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Vol 19 • Issue 2

A CLIMB THAT HEALED

How I found peace

The Seasons of Life
Understanding the cycle

A Thrilling Encounter
The day that changed my life





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION GOD'S PARTY

I can't remember ever coming across this verse until the other day. At least, it never stood out to me the way it did this time. That could be because the book of the prophet Zephaniah is one of the lesser-known zip codes in the Bible: "The Lord your God wins victory after victory and is always with you. He celebrates and sings because of you, and he will refresh your life with his love."¹

The great God of the universe loves me so much and is so happy to have me in His life that He can't help but throw a party and break into singing to let it be known! It's a fun and encouraging picture, especially if you've ever struggled with feeling distant from God.

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."² But it's hard to love someone you don't know, and I realize that I don't know Jesus anywhere near as well as I would like.

Each of us has family and friends—people that we know well. Then there are people we spend time with and know—not necessarily by choice, but because they're our coworkers, schoolmates, etc. Then there are people we sort of know, whom we meet by chance or occasionally bump into and have to struggle to remember their names. There are also people we'll probably never meet but whom we read about or follow on social media. The question is, where does Jesus fit into this spectrum?

Of course, God's nature is so vast and complex that no human being can ever fully know Him. But life is about continually seeking Him,³ learning more about Him, and enjoying His fellowship. As Paul wrote, "Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."⁴

Let's get to know Jesus.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Zephaniah 3:17 CEV
2. Matthew 22:37
3. See Jeremiah 29:13.
4. Philippians 3:8 CEV

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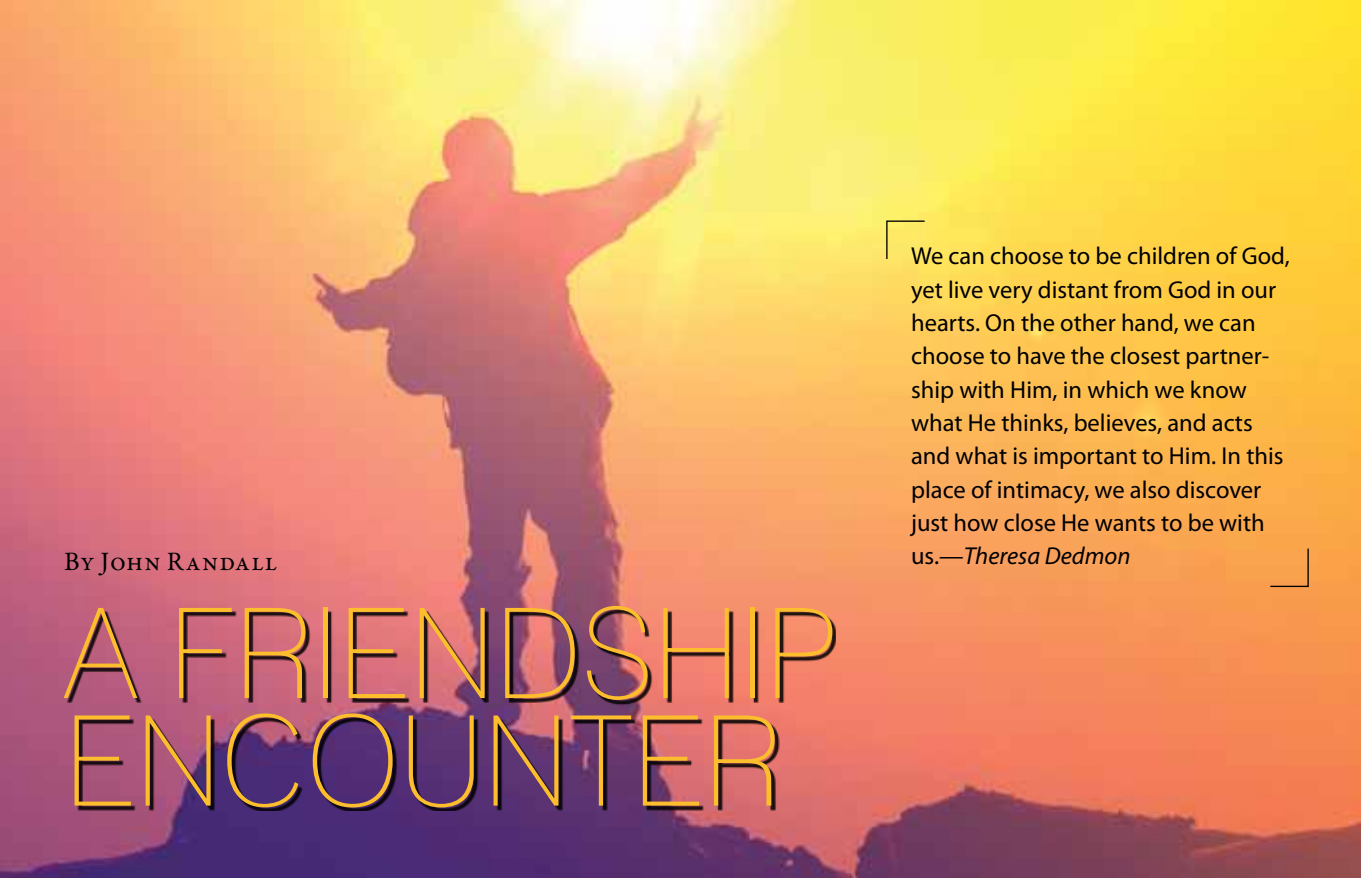
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BY JOHN RANDALL

