

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 20 • Issue 2

CREATION SPEAKS

God's love letter

Teleportation—Or Transformation

God is everywhere

Lonely?

Look to Jesus





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE TREASURE

God only knows why He put so many of this world's most precious commodities in such hard-to-get-at places. If it was to test our wills—to see to what lengths we would be willing to go and what price we would be willing to pay to get to them—it worked.

Whether probing for oil beneath the deserts of the Middle East or within the Arctic Circle, or plunging into the subterranean dark and cold to mine for gold, diamonds, and other precious metals and gems, the most determined of us brave some of the world's harshest conditions and risk life and limb to get to the source and strike it rich.

But what then? Worldly riches don't last, nor do they provide lasting happiness. "What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?"¹ Jesus asked.

Fortunately for us, God put the very most valuable thing in life—the one thing that can truly satisfy and last for eternity—within reach of everyone. I'm referring to His love, of course.

One of the best-known and most-loved Bible verses describes God's love: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."² His greatest desire is for us to join Him in His eternal home, heaven, and He made the way possible by paying the price for our sins. God is the essence of love itself³—the wellspring from which love in all of its other forms flows.

If you haven't yet learned how to tap into God's unending reservoir of love, this issue of *Activated* could change your life!

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Matthew 16:26 NLT
2. John 3:16 NIV
3. See 1 John 4:8.

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TELEPORTATION—OR TRANSFORMATION

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

SOME YEARS AGO, a friend and I were on an overnight bus trip to another part of South Africa. We stowed our bags, connected our headphones, and braced ourselves for the long uncomfortable hours ahead. Before the journey began, I remember thinking *I wish teleporters existed, and we didn't have to waste all these hours just to get somewhere.* Little did I suspect what was coming.

About halfway through the trip—just after 2 AM, the bus broke down, and the driver announced our journey was placed on indefinite “pause.” Mechanics would be arriving, but exactly *when* was a little hazy, as we were in the middle of nowhere.

Some of us decided to file out and stand outside, stretching our legs and breathing the crisp air. I was extremely frustrated, and even a

bit upset, with God for allowing the bus to break down. I paced up and down in the darkness, feeling sorry for myself.

Then I heard the singing, a low melodic rumble welling up from somewhere in the group of passengers. It rose up in a beautiful rhythm, clear and utterly joyous. Then another voice joined in, then another, then a few more. Before long, many of us were singing along, our woeful thoughts unexpectedly carried away by the tunes of camaraderie and a thankful song.

My friend grabbed my arm, “Look up!” she said, pointing to the sky. What a glorious view—stars without number covering the expanse and shining serenely and brightly without competition from city lights, as if to say, *It will all work out.* As we stood and stared and sang, I regretted my

earlier griping and remembered a quote I'd once read: “One man sees the mud, the other sees the stars.” And I realized I didn't really wish for teleporters after all. I decided to thrive in the moments—both the good and the less good—thankful for what I have and taking time to experience the little joys of life. With the song of salvation in my heart and the twinkles of blessings around me, I can face every day with anticipation.

And yes, the bus was repaired and we continued on in our journey, but more than that, I was changed. On that starry night in the middle of nowhere, I was reminded that my Lord is everywhere.

CHRIS MIZRANY IS A WEB DESIGNER, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. ■



Love in the Parking Lot

BY MARIA FONTAINE

DID YOU KNOW THAT PARKING LOTS AT MIDNIGHT CAN BE VERY ROMANTIC? I'm talking about the romance I experienced with Jesus while walking in a parking lot.

I needed to get some daily exercise and I only had two options: either go to the air-conditioned gym or walk in the warm outdoors. Since I get cold easily, I chose walking outside in the heat. However, I found that even for me, there's a limit to the heat I can take. So since it was a very hot time of year, I had to wait until it was cooler outdoors—which turned out to be close to midnight.

I would go for my exercise when everything was quiet and almost everyone was in bed. As it was late and I was unfamiliar with the area, I stayed in the parking lot, which was well-lit and had a security guard. It

took me five minutes to walk the full circle of the parking lot, and I'd repeat the rounds to make for an extended walk.

The kind night watchman assured me that I'd be safe walking in the parking lot. He was like a visible reminder of God's presence, always close and comforting. I could relax and enjoy my exercise, knowing both the watchman and God and His angels were on duty.

Back to my original thought: What was romantic about this parking lot? It was my personal time walking and talking with Jesus, the One who knows my heart better than I know it myself. Everything was quiet, there were no distractions, and most of the time, there was nothing to capture my attention except the moon, which only enhanced the experience.

Well, sometimes there was a little rabbit, which would pause in the grass as I walked by. He didn't seem afraid—just a little curious. He stayed up just as late as I did.

I have to admit, cars aren't my favorite things to look at. On the other hand, the cars gave me something to praise Jesus for as we walked along—all the conveniences and solutions without which modern life couldn't exist.

The unattractive cars were offset by the natural beauty of the trees growing alongside the wall that bordered the property. The parking lot's security lights shone on the leaves, giving them a feathery or lacy appearance and a soft, golden hue. The effect of the lights shining through the trees was ethereal, almost magical. The contrast between the darkness and the golden light caused



a special effect that could only be appreciated at night.

