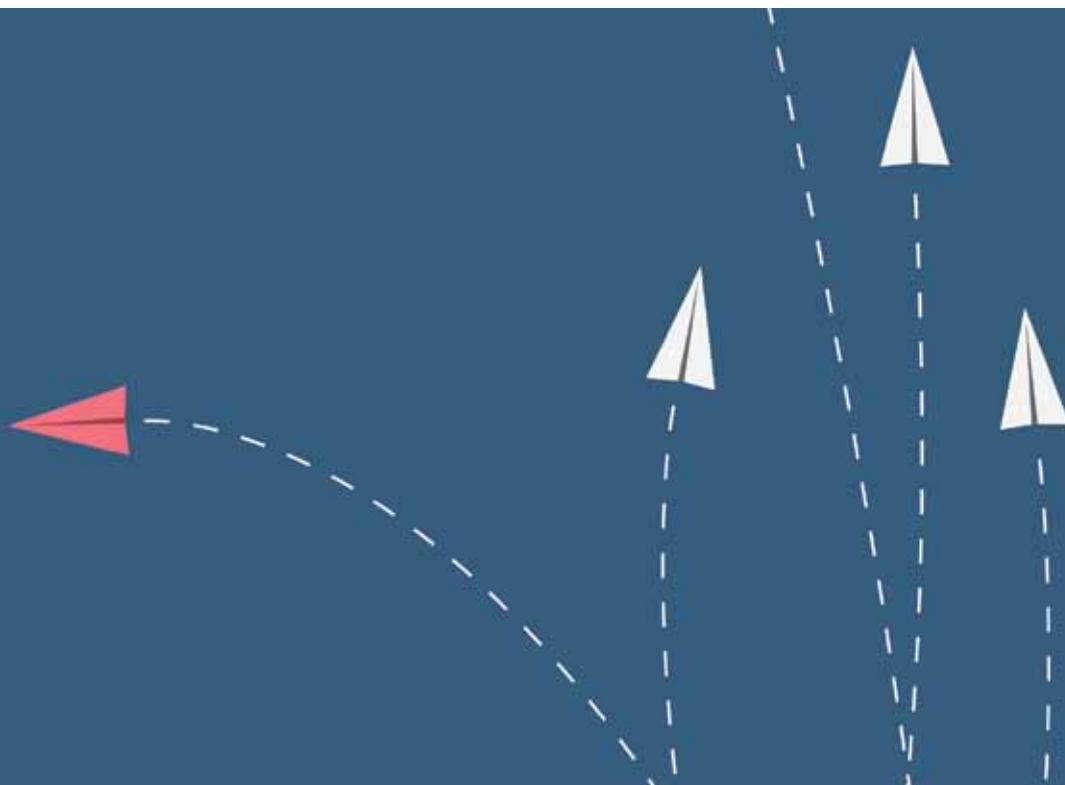
apply them to myself and my own quest for a change of attitude.

I was tired of my negative mindset, so the motivation was there.

Now for the skill. I discovered that throwing myself into an absorbing activity—like helping or listening to someone, working on a creative project, or writing a thankfulness journal—had the power to dissipate the momentary negative and heavy-hearted feelings and clear up the clouds in my mind. For example, on Christmas Day, instead of sinking into the depths of thinking about what I didn't have, I volunteered at a local homeless shelter. I ended up meeting and listening to people from five different nations with colorful backgrounds and heart-wrenching stories. It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that this was the most fulfilling Christmas Day for me in the past ten years.

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T9TYz5UxI0>

2. To read more on the six sources of influence, see <http://sourcesofinsight.com/six-sources-of-influence>.



Next I needed some social support and motivation. At the time, there was no one in my life with whom I could share my change program and no support group available. But Jesus is always there for me, to listen to me and support me in my endeavors. So I decided that my daily communication with Him would give me the necessary encouragement until the time that He provides people in my life to fill that need.

The next source of influence was an extra incentive. What could I do on that score? I decided that once a week, if it was a good one, considering the needed changes and if I felt that I was living up to those changes, I would reward myself by doing something I liked—an extra outing or dessert, some time spent in a favorite activity, etc.

The last source of influence was my physical surroundings. I'm quite an avid reader and often find memorable quotes in the inspirational books I read. So I hung a heart-shaped blackboard on the wall, got some chalk, and started writing quotes on it. I'd erase each quote after I'd memorized it to free up space for a new one. I also made a "wall of doodles" where I hung more motivational quotes, photos, or loving notes from friends which had motivational power of their own.

So there were my six sources of influence! Now I was testing the method and would soon find out if anything was going to change. It's been an adventurous and rewarding journey, as I work on recreating myself and changing some of the habits I have acquired in over thirty years of life. There have been

skirmishes and even occasional dips into my old melancholy; nevertheless, the direction of change has been generally forward.