A FRIENDSHIP ENCOUNTER

We can choose to be children of God, yet live very distant from God in our hearts. On the other hand, we can choose to have the closest partnership with Him, in which we know what He thinks, believes, and acts and what is important to Him. In this place of intimacy, we also discover just how close He wants to be with us.—*Theresa Dedmon*

MY DAY INVARIABLY begins with taking my jet-black poodle for her morning walk, an activity which is high on her list of priorities. We have a regular route which takes us about 10 minutes to complete.

Just as we're setting out on this warm July morning, I remember that we're out of oranges, so I decide to alter our regular route and instead head for the Carmelite mission that sits relatively secluded atop a small hill. The mission sells oranges for a couple of dollars a bag.

As we make the trek up the long circuitous drive that wends its way through the orange groves, I notice a sign with fading lettering proclaiming, "Prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God.—*Teresa of Ávila.*"

I say a hearty affirmation to this beautiful message and purchase my bag of oranges.

Shortly thereafter, the dog fed and my orange juice made, I'm ready for my morning devotional time. I crack open my devotional book, and my eyes fall on the chapter title, "Listening prayer is friendship with God." That got my attention!

Coincidence? No, I don't think so. I've known God long enough to realize that He's trying to tell me something. He had me notice that little mission sign because it related to what He wants to speak to me about today.

And it's not as if God singled out this day out of the blue to suddenly start talking to me randomly about this topic, but as He often does, there have been general undercurrents,

little impressions and incidents, along the way of late. Today has been only a further fine-tuning, a further crystallization.

What kind of things have I learned on this journey? Among others that the deep longing that we all experience, the aloneness that finds partial fulfillment in our earthly companionships, is only completely fulfilled in relationship with God.

Friendship is identifying in thought and spirit with someone, and as we develop a listening, communing, interactive relationship with God, we're able to enter into true friendship with Him.

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JESUS—HIS LIFE AND MESSAGE

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

*WHEN THE TIME WAS RIGHT, God sent his Son, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law, so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children.*¹

God sent His Son into the world at a specific time and place to live as a human being, to die on a cross, and to be raised from the dead to redeem fallen humankind, so that humanity would have the opportunity to enter into His kingdom and into a special relationship with Him. The four Gospels tell this story—the story of a unique human being, a Galilean Jew, a person who in many ways was very much like everyone else who has ever been born. At the same time, He was very different from anyone who has ever lived.

The Gospels tell us what made Jesus different. They teach us that He came into the world to lay down His life for humankind, and how through His death and

1. Galatians 4:4–5 CEV

2. See John 3:16–18.

3. See Genesis 12:2–3.

4. See John 20:31.

5. See Romans 1:3.

6. See Galatians 4:4.

7. See 2 Corinthians 10:1.

8. See 2 Corinthians 5:21.

9. See Hebrews 2:18.

10. See 1 Peter 3:18.

11. See Hebrews 12:3.

12. See 1 Corinthians 11:23.

13. See 1 Peter 2:21–23.

14. See 1 Corinthians 1:23.

15. See 1 Corinthians 15:4.

resurrection humanity was able to enter into a new relationship with God. Jesus didn't come to *teach* people how to be good; He came to give them the *power* to be good through the supreme sacrifice He made for us all. There is no other story as important as this one, because how people respond to this unique individual determines their destiny for eternity.² It's through this story that we understand the great gift that is offered to us: the gift of becoming a child of our Father in heaven, the means to become a part of His family, and the wonder of living with Him forever.

The Gospels lay the foundation of Christian belief. It's within their pages that we learn that Jesus was more than a good or righteous man, more than a teacher of morals and ethics, and more than a miracle worker. It's within the Gospels that we find that Jesus is the Savior promised by God. It is from the Gospels that we learn of the fulfillment of the promise God made, that through the ancient Hebrew patriarch Abraham all the world would be blessed.³

Jesus lived over two millennia ago, and the Gospels were written a few decades after His death and resurrection by believers of that day. Their goal in writing Jesus' story was to preserve it so that it could be shared over and over. They wrote so that others would believe,⁴ and they were successful. There has been an unbroken line of





Christians from their day until ours. Two millennia later, we read the same Gospel as did the first readers, and it has the power to transform our lives just as it did theirs.

