

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

Vol 20 • Issue 4

## EASTER TRADITIONS

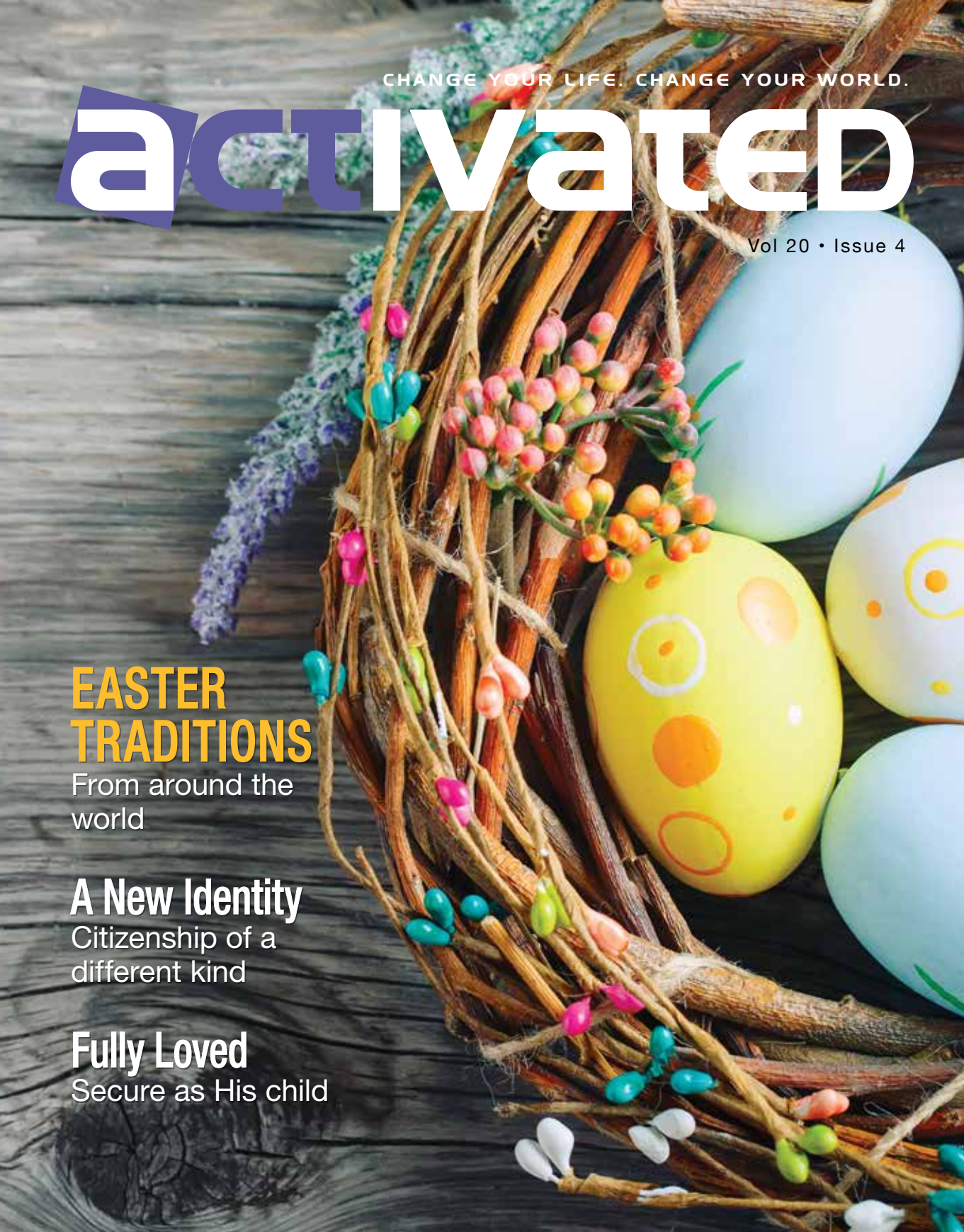
From around the world

## A New Identity

Citizenship of a different kind

## Fully Loved

Secure as His child





## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### "WHO'LL TAKE THE SON?"

I recently reread the touching story of a wealthy man and his son who loved to collect works of art. (The story appears in several sermons and books, but the original author is unknown.) It goes like this:

When war broke out, the son went to fight and died while rescuing another soldier. Not long after, there was a knock at the father's door. He opened to find a young

man holding a large package.

"Sir, you don't know me," the young man said, "but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him and he died instantly. He often talked about you and your love for art." The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much, but I wanted you to have this."

The package contained a portrait of the son, painted by the young man. The father hung the portrait over his mantle, and thereafter, he always showed visitors the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the masterpieces in his collection.

When the father died, an auction was organized to dispose of his art collection. On an easel next to the platform was the portrait of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?"

Silence. Then a shout came. "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one!"

The auctioneer was unmoved. "The son. Who will take the son?"

Finally the family's longtime gardener spoke from the back of the room. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." He felt embarrassed offering so little, but it was all he could afford.

"We have \$10. Will someone bid \$20?"

"Give it to him for \$10, and let's get on with it!"