In the daytime, things can look so harsh and stark and pragmatic and utilitarian, but when the mellow darkness of night blends with soft lights, everything changes. The combination seems to highlight and enhance the beauty that is already there. It's not that the flaws have vanished; they're still there and will show up again in the sunshine, but the welcome darkness covers them up just long enough to help us appreciate those points of beauty that we might not notice in the daytime. God's love is a lot like that. It was an illustration to me of the way that Jesus sees the beauty in us and chooses to overlook our imperfections.

One night I heard a songbird, just once. I never heard it again. It was such a beautiful concert it performed

with different songs—a special gift that my always thoughtful and caring Lord wanted me to enjoy.

When I'd walk around this parking lot at night, I'd have my MP3 player with me with all kinds of interesting things to listen to, yet I rarely turned it on, because this was my “Jesus time” and I felt His love call.

He and I talked about a lot of things. He reminded me that beauty can be found even in parking lots when He's there. He assured me that whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, together we can make something wonderful from them.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

IN THE GARDEN

By C. Austin Miles

I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.

And he walks with me and he talks
with me
And he tells me I am his own
And the joy we share as we tarry
there
None other has ever known.

He speaks and the sound of his voice
is so sweet
The birds hush their singing
And the melody that he gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.

And he walks with me and he talks
with me
And he tells me I am his own
And the joy we share as we tarry
there
None other has ever known. ■



GIVING HIM ALL THE PIECES

BY DINA ELLENS



I THOUGHT I HAD MY LIFE TOGETHER. I had a loving husband, four wonderful children, and a fulfilling life as an aid worker. We had moved to Indonesia to work with a sheltered workshop for disabled children under the sponsorship of the International Council on Social Welfare and were truly enjoying our experiences.

However, after the birth of my fifth child, things took a different turn. I began struggling with nightmares and depression that overshadowed every aspect of my life. Then my marriage fell apart.

Around this time, I made friends with some other expatriate mothers. They were Christians, and not only did they open their homes and lives to me, but they also prayed for me and pointed me to God's Word.

With their encouragement, I started finding my answers in the Bible. As I was reading one day, these words in Isaiah 54 moved me to tears:

1. Isaiah 54:4–5,13 NLT

“Fear not; you will no longer live in shame. Don't be afraid; there is no more disgrace for you. You will no longer remember the shame of your youth and the sorrows of widowhood.

“For your Creator will be your husband ... He is your Redeemer.

“I will teach all your children, and they will enjoy great peace.”¹

Although the passage had been written thousands of years earlier, somehow I felt God speaking to me personally. I didn't understand all the verses perfectly, but as I read them over and over, I felt comforted.

This was a turning point for me. Not long after, the sad dreams completely stopped, and for the first time in months, I was able to sleep peacefully. My days were happier, too, and my outlook became more positive. I continued living in Southeast Asia and raised my five children, now grown and married, who have already blessed me with fourteen grandchildren.

Looking back now, I realize the extent to which God has fulfilled those promises. He took the broken pieces of my life and put them back together.

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

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.—1 Peter 5:7 NLT

In the darkest of nights cling to the assurance that God loves you, that He always has advice for you, a path that you can tread and a solution to your problem—and you will experience that which you believe. God never disappoints anyone who places his trust in Him.—*Basilea Schlink (1904–2001)*



LONELY?

BY MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA

I AM SITTING IN A SMALL SQUARE IN SARAJEVO.

Somehow I've always had the urge to come back here, to this country which suffered so much in the recent past. Memories are flooding my mind. I brought my two sons here when they were children to run around and to rollerblade. They ran, played, raced, and shouted excitedly. I watched, sometimes worried, always prayed for their safety, and once in a while helped them with a game or refereed their competitions.

So long ago...

They grew up. So fast...

I spent so much time with them, homeschooled them, brought them on most of my travels, involved them in my volunteering, taught them cleaning and cooking, took them on excursions, and so much more. They were simply with me wherever I went. As a single mom, I faced my share of problems and challenges, but I loved being a mother.

And then they left home and I found myself living without them. I decided to return to missionary work and joined a project in Bohol, in the Philippines.

Bohol looked like paradise on earth. The ocean was all imaginable shades of blue: dark blue, azure, turquoise, baby blue, indigo, ashen blue, and more; the sunsets were the most amazing combinations of colors: bright yellow, gold, orange, raspberry, and light purple. I loved the palm trees, the dreamlike boats, the slow-moving lifestyle...

Despite all the beauty surrounding me every day, my evening walks along the shore were filled with feelings of loneliness and nostalgia. I missed my children and close friends. At times it was nearly unbearable, and I would cry and pray for strength to go on and not to feel so discouraged and alone.

Sitting by the water, absorbing the view, I felt Jesus' presence.

Sometimes I didn't know what to tell Him. Sometimes I was so low I couldn't hear Him. But it was like sitting next to a close friend, when everything has been shared and you just sit together, silently, feeling comforted by their presence.

In the mornings, before all the hustle and bustle began, I would listen to a short sermon or an inspirational message. I don't know how I would have survived without my devotions in the morning and my "sittings" with my Jesus in the evenings. Those were very special times.

I am writing this from Sarajevo where I'm visiting. My son now is so much taller than I. He fastens his fancy camera on the tripod and runs to stand next to me. Click. I'm ready for the next chapter of my life.

