

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

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## GOD'S DOMINOES

One step leads to the  
next

## Fog Rising

Drop. Look. Follow.

## Just Stay On Your Feet!

Lesson from an  
endurance course



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### NIGHT VISION

In one of his psalms, King David wrote, speaking to God, "To you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you."<sup>1</sup> I've always found that to be a beautiful description of God's ability to be everywhere and see everything.

In the context of the psalm, this verse is describing how nothing we do is hidden from God's sight, and specifically, how God is able to see our "hidden sins." However, it also makes an interesting statement about darkness.

To God, darkness is nothing like it is to us. We can't see at all in pitch dark, and there's not a whole lot we can do in limited light either. But before God created the universe, it was completely dark and formless,<sup>2</sup> so clearly God has no trouble working in darkness.

No matter how obscure the circumstances or situations we face, God can see the path ahead. The darkness of uncertainty that affects us and clouds our mind makes no difference to Him. While we have trouble navigating in the dark, He doesn't.

Making the right choices is a heavy responsibility, especially when our choices will affect others. But we don't have to do so entirely alone. While God wants us to learn and grow in making right decisions, He's also willing to share His insight and wisdom, to let us benefit from His light.

As King David also wrote, "O Lord, you are my light! You make my darkness bright."<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

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1. Psalm 139:12 NLT

2. See Genesis 1:2.

3. 2 Samuel 22:29 TLB



# THE OFFER

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

*SOME YEARS AGO, after a series of mistakes left me exasperated and discouraged, I pleaded with God to turn me into a robot, programmed to always do what He knew was best. You know that deep down I want nothing more than to do what's right, but my wrong decisions and harebrained ideas keep getting in the way! Can't You reprogram me to always make the right choice and do the right thing? Think how much better off Your world would be!*

*That's really not the solution, He replied. Not only would that take the challenge out of your life, but it would put a damper on our*

*relationship. Because you would no longer need to come to Me for guidance, you would stop relying on Me. You would stop appreciating Me, and before long you would stop loving Me. No, I think we'd better leave you the way I made you—but I'll tell you what I will do. Instead of programming you with all the answers all at once, I will give them to you one by one, whenever you bring a matter to Me in prayer.*

It wasn't really a new offer at all, of course, and it wasn't exclusively for me. He makes the same offer to you, summed up in these verses from the Bible: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your

ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."<sup>1</sup>

The arrangement isn't perfect, because it involves imperfect people like you and me—it depends on us remembering to stop and ask Him for guidance and then having the faith, yieldedness, humility, and whatever else it may take to follow through and *do* what He shows us—but I'm sure you'll find, as I have, that it beats trying to figure things out yourself!

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED'S* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■

1. Proverbs 3:5–6



# MAKING GODLY DECISIONS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

ONE OF THE TRAITS OF HUMANKIND, as beings created in the image of God, is free will, which includes both the ability to make decisions and the responsibility for the outcomes of our decisions. Learning to make decisions that will glorify God and fulfill His will for our lives can be very challenging. It can test and grow our faith, as we seek His will and wait on Him for answers and guidance.

Decision-making for Christians is meant to be a relational process,

1. See 1 Peter 5:7.
2. Isaiah 1:18
3. See John 16:13.
4. Proverbs 3:5–6
5. Romans 12:2 ESV

involving ourselves and God, as we bring all our anxieties to Him, knowing that He cares for us.<sup>1</sup> He has told us to “come and let us reason together,”<sup>2</sup> demonstrating His desire to carry on a conversation with us. He wants to be present and to participate in the conversation as we make decisions. He has promised that His Spirit within us will guide us into all truth.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout our lives, we are faced with decisions that affect our future, whether they relate to what career to pursue, whom to marry, how to raise our children, where to live, or how to commit to our faith and participate in God’s work. One of the most important steps for finding God’s will and making

good decisions is acknowledging Him and committing our ways to Him. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”<sup>4</sup>

Learning to make decisions that will honor God and align with His will and commands is often accompanied by times of soul searching, prayer, and testing. Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish what God’s will is in a situation or what decision will produce the best outcomes. At such times, we can wish that a lightning bolt would light up the sky or that we’d be knocked to the ground like the apostle Paul to give us a precise, infallible sign. And yet,

We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

—*Colossians 1:9–10 ESV*

You clear the way for me, and now I won't stumble.