"Going once, going twice, *sold* for \$10!" The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "The auction is ended," he announced. "When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the man's will: only the painting of the son would be auctioned, and whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate. The man who took the son gets everything!"

Like the auctioneer, God's question today is, "Who'll take the Son?" Because, you see, whoever takes the Son receives everything.

God's Son died for us nearly 2,000 years ago. This Easter, let's remember Him together.

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

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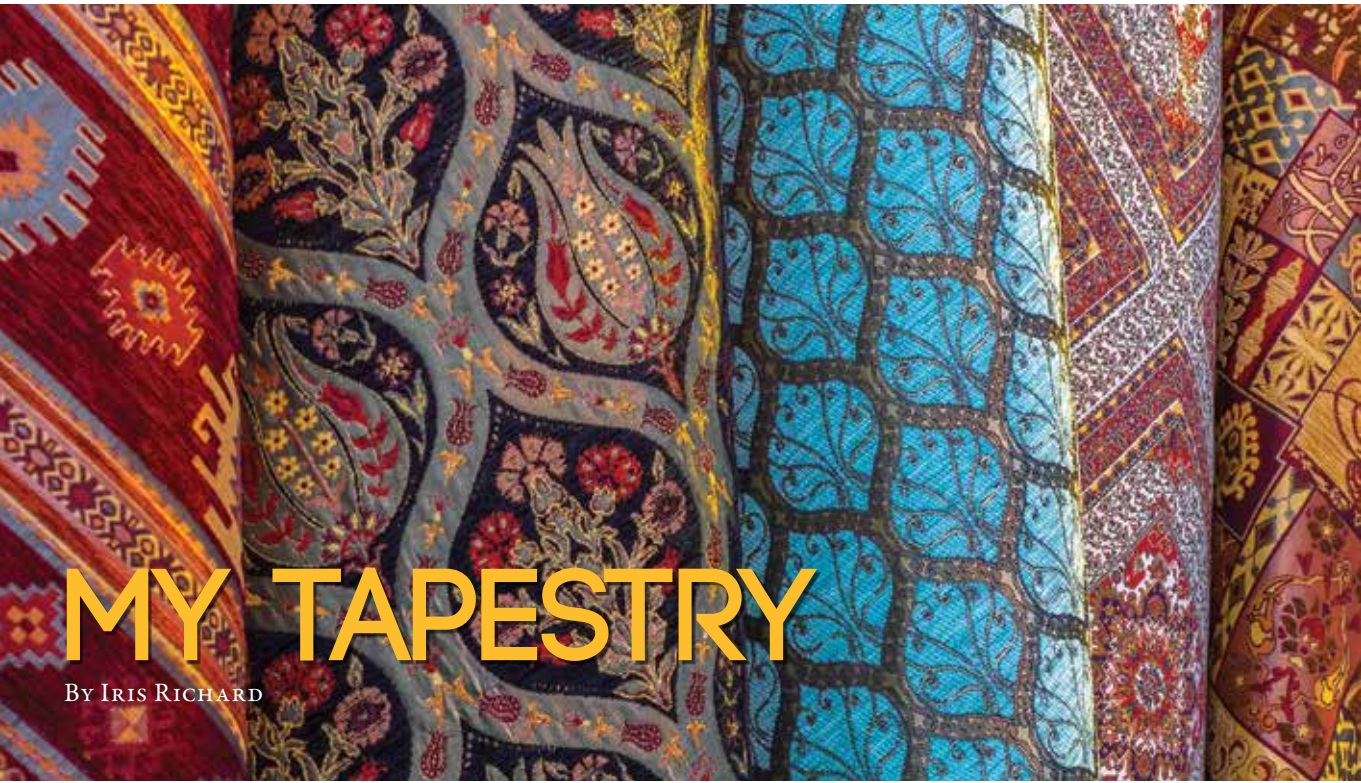
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Gentian Suçi

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# MY TAPESTRY

BY IRIS RICHARD

**HAVE YOU EVER FELT LIKE LIFE TOOK YOU DOWN THE WRONG ROAD**, or that things just weren't meant to work out for you? There was a time when my life didn't seem to make any sense, like the tangled threads on the back of a tapestry.

A serious case of scoliosis, or curvature of the spine, left me depressed as a child and then heightened the usual teenage worries about the future. By the time I was 15, I was on drugs. It was a wonder that I managed to make it through those troubled years when I couldn't have felt more lost and helpless. God was the furthest thing from my mind.

In my early twenties I worked for several years as a nurse in a cancer ward, but witnessing so much suffering, day after day, month after month, was too much for me. I

became increasingly disillusioned with life, and not knowing who to turn to, decided to leave my native Germany and travel the world in search of truth. I wound up in India, where, after a failed attempt to become a Buddhist nun, I trudged the dusty roads on a pilgrimage for peace, happiness, and a reason to live.

Then one day in northern India, I got into a deep conversation with a young foreign Christian missionary. I explained my many questions about life, and one by one he pointed me to the answers in the pocket-sized Bible that he carried with him. Seven hours later I ran out of questions and decided to put what he called the "promises from the Bible" to the test. My life was about to take a turn for the better; I was about to get a glimpse of my tapestry's top side, and things would begin to make sense.