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

BY LILIA POTTERS

PASS » IT ON

I SAT BACK IN MY SEAT AND WAITED FOR TAKEOFF. My back ached and my limbs were stiff from the five-hour drive to the airport and the two-hour first leg of my flight home. I wasn't looking forward to another five hours in cramped economy-class seating.

My mind drifted to my daughter, not yet 18 years old, who I had just taken to live with her older brother for a while. I was going to miss her! It was her first time away from home, and my heart ached at the thought of not having her near me. I knew this feeling well. She was the fifth of our six children to leave home. *I should be getting used to it*, I thought.

But the same empty feeling started to overtake me. Tears burned in my eyes, but I determined not to give in to my emotions.

As the plane taxied down the runway, I closed my eyes and lifted my heart to Jesus, asking Him to grant me a safe flight and to keep my dear daughter and the rest of my children safe in His care. I thanked Him that He always had. His still small voice whispered to my heart that all would be well with my daughter, just as it had been with her four older brothers who had left home before her.

The plane took off, climbed, and then leveled off.



Peace came over me as I drank in God's assurances and remembered how He had never failed to answer my prayers for our children. Tears of longing turned to tears of gratitude as I thanked Him for His faithfulness and comfort.

When I opened my eyes, I saw that a woman and a little girl about three years old had moved into the seats next to mine, which had been empty at takeoff. Although I had hoped for empty seats beside me so I could stretch out, I understood how the stewardess probably felt they needed the space.

I watched the mother struggle with her daughter, who was tired and whiny and sleepy. I offered the woman my pillow and an extra blanket to cushion the child's head. With a grateful look, she explained they'd already flown for eight hours. Soon the little girl fell asleep, half in her own seat and half in her mother's lap.

A meal was served, we made a little small talk, the stewardess collected the trays, and the woman tried to get some rest. A few minutes later, I noticed a tear run down her cheek, then another. She tried to

brush them away before I could see, but quickly realized I already had and gave me a sheepish smile.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

"Yes, yes," she said. But the tears kept coming.

I gently touched her arm. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

After a valiant effort to compose herself, she explained that she'd just taken her 16-year-old son to the United States, to study. She had seven other children, but he was the oldest and the first one to leave home. She missed him already.

I looked at her in amazement. Here I was, sitting next to a woman who was experiencing the exact same emotions I had only minutes earlier, thinking about my own dear daughter.

I took her hand in mine and I told her that I understood. I explained about my daughter and shared the comforting thoughts God had whispered to my heart just a short while before. She listened intently and smiled through her tears when I told her we could pray for our children and then trust God to care for them.

After parting, I thanked Jesus for a safe flight and for the way He so

perfectly engineers things. I believe He worked out those seating arrangements on the plane so I could pass on His words and reassurances to someone else. He wanted to comfort us both.

LILIA POTTERS IS A WRITER AND EDITOR IN THE USA. ■

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable only, but to make us comforters.—*John Henry Jowett (1863–1923)*

The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort ... comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.—*2 Corinthians 1:3–4 NIV*

Encourage one another and build each other up.—*1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV*

The loving-kindness of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting to those who reverence Him.—*Psalms 103:17 TLB*

Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!—*Isaiah 49:15 NLT*

LOVE NEVER FAILS TO LOVE

BY MARA HODLER

MOST OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE PHRASE “Love never fails.”¹ It’s illustrated in children’s devotionals. It’s woven into songs, stories, and poems. I can’t remember a time when this scripture wasn’t familiar to me.

In my younger years, I took it to mean that love was always strong enough to get what it wanted. “Love” held the trump card and could somehow get its way. I guess I had a somewhat manipulative idea of love. I thought it could outsmart, convince, reason and persuade to encourage whatever results were necessary.

Looking back, I can see that I applied this meaning of “love” generously in my friendships. I thought, “Love never fails. It pushes till it gets the necessary results.” I thought that love had license to manipulate, because my “love” for my friends was only after good results.

As you can imagine, this didn’t always make me a good or sought-after friend. I tried, I really did, but somehow, I often fell short. I did great with people who weren’t in my life for very long. And the fact that my family’s lifestyle was one of constant travel worked well for me. Even though I had many short-term close friendships, I didn’t often have to work through a lot of issues with my friends, since we were only around each other for a limited time.