The Gospels were not the first writings about Jesus. The apostle Paul's letters are believed to have been written between 49–67 AD, which means some of them were most likely in circulation before the Gospels were written. Some of the other Epistles written in the early 60s AD could have predated the Gospels as well. The Epistles don't tell a great deal about the life of Jesus, most likely

because the authors were writing to believers who already knew something of His life. As was the general custom of the day, the stories and teachings of Jesus would have been circulated orally. The original witnesses, those who knew Him, would have told others the story of His life, describing His miracles, retelling His parables, and sharing other details of His life.

The time between Jesus' death and resurrection (c. AD 33) and the first of Paul's Epistles was probably about fifteen years. The first Gospels were written about thirty years after Christ's death. From what the authors of the Epistles wrote, it's clear that what they communicated in their writings corresponded with what the Gospel writers later recorded.

The Epistles tell us that Jesus was a descendant of David,⁵ a Jew raised under the Mosaic law,⁶ gentle and meek,⁷ sinless,⁸ tempted,⁹ and righteous.¹⁰ We also learn that He experienced hostility,¹¹ was betrayed,¹² suffered without resisting,¹³ was crucified,¹⁴ and rose from the dead.¹⁵

The Gospels focus on the time of Jesus' ministry. Two of the Gospels give an account of His birth, and one speaks briefly of an event from His childhood when He was about twelve years old. Beyond that, we know almost no specific details about His life until He was baptized by





John the Baptist. His pre-ministry life wasn't the focus or purpose of the Gospel writers. Instead, they speak about what Jesus said and did during the public era of His life, the message He proclaimed, and the manner in which He proclaimed it. They tell us of His actions, miracles He performed, stories He told, the manner of His death, and His rising from the dead. They teach us that He was God's only begotten Son, the only person who was both God and man, and that His purpose for taking on human form was to make it possible for us to live with God forever. In short, the Gospels' main purpose is to share the good news that salvation is available through Jesus Christ.

The Gospels also teach believers about the relationship we enter into when we become children of God. They lay the foundation for living as the new creations we become through salvation and receiving the Spirit of God within us. The Gospels impart information which can affect our lives for eternity, help us to develop a worldview built on the foundation of truth, and act as spiritual, moral, and ethical guideposts on the journey of our lives.

A fuller understanding of what the Gospels teach can bring us into a richer relationship with God. If we can grasp the deeper concepts of what Jesus said and did, of His parables, His sermons, His miracles, if we can see them through the eyes of the first

eyewitnesses in the milieu of first-century Palestine, then we can see more of the depth and beauty of His message. This can result in a fuller understanding of Jesus' life, a more profound appreciation for the "wealth and wisdom and knowledge of God,"¹⁶ and ultimately a deeper faith.

The Gospels provide foundational principles which act as guidelines for leading a meaningful life and making choices and decisions based on eternal truths given by our Savior. Knowledge of the Gospels and what they teach is vital for living a God-centered life, which leads to joy in this life as well as the next.


I've always loved the Gospels, but studying them more thoroughly these past years has given me a greater appreciation for their depth, beauty, and the life-changing power they possess. Spending more time reading them has enriched my life in numerous ways. They have helped strengthen my understanding, my faith, and my connection with God.

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

THIS ARTICLE IS ADAPTED FROM THE INTRODUCTION TO HIS SERIES OF POSTS ON JESUS' LIFE AND MESSAGE, WHICH CAN BE FOUND HERE: [HTTPS://DIRECTORS.TFIONLINE.COM/TAG/JESUSHIS-LIFE-AND-MESSAGE/](https://directors.tfionline.com/tag/jesushis-life-and-message/). ■



16. Romans 11:33 CEV

A woman with long dark hair and glasses is sitting on a wooden swing. She is wearing a grey t-shirt, blue jeans, and blue sneakers with pink laces. She is holding an open book and looking down at it. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green grass and trees, suggesting a park or a natural setting. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

I GREW UP IN A CHRISTIAN FAMILY, but when I was a teenager, feeling overwhelmed over the world's problems caused me to start doubting my faith. When I was 18, though, my boyfriend was a firm believer. We had some discussions on faith, and he was so sincere that I started doubting my doubts.

One day, I took his New Testament, went to a big city park, and sat by a small lake. I started at the very beginning, the Gospel of Matthew. When I got to the Sermon on the Mount, I was shocked! Those were the principles I wanted to live by; I just hadn't seen them spelled out so clearly anywhere else.

I kept reading through the afternoon, passing from Gospel to Gospel. It was like a movie scene, where someone is so focused that everyone and everything else disappears. I was transported to the dusty roads of Galilee, the fishing villages, the temple, and I was one of Jesus' disciples, eager to hear and see what He would say and do next.

Dusk descended as I read the last chapter of John, and I came back to earth. I walked home transformed, and all I wanted to do was find out how I could live what Jesus taught. A few months later, He showed me my life's mission, and I have been trying my best to fulfill it since then.

Getting to know Jesus is the biggest discovery anyone can make! Someone said that reading the Bible is like reading our own story, because we're also part of that story, one that's being played out in each of our lives. The best bit is that we know our story has a very happy ending!