I didn't have a big emotional experience when I invited Jesus into my life, but over the next few days something wonderful happened. Words from the Bible fed my soul and became clearer by the day.

That was 40 years ago. Since then, like a golden thread weaving through the tapestry of my life, God's Word has led me over mountains and through valleys, through sunshine and shadows, beside refreshing brooks and across desert plains. Regardless of the path or place, it has never failed to cause my soul to flourish with joy, peace, and spiritual growth.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■



# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

WHEN I THINK ABOUT HOW TO SUM UP WHO GOD IS IN A SINGLE PHRASE, “unconditional love” comes to mind. Of course, God is many things and cannot be confined to one phrase or term, but as we know from 1 John 4:8, *God is love*. That is His very nature; it is intrinsic to who He is. It is one of His fundamental character traits. While that doesn’t mean that He loves everything we do—we *are* sinners, after all—nor that He overlooks or turns a blind eye to our sin or wrongdoing, nonetheless He loves His children unconditionally and forgives us if we are humble enough to ask Him to.

God’s unconditional love for us is worth thinking about. It’s easy to get caught up in the fast pace of life and forget some of the fundamental

truths that bring us joy, peace, and confidence as Christians. The nature of God’s love, its unconditionality and universality, is truly a wonderful thing. Too often, the love we see in society is predicated on the value that the other person provides, and when that value ceases or is no longer needed, the love fades with it. Not so with God’s love. He delights in our company and wants to befriend us. God’s deep and abiding love motivates His continual call to each human being He has created, inviting them into relationship with Him.

When I reflect on Jesus’ love for me, it takes me to a place of gratefulness, humility, and awe. It makes me want to be more like Jesus. More kindhearted to others. More generous. More thoughtful. More unconditional in my love for others, loving and respecting them as human beings created in His image regardless of their circumstances.<sup>1</sup> That’s a tall order, as we are fallible humans and unable to show unfailing love to

others in the same way God does to us. Yet we’re called to be like Christ, and that includes emulating His nature and doing our best to give the gift of His unconditional love to those around us.

As Christians, we should be striving to be more like Jesus in every way, which includes strengthening our “unconditional love” muscles. Let’s look at three steps we can take to grow in this area of our spiritual lives.

**1. START WITH YOURSELF.** Knowing how completely God loves each of us despite our faults, flaws, and failings provides us with the assurance that we are loved, valued, cherished, and forever one of God’s children. From this place of strength, we are better able to love others. If you don’t feel that you are loved unconditionally by God, it will be very difficult for you to offer His love and support to someone else.

**Action:** Accept God’s unconditional love for you. Admit your limitations and weaknesses, and

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1. See Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 2:17.

2. 2 Corinthians 12:9

3. Romans 5:5 NIV

4. Romans 8:5 CEV

rejoice in God's promise that "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."<sup>2</sup>

**2. THE CLOSER WE ARE TO JESUS, THE MORE WE CAN BE A CONDUIT OF GOD'S LOVE FLOWING THROUGH US TO THOSE AROUND US.** "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

**Action:** Keep close to Jesus through regular time spent in prayer and reading His Word. Ask for a renewed infilling of the Holy Spirit.

**3. WHEN WE MEDITATE ON GOD'S LOVE, IT PUTS US IN A SPIRITUALLY HEALTHY PLACE.** When we dwell on God's love and the ultimate sacrifice that He made in sending Jesus to die for our sins to reconcile us to Him,