—*Psalms 18:36 CEV*

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

—*Proverbs 3:5–6 NLT*

If you have arrived at your decision with the sincere intention of pleasing the heart of God, incorporating biblical principles and wise counsel, you can proceed with confidence knowing that God will work out his purposes through your decision.

—*Mary Fairchild*

so often, the voice of God is so quiet that if we don't calm our spirit and open our minds and listen, it can be missed.

God created us in His image, as rational beings, capable of freewill decisions and of choosing to place Him at the center of our lives. This is one of the ways by which we love God with all our minds: by making conscious decisions to love God, and by seeking to glorify Him in our decisions and ways. This positions us to discern the will of God, as Paul explained in Romans: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."<sup>5</sup>

As you take that first step, God will often either confirm it or new factors will emerge that will shed new light on the situation. You may need to make adjustments, as you discover that the coordinates of your original decision, while pointing you in the right general direction, need to be fine-tuned as you zero in on your final destination. Decision-making is often a process involving many choices, and each one lays the foundation for the next ones.

God usually wants us to do the work of wholeheartedly seeking His will, investigating, analyzing, assessing, and using every means at our disposal to make wise and godly decisions. He rarely seems to do things for us that we are capable

of doing. I've found that I make the best decisions when I make them in conjunction with Him through analyzing the possibilities and the options, weighing the pros and cons of each one, and seeking His guidance and thoughts on the matter through prayer.

As we place God at the center of our lives, acknowledging Him in all our ways, we can trust that He will guide us and help us to make wise decisions.

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



BY MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA

# GOD'S DOMINOES

**A FEW YEARS AGO MY LIFE CHANGED**, and not in a small way. There were so many changes at once. It was quite overwhelming and rather discouraging at times.

First, I had to move back to my home country, Ukraine, after having lived in Bosnia and Herzegovina for six years doing missionary and volunteer work. My two sons, who had always been with me, had grown into wonderful young men and moved on to pursue their goals. I needed to find a place to stay, a job, things to do, and motivation to go on.

I speak English and I like to organize events and activities for teens and students. So I applied for a position as a team leader at an English summer camp run by a private school. To my surprise, I was hired not just for the summer camp, but on a permanent basis.

One day, while checking out the library's English section, I was complimenting the woman who worked there on the variety of books, materials, and paraphernalia available. We got to talking more, and before I knew it, we were organizing an English club together. Very quickly, this English club became a highlight of my week. Every week I got to meet with a group of young people

from various countries and continents who wanted to do things, go places, help others, and make a difference.

I recently met up with a few people who attended the English club. We were casually chatting and drinking tea when one of the girls said: "I never told anybody before, but when I first came to your club I didn't believe in anything or anybody. I was a mess and didn't have any hope. After a year of what I thought were simple gatherings once a week, I understood that they had changed my outlook on life and my attitude toward people. I now want to do something worthwhile with my life." With tears in her eyes, she added, "Please keep doing what you do."

Through this, I see God's domino effect at play. We don't know the future, when things will change, where life's turns will take us. But we can trust in our Maker, that each change will be a necessary part toward the making of the bright, meaningful, unique picture that is our life.

MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA DOES MISSIONARY AND VOLUNTEER WORK VIA AN NGO IN KHARKOV, UKRAINE. ■



BY JOYCE SUTTIN

# FOG RISING

I HAVE SUCH A CLEAR MEMORY OF IT. I woke up early on a summer morning and looked outside to see only white. I rubbed my eyes, thinking there was something wrong with them, then decided to explore. I stepped out onto the porch and down the steps and was amazed to feel like I was in the middle of a cloud. I walked a few feet and spun around, then I realized that I didn't know where I was. I was only steps from the porch, but I didn't know which way it lay.

My panic rose as I realized that my family might not hear me if I cried out. Then I remembered that if I could find my way to the stone path, I'd be able to get back to the house. I bent down and reached into the moist grass, trying to find the stones. As I bent lower and lower, I actually began to see the color of the

grass. I could make out my shoes. I could feel the slight incline I was kneeling on and knew I needed to go up.

I crawled along the ground and suddenly there was a stone. As I followed the path, the fog rose higher, so I could see my knees. By the time I reached the porch, I could see my waist. I straightened to my full height and marveled as the fog lifted and the cloud rose to reveal the familiar scene around me.

