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aCTIVATED

Vol 19 • Issue 11

EPHEMERAL BEAUTY

Focus on the good

The Gratitude Journal

Daily blessings

The Silver Lining

Beauty in hard times



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE MIRACLE BERRY

You may have heard about the miracle berry, which is an amazing little red berry found in West Africa that causes sour foods, like citrus fruit or hot sauce, to taste sweet. One woman who tried the miracle berry wrote, "Sinking my teeth into the lemon, I braced myself to wince at the sour, citric tang that would inevitably assault my taste buds. But, almost unbelievably, there was not a hint of bitterness. The acidic fruit tasted as sweet as lemon meringue pie. The sensation was surreal, as if I were sampling the result of some worrying genetic modification. Yet it was 100 percent natural, the incredible effect of the 'miracle berry'."¹

In a way, gratitude is like the miracle berry. When we fill our hearts and minds with gratitude, it changes the way we experience things, and sour experiences can even seem sweet to us.

As author Melody Beattie wrote, "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

Let's try to make this month a month when we stay on the lookout for things we can be grateful for. After reading the articles in this issue of *Activated*, I'm betting we'll see good results.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. "The 'miracle berry' that turns taste on its head: I tried it and it works,"
by Liz Todd, 7 June 2008, *Daily Mail*

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Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my savior.

—Habakkuk 3:17–18 NIV

A POSITIVE PRAISE POST

BY BRIAN WHYTE

I WAS INSPIRED THE OTHER DAY when I read some personal accounts on a friend's blog on the subject of praising God for His goodness in spite of daily problems and annoyances.

Generally, I'm a thankful person. I post inspirational stories on my blog or send them to friends and family by email to share with them the good things that happen in my life. Still, after all these years, I wasn't in the habit of praising God for even the "bad" things—"giving thanks *always* for *all* things to God."¹ I also wasn't in the habit of looking for the good in everything.

1. Ephesians 5:20, emphasis added

2. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV

But after I read my friend's post, I was reminded that the little daily things—a sandwich, a shower, a sunset, an encouraging word from a friend, a walk—are all events that are worthy of thanks. Previously I'd always waited for a "biggie" before I would become ecstatic—like the first time I flew on an airplane as a child, or when I attend a class reunion, or the day I will meet my future wife or become a father or find buried treasure on a South Sea island. But that's a lot of waiting and a lot of missed chances to be ecstatic when I could and should be truly happy and thankful to God, even if I'm just eating breakfast in the morning or receiving an email from my mom.

That's easier said than done, you might say—and you'd be totally

right. But the cool thing about reading my friend's post was that it clicked with me that I could indeed be grateful for the same things that she was and instantly adopt the same "gratitude attitude." Once you start, it becomes automatic.

So let me remember my own words when I'm stuck in downtown traffic tomorrow, or when I'm under the weather, or when one of my coworkers is getting on my nerves. Those annoyances won't matter. I can rejoice and be glad in those times too, when I determine to see beauty in everything that comes my way, and "give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will."²

BRIAN WHYTE IS AN ACTOR AND SMALL BUSINESS OWNER IN ATLANTA, USA. ■

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

GRATITUDE



BECOMING MORE CHRISTLIKE IS ABOUT BECOMING A BETTER CHRISTIAN through a more committed application of the Bible, coupled with the guidance

1. See Romans 13:14.
2. Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Publications, 2005
3. Zigarelli, *Cultivating Christian Character*, 24.
4. See 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
5. See Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18.

and grace of the Holy Spirit. This application of Scripture cuts two ways. First, it calls for doing away with ungodliness, for resisting and overcoming sin as much as possible. Second, it calls for us to put on Christ,¹ to embrace the godly virtues spoken of in Scripture, and live in a manner that strengthens these virtues within our lives.