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



BY BETH JORDAN

A CLIMB THAT HEALED

“IF WE CAN CLIMB THIS MOUNTAIN, there’s nothing we can’t overcome together!”

I remember my dad struggling to smile and look hopeful as he pointed toward a rocky mountain about 100 feet from the highway. I was 13, and my dad, my older brother, and I were driving through the scorching rocky deserts of Mexico back to the United States to take care of some business.

My parents had been doing full-time mission work in Mexico, and I loved being right beside them at every step. Life was beautiful there, and I enjoyed it very much.

At this particular time, however, things weren’t so great. My parents were having some difficulties in their marriage, and they’d decided to live apart for a few months. Mom had moved away a few weeks before, and

I worried and wondered if she would return.

For most of the journey, I could tell that my dad was dealing with the difficulty of the situation. He looked sad, worried, and tired. The air was thick with a feeling of weariness and insecurity. At the same time, all three of us began to feel physically sick with headaches, mainly due to the heat, but also because of all the emotions. I remember feeling like we could all easily burst into tears. It went on like this for almost a whole day when suddenly, in the middle of nowhere, Dad stopped driving.

I can still see Dad’s face. The tears that he was holding back seemed to glisten in his eyes as he got out of the car and told us to come with him. Reluctantly—as teenagers can do—we slowly got out of the car.

About 100 feet away rose the big crag of a mountain—all rock. It was at least a couple of hundred feet high and there certainly wasn’t any sort of path leading up to the top.

The heat raged down on our heads as we squinted up at the rocks, then quickly turned around to ensure there weren’t any wandering rattlesnakes or coyotes. We stood there silently wondering what we were supposed to do, when Dad spoke:

“If we can climb this mountain, there’s nothing we can’t overcome together!”

Somehow he knew that this was the healing that each of us needed.

Amazingly, my brother and I, as horrid as we were feeling, didn’t argue with him. I stood there, looking up at this rocky hill, and actually felt challenged to give it a try. Sure, we



were tired, sick, and sad, but looking up at the top, I knew it was going to feel good to stand up there, having conquered the rocks.

We left the truck on the side of the road, and without looking back or stopping to take anything with us, we started climbing upward. After about ten minutes of climbing, we began having small talk as we wove our way through the rocks and crevasses—a little “Thanks, Dad” here and “Hey, you did that fast!” there. This eased our discomforts and helped us focus on the task at hand.

Thinking back on that climb now, it was as though we were letting go of our hurts and fears as we climbed. We were throwing up our hands in surrender and telling Jesus, “We trust You.”

There were so many emotions and unspoken questions in the corners of my heart. I’d tried to be strong for my dad’s sake and had not even realized these feelings and fears were there. But as we climbed higher, it felt as if the weights and worries were falling off my shoulders and were

being left behind each boulder and rock I passed.

It took us two to three hours in the scorching sun before we reached the top, and by then, the wind was blowing and the sun was beginning to set with a gorgeous orange and yellow glow. We were breathless, both from the climb and from the panoramic beauty we were privileged to see. We laughed, we talked, and we allowed ourselves to feel our great Creator’s love. We let go of our troubles, and the smiles returned to our faces. As exhausted as we were, I remember feeling so alive, so free.

We climbed down from that mountain changed and renewed. I just *knew* everything was going to be okay. And it was, even aside from the fact that my parents eventually worked out their differences and my mom came back. God had touched us through the beauty of His nature and the simple illustration of climbing a mountain; He showed us that there was nothing that we couldn’t overcome! And He made sure that we felt His love and presence.

Here are two reasons I’ll never forget that climb:

The first was how distinctly I felt Jesus’ presence. As I stood on the top of that rocky mountain, I felt happy, secure, and loved, when all my previous emotions made me feel anything but *that*. It was unearthly and surreal.

The second reason was that it was clear to me that I didn’t have to “heal” myself. I didn’t have to struggle to overcome the emotions. I didn’t have to work at it; I wasn’t down on my hands and knees in anguish and desperation. I simply relaxed and let Jesus speak quietly to my heart through the wind and the mountains and through that feeling of joy at reaching the top. It was nothing more than throwing myself into His strong arms, knowing that He would catch me.

BETH JORDAN LIVES IN INDIA WITH HER HUSBAND AND TWO CHILDREN. THEY ARE THE FOUNDERS OF PLACE FOR CHANGE, WHICH COORDINATES VOLUNTEER-ABROAD PROGRAMS IN INDIA, NEPAL, AND THAILAND. ■

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

OUR THEATRE GROUP REGULARLY PERFORMS a dynamic skit based on a monologue from the Shakespeare play *As You Like It*, where he summarizes the seasons of our lives in seven stages: the crying baby, the reluctant schoolboy, the pining lover, the fierce soldier, the wise judge, the old man, and finally death.