When I tried to explain to my brothers and sisters about getting lost in a cloud in the front yard, they didn't understand. Finally, Dad explained that the fog had rolled up that morning from the stream below and cautioned me that if I ever found myself in a thick fog again, I should stay still and hold on to something familiar until it rose. It felt good to

finally be understood and to know what I had experienced.

Since then, I've sometimes felt that I'm lost in a fog, mentally or emotionally. I lost track of where I was and felt the same panic I felt as a child, the same disorientation, as I tried to figure out what was going on. During those times of confusion, I learned to get down on my knees to ask God for direction. As I did so, the fog would slowly begin to lift. I could recognize something there, a rock of some kind I could base my faith upon. Then I would follow the familiar path to my goal as the fog lifted.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [HTTPS://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM/](https://joy4dailydevotionals.blogspot.com/). ■

# WHEN DO YOU STOP TRUSTING GOD?

BY MARIE STORY

ONCE UPON A TIME, in a faraway land called Uz, there was a guy named Job. He was definitely one of the best guys around. He feared God and avoided evil. He was generous, kind, hardworking—overall, a good, godly man.<sup>1</sup>

Not only was Job a good guy, he also had a pretty great life. He had money, land, livestock, and servants. He had a wife and ten children.<sup>2</sup> He was healthy. He was a respected figure in the community and had friends everywhere. *Everyone* knew who Job was.<sup>3</sup>

Job had a blessed life. And why not? He obeyed God in even the minute details and lived right. But wait. Stop and think about this for a second. When is it harder to trust God? When everything's going well? Or when it seems like everything has gone completely wrong? The greatest test of our character is how we react when life takes a turn for the worse; and the greatest test of our faith is trusting God when He allows us to go through tough times.

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1. See Job 1:1.
  2. See Job 1:2–3.
  3. See Job 29:7–25.
  4. See Job 1:7–12; 2:1–7.
  5. See Job 1:13–19.
  6. See Job 2:7–8.
  7. Job 2:9 TLB
  8. See Job 3:3–26.
  9. Job 36:15 CEV
  10. See Job 38–41.
  11. See Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 43:2.
  12. NLT





Satan knew that as well. “Everyone thinks Job’s such a great and godly guy,” he told God. “But *of course* he’s good. He’s got *everything!* Money, land, family, friends, respect. Let me take it all away, and *then* we’ll see how good he is.”<sup>4</sup>

God agrees to this experiment, and one after the other, poor Job loses his money, his livestock, his house, his children, and eventually his health.<sup>5</sup> We next hear of him



sitting in a pile of ashes, scraping at the boils that cover him from head to toe.<sup>6</sup> His wife, apparently the one person he had left to lean on, tells him, “Are you still trying to be godly when God has done all this to you? Curse him and die.”<sup>7</sup>

At this point, people seem to think that Job must have done something really wrong to be struck with such bad luck. He must have been WAY out of God’s will to deserve all those calamities. And maybe Job sitting in that pile of ashes thought the same. What could he possibly have done to deserve such a sour turn of events? Finding no just reason, he finally did what many of us would do in the same situation—he started feeling sorry for himself.<sup>8</sup>

Fortunately, Job had some good friends who came to see him in his misfortune. They found Job in his miserable state and listened to his ranting about injustice: “I’m a good guy! Why is God treating me this way? This is so unfair!”

Sometimes when we’re in the middle of a rough time, that’s all we can see, how “unfair” the whole situation seems. Job had done his best to live as God asked, to follow His Word, to treat others fairly, and *this mess* was what he got in return?!

Finally, one of Job’s friends named Elihu tells him: “Hard times and trouble are God’s way of getting our attention!”<sup>9</sup>

Job eventually enters into a good, long conversation with God<sup>10</sup> where he realizes that no matter how good

he tries to be, or how closely he obeys God, he’s never going to know better than Him. God is a lot bigger and wiser than he is, so he figures he’d better just trust Him. Eventually, God steps in and rescues Job.

It’s something to think about when we’re facing troubles of our own. We can react like Job did and get upset that God isn’t treating us right, or we can turn to Him, give Him our attention, and see what He wants us to learn through it.

The fact is, God never promised us a perfect, problem-free life. He did, however, promise to help us *through* whatever problems we may face.<sup>11</sup> If we’re aware of this, we won’t waste time complaining about our predicaments, and we won’t waste energy trying to pull ourselves out of trouble on our own; instead, we’ll immediately turn to God and find our strength and solutions in Him.