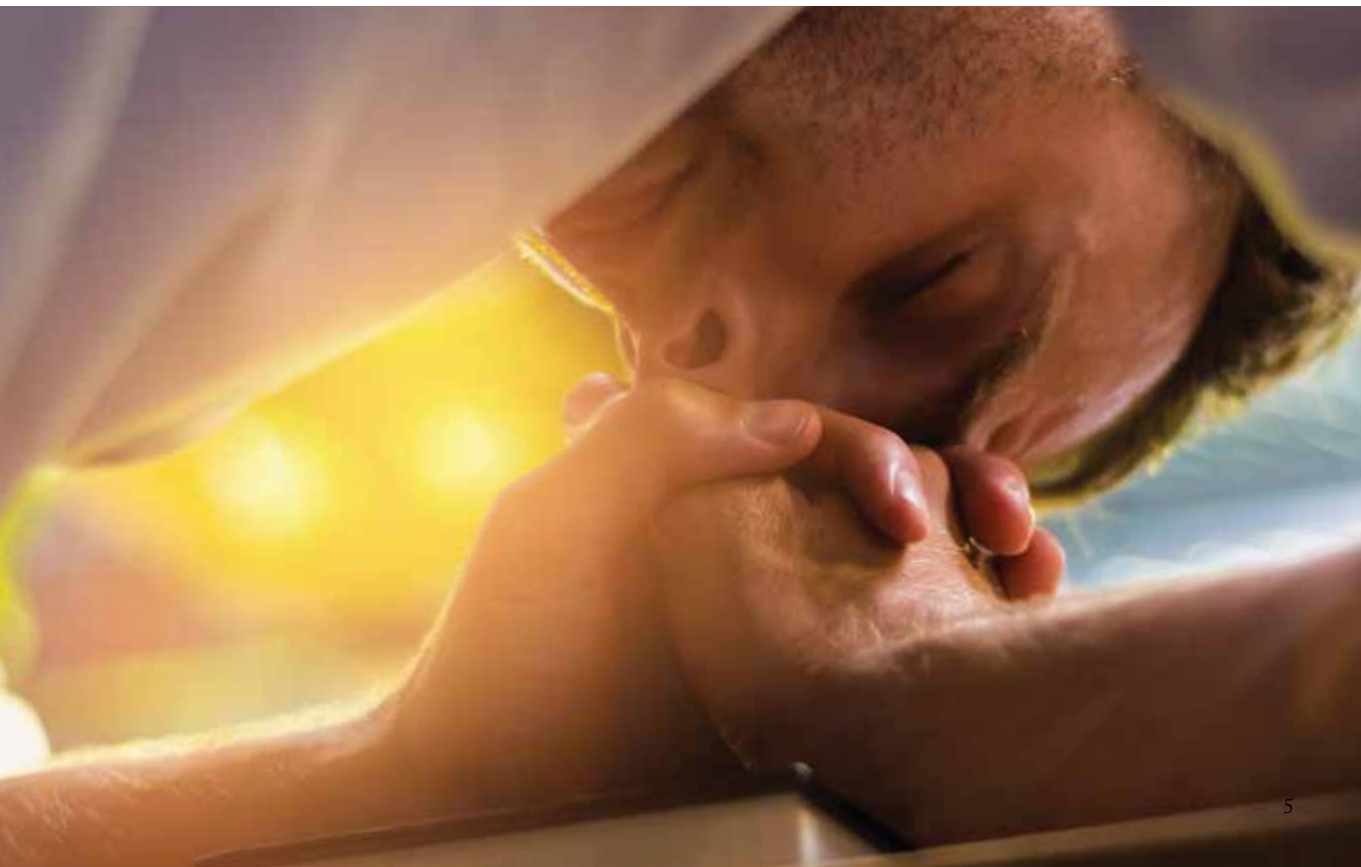
we gain motivation to follow Him more closely, to overcome sin, and to allow His Spirit to guide us and empower us to serve Him. "People who are ruled by their desires think only of themselves. Everyone who is ruled by the Holy Spirit thinks about spiritual things."<sup>4</sup>

**Action:** Spend more time with Jesus so that your mind is set more "on what the Spirit desires." This will naturally lead you to behave more like Jesus. I find regularly reading 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 to be very helpful in redirecting my thoughts and reactions to be more loving and led of God's Spirit.

We who have been born again through receiving Jesus as our Savior are so richly blessed. We have been

given so much—forgiveness of our sins, eternal life, and God's unconditional love, help, and guidance. As we grow in God's love, we can in turn encourage our brothers and sisters in the Lord and help to bring others closer to Him. 1 John 4:7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." I want to be "born of God." I truly desire to *know God*, and God's Word tells us that loving one another is a path to that aim.

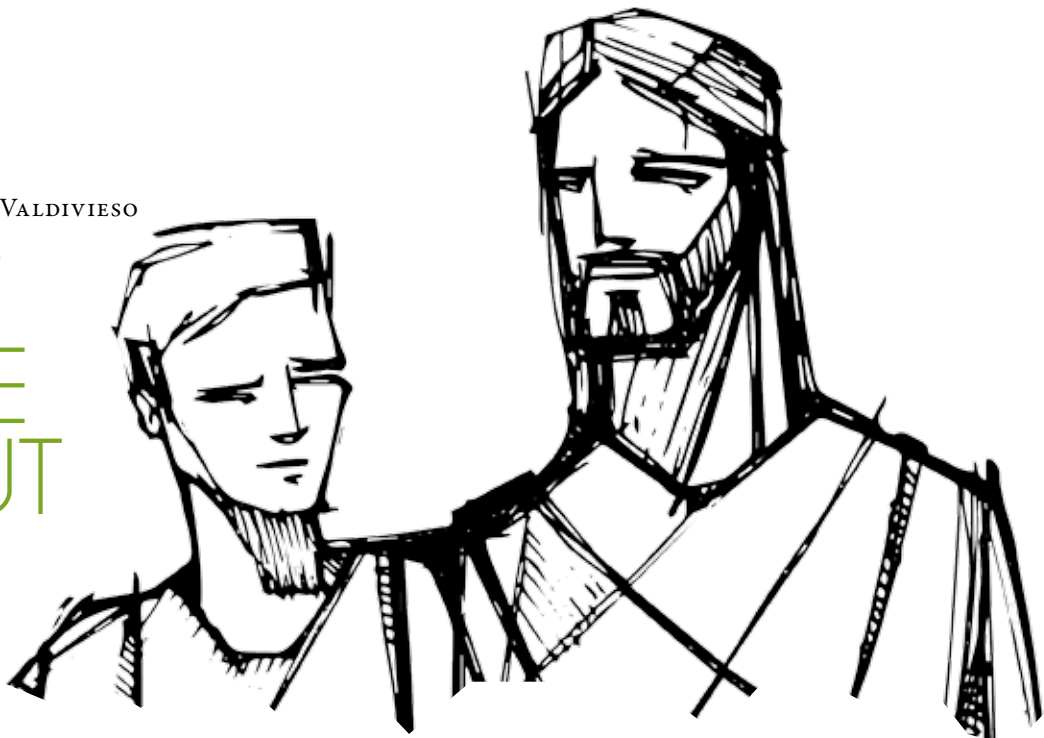
PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■