Shakespeare ends it there, but the Bible promises one more season of life: everlasting afterlife. So rather than ending the story with “mere oblivion,” as the Bard does, we like to end with our protagonist awakening in heaven—the true happy ending.

This play got me thinking of the seasons of life I find myself going through. We live through so many cycles and seasons both big and small, and in working on our various projects, it helps to step back and see how the seasons work. In that way, we can know where we are in the change and growth cycle and what to expect next. For example, if you’re going through a tough time, you can derive hope from realizing you’re in a “winter,” and the spring will come with new life.

In my travels, I’ve noticed that the countries that have subtle variations in seasons have a completely different flora and energy from the countries that have more distinct seasons.

I took a walk in the mountains of Romania recently and was amazed at how vibrant life was there. Bright wildflowers popped out every which way—each with its bevy of bees and other pollinators ensuring the next generation of flowers to come. Greenery competed for the sunlight in every available patch of land; even the puddles were full of tadpoles, water striders, and a myriad of tiny water oddities.

It seems they know that their time is short and that soon colder temperatures will once again bring deep sleep upon the land. People are also affected. It seems that those living in tropical countries tend to be a bit more relaxed and less work-oriented; nature seems to be the same way. Life seems to meander along—as opposed to sleeping and then exploding.

Applying an understanding of the seasonal changes in our work can help us to know what to expect next.