In all of our lives, there are going to be high points and low points. Trust that God has a good reason for the low points—He has something to teach you through them. And trust that, as Psalm 34:19 says, “The righteous person faces many troubles, but the Lord comes to the rescue each time.”<sup>12</sup>

MARIE STORY LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA, WHERE SHE WORKS AS A FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR AND VOLUNTEERS AS A COUNSELOR AT A LOCAL HOMELESS SHELTER. ■



BY DAVEEN DONNELLY

# THE PIGGIE THAT BUILT ON A ROCK

**THE STORY OF THE THREE LITTLE PIGS** begins with the piglets being sent out into the world to “seek their fortune.” The first little pig builds a house of straw, but a wolf blows it down. The second pig builds a house of sticks with the same result. Each exchange between the wolf and the pigs features the ringing proverbial phrase:

*“Little pig, little pig, let me come in!”*

*“Not by the hair on my chinny-chin-chin!”*

*“Then I’ll huff, and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your house in.”*<sup>1</sup>

The third pig builds a house of brick. The wolf cannot huff and puff hard enough to blow the house down. He attempts to trick the little pig out of the house, but he’s outsmarted at every turn.

In Matthew 7:24–27 Jesus says, “Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that

1. “The Three Little Pigs,” a 19<sup>th</sup> century fairytale
2. CEV
3. *Spectacular Sins, and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ*, Crossway Books, 2008. p. 57
4. [www.just1thing.com](http://www.just1thing.com)



house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock. Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell with a crash.”<sup>2</sup>

In verse 25, the Greek word translated as “beat against” is *prospipto*, which is a strong verb and in the context of the verse means that even when a huge amount of water rushes in, the house that is built on the rock will stand. In verse 27, the Greek word is *proskopto*, which is much weaker, and in the context, means that when a small amount of water, like a creek, comes, the house that is built on the sand will still fall.

In other words, if your life is anchored in Jesus and grounded in Him, then even through the biggest, toughest difficulties that life can throw at you, your house will stand. You'll be able to weather that storm because Jesus will be your rock, your stability; He'll hold you up. But if a house isn't grounded in Jesus and His Word, but is built on a weak foundation, like sand, then even the smallest difficulty can knock that house, or life, for a loop.

John Piper states the following: “Christianity is not a game; it's not a

therapy. All of its doctrines flow from who God is and what He has done in history. They correspond to hard facts. Christianity is more than facts, but not less. There is faith and hope and love. But these don't float in the air. They grow like great cedar trees in the rock of God's truth. Those who will be left standing will be those who have built their houses on the rock of great, objective truth with Jesus Christ as the origin, center, and goal of it all.”<sup>3</sup>

Adoniram Judson, who lived from 1788 through 1850, is an amazing example of having built his life upon a rock. He was an American missionary who served in Burma for 40 years. But his life wasn't glorious at all. Adoniram was only 25 when he and his wife went to Burma. During those first years they experienced loneliness and poor health. It was six years before they won their first convert. On top of that, Adoniram was in prison for two years. Talk about a heavy storm beating against one's house! Then, shortly after he was released from prison, his wife and baby daughter died. It seemed like Adoniram received blow after blow of harsh winds and rain. It was one difficulty and heartrending experience after another. And yet, through it all, Adoniram's “house” remained standing.

He may not have always felt like it was standing. There were times when he felt defeated and destroyed. But history shows that he was not destroyed and that his life's work and efforts were worth it. One proof is that when Adoniram began his mission in Burma, he set a goal of translating the Bible into Burmese and founding a church of 100 members. When he died, he left the Burmese Bible, 100 churches, and over 8,000 believers.

I'm frankly amazed at how Adoniram could keep going even after being hit and beaten by so many of life's storms. And I realize it wasn't so much about Adoniram—the inner strength he must have had, or his incredible willpower or gumption. It was about what he was relying on to hold him up, the Rock that his life was built on. Adoniram was able to face the storms of life and threatening winds, yet remain standing, because he was grounded in Jesus.

So the question is, where are you building your house? When the storms of life come, and they certainly will, what will be left of it?