In a recent personal trainer course I took, I learned that even following a diet 60–70% of the time is usually successful, because we, as imperfect beings, will never be 100% the way we want to be; but if we persist and don't give up, we usually get to our destination, even if it takes longer than the time we'd originally planned for the journey.

I'm convinced that there is barely anything that we can't change for the better, whether in our surroundings or our attitudes, with a little determination, some skill, and God's help!

MAG RAYNE RUNS A VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATION IN CROATIA. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

CHOOSING LESS

MY HUSBAND AND I SPENT A YEAR IN A SMALL TOWN IN TANZANIA. When I say a “small town,” I mean a town with two stoplights, no supermarket, no restaurants to speak of, only one two-story building, and no entertainment! We lived in a simple house with only the most basic furnishings and conveniences.

Our move to Tanzania was motivated by an opportunity to join a fledgling humanitarian effort striving to better the lives of disabled people by giving them mobility and helping them be independent and earn a living. In the two years leading up to our move, we got married, had a child, and spent months fundraising to make our project a reality, or a semi-reality.

On the first night in our new “hometown,” there was a power

cut. These are very common in rural Africa and can last anywhere from minutes to days. This one lasted a few hours and was an introduction to the fact that nothing was going to happen on our timetable. We could push as hard as we wanted, but we weren’t going to have much success against the facts of life on the ground.

So for the first time in years, we slowed down. We adopted a new pace for life that involved such things as daily walks to the market, hanging laundry, and cloth diapers. We adapted to not having any internet, TV or movies, “urgent” emails, time-sensitive meetings, or vehicle to rush to places with. Our lives had no emergencies. Even if we felt like we had an emergency, we couldn’t move anything faster than the pace it was going to move at.

It was terribly frustrating at first! Every step of every process was so slow! And in the end, as much as I wanted to change the modus operandi of the town, what really changed was me. My life slowed enough that I found myself appreciating the bright blue sky and the open red earth that stretched out all around us. I began to make friends with the cheerful villagers. I stopped missing movies and the internet. I learned to enjoy very simple food and clothing, and an uncluttered lifestyle.

The biggest change that year brought about was in my marriage. Our busyness was no longer an issue, and our lives slowed down enough that we got to really know each other. Often in the evenings, there was nothing to do but spend quality time together. We would sit in the dark



The secret of happiness, you see, is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less.—*Socrates (d. 399 BC)*

Be content with what you have; rejoice in the way things are. When you realize there is nothing lacking, the whole world belongs to you.—*Lao Tzu (d. 531 BC)*

The system of consumerism may seem like an immovable fact of modern life. But it is not. That the system was manufactured suggests that we can reshape those forces to create a healthier, more sustainable system with a more fulfilling goal than “more stuff.”—*Rachel Botsman (b. 1978)*

Our souls are not hungry for fame, comfort, wealth, or power. Our souls are hungry for meaning, for the sense that we have figured out how to live so that our lives matter.—*Harold Kushner (b. 1935)*

(because the mosquitoes would flood our room if we had the lights on) and ask each other questions about hopes, dreams, likes, wants, wishes, and fears. Without the distraction of modern life, our relationship as followers of Christ, friends, and lovers grew stronger every day.

Back in the USA, we have many reasons to rush and regular

emergencies. We have the amenities—supermarkets, restaurants, the internet, paved roads, and modern medicine—and the struggles—no time to be still, and a life that moves too fast to really connect with people.

I often catch myself thinking back wistfully on my year in Tanzania. I treasure those memories of peace, connection, and simple pleasures. To


this day, I find myself reaching for the simpler life because of that experience.

We tend to feel the pressure to start each new year with the commitment to be more or do more or get more—more stuff, more rush, more spending, more earning. But my heart and soul thrive on more connection, more stillness, more joy.

My prayer, as the new year begins, is for the courage to push back on the rushing and the accumulating—to give my soul time to connect with God and others, my body time to rest and recharge, and my mind time to grow and enjoy.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■





The only limits to the possibilities in your life tomorrow are the “buts” you use today.—Les Brown (b. 1945)

BY CHALSEY DOOLEY

ACHIEVING MY DREAMS

WHEN I STARTED MAPPING OUT MY GOALS FIVE YEARS AGO, achieving them seemed daunting. But I claimed the promise, “Faithful is he [God] that calleth you, who also will do it,”¹ and with His help, I went forward. My plan was to write and create thousands of pages of good-quality faith-building books for children.