THE SEASONS OF LIFE

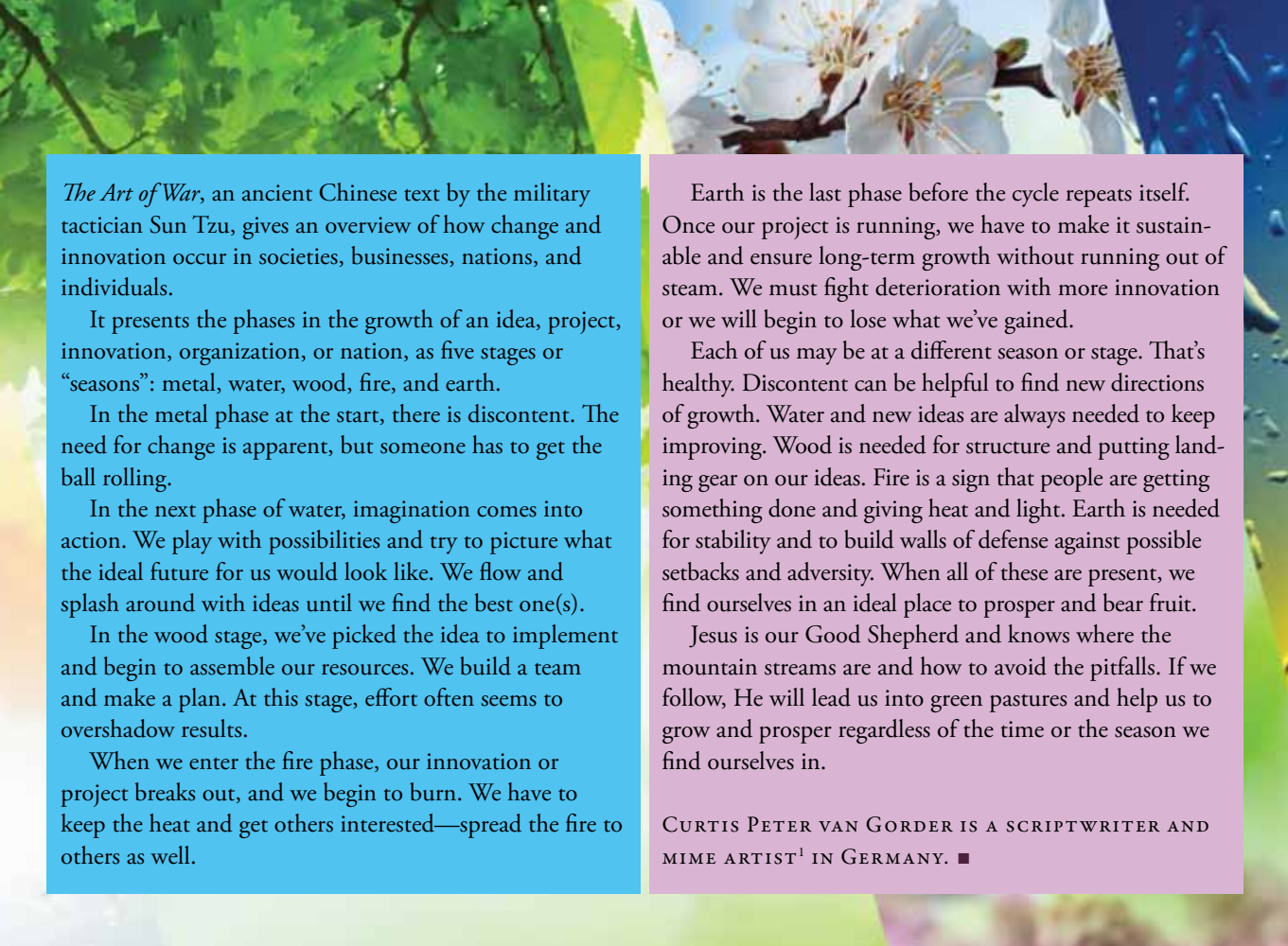


1. <http://elixirmime.com>

SEASONS

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

We all know that if the seasons were the same, there would be no growth. We know that without winter there would be no spring. We know that without frosts there would be no bulbs and without the monsoon there would be no rice harvest. In the same way, we also know that without sorrow there would be no joy. Without pain there would be no healing. I think that's precisely where the beauty comes in. It comes in through the fruit of the seasons. He has indeed made everything beautiful in its time.—*Naomi Reed (b. 1968)*



The Art of War, an ancient Chinese text by the military tactician Sun Tzu, gives an overview of how change and innovation occur in societies, businesses, nations, and individuals.

It presents the phases in the growth of an idea, project, innovation, organization, or nation, as five stages or “seasons”: metal, water, wood, fire, and earth.

In the metal phase at the start, there is discontent. The need for change is apparent, but someone has to get the ball rolling.

In the next phase of water, imagination comes into action. We play with possibilities and try to picture what the ideal future for us would look like. We flow and splash around with ideas until we find the best one(s).

In the wood stage, we've picked the idea to implement and begin to assemble our resources. We build a team and make a plan. At this stage, effort often seems to overshadow results.

When we enter the fire phase, our innovation or project breaks out, and we begin to burn. We have to keep the heat and get others interested—spread the fire to others as well.

Earth is the last phase before the cycle repeats itself. Once our project is running, we have to make it sustainable and ensure long-term growth without running out of steam. We must fight deterioration with more innovation or we will begin to lose what we've gained.

Each of us may be at a different season or stage. That's healthy. Discontent can be helpful to find new directions of growth. Water and new ideas are always needed to keep improving. Wood is needed for structure and putting landing gear on our ideas. Fire is a sign that people are getting something done and giving heat and light. Earth is needed for stability and to build walls of defense against possible setbacks and adversity. When all of these are present, we find ourselves in an ideal place to prosper and bear fruit.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd and knows where the mountain streams are and how to avoid the pitfalls. If we follow, He will lead us into green pastures and help us to grow and prosper regardless of the time or the season we find ourselves in.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST¹ IN GERMANY. ■

PURSUIT OF PASSIONS

BY MARIE ALVERO



I have one life and one chance to make it count for something. My faith demands that I do whatever I can, wherever I am, whenever I can, for as long as I can with whatever I have to try to make a difference.
—Jimmy Carter (b. 1924)

I LOVE WORKING OUT, and I also love food! Cooking a great meal makes me incredibly fulfilled and happy, and I've often read cookbooks like they were novels. So, knowing how passionate I am about food and fitness, and seeing all the workout videos and amazing recipes I share on social media, you might imagine me to be a super fit gal who eats only the finest foods.

Someone made a comment to that effect on my Facebook page the other day. It got me thinking how some of the things I really am passionate about are notwithstanding actually quite poorly represented in my real life. Truth be told, I'm lucky to work

out for 20 minutes four times a week, and I cook something wonderful maybe once a week.

I wonder if other things I love are just as poorly represented in my life. For example, if you look at my life, could you tell that I'm passionate about Jesus? Does that show? Do I know Him in a way that reflects in my life in an obvious way?

I want my relationship with Jesus to be a resounding feature of my life, not just another biographical tidbit. I don't have loads of time every day to read God's Word, pray, and worship. But I do have a little, and I want it to count.

That's my takeaway: make it count! If I only have 20 minutes to work

out, I will push myself as hard as I can. On the days that I can cook and create, I'll put all my skill and focus into it. And in the time I set aside to growing in my relationship with Jesus, I'll be sure to put all my heart into it. I'll treat His Word as the treasure it is. I'll pursue His truth.

My passions might not be my day job, but they'll be a big part of what gives my life definition and purpose.

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. ■



PRAYER LUNCHESES

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

WHEN I WAS IN THE SECOND SEMESTER of my first year in college, some Christian classmates and I started to feel concerned that our faith was getting buried amidst our assignments, friends, clubs, and hobbies. We didn't want it to be something that we briefly attended to during the weekends, and then set aside as we bounced back to the exciting and busy pace of college life on Monday. The problem was compounded by the fact that some of us were now living far away from the churches and fellowships we were used to, while others were living with family members who weren't believers. Someone had the idea of getting together twice a week over lunch to pray and swap thoughts about our faith lives. It seemed like such a small step, and though I agreed to try it out, I doubted if this would really help us make Jesus a bigger part of our lives. We decided to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Usually, we started with singing some songs. Then some would share

spiritual lessons they were learning, while others talked about answered prayers or special touches of God's love in their lives. Other times, we discussed ways to make time for prayer and Bible study in the tumble and rush of college life, or how to initiate conversations about Jesus with our friends. Afterwards, we'd exchange prayer requests, which ranged from upcoming exams to relations with our families to career decisions. These times of talking about Jesus in the context of daily concerns and issues reminded me of how much Jesus wants to be actively present in my life and inspired me to invest time in strengthening my personal relationship with Him.