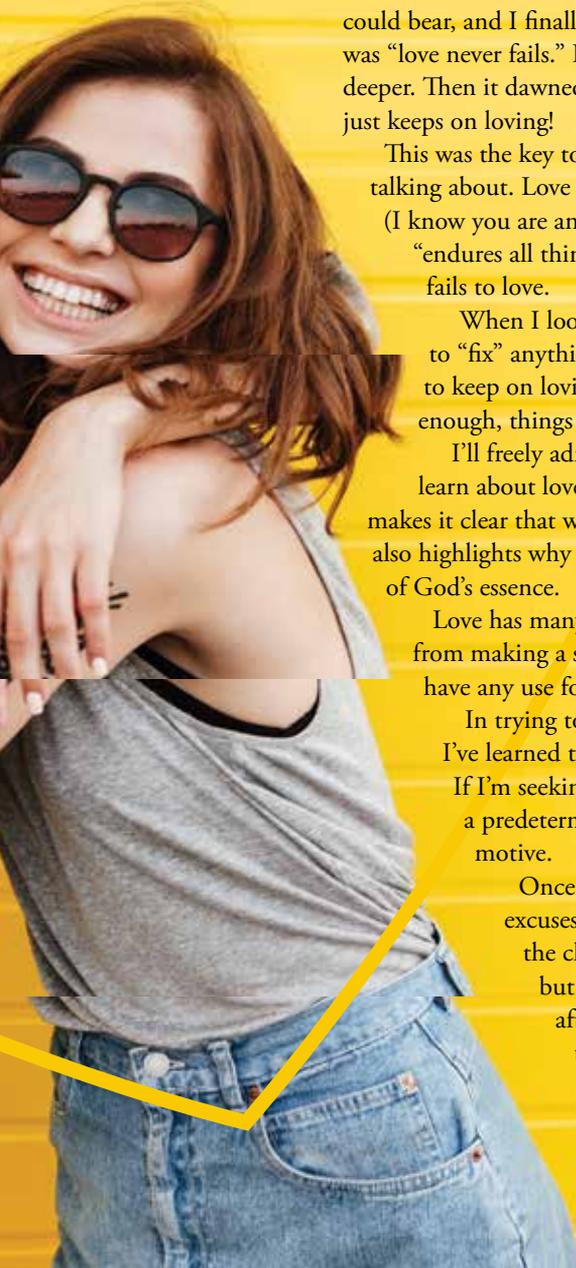
When I hit my early twenties, I settled down a bit and stayed for several years in one place. That’s when I had some of my first experiences with the ups and downs of close friendships. Sometimes things were fine, and I was in sync with my friends. Other times, things didn’t flow so well. One of us would hit a rough patch, do something that hurt the other, develop an interest in a hobby that didn’t include the other, or pursue a friendship that wasn’t inclusive.

1. 1 Corinthians 13:8

2. 1 John 4:8

3. www.just1thing.com





When that happened, I always tried to figure out how to get things back to the way they were. I didn't always look at what my friend needed or wanted. I just thought about how I felt things should be.

This caused me to hit a wall with my very closest friend. Over a period of time, she and I fell so out of sync it was hard for me to believe that we used to spend our free time climbing hills together, frequenting our favorite coffee shops, and talking for hours to each other. I missed her and I wanted things to go back to how they were!

Week after week of us not syncing or understanding each other got to be more than I could bear, and I finally took some time to pray about it. The verse God brought to mind was "love never fails." I was more desperate than usual and felt that I needed something deeper. Then it dawned on me: love never fails *to love*. Love isn't after any set outcome. It just keeps on loving!

This was the key to unlocking what the preceding verses in 1 Corinthians 13 were talking about. Love "bears all things" (it's okay if you're upset at me); "believes all things" (I know you are an amazing person); "hopes all things" (I know we'll always be friends); "endures all things" (I can wait until you feel like being friends again). Love never fails to love.

When I looked at my friend from that perspective, I didn't feel an urgency to try to "fix" anything. I realized that I loved and respected her enough to just be patient, to keep on loving her, and wait until she felt ready to reinstate our friendship. Sure enough, things got better quickly.

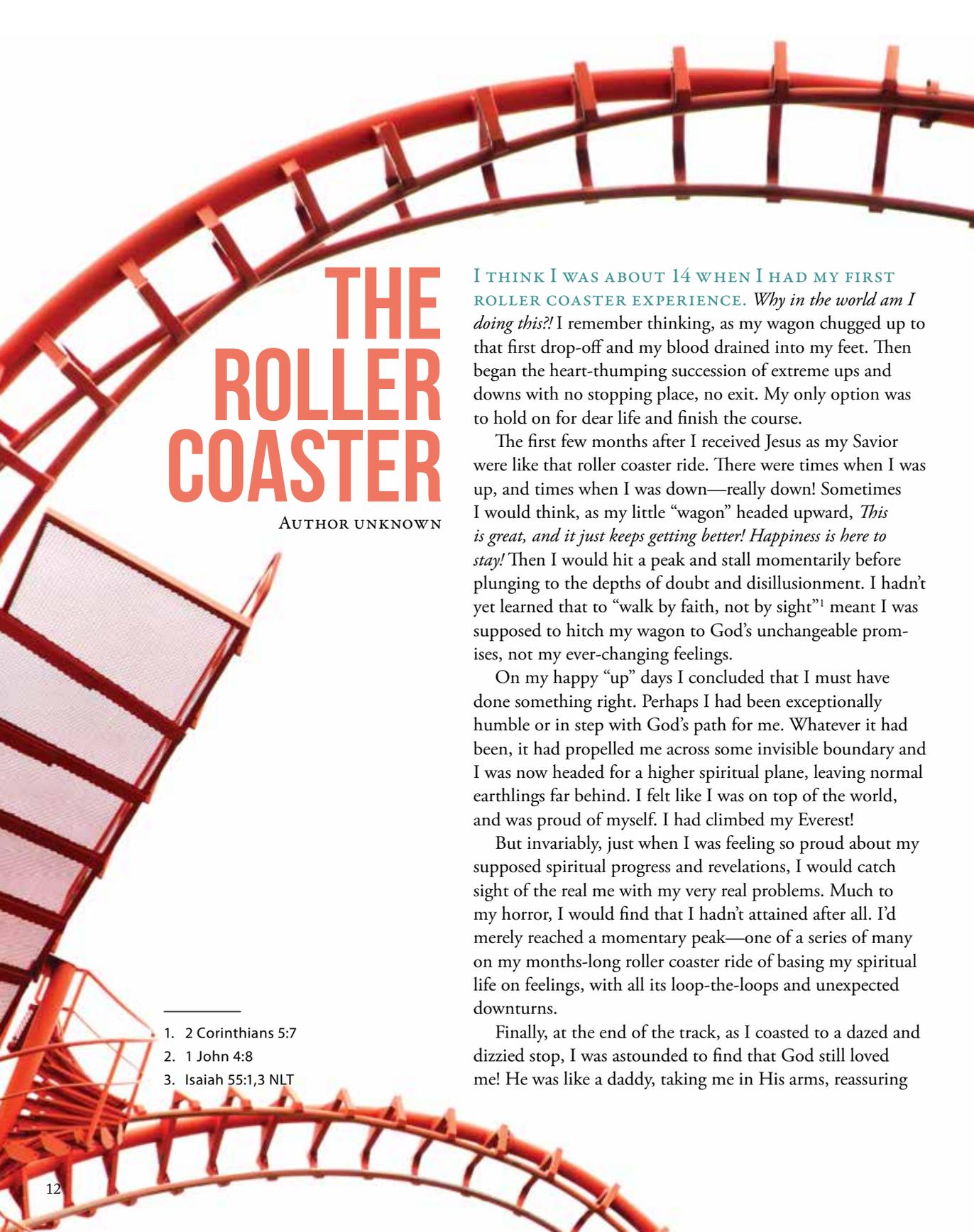
I'll freely admit that even now, more than a decade later, I still have a whole lot to learn about love. The Bible tells us that "God is love."² That right there pretty much makes it clear that we will never fully grasp love or ever have enough love ourselves. But it also highlights why love is so powerful, so worth striving for. When we love, we partake of God's essence.