BY GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO

# WHAT I LOVE ABOUT JESUS



**THE OTHER DAY**, I found myself sitting in a restaurant alone, as my friend was running late. As I waited, I decided to jot down some thoughts about what Jesus means to me and what I love most about Him. This is what I came up with:

## **HIS ACCEPTANCE**

Jesus never condemns me. His understanding, patience, and forgiveness are unique. Even when He chides, He does it in love. He has a way of speaking to my heart and convicting me of my wrongdoing that makes me want to change and be a better person.

## **HIS HELP**

The Bible tells us to cast all our cares upon Jesus, because He cares for us.<sup>1</sup> My will, skills, and self-control are puny compared to His power. Much of my best work as a translator

and a writer has come from moments in which I was clueless about what to write or how to express a thought, and suddenly, out of the blue, God manifested Himself with a good idea or a flowing paragraph.

## **HIS MERCY**

Jesus has such a great way of looking at people! He is always so positive, even when I'm irritated. He never loses faith in people. In the Old Testament, when God's people rebelled time and again, even though He chastised them, He never gave up on them, and always offered deliverance, a way to repent, and encouragement to turn around and try again.

## **HIS UNIVERSALITY**

Mother Teresa said that she saw Jesus in every human being. One day He is dressed as a beggar and another as a king. One day He wears the attire of a businessman, and the next,

the work clothes of a laborer. He puts himself at everyone's level.

## **HIS PLANS**

I love that I can put my life in His hands and trust that He will help me chart the best course. The poet Robert Burns penned, "The best laid plans of mice and men go oft awry." But if I involve Him in charting my way, I can have confidence that the final destination will be splendid, even if I have to go through some rough patches to get there.

Why not take a few minutes of thankfulness and reflection and pen your own list of what you love about Jesus? It's a refreshing activity, and you can refer to it anytime your vision gets cloudy.

GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO IS THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF *ACTIVATED* AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

1. See 1 Peter 5:7.

BY UDAY PAUL

# A NEW IDENTITY



ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOVIES IS THE 1967 CLASSIC *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. The movie was released at a very sensitive period in American history when race relations were highly volatile. It went on to become a major hit and acted as a great agent for social change.

It tells the story of a young white woman, Joanna Drayton (Katharine Houghton), who brings her black fiancé John Prentice (Sidney Poitier) home to meet her parents. Though her parents are proud of being liberal and progressive in their outlook, their world is shaken when the values they professed in theory were put to the test. Meanwhile, John also has to deal with the objections raised by his

father, who doesn't want his son to marry a white girl.

Although interracial marriages were frowned upon and were even illegal in many parts of America at that time, Joanna's love for her fiancé looks beyond any differences in their outward appearance and the prejudices of her day. This is a wonderful illustration of the way in which God looks beyond appearance, nationality, race, class, and gender, and how He accepts people anywhere who open their hearts to Him.<sup>1</sup> When we believe in Jesus, He breaks down any barriers of division and makes us one.<sup>2</sup> The spiritual bond among believers transcends any national or ethnic differences, as we become citizens of a new country, the kingdom of God,<sup>3</sup> whose values and rules are radically different from those of the present world.

Through His sacrifice on the cross, Jesus redeems people from every background.<sup>4</sup> While He was on earth, He chose people from diverse and sometimes questionable backgrounds to be His disciples. Today, He continues to welcome people from every country and ethnic origin.

The kingdom of God is the best country anyone can belong to. It isn't a physical country, but one that lives in the hearts of believers who are bonded in a community of faith. It's a country that has never persecuted the poor or oppressed the weak or waged a war for the wrong reasons. It's a great privilege to be a citizen of the kingdom of God.

UDAY PAUL IS A FREELANCE WRITER, VOLUNTEER, AND TEACHER BASED IN INDIA. ■

1. See Acts 10:34–35.
2. See Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:14.
3. See Philippians 3:20.
4. See Revelation 5:9–10.

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

# GRANDPA'S SMILE

HE LAY COVERED IN WHITE HOSPITAL SHEETS, hooked up to a tangle of tubes and wires. As I approached, I barely recognized him—the pasty skin, the sunken cheeks—but when he opened his eyes and smiled at me, it was all I could do to keep from jumping into his arms like I always had. Grandpa, whom I loved more than anyone else in the whole world, had had a serious heart attack.

Grandpa had always been my best friend, as well as my confidant and counselor when I'd had problems with friends or siblings. As the youngest child in my family, I was shy, gangly, and unsure of myself, but Grandpa always knew how to give me the boost I needed. If I needed a friend, he joined me in my games. If I needed a shoulder to cry on, I knew where to find one. Grandpa's big, warm hugs were the most comforting place on earth! If I needed correction, he gave it firmly but gently. He would reach deep into my heart and make me want to change for the

better. He also prayed a lot, and was quick to remind me that prayer was the surest way to make good things happen.