In his book, *Cultivating Christian Character*,² author Michael Zigarelli conducted a survey of 5,000 Christians and found which virtues

seem to help in the growth and development of Christian character. He identified three attributes that appear to be major building blocks in developing Christlikeness:

There are three attributes that best explain why high-virtue Christians are different from average-virtue Christians. Those attributes—those three pillars of success—are gratitude, joyful living and God-centeredness ... Christians who have sown these three seeds into their lifestyle are far more likely to reap maximum Christian character ... to see

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manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. Fundamental but elusive Christian virtues (e.g., love, inner peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, compassion, and the ability to forgive) all flow from the roots of gratitude, joyful living, and God-centeredness.³

Gratitude is a key element of growth in Christlikeness because it's a "parent virtue"—a virtue that helps produce other godly virtues and has a transformational effect on our

character. It's also widely understood in fields such as psychology and self-improvement to be beneficial for improving one's health and emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Gratitude is universally considered a basic foundation for a better, happier life.

In Scripture, gratitude or gratefulness is based on the concept that everywhere and in every situation, God's people should give thanks to God, the One who has created and redeemed them. The giving of thanks in the Old Testament is indicated most often by the Hebrew word *todah*, which is translated *thanks*, *thankfulness*, and *thanksgiving*. It's also how you say "thank you" in modern Hebrew.

The New Testament is also full of examples of expressing thankfulness to God, as well as instruction to do so. In fact, we're told to give thanks to God for everything⁴ and always.⁵

Cultivating gratitude changes our outlook on life, producing over time a new context or lens through which we process our circumstances. We begin to see our experiences and everything we have in the light of God's love, and we recognize that no matter what our situation, it could be worse—but it isn't. This doesn't mean we don't do what we can to improve our situation, but we view it with thankfulness.

In a sense, gratitude is a mindset. No matter what our circumstances, we can choose to see them through the lens of thankfulness to God for His love, care, and supply, rather than comparing with others or bemoaning our lot in life. It requires focusing our thoughts on our blessings instead of what's missing from our lives or how much better life could be "if only..." Gratitude causes us to want what we have, to be content with whatever state we are in, and to regularly thank God for our blessings, whether they're meager or abundant.

It's often difficult to feel grateful when we face adversity in our lives, when it seems life doesn't make sense and our prayers go unanswered. But a grateful attitude isn't based on events, it's anchored in faith that God loves us, that He hears our prayers, and that there are always things to be thankful for even in the worst of situations.

One way to cultivate gratitude is to keep track of the things you are thankful for. Keeping a gratitude journal helps you take account of and focus on your blessings, which is part of developing a positive and grateful mindset. Each of us has numerous things in our daily lives that we are thankful for, yet we rarely take time to acknowledge them, so



they don't consciously register in our minds as blessings.

I recently started to keep such a journal, and I've been surprised at how many things I'm thankful for that I've rarely given much thought to. I go through my day surrounded by blessings—but until I started listing five things I'm thankful for each day, I rarely took specific notice of them. Of course, I regularly thanked God for my blessings, but I did so in general terms. I've found that keeping track of specifics has helped me both to be aware of my blessings and be more specifically grateful for the many things I've taken for granted for so many years.

In the short time I've been doing this, it's already changed the way I respond to things. Just yesterday, I found out I had an unexpected bill to pay, and my first reaction was to complain about it, but then I

reframed my thoughts and thanked God that I had the funds on hand to pay it. It felt so much better.

There are so many things in our lives, both small and great, which we can identify as God's blessings: our gifts and talents, goals we've achieved, opportunities that have come our way, our health, the car getting fixed, food on the table, water in the faucet, and so on. Then we also have family and friends who love us, and others who have helped or cared for us in some way. Keeping a journal helps train our mind to recognize them, and eventually our mindset can change so that gratitude becomes part of who we are, putting us on the pathway to greater Christlikeness.

Remembering the poor in our prayers can also enhance gratitude. When we pray for those who have less than we do, it reminds us of how difficult life is for some and makes us grateful for our lives. When we pray for refugees who have to leave

everything behind and risk their lives to get somewhere safe, it helps keep our situation in perspective.