Love has many different faces. It might be taking your mom shopping, refraining from making a snarky quip to your friend, donating something you like but don't have any use for, and on and on the list goes.

In trying to determine whether or not I'm truly doing something out of love, I've learned that my true colors show if I simply ask myself, *What are my motives?* If I'm seeking a specific outcome that's advantageous to me, or if I'm pushing for a predetermined result, I can usually deduce that I have some sort of an ulterior motive.

Once I'm sure that I've purged my selfish motives and eliminated my excuses and "good reasons" for them, I only have one choice left to make: the choice to just keep on loving. Sometimes that's easier said than done, but I've found that it's just a matter of making one little loving choice after another. When I try my best to do that, I find God takes care of the rest.

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST I THING,³ A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■



THE ROLLER COASTER

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

I THINK I WAS ABOUT 14 WHEN I HAD MY FIRST ROLLER COASTER EXPERIENCE. *Why in the world am I doing this?!* I remember thinking, as my wagon chugged up to that first drop-off and my blood drained into my feet. Then began the heart-thumping succession of extreme ups and downs with no stopping place, no exit. My only option was to hold on for dear life and finish the course.

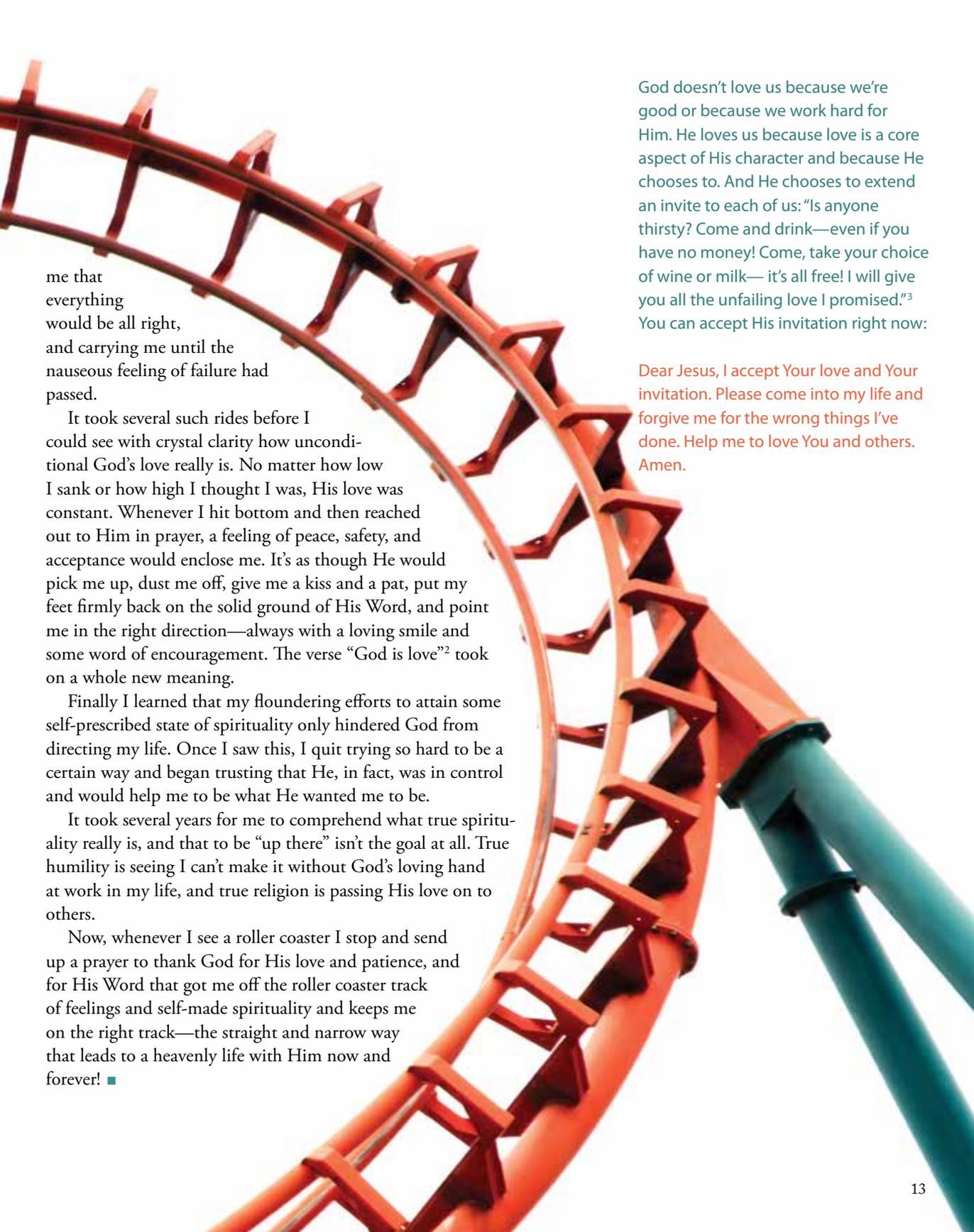
The first few months after I received Jesus as my Savior were like that roller coaster ride. There were times when I was up, and times when I was down—really down! Sometimes I would think, as my little “wagon” headed upward, *This is great, and it just keeps getting better! Happiness is here to stay!* Then I would hit a peak and stall momentarily before plunging to the depths of doubt and disillusionment. I hadn’t yet learned that to “walk by faith, not by sight”¹ meant I was supposed to hitch my wagon to God’s unchangeable promises, not my ever-changing feelings.