I was 14 years old, just leaving childhood behind, when we were called to the hospital. One by one, from the oldest to the youngest, we were allowed into Grandpa's hospital room to see him for just a moment.

After a smile and a feeble but cheery "hello," Grandpa took my hand. "Joyce, you have always been my favoritest youngest granddaughter. I know that sometimes you have a hard time finding your place. You often feel like you don't know what to do, and you worry that you won't amount to much. But I want you to know that God loves you and has a special plan for your life."

Then Mom gently tapped me on the shoulder and guided me out of the room. "Grandpa needs to rest," she said.

A couple of days later I saw Grandpa again. This time he was in his best suit, lying in a coffin. Almost







overwhelmed by the scent of so many flowers, I had my final moment with him. This time his shiny blue eyes didn't open. I shook with fear and emotion as I approached, but then I saw his face. His radiant smile told me that everything was okay. Grandpa died like he had lived—smiling. People talked for days about Grandpa's smile. The undertaker said he had tried, unsuccessfully, to change Grandpa's expression because he'd never seen such a thing and thought it was a little eerie. Grandpa left little in the way of money or possessions; his last will and testament was the smile of peace and satisfaction on his face.

My family had always attended the same church in a country town so small that it doesn't even show on a map of the northeastern United States. Every Sunday, Grandpa arrived at least 20 minutes late. And every Sunday, a band of as many as 30 children trailed in behind him. That had been his little ministry, rounding up children from poor families who lived in the hills and bringing them to church.

Once, in a bank in a nearby city, a young businessman overheard my dad give his name.

"Hancock?" the young man asked. "Are you by any chance related to Ed Hancock?" He went on to explain that when he was a boy, my grandpa had always made sure he got to church.

"That was nice, but what really changed my life was when he told me, 'I know you come from a poor family and sometimes worry that you won't amount to much, but I want you to know that God loves you and has a special plan for your life.'"

Throughout my teen and college years, faced with atheistic professors and skeptical friends, I struggled with my faith and sometimes wondered what I believed. But even at my lowest point, I couldn't shake the memory of my grandpa's smile and faith.

Over four decades ago, I decided to give my life to God and see what He could do with a nobody like me. I have since worked in 10 countries sharing God's love with others and introducing people to Jesus. I have overcome my shyness, spoken to large groups, run seminars, and taught hundreds of children, teenagers, and young adults. I have done lots of things that the shy, awkward 14-year-old Joyce never dreamed she could.

Still God continues to bring special people across my path. I see their fear and timidity, and take their hands. Without thinking, the words pour forth. "I know you sometimes feel like you don't know what to do, and you worry about what you will become. But God loves you and has a special plan for your life."

JOYCE SUTTIN (NÉE HANCOCK) IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. ■



# THE PASSION OF THE CHRISTIAN

EACH YEAR, when Easter comes around, I find myself overwhelmed by the thought of what Jesus went through for us. So much suffering, anguish, and pain He took in the hours before His cruel execution. Not to mention the mental distress of knowing what was coming. Yes, He knew the purpose behind it all, but it was clearly still terrifying. In fact, Jesus requested an exemption from the cross.<sup>1</sup>

He could have held back, given up, or even called angels down to rescue Him.<sup>2</sup> Why didn't He? Because more than to end all the physical pain and mental torment, He desired to rescue us.

He loved without prejudice. When a Roman centurion—a

participant in Rome's oppressive military regime—came to Jesus, requesting healing for his servant, Jesus gladly healed the man. He loved the centurion, and his servant, as much as any other person.<sup>3</sup> The Samaritan woman at the well was part of a foreign culture, one that the Jews did everything possible to avoid—and she was a woman. But Jesus saw a hurting heart and showed her she was special to God.<sup>4</sup>

He stepped beyond the social norms to show compassion. He was inclusive, even if it damaged His own reputation. A woman (described as a well-known sinner) once came up to Jesus while He was eating and began weeping in repentance. She washed His feet with her tears and

1. See Luke 22:42.

2. See Matthew 26:53.

3. See Matthew 8:8–13.

4. See John 4:7–26.

5. See Luke 7:37–50.

6. See Matthew 12:10–12.

7. See Luke 19:2–10.

8. See Luke 17:12–19; Mark 1:40–42.

9. See John 11:35.

10. See Matthew 14:30–31.

11. See Mark 16:7.

12. See John 20:24–28.

13. See Psalm 103:14.

14. See Mark 11:15; Luke 11:46; John 8:44.

then began drying them with her hair. The religious leaders and others eating with Christ were horrified that Jesus let such a woman touch Him. Jesus told them a parable of how a group of debtors were forgiven their debts and asked, “Who do you think will love the forgiving creditor more, those who had little to be forgiven, or those who had much?” When they answered that they supposed it would be those who were forgiven the most, Jesus simply said, “You have judged right.” Then He turned to the woman, and in front of everyone told her, “Your sins are forgiven.” And that was that.<sup>5</sup>