Our frame of reference becomes the impoverished widow, the hungry child, the jobless father, the disease-ridden infant, the refugee forced from home by war, the third-world neighbor without electricity or running water. Praying daily for these people is a practice that illuminates our own existence in the blazing light of God's providence, and as a result, one may experience a stunning series of reversals. Envy gives way to fulfillment. Resentment gives way to contentment. Complaints give way to praise. The catalyst through it all is gratitude, born of a clearer perspective that's generated by reflecting on the poor.⁶

As Christians, we possess the ultimate blessing—salvation, the knowledge that we will live forever with God. We are in relationship with the Creator and sustainer of all things. Our God is also our Father, who knows what we need and promises to take care of us. No matter our circumstances, we are in His presence. Gratitude isn't our natural state, but as we work to cultivate it in our lives, we will be on the path to greater Christlikeness.

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

6. Zigarelli, *Cultivating Christian Character*, 36.

THE GRATITUDE JOURNAL

BY SALLY GARCÍA

Better to lose count while naming
your blessings than to lose your
blessings by counting your troubles.
—Maltbie D. Babcock (1858–1901)

Gratitude is the heart's memory.
—French proverb

I CAN'T REMEMBER HOW TO SPELL THAT WORD! How do I express this idea correctly? I can't seem to get my thoughts onto the paper!

I was seeing how rusty my writing was. I hadn't had much opportunity to order my thoughts into written paragraphs since my school days, and I was facing the obviously poor consequences. Then I remembered how much I'd enjoyed a creative writing course in college.

That's how the idea for my praise journal was born. I'd previously kept track of my days in an abbreviated log fashion, mainly for organization's sake. My entries said, "April 8th: Sent a package to my daughter and visited Mary," or "Went to the doctor, began flu treatment." But this journal would be different. I

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV
2. Romans 8:28
3. Author unknown

would do more than just list events; I'd take the time to contemplate all that had happened that day and then express my thoughts and feelings.

Most importantly, I laid down one condition: I wouldn't allow myself to express negative remarks about people or situations. Whatever I wrote had to be from a *praiseful heart*—even when the situation seemed unfair, the person contrary, or the day totally bleak!

It was therapeutic. I learned to write prayers that committed the unpleasant situations into God's capable hands. The more I wrote from this positive perspective, the more I began to have clearer understanding of situations, the more positive I became about other people, and the more ideas I got for possible solutions. This way of journaling reminded me to "give thanks in all circumstances"¹ knowing that "all

things work together for good to those who love God."²

Along with recounting the many blessings of each day, this has also taught me to commit the unpleasant aspects to prayer. These written thoughts and prayers are like declarations of faith that I can look back on as I review my entries. It's becoming more natural to view the events in my life through the prism of praise.

As a bonus, with the practice I'm getting, my spelling has improved and my writing is more creative. I bought a calligraphy pen for the page titles, and sometimes I even do a bit of fancy lettering or illustrate the special entries with little ink sketches. Daily I am reminded that "if we pause to think, we have cause to thank."³

SALLY GARCÍA IS AN EDUCATOR, MISSIONARY, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

EPHEMERAL BEAUTY

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

A FRIEND OF MINE mentioned how he often feels melancholy after experiencing something beautiful. I wasn't sure what he was talking about. It wasn't until I started to recall my feelings at the end of a magnificent sunset, a fantastic day, or a moving performance that I realized how often I feel the same.

Strange, this paradoxical mix of joy and sorrow at things we *do* enjoy. Could it be that it reminds us of the transitory nature of such pleasures? These great feelings linger for a moment and then vanish into the past—living only in our memories.

This mysterious feeling is universal. The Japanese call it *mono no aware*, which means “the pathos of

things.” It is something they experience yearly when the cherry blossoms are in all their glory. Sometime around April, people picnic and gather under the flowers to sing, meditate, and fully savor a moment that they know will fade away in a week or two.

The Japanese try to capture the special short-lived cherry blossom season, called *sakura*, in their flower arranging, tea ceremonies, and especially in their haiku poetry, which is like a snapshot of an event in nature that conveys a deep feeling—often a sad, sweet thought.

Asu araba araba to omou sakura kana.