On my happy “up” days I concluded that I must have done something right. Perhaps I had been exceptionally humble or in step with God’s path for me. Whatever it had been, it had propelled me across some invisible boundary and I was now headed for a higher spiritual plane, leaving normal earthlings far behind. I felt like I was on top of the world, and was proud of myself. I had climbed my Everest!

But invariably, just when I was feeling so proud about my supposed spiritual progress and revelations, I would catch sight of the real me with my very real problems. Much to my horror, I would find that I hadn’t attained after all. I’d merely reached a momentary peak—one of a series of many on my months-long roller coaster ride of basing my spiritual life on feelings, with all its loop-the-loops and unexpected downturns.

Finally, at the end of the track, as I coasted to a dazed and dizzied stop, I was astounded to find that God still loved me! He was like a daddy, taking me in His arms, reassuring

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1. 2 Corinthians 5:7
 2. 1 John 4:8
 3. Isaiah 55:1,3 NLT



me that everything would be all right, and carrying me until the nauseous feeling of failure had passed.

It took several such rides before I could see with crystal clarity how unconditional God's love really is. No matter how low I sank or how high I thought I was, His love was constant. Whenever I hit bottom and then reached out to Him in prayer, a feeling of peace, safety, and acceptance would enclose me. It's as though He would pick me up, dust me off, give me a kiss and a pat, put my feet firmly back on the solid ground of His Word, and point me in the right direction—always with a loving smile and some word of encouragement. The verse "God is love"² took on a whole new meaning.

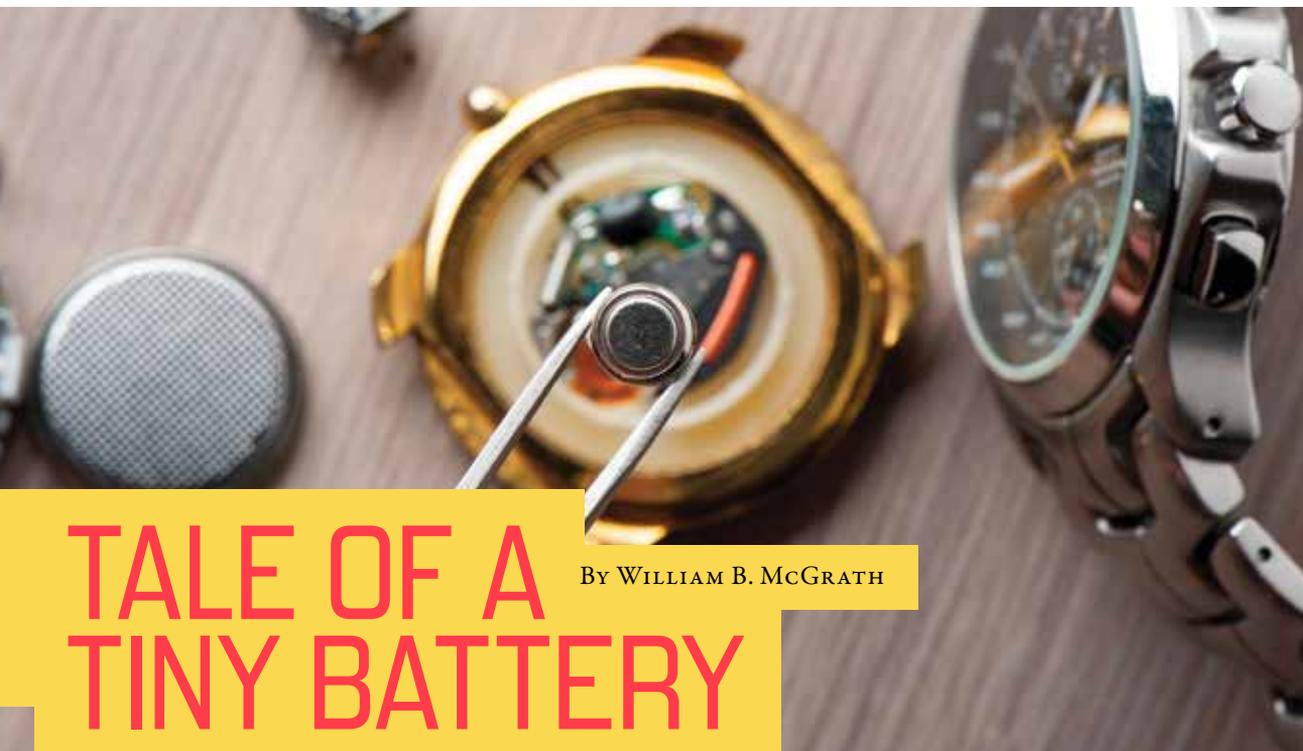
Finally I learned that my floundering efforts to attain some self-prescribed state of spirituality only hindered God from directing my life. Once I saw this, I quit trying so hard to be a certain way and began trusting that He, in fact, was in control and would help me to be what He wanted me to be.