He healed the sick even on a Sabbath—when work was forbidden by Jewish religious law—and explained why He did so.<sup>6</sup> He dined with Zacchaeus, who was a hated tax collector.<sup>7</sup> He spoke kindly to the despised lepers and made them whole.<sup>8</sup>

Jesus was moved with the plight of others. When Lazarus died, Jesus wept in commiseration.<sup>9</sup> When Peter began to sink in the tossing waves, Jesus reached out and caught him.<sup>10</sup> After

the resurrection, even though Peter had emphatically denied any association, Jesus mentioned him by name, letting him know that forgiveness is always at hand.<sup>11</sup> Even when Thomas doubted the reality of the resurrection, Jesus willingly let Thomas test the evidence for himself.<sup>12</sup> He knew that His disciples were sometimes weak-hearted and swayed by emotions. And He knows that we are as well, yet He still loves us.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus stood up for what was right. He threw the moneychangers out of the temple and called out hypocrites and liars whenever He encountered them. While He was wise, longsuffering, and often gentle, He also made clear what He knew to be true, regardless of the consequences.<sup>14</sup>

So if we truly desire to be like Christ, Jesus Himself gave us the benchmark in Matthew 22:37–40 when He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind [and] love your neighbor as yourself.”

If each of us loves God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we will naturally listen to what He says. We won’t

put other gods before Him, take His name in vain, or forget to set aside time for Him. And if we love our fellow men and women as much as we love ourselves, we won’t lie, steal, kill, covet, and so on. In fact, we will go out of our way to do things for others. We will love unconditionally, for that is how we’ve been loved. We will stand up for what’s right, because God and His Word will be our example. We will help others, knowing that we are all equal in our Lord’s sight, even if that requires crossing the lines of the socially acceptable box.

There may be times we lose our way, disregard our Master, or even deny association. But just like the Prodigal Son, if we turn around and head toward forgiveness, our Father will run to meet us with open arms.

Through His suffering, death, and glorious resurrection on Easter morning, we can live every day with passion—the passion of a Christian.

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







BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

# GOD'S GIFT TO ME

I'VE ALWAYS ESPECIALLY LIKED EASTER. While Christmas is a celebration of joy and excitement for the entire world to take pleasure in—even non-Christians—I feel Easter is a celebration of what Jesus did for each of us as individuals. Easter is all about the relationship between Jesus and me. As a child, I never understood this relationship. Jesus was my friend, sure, but it didn't really go beyond that. I guess I sort of saw Jesus as a “get out of jail free” card, someone who was there to be leaned on, but only when necessary.

It was a one-way relationship, and I didn't really realize what I was missing until one night, when I was 14, I lay in bed listening to my MP3 player and it started playing a song I had forgotten was even on my playlist. It was a song sung from Jesus' perspective and went like this:

 I still would have died for you,  
If you were the only one  
I still would have cried for you,  
If you were the only one,  
And rose from the dead,  
If you were the only one. 

The song went on, saying that all the things that He'd gone through had been for me, and that He would do it all—He *did* do it all—just for me. I remember lying in bed, thinking about the enormity of that concept. The Son of God, coming down to earth and going through unspeakable amounts of torture and reviling, giving His blood and His last breath, for me.

Although I'm not usually a very emotional person, I buried my face in my pillow and cried, because the thought of such love overwhelmed me. His heart was filled with so much love for me that it was

willingly pierced for my mistakes. This man, who knew He would be rejected, despised, and alienated, saw my soul and deemed me worthy of such a sacrifice. It wasn't a save-one-get-the-rest-free deal. He went through each and every humiliating and painful experience as an individual sacrifice for every one of us that ever lived on this earth.

This is why Easter is particularly special to me, because it shows the story of an always present, very loving God, and the length He was willing to go to have a relationship with me. I know I can never equal His love, but I will try to give Him all of mine.

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND. IN HER SPARE TIME SHE STUDIES MICROBIOLOGY AND PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



BY LILY NEVE

# EASTER JOY

**LAST EASTER SUNDAY**, I baked a lemon cake for a small group of friends gathering at my place to read the Easter story. We followed along in our Bibles, stopping to discuss interesting points as they struck us, then when it was over, we joined hands and prayed for healing and forgiveness for ourselves, our families, and our friends who couldn't be with us that day.

After everyone left, I went online and my eyes fell on this quotation, which I had never read before:

For the Christian, heaven is where Jesus is. We do not need to speculate on what heaven will be like. It is enough to know that we will be forever with Him. When we love anyone with our whole hearts, life begins when we are with that

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1. William Barclay (1907–1978)

person; it is only in their company that we are really and truly alive. So it is with Christ. In this world our contact with Him is shadowy, for we can only see through a glass darkly. ... The best definition of it is to say that heaven is the state where we will always be with Jesus, and where nothing will separate us from Him anymore.<sup>1</sup>

It deeply touched me, and out of the blue, the thought came: *Send it to your friends*. I didn't know if it would impress anyone else as it had me, but I copied it into a group email with a simple greeting wishing everyone a happy Easter and telling them that I was praying for them.

I hadn't even closed my laptop before I got a reply. A friend I hadn't been in touch with for months thanked me for sharing the quote, saying it had come in the midst of a very trying day.