Here are the difficulties I was facing:

- Caring full time for my young children with special needs meant I hardly had any time to call my own
- Lack of professional training
- No relatives living nearby for hands-on help
- Health-related challenges
- Limited resources

I did have some assets, however:

- Equipment: a laptop and Internet connection, a dictaphone, and a camera
- A supportive husband

- Children with an endless craving for new stories
- Friends who supported my project and who helped all they could by writing, proofreading, or contributing art and photography

I came up with the following methods for tackling the job:

- Prayer and more prayer, and enlisting the prayer support of others (When I pray, things happen. When I don’t, and instead think progress will happen naturally, things come to a standstill.)
Thomas Edison once credited his success to “not looking at the clock.” Whenever there was a moment to spare—even just a couple of minutes—I jumped in and got working, regardless of my mood or the time of day or night.
- Visualizing the end goal and being convinced that it could be achieved
- Learning as I went, by considering the observations, concerns, and suggestions given by my children, reviewers, professionals, old-time friends, and even people I had

never met in person but who had gotten in touch online

- Keeping my focus
- Staying positive and content, finding the opportunities that await me, discovering something new each day
- Not setting hard plans, because those tended to fall through, but letting Jesus lead me each step

Outcome:

Over 1,200 files (many thousands of pages) of new books for all ages, illustrated stories, posters, educational material, and more, are completed and available on my website. The dream of having a wealth of refreshing input and inspiring learning aids at people’s fingertips is a reality—and one that is enhanced each day.

CHALSEY DOOLEY IS A WRITER OF INSPIRATIONAL MATERIAL FOR CHILDREN AND CAREGIVERS AND A FULL-TIME EDU-MOM LIVING IN AUSTRALIA. CHECK OUT HER WEBSITE AT WWW.NURTURE-INSPIRE-TEACH.COM TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT HER BOOKS. ■

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:24 KJV



BY ANNA PERLINI

A YEARLY APPOINTMENT

ONE DAY ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, my father invited his five children, married and parents themselves, to accompany him and my mother to the Holy Land. He was already 85 and hadn't been traveling or flying for quite a few years. Up to that point, I think he had been feeling old and a bit worried and fearful and had sort of closed that chapter of his life. But that day something happened, the result of a combination of his desire to visit again the places his beloved Jesus had grown up in and his eagerness to take a trip with his family, something we hadn't done since we had all been pretty young.

It didn't take much for all of us to say yes! In the months preceding the trip, the seven of us met a few times to prepare and work out the schedule and details. My father researched and

came up with a personalized guide book that covered the nine days we would spend in Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Everyone was assigned responsibilities: my father was "the patriarch," my mom was the nurse and vitamins dispenser, one of my brothers kept a diary, another one took care of practical aspects, one of my sisters was the treasurer, and the other helped with the historical background. Because of my knowledge of English, I was assigned interpreting duties.

There was much trepidation and expectation up to the morning we boarded the plane, and the nine days we spent were magical, an unforgettable experience of great sights, unexpected adventures, long, deep talks, and lots of fun. We haven't always been a lovey-dovey blissful family, but with age have come wisdom and empathy. We were able

to talk about the past with affection and tenderness, and a touch of humor. We came back enriched by this experience and definitely more united.

Since then, we've been taking a trip together as a family every year—not as long or involved as the first one, but each one unique. No matter how busy our year is, we all know it's one of our most important appointments.

Now my own children are looking forward to the day my husband and I will take them on a trip of this kind, and others of our relatives and circle of friends have begun doing this as well.

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



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

CROSSROADS

Crossroads are a wonderful place to be because you have so many options. You can go forward, return the way you came, or go in a new direction.

I use the crossroads of life to help some people come to terms with mistakes or wrong turns they've made and give them a chance to get going in the right direction. For others, it's a chance to go in a new direction that may take them farther in the long run. For yet others, it's a time to confirm that they're going in the right direction, so they can continue with the vigor that renewed conviction brings. Whatever the case, whenever someone comes to a crossroads, it's an opportunity, and if they ask Me which way they should go, I can guide them.

Maybe the new direction will be something you've never done before. It might even be something you're afraid to do. Or it could be the same thing that you've done for years. Whichever road I guide you

to take I will also equip you for. As you take a step in the direction I'm leading you, I will supply what you need to take the next step. If you need more faith, ask Me, and I will strengthen your faith. If you need more courage, call out to Me and I will strengthen your heart. If you need more strength or perseverance to face new challenges, seek Me and place your trust in Me. Step by step, as you follow Me, I will continue to help you.

So instead of being afraid of those crossroad signs, you can look forward to them with anticipation, knowing that I'm by your side to instruct you, guide you, and help you. I know your heart, and I know where you will ultimately be the happiest and most fulfilled. If you don't know where that is, just ask Me to point you in the right direction, and then start walking. I am always with you, no matter where you are and what you're doing. I am with you each step of the way. I love you, and I will never fail you.