It took several years for me to comprehend what true spirituality really is, and that to be "up there" isn't the goal at all. True humility is seeing I can't make it without God's loving hand at work in my life, and true religion is passing His love on to others.

Now, whenever I see a roller coaster I stop and send up a prayer to thank God for His love and patience, and for His Word that got me off the roller coaster track of feelings and self-made spirituality and keeps me on the right track—the straight and narrow way that leads to a heavenly life with Him now and forever! ■

God doesn't love us because we're good or because we work hard for Him. He loves us because love is a core aspect of His character and because He chooses to. And He chooses to extend an invite to each of us: "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk— it's all free! I will give you all the unfailing love I promised."³ You can accept His invitation right now:

Dear Jesus, I accept Your love and Your invitation. Please come into my life and forgive me for the wrong things I've done. Help me to love You and others. Amen.



BY WILLIAM B. MCGRATH

TALE OF A TINY BATTERY

MY WIFE AND I WERE ATTENDING A FUNERAL IN THE USA.

We'd rented a car and were out running errands. Personally, I wanted to find a watch repair shop where I could purchase a new battery and get it installed in my old wristwatch. In the first two commercial centers we had visited, we asked around, but there was no one that we spoke with who knew where we might find one. A Google search was also unsuccessful, and I reluctantly gave up on that errand.

As we drove, my wife and I were reminiscing about our relative who passed away, and I told her it was hard for me to imagine how Jesus could appear personally to so many different people, meeting them when they arrived in heaven. With so many billions of people on earth, and so

many dying each day, how does God keep such intricate tabs on each of us and meet so many of us personally when we go up to heaven?

I was just finishing expressing all this to her, confessing my somewhat negative wonderment, when the impulse hit to not give up on searching for the little battery for my watch just yet. So I said, "I'm going to ask around one more time," and I turned right, off the main boulevard. Amazingly, the very first thing I saw as we pulled into the strip mall was a store, right in front of us, with a large sign: Watch Repair Shop.

My wife started laughing and said, "See? He just answered you. *This is how!*"

She got it before I did. God was telling me, in a memorable, succinct manner, *Not only can I greet each one of you individually when your time comes to come here, but I can meet your*

smallest needs, even down to a tiny watch battery, in unpredictable ways!

So God intervened that day and answered my question! And there we were with a pleasant and skilled Vietnamese gentleman, surrounded by beautiful clocks. He had just the right tiny battery, and after inspecting my watch, he assured me that although it is a very old watch, it was still in very good condition.

It reminded me of the intro to Psalm 139: "You have looked deep into my heart, Lord, and you know all about me. You know when I am resting or when I am working, and from heaven you discover my thoughts. You notice everything I do and everywhere I go."¹

WILLIAM B. MCGRATH IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN SOUTHERN MEXICO. ■

1. CEV

CREATION SPEAKS

BY MARIE ALVERO



MY FAMILY AND I ONCE DROVE UP TO THE TOP OF PIKES PEAK, the highest summit in the Rocky Mountains. Around 14,000 feet above sea level, we took in the breathtaking views of winding mountaintop lakes, rock formations, forests, and soaring mountains on all sides. The whole scene has been etched into our family's collective memory, to be shared over and over.

I know there are many ways to take in nature and experience its splendor. A wildlife enthusiast might marvel at the creatures that inhabit the area, a geology buff would be impressed at the stories the mountains tell, an adrenaline junkie would thrill in the highest climb or even a more extreme sport, but what I saw was a massive expression of God.

I'm in awe of how God created these stunning scenes, not based on my worthiness, nor the collective worthiness of humanity. Knowing

our fallen nature, He still created this beautiful world. Somehow He connected humanity to this creation, and to each other. Through the physical nature, the mountains, oceans, forests, deserts, plains, and waters, we get a glimpse of His nature: enduring, awesome, fearsome, and life-giving.