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,<sup>4</sup> A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

# KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY



I WAS ON MY WAY TO VISIT A FRIEND. As the bus approached the hospital where she was staying, a nervous shudder went through me, and I fumbled for a fitting greeting. My friend had always been sickly, and within the past year, she'd struggled to fight off several aggressive infections. Now, a major surgery had resulted in complications. I hoped I could bring some cheer into her sick room, but I wasn't confident. My own heart was too burdened with questions and fears for my friend's present distress and bleak prospects to be able to think of something appropriate, yet uplifting, to say. Visions of her pain-riddled future clouded my mind.

Suddenly, as the bus turned a corner, a bright red billboard with white lettering beneath a Tudor

Crown caught my eye. First, the color, then the words: "Keep Calm and Carry On"—the British government's famous and oft-paraphrased WW2 slogan. The British fashion brand name in small lettering on the bottom identified this as merely an advertisement. But I knew that there was more than just a clever promotional ploy afoot in this case. God had sent His answer to my heart's questions in a way that was unorthodox, but so clearly articulated that I couldn't miss the meaning!

As I thought over that sentence on the billboard, I felt God's peace settle over my heart. It brought to mind a well-known Bible verse: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>1</sup> Despite the depressing circumstances, I could still confidently *keep calm and carry on*, and try to share this message with my friend. The King is in control of every detail of our lives.

However bleak my friend's situation seemed, she was in good hands!

With this realization, it dawned on me that there'd been so many other ways that God had shown my friend His love: the skillful doctors, the efficient and kind nurses, the prayers and assistance of friends and coworkers. How foolish I was to let my mind get so wrapped up in the negative aspects of the situation that I didn't pay attention to God's continual reminders of His presence. I hope that no matter how tumultuous the circumstances, I can always trust in the perfection and faithfulness of God's love, and not have to wait until He puts His truth on a red billboard to turn my focus heavenward.

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

1. John 16:33

A vibrant photograph of a young child splashing in the ocean. The child is captured mid-air, with their arms raised and a joyful expression. Water is splashing all around them, creating a dynamic and energetic scene. The background shows the blue-green waves of the sea under a bright sky.

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

# THE BEST CHOICE

We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.—*Ephesians 2:10 NLT*

**THE BRAZILIAN WRITER AND POET CORA CORALINA**, from a very poor family, became a famous teacher and author. She left many wise sayings in her books, one of which was: “The most important things in life are our choices!” She meant to teach her students that being rich or good-looking or other things society values are not as crucial as learning to make the right choices in life.

Once, I was at the beach with my youngest son, Mateus, who was 12 at the time, and my daughter and grandson. At this particular beach, the sea floor drops suddenly, so parents are cautioned to make sure that the children go in only

waist-deep. We warned them of this, then kept a close eye. My grandson obeyed promptly, but it was clear Mateus had doubts whether he should obey. We could almost see the thoughts inside his head: *Should I do what she said or not? After all, I'm a good swimmer!*

Eventually, he went up to his waist and stayed there for about a minute, apparently considering his options. Then he backed off and returned to the safe zone with his nephew. In the end, he made the right choice, and I silently prayed that he would have that same wisdom in many other decisions he will have to make growing up and throughout his life.

Today's decisions are extremely important and will shape our future. Every time I act on impulse or

emotion, things get messy, and later I have to fix the problems I've created. But when I take time to think things over with a cool head, asking for advice from trustworthy friends and waiting for clarity, things go much more smoothly.

Many times, when faced with a difficult decision, I've had to remind myself of the example Jesus gave and pray for the strength to also say “Not as I will, but as You will,”<sup>1</sup> then go ahead and do what I know is right. These sorts of decisions can be hard to make at the time, but God is always able to bring good out of even seeming difficulties.<sup>2</sup>

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

1. Matthew 26:39

2. See Romans 8:28.



# JUST STAY ON YOUR FEET!

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

RECENTLY, two friends, my brother, and I participated in a very special event—the Fisherman’s Friend Strongman Run! This 15 km route includes 30 obstacles of varying difficulty. There’s sticky mud which sucks your feet down rapidly, and you have to keep moving to stay on top. Then there are icy river sections to swim or wade through, testing endurance. Nets, trenches, tires, steep dirt slopes—all good reasons to justify to oneself, *I just couldn’t make it*. But the fact is, it’s possible.