*Tomorrow and tomorrow
Will they still be?
Cherry blossoms.*

When I lived in Jordan, my favorite time of the year in Jordan was in the spring, when the rains came and

the barren desert burst into a symphony of floral color. One time we went to the Wadi Rum desert during a rare rainstorm and marveled at how the mountain peaks abounded with waterfalls cascading down into the sandy valley below. We were trying to get out of the rain, but the Bedouin locals loved it and drove back and forth through the newly formed streams in their jeeps. They were like kids splashing in puddles. They knew how soon the precious liquid would soak into the insatiable desert sands.

Each year there would be one or two days when snow fell and everything would be covered in a white blanket. On such special days, we would take a walk around the block to see the mundane transformed into a magical wonderland of snow and ice. The kids would build snow forts and have all-day snow fights, loving every minute of it. The next day, the sun would come out and it would all disappear.

1. NIV
2. 1 Peter 1:25 CEB
3. See James 4:14.
4. Hebrews 13:5
5. Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33
6. <http://elixirmime.com>



Dear young people, let me now ask you a question. What will you leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure?

—Pope Benedict XVI (b. 1927)

Music and drama are inherently ephemeral in their beauty. Perhaps that is why these things give us moments of pure joy, and instill within us the desire to preserve those moments.

The Bible contains a few images of ephemeral beauty. One that comes to mind is found in Isaiah 40:8, where it says “the grass withers, and the flowers fall.”¹ Then it goes on to say that only “the Lord’s word endures forever.”² The Bible also talks about how our lives on earth are like vapor—we’re here a little time and then we vanish.³ I think God made the wonderful moments we experience—as well as our whole lives—this way, so that we would learn how to make the most of those moments, and more importantly, the most of our lives.

However, the Bible also encourages us that God’s Word and love will never pass away. Jesus told us,

“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”⁴ Three of the Gospels tell us that: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”⁵

Realizing that all the pleasures of this life are fleeting helps keep my perspective on what really matters. There are times when I feel I am a “wayfaring stranger” passing through this world of woe and wonder, but it helps to know that what’s done in love will last.

I recently gave one of our family photo albums to my daughter to “keep safe.” However, the suitcase that they were in was lost by the

airline! At first I was devastated at the loss, until I recognized that those moments that were recorded in those photos live on in my memories and in the lives of my children, something that no one can lose or steal from us.

I believe that as we channel God’s love and Word to others, we can be assured that we are building something that will last—something we can enjoy forever and that will never fade away.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST⁶ IN GERMANY. ■

DO I HAVE TO?



OCCASIONALLY I TEACH A BIBLE CLASS at Sunday school for three- to five-year-olds. The group is very small, sometimes only four or five children. One of the girls, a frequent visitor, is very smart, outspoken, and strong-willed. On one recent occasion, she was refusing to come to class because her hair was messy, but she wouldn't let her mother brush her hair because her mom forgot her favorite pink hairbands. I found pink ribbons in the