What's more, anyone can experience His wonder, regardless of where we stand with God. The Bible says He sends the rain on the just and the unjust, showing His love for us as a whole. His creation demonstrates His desire to care and sustain the world and His faithfulness toward us regardless of our actions. Creation, nature, is renewing, continually showing hope and promise, even in the wake of disaster and catastrophe.

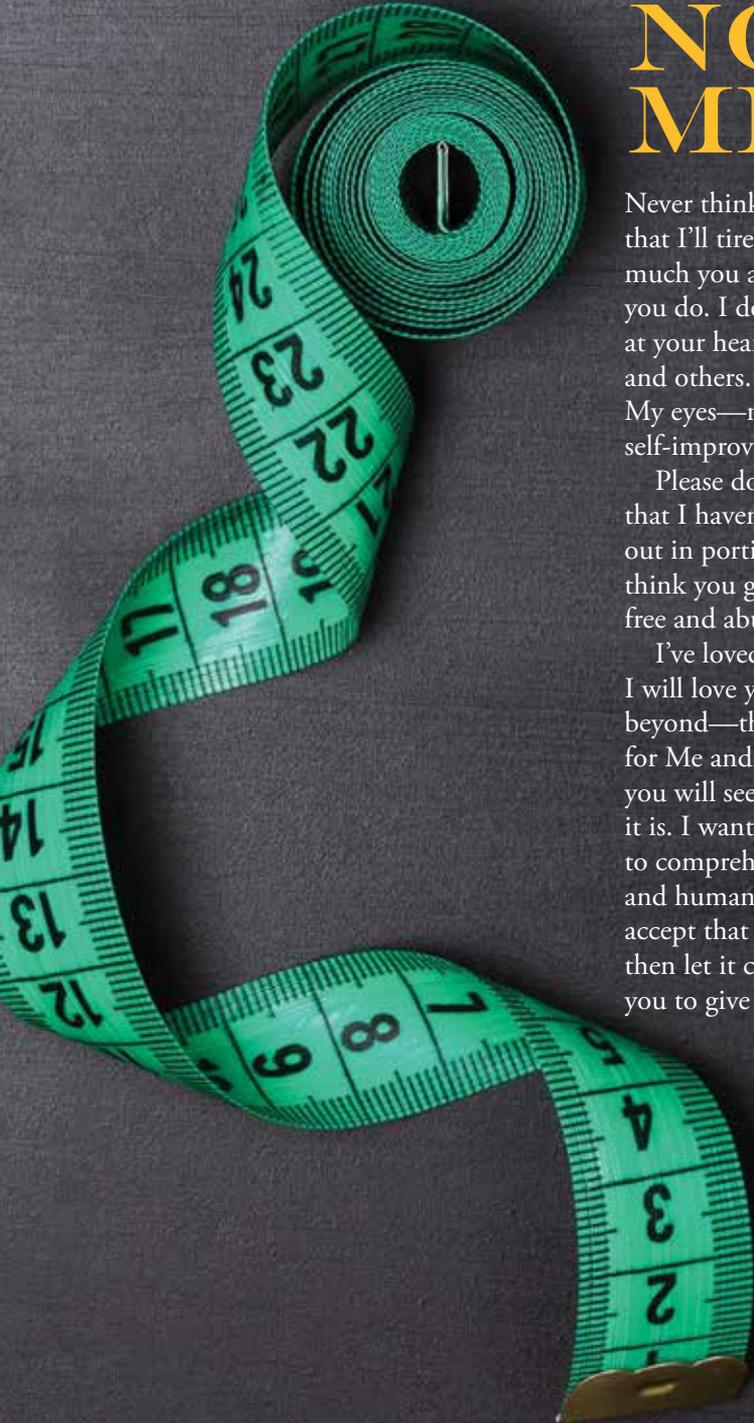
I feel small, just a little note in a fantastic and enormous symphony, but I also feel known. I hope you also get a chance to

stand on top of the world, so your soul can exclaim with mine, *O God, how great Thou art!*

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. ■

Whether it's a pebble in a riverbed or a soaring mountain peak, I see everything in the world as the handiwork of the Lord. When I paint, I try to represent the beauty of God's creation in my art. ... Because I see God's peacefulness, serenity, and contentment, I work to capture those feelings on the canvas. My vision of God defines my vision of the world.

—Thomas Kinkade (1958–2012)



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

NO MEASURE

Never think that I'm far from you. Never think that I'll tire of you. I don't judge you by how much you accomplish or by what good works you do. I don't compare you with others. I look at your heart and the love you have for Me and others. Those are the important things in My eyes—not your good works or efforts for self-improvement.

Please don't compare yourself to a standard that I haven't set for you. My love isn't measured out in portions, according to how much you think you give to Me or do for Me. My love is free and abundant.

I've loved you from the beginning, and I will love you to the end of your days, and beyond—through eternity! As you live your life for Me and experience My love for you daily, you will see how infinite it is, how free-flowing it is. I want you to accept it as is. Don't even try to comprehend it, for it is above your thoughts and human understanding. Just know and accept that it's there, that it's never-ending, and then let it change you, mold you, and inspire you to give to others also.