A good friend, who is a serious athlete, laughingly told us, “As long

as you can stay on your feet, you’ll make it.” And his words proved true more than once. Just when I felt it was too much, my muscles sore and strained, I’d think, *All I have to do is stay on my feet and move forward*. Step by step, obstacle by obstacle, through hot thick mud and cold rushing water, I made it.

In fact, all four of us crossed the finish line together, cementing both achievement and friendship in triumphant completion! It was an incredible experience, and we’re so thankful to have been a part of it.

The Bible verse “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”<sup>1</sup> now has more meaning than ever before! Living a Christian life isn’t easy;

You are definitely my rock and my fortress. Guide me and lead me for the sake of your good name!

—Psalm 31:3 CEB

He makes me as surefooted as a deer, enabling me to stand on mountain heights.

—Psalm 18:33 NLT

it takes discipline, hard work, and perseverance. Sometimes it feels like all I can do is just stay on my feet. Then I find that His strength is made perfect in my weakness,<sup>2</sup> and when I’ve done all I can to stand, He takes over and carries me.<sup>3</sup>

Life surely has its troubles and obstacles, but there is a finish line where our loved ones and Lord await us for a celebration! Like Paul, I don’t consider myself to have attained yet.<sup>4</sup> I’m just staying on my feet, eyes fixed on Him, knowing that, when the time comes, we’ll cross that finish line together.

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

1. Philippians 3:14 ESV

2. See 2 Corinthians 12:9.

3. See Deuteronomy 1:31; Isaiah 40:11.

4. See Philippians 3:13.



BY MARIE ALVERO

# THE PURPOSE

**IT WAS SUMMER AND I WAS ON A YOUTH MISSION TRIP ON THE NORTHERN COAST OF POLAND.**

As our trip came to a close, our base in Warsaw was sending a van to pick most of us up, while Nick, René, and I planned to head back by train/bus/hitchhiking. I have no idea how this harebrained plan was conceived, but for some reason, we thought it was great.

On the appointed morning, we started our trip back. We were young and inexperienced in traveling in a foreign country, with not a lot of cash and with a language barrier. We got to the station, but right out of the gate, things started to go wrong, as the train's doors closed before Nick made it on.

René and I got off at the next station and waited for him, but when the next train came, he wasn't on it. We foolishly decided that the best thing to do was to take a train back to our first station. But of course, just as we were pulling out, there was Nick

stepping onto the platform! Luckily, he stayed put and we were able to turn around again and get back to him.

With all that, it took us two hours just to successfully reach the bus depot. We took a bus to the city outskirts, then traipsed through some fields to get to the highway, where the three of us stuck our thumbs out and hoped for the best. But no one stopped. Midday faded to late afternoon and we were hungry and tired, and also worried about our situation.

It was around this time, six hours into our trip, that we started to wonder if maybe God was trying to show us something. We seemed to be striking out at every turn. We prayed, and all agreed that we should turn around and head back to the cabin we'd been staying at for the last few weeks. We didn't really know how that plan would turn out, but it seemed better than spending the night in the fields.

We crossed the road, and within minutes, we had a ride. And the rest of our trip back to the cabin went off without incident. Imagine our surprise, as we arrived back at the cabin, to find the rest of our team was still there. The vehicle that was supposed to pick them up had broken down, and there would be another week before the van would arrive. Our frustration with our crazy day vanished as we realized we were now exactly where we needed to be.

Without the use of cell phones or any outside communications, and despite our ignorance and folly, God had guided us back into His will. Even if we fail, He never fails. He takes us where we're at and brings forth His purpose.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# A RESHAPED VESSEL

The cares of this life and its many burdens and worries can easily distract you from your close fellowship with Me, and fear of failure can cloud your ability to look to Me and have faith that I hear your prayers and love you and want to bless you. I want to raise you up from your burdens and give you a new start. I want to make you a testimony and a witness of My love.

I take the weak things and the foolish things, the broken things and imperfect things, to use as My vessels of love. All that you experience over the years is meant to help you become a gentle, compassionate vessel, one who understands, one who empathizes and knows what it's like to ache and be in need, who knows the pangs of loneliness and desperation people feel.

Even the darkest days you face in life can work together for good if you will put yourself, as soft, moldable clay, in the hands of the Potter, so I can make from the broken pieces a better vessel. I can pick up all the broken pieces of your life—your broken dreams, your heartaches, your disappointments—and with My hands of love I can cause it all to work together for My good purposes to reshape and form My beautiful creation.