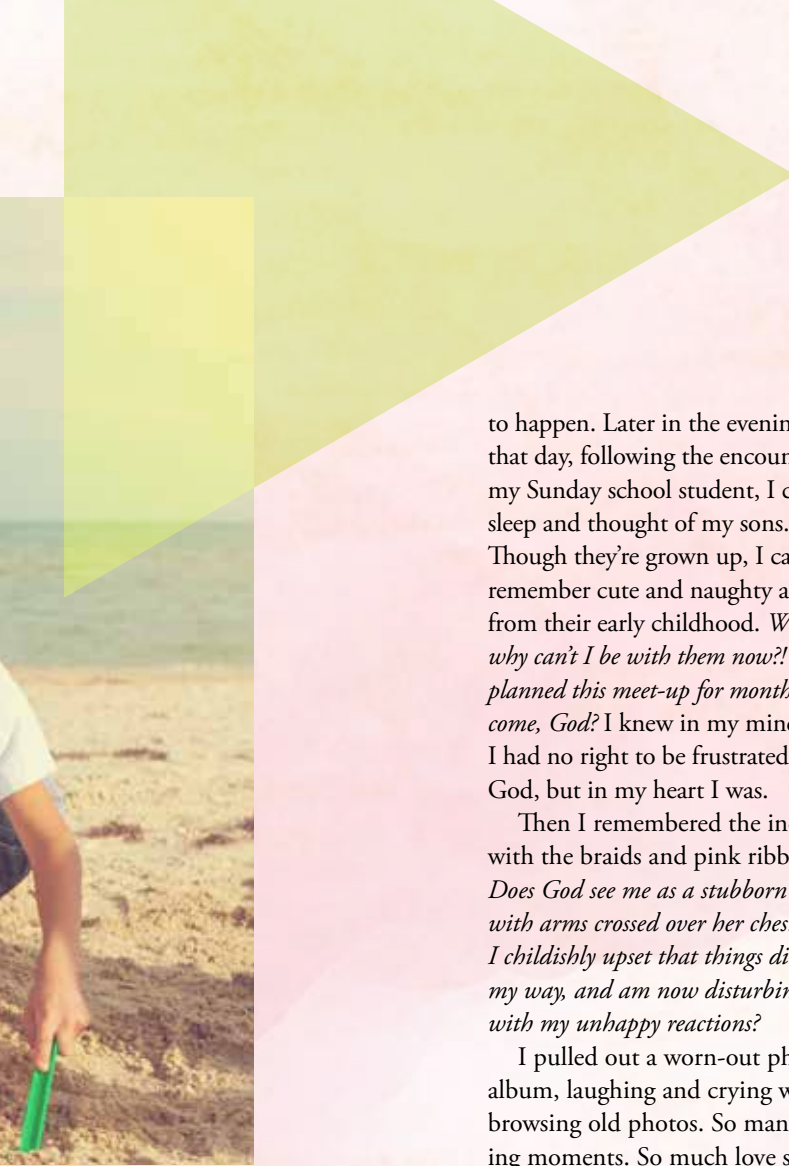
arts and crafts box, and she graciously allowed me to braid her hair.

When I was done, despite her mom's soft nudging and dad's firm prompting, she wouldn't say thank you. She finally crossed her arms over her chest, gave a stern look, and quietly asked, "Do I have to?"

For a second, I didn't know what to say. "No, you don't *have* to, my dear," was followed by an elementary explanation about how politeness "smoothes" the rough spots of life

and makes interactions somewhat easier, and that most of all, showing gratitude melts hearts, and a grateful spirit is always appreciated by others. That didn't have the desired effect, and since the other children were waiting, I had to let it go and start the class.

That month had been tough for me emotionally. My son, who lives on another continent and whom I hadn't seen in over a year, was supposed to come for a three-week



visit. His older brother, who lives closer—but still abroad—planned to join us as well. We'd made adventurous plans, booked a place to stay, and had a series of fun-filled activities planned out. But his schedule changed, and all of it had to be cancelled.

I was so distraught that for a couple of weeks I couldn't pull myself together. I even went as far as wondering if God really cared about me, as He had allowed something like this

to happen. Later in the evening of that day, following the encounter with my Sunday school student, I couldn't sleep and thought of my sons. Though they're grown up, I can still remember cute and naughty antics from their early childhood. *Why, oh why can't I be with them now?! We had planned this meet-up for months! How come, God?* I knew in my mind that I had no right to be frustrated with God, but in my heart I was.

Then I remembered the incident with the braids and pink ribbons. *Does God see me as a stubborn girl with arms crossed over her chest? Am I childishly upset that things didn't go my way, and am now disturbing others with my unhappy reactions?*

I pulled out a worn-out photo album, laughing and crying while browsing old photos. So many amazing moments. So much love shared. In this one, I'm reading a bedtime story to my boys, five and two years old at the time. Here we are cooking together. There they are performing at a music school. In that one we're playing a board game with their best friends.

I opened photo files on my computer. Here the three of us were together last winter in the mountains; the boys are snowboarding and I'm filming them. In the next one we're riding horses, surrounded by a breathtaking view. Another is

a group shot from some years ago when we were volunteering with a clowning troupe at the children's hospital. Then a photo shoot from a few years ago of my younger son receiving a medal for graduating from school with honors. And then me taking a picture of my eldest son feeding peacocks last summer.

Then me last year: traveling through Europe, hiking in the mountains, swimming in the sea, attending a concert, visiting an art museum, painting a mural at an orphanage, studying at a university, cutting cake at my birthday party, meeting old friends and making new ones. Numerous adventures filled my heart with thankfulness. There are so many sweet memories and unforgettable moments to be thankful for!