Before starting these lunches, our friendship had been mostly centered on our studies and class activities, but as we continued to fellowship together we forged deeper bonds because of our shared faith. Instead of feeling isolated and awkward about our beliefs, we encouraged one another because we were a team with a common goal: to "run with endurance the race God has set before

us."¹ In addition, knowing that we had friends who also valued spiritual truths created a positive, motivating atmosphere that inspired us to seek out ways to revitalize our spirits during our daily routines—listening to an audio Bible during our commute, reading some spiritually motivational material between classes, among others.

I treasure the joyful memories of those prayer meetings, because that's where I learned that there's always a way to include Jesus in my life, no matter how preoccupied I am or how crammed my schedule is. Seeking out interaction with those who are like-minded strengthens my commitment to being a disciple of Jesus. The more I experience the relevance of His principles in my daily struggles and watch the wonderful ways in which He works in the lives of my brothers and sisters in the faith, the less I'm inclined to section Jesus off to the weekend.

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

1. Hebrews 12:1 NLT

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

God's TRADING HOURS

24/7/365

The most important lesson that I have learned is to trust God in every circumstance. Lots of times we go through different trials and following God's plan seems like it doesn't make any sense at all. God is always in control and he will never leave us.—*Allyson Felix (b. 1985)*



I've been saying for a couple of years now that people need to let God out of the Sunday morning box, that He doesn't want to just be with you for an hour or two on Sunday morning and then put back in His box to sit there until you have an emergency, but He wants to invade your Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.—*Joyce Meyer (b. 1943)*

IF, LIKE ME, you've gotten to a store only to find that you'd misread their "open hours" sign and ended up staring morosely at locked doors, this is for you.

I don't often have epiphany moments, but this became one. As I tried to figure out how I could have missed closing time by an hour (and simultaneously mentally justifying myself), I had a sudden thought.

What if God had business hours? What if, just because He can, God took off early? Can you imagine?

"Sorry, I'm out of the office. Will address your request when I return."

"The number you have dialed is not available right now. Please try again later."

1. See Matthew 28:20.

2. See 2 Corinthians 1:10.

3. See 1 John 3:22.

Or even "Please press 1 to make an appointment."

We might chuckle at the mental picture of God chilling at some heavenly resort, but it's actually a sobering thought. As I reflected on it, I asked myself, *Could I get along without God for a day? Part of a day?* It didn't take long for me to realize I dare not even try.

The wonderful truth about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit is that all we who believe have full access, 24/7/365, to all their help, power, wisdom, and love. We're never left staring at a "Back in 10 minutes" sign on God's office door. Jesus never declines our calls, and the Holy Spirit doesn't say, "I'll get back to you tomorrow."

In fact, God's "open hours" sign reads something like this:

"I'm here for you always. Even if every other door closes to you. I'm not going anywhere."¹

"Remember that time when you were hopeless, and I rescued you? Well, I can do that again. Just trust Me."²

"Respect My rules, and you can have absolutely anything that's good for you."³

So let's not treat God as our last option, the one that we resort to only if "regular things" don't work out. Let's visit Him first thing in the morning, last thing at night, and all the hours in between. Any time, any day, His door is always open.

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BY UDAY PAUL

A THRILLING ENCOUNTER

I STILL REMEMBER THAT DAY. It was the early 80s and I was a teenager sitting in the back seat of our car. Somebody at a stop light handed my parents some beautiful color posters to read, and they quickly handed them to me in the back seat. Then they stopped at a place where they had some business and left me alone in the car for a while. As I had nothing else to do, I picked up the posters and glanced at them. They had a picture in the front and a message at the back about salvation and the gift of eternal life through Jesus.

Having been raised in a Hindu family, I was familiar with spiritual and religious matters. I had some favorite deities in the Hindu

pantheon of gods that I liked to pray to, and I was also interested in other religions, like Buddhism and Islam. However, the Christian concept of salvation being a gift was new to me.

The text at the back of the posters concluded with a prayer to invite Jesus into one's heart. I couldn't imagine that such a monumental thing like salvation could be obtained so easily, but I thought there was no harm in trying. After praying the prayer, I felt a profound sense of peace, and any skepticism or doubt vanished.

That memorable day marked the start of the greatest adventure of my life. It was my first encounter with the God who created this amazing world and everything in it.