His reply was running through my mind as I took my dog for her evening walk. I remembered how close I had been to not following the nudge to send it. *It's just a little quote. Others probably won't be touched by it the way I was*. I remembered how often I'd thought that the things I did didn't matter, weren't big enough, or would mean more if they were more spectacular.

We turned the corner onto a quiet, residential street, and the moon—bright and full—appeared at the end of the road, as if it were our destination. I was suddenly filled with joy. Easter is a time to celebrate resurrection and new life, and that night it felt like I was the one with a new life.

LILY NEVE IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN SOUTH ASIA. ■



# EASTER TRADITIONS

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

EASTER IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS OF THE YEAR, celebrating Jesus' resurrection three days after His crucifixion. Some Easter traditions in various countries may have originated in other faiths or customs, but they are nonetheless imbued with meaning we can relate to.

In Japan, wild lilies sprout up in uncultivated fields every spring, so it's not surprising the lily is a favorite symbol of Easter there, as well as in many parts of the world. The pure white blossoms remind us how Jesus took us, dirty in sin as we were, and washed us clean. As the lilies sprout after a long winter, so Jesus gives us new life through His resurrection.

In Russia, Orthodox Christians hold a prayer vigil service on Easter

Eve. A large lit candle on the altar represents Jesus as the light of the world and is used to light each worshipper's candle. This tradition represents the spreading of Jesus' light throughout the world.

Orthodox children in Greece and across Eastern Europe are sometimes seen tapping decorated eggs together. One child says, "Christ is risen," and the other replies, "Risen indeed!"

Many people around the world dramatize the Easter story in Passion plays. Perhaps the most famous Passion play is performed by the villagers of Oberammergau, in southern Germany. It was first performed in 1634 as the result of a vow made by the inhabitants during an outbreak of bubonic plague, and with only three exceptions, the play has been performed every 10 years since 1680.

In Eastern European countries, the lamb is an important symbol of

Easter. Many people serve lamb for the Easter feast, or make a lamb-shaped cake. Jesus is referred to in the Bible several times as the Lamb of God. For instance, upon seeing Jesus, John the Baptist said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"<sup>1</sup> On the very day that Jesus was crucified, the Passover lamb was being sacrificed in the Jewish temple. Sacrificial Passover lambs needed to be without blemish.<sup>2</sup> Jesus was without sin, and His death purchased forgiveness of sin and salvation for all who would accept Him as their Savior.

Easter is a time to celebrate new beginnings. Let Jesus touch your life, if He hasn't already, and He will give you heaven hereafter, as well as a wonderful new start here and now.

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1. John 1:29
2. See Exodus 12:5.
3. <http://elixirmime.com>





# FULLY LOVED

BY MARIE ALVERO

WHEN MY YOUNGEST WAS A TODDLER, each night I would put her to sleep in her own bed. Sometimes this was an easy job and my tired little one would be asleep in minutes; sometimes it was a hardcore showdown of her stubbornness against mine. But always, eventually, she would end up peacefully asleep. (Mom won!)

This sweet sleep would last long enough for me to get to bed and fall into my own sweet slumber. Then, without fail, my little girl would wake up and decide it was time to move to mom and dad's bed.

She would amble out of her bed, scoop up all the paraphernalia she deemed important and come to our bed. She would wake one of us up with pats and whines, "I 'leep in your bed." We always said yes and then assisted her in the process of

1. See Luke 8.

"setting up." She would pass us all her stuff—sippy cup, tiny pillow, blanket, doll, stuffed animal, etc. As soon as she established herself as the chief occupier of the bed, she would fall back asleep, usually with her face pushed up to one of ours. This was our story every night for years.

This sweet little ritual was like a daily illustration of God's love to me. I would see myself as a child, helpless and clueless, trying to carry all the things I thought were so important, into God's arms. And God would feel nothing but tenderness toward me and want only to comfort and hold me. He was never annoyed with me, just like we never felt anything but love towards our nightly disruptor.

I still cherish the sweetness of those nights snuggling my daughter and the way God whispered His love to me. He showed me that, just like my little

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me!

—Psalm 139:17–18 NLT



You can experience God's love by asking His Son, Jesus, into your life:

*Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me and forgiving me for my mistakes. Please come into my heart and help me get to know You and share You with others. Amen.*

girl had no qualms about barging into our space and making her needs known, with zero fear of rejection, I could do the same with Him.

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. ■

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# THE REAL THING

I am not a fabrication, a figment of the imagination, or a fable. I am real—and I am what you need. I can give you comfort in place of anxiety, faith in place of fear, rest in place of struggle, peace in place of worry, happiness in place of sadness, and answers to your questions. I can be your strength, your help in time of need, your friend and companion. That doesn't mean you will never have another problem or challenge in life, but I can help you with life's problems.

Your life consists of more than the physical, the material. You also have spiritual needs, and I have the power to fill those needs and to satisfy your spiritual hunger. In My Spirit, you will find real love and satisfaction. I can fill your life with true love, peace of mind and heart, unfailing friendship, answers, and strength for every task.

Open your heart to receive My blessings and truth. Reach out and receive My love and find fulfillment.