Do I have to say "thank you" to God? Yes, I believe I do! In fact, I want to show Him my gratitude and to remind myself what a wonderful world He created for me to live in. I have to keep thanking God, for my sake, for the sake of other people, for the sake of my sons, and even for the sake of my future grandchildren, whom I will try to teach to say "thank you" to people and to the One who loves them most of all!

MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA IS A YOUTH COUNSELOR AND VOLUNTEER IN UKRAINE. ■

THE EYES OF GRATITUDE



BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

AS A CHILD, I had a lazy eye and blurred vision, which made it necessary for me to wear glasses from the time I was seven years old. In order to keep my myopia from worsening, I had strict limits on my reading—no reading at night, and any reading only allowed when sitting at a desk with a bright desk lamp and proper posture. Watching television or movies was something that had to be minimized, along with other eye-straining hobbies, such as painting, sewing, and crafts.

I'd watch other children lying on a couch, enjoying a book or happily watching cartoons for hours, and wonder why I had to be so different, while everyone else enjoyed the use of their visual senses without a second thought.

In addition to my sense of isolation, my impaired vision required me to have weekly eye checkups and visual therapy from the time I was eight until I was eighteen. And I had to get new glasses whenever my myopia got worse—which it did regularly. Since to keep my eyesight from worsening I had to keep good reading habits and posture, the deterioration was always cause for increased anxiety and new

restrictions. I resented the fact that my life depended on the vicissitudes of my myopia level fluctuations, a process that went on invisibly inside me and that seemed to arbitrarily deteriorate in spite of all my efforts to protect my eyesight.

When my physical growth plateaued, the myopia stabilized. I no longer had to go for weekly visual therapy, though I still had to go for checkups several times a year. Yet when I look back on the struggles my parents and I faced with my eyes, I see that contending with the uncertainty and pain of this affliction taught me to be grateful for such an innate and basic bodily function as eyesight. Each time a checkup revealed that my eyes had remained stable, I was filled with joy and gratitude. As my eyes stabilized and I was allowed to read and paint in moderation, I treasured each time the restrictions on my activities were eased. My impaired eyes have brought anxieties and frustrations into my life that others are spared from, yet they have been the eyes of gratitude that see joy in the experiences that others might take for granted.

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

You can invite Jesus, the giver of hope, to be with you always by simply asking Him:

Dear Jesus, I believe in You and invite You to come into my life. Please help me to love You and to become a happier, more grateful person. Amen.

THE JOYFUL HEART

BY MARIE ALVERO



AS FOLLOWERS OF JESUS, “grateful” should be our default setting when we consider that Jesus died to redeem us from an eternity of being separated from God. This should put a spring in our step and cause all the not-so-great stuff to bounce off as irrelevant. But I tend to succumb to less-than-grateful reactions, because, well, traffic, mess, stress, too little of this, too much of that. You know how it goes.

Still, I know that in the big picture all the daily details matter very little, and I want to have joy in my heart. Let me share with you three areas that I have been concentrating on in order to be more positive in my reactions and outlook.

BE GRATEFUL FOR THE SMALLEST THINGS

I’m learning to notice the smallest things that bring joy, and the list is

1. Romans 5:4 NLT

endless: the sunrise, the sunset, a great cup of coffee, the cool morning air, the laughter of children, my husband’s strong arms, a good book, my pillow, and on and on the list goes. I’ve discovered that keeping a long string of small joys in mind can do wonders for absorbing the impact of some of the harder things life throws at me.

DON’T GET ATTACHED TO ANY PARTICULAR OUTCOME

This is a hard one! There are times when I’ve had very strong feelings about what I believe the outcome should be, but there were things at play that I couldn’t control. It’s often hard for me to say “Either way I’ll be grateful,” because who wants to be grateful for a bad diagnosis or a rejected job application? But I’ve learned that my gratitude is not meant to be based on the outcome, but rather based on the

fact that God is good. Always. Even when His goodness is beyond my comprehension.