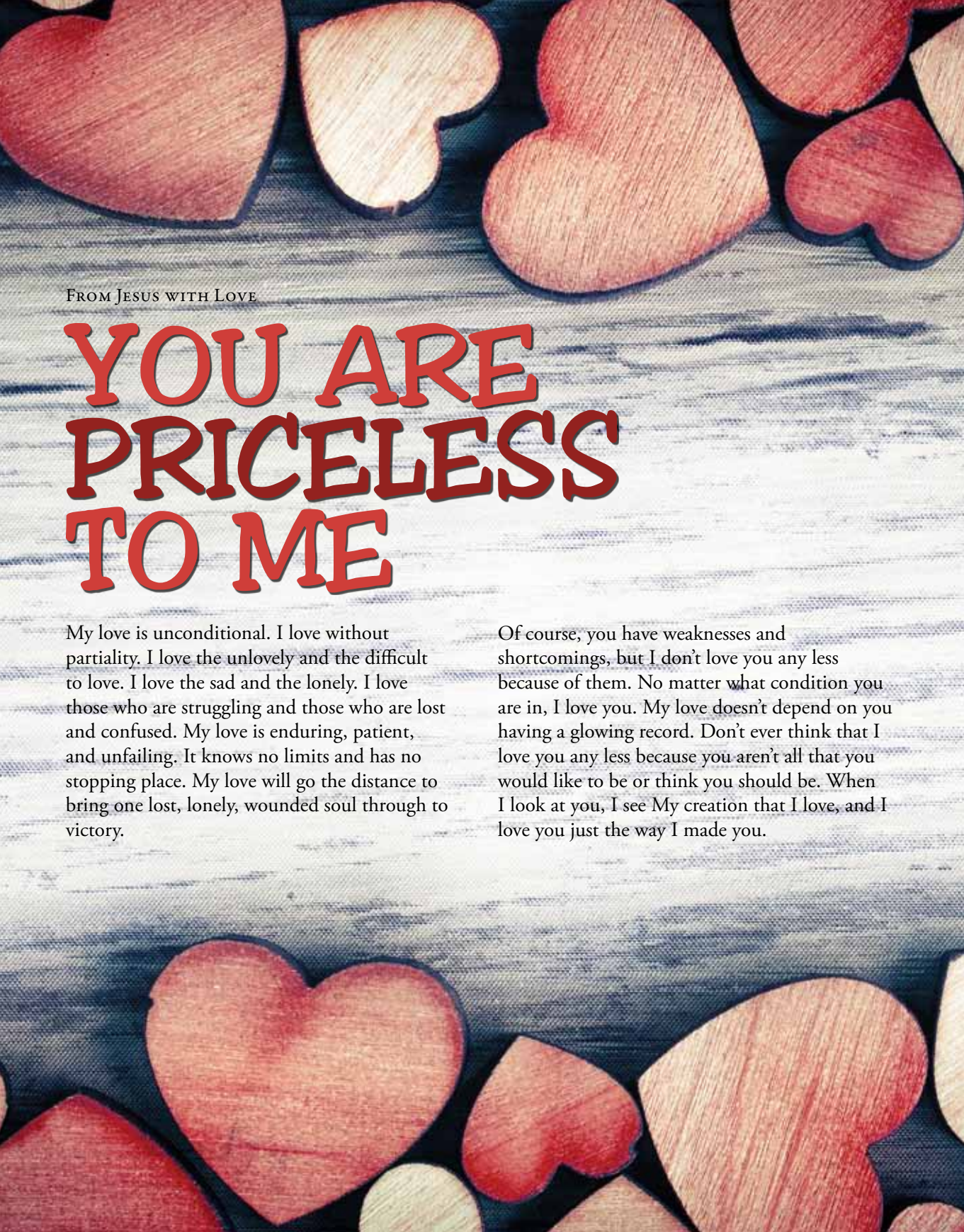
There have been times when I've been willful and haven't wanted to

If you don't know Jesus yet, you can start with a simple prayer:
Dear Jesus, please come into my life and give me Your free gift of salvation. Forgive me for the wrong things I've done and help me get to know You better and stay by Your side. Amen.

acknowledge His presence, and also difficult times when I didn't feel His presence and comfort as much as I would have liked. But through it all, He has always been there for me and blessed me with His unconditional love. The Bible says that "we walk by faith, not by sight."¹ The Christian walk is one of faith in an all-powerful and sovereign God who loves us and wants to give meaning and purpose to our lives. Over the years of my believing in Jesus, He has proven Himself to me over and over. He's been my best and most intimate friend.

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1. 2 Corinthians 5:7



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

YOU ARE PRICELESS TO ME

My love is unconditional. I love without partiality. I love the unlovely and the difficult to love. I love the sad and the lonely. I love those who are struggling and those who are lost and confused. My love is enduring, patient, and unfailing. It knows no limits and has no stopping place. My love will go the distance to bring one lost, lonely, wounded soul through to victory.

Of course, you have weaknesses and shortcomings, but I don't love you any less because of them. No matter what condition you are in, I love you. My love doesn't depend on you having a glowing record. Don't ever think that I love you any less because you aren't all that you would like to be or think you should be. When I look at you, I see My creation that I love, and I love you just the way I made you.