REMEMBER GOD’S GOODNESS

For all my worrying, for all the tight spots, for all the difficult journeys, haven’t I come through okay? None of the hard things have altogether ruined me. I’ve never reached a place where God’s love couldn’t find me. Like Paul says: “Endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope.”¹ When I pause to remember God’s goodness, my heart is flooded with that truth and my outlook can again become grateful.

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 SILVER LINING

BY PATRICIA FORTNER

I REMEMBER MY MOTHER often reminding us children to “look on the bright side” and “be thankful for the little things.” If we’d complain about the hot weather in mid-June, she’d point out, “At least we can go swimming, right?” If we’d complain about not having dessert one night, she’d ask, “Doesn’t that make you thankful for the nights we *do* have dessert?” She tried to teach us to take every seemingly “bad” or “sad” situation we faced and look for something that we could appreciate or be happy about. She called this concept “looking for the silver lining.”

According to the *Oxford Online Dictionary*,¹ the English idiom “every cloud has a silver lining” means that every difficult or sad situation has a

comforting or a more hopeful aspect, even though it may not be apparent immediately.

Many of God’s people were faced with difficult or trying circumstances and needed to find the “bright side” of the situation in order to survive. Take Paul and Silas, for example. In the book of Acts, we read about them preaching the gospel and bringing

people to Christ in Philippi. Unfortunately, some of the city’s elders roused an angry mob against them:

“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.

“After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.

“When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

“Around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”²

1. See https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/silver#silver__13

2. Acts 16:22–25 NIV

3. See Job 2:9.

4. Acts 16:26 NIV

5. Read the full story in Acts 16:19–34.

They could have spent their time in prison complaining and wishing for freedom. They could have given up and cursed God for allowing them to be beaten and imprisoned, just as Job's wife advised him to do.³ But instead, Paul and Silas spent their time in jail "praying and singing hymns to God," and He rewarded their praise:

"Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And at once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose."⁴

This was their big chance! They could escape! But instead of hightailing it out of there, they stayed and told the jailer, "We are all here!" Being imprisoned is a dreadful circumstance, but Paul and Silas found a silver lining when they were able to preach the gospel to the jailer and bring salvation to him and his family.⁵

Our family faced a "storm cloud" of sorts when a friend borrowed our vehicle while we were on vacation and totaled it. Then it seemed the insurance company might not process our claim, because our friend wasn't on our insurance plan. So

you can imagine that we had a *very* hard time looking on the bright side of *this* situation.

One day, after getting off the phone yet again with our insurance company, I was complaining to myself about our situation: the car, our bills, our health problems, and just about my general sorry lot in life. I then happened to glance over to the newspaper on my desk, and that's when I saw that compared to so many, I have so, *so* much to be thankful for:

- Even though we had to put a large amount of money into buying another car, and take on a loan, it's a much better car than the previous one. And the auto insurance company finally agreed to pay toward the damages.
- Even though I work crazy hours, I have a good job that is providing steady income.
- Even though we've had high medical bills from past health issues both my husband and I had, the physical therapy is working and our health is improving.

So, yes, losing our car wasn't easy, and being indebted in order to pay for the new one isn't fun either, but no one said life would be a breeze. The next time I find myself in a tough situation, like Paul and Silas, I'll try to choose to thank God for the silver lining instead of questioning Him about the unpleasant things He's allowed to happen. ■

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

HAPPINESS ATTITUDE

The more you speak words of gratitude and praise Me for the good things in your life, the more you'll develop a positive outlook, even about things you're tempted to feel negative about. The more you cultivate a positive outlook, the more you will realize that I can use all things in your life to work together for good, to be a blessing to you in some way, and to help you to learn something important or gain a new skill.

The more you see everything in your life against the backdrop of My love and care for you, the less room there is for you to look on things as mistakes or defects, because you'll trust that I'll work them together for good somehow. I have a wonderful plan for your life and I can bring victory out of seeming defeat, as you trust Me for your future.

No one could ever love you more than I do or understand you better than I do. I'm the best friend you'll ever have. I'm the one who truly knows you and loves you unconditionally. Open your heart and mind to My love for you, and let your life be filled with gratitude.

