

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 20 • Issue 11

A NEW START

How to thrive in the golden years

Creating Family

Putting effort where it matters

Each One Unique

Babies are forever



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

SEASONS

I recently saw this quote and loved its description of a family: “Families are the compass that guides us. They are the inspiration to reach great heights, and our comfort when we occasionally falter.”

But families aren't static. In fact, in our lives, one of the main things that changes as we go through the seasons of life is our relationships with family. As my three-year-old son recently said, “First, you are a boy, then you turn into a dad, then you turn into a grandpa.” Oh, for the simplicity of a child.

Life is a little more complicated than that, but one thing that's certain is that we all go through seasons in life. Some, we look forward to and are grateful for. Some, we don't enjoy or like to think about. King Solomon described the cycle of life in Ecclesiastes 3—seasons of birth and of death, of planting and of harvesting, of trying and of giving up, of gaining and of losing, of grieving and of laughing.

There are seasons of stretching, where God is working to shape something new in our hearts. Seasons of passionate, growing love—and drier seasons, where love is tested. Seasons of blessings—and seasons of wondering where all those blessings that others seem to be experiencing are.

It's important to understand that we experience seasons in life and to figure out what season—or seasons—we're currently living in. While we can't change the difficult seasons, we can change our perspective of them. Even the trying times can be beautiful—but only if we learn to see them from a different perspective. Maria Fontaine's feature article in this issue (“Appreciating Aging,” pp. 4–6) is a great example of doing that.

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THANKFUL FOR THE MEMORIES

BY ANDREW HEART

I REMEMBER WHEN GROWING UP AS A BOY IN THE USA,

Thanksgiving was a holiday I looked forward to nearly as much as Christmas. I loved the fall season with its dramatic colors: the browns and yellows, oranges and reds, as the hardwood trees of the Ohio Valley burst forth with praises of thanks to God for the warm and sunny summer He had just given them. One last attestation to the glory of God before finally shedding their leaves and letting them float down to fertilize the ground.

I loved seeing the haystacks in the fields and the cornucopia with its overflowing goodness and visions of prosperity. But mostly I loved the drive over to Grandma's house and the anticipation that would build as Grandpa carved the turkey, and all

the aunts, uncles, and cousins were called to take their seat at the large dining table.

We kids would respectfully bow our heads as Grandpa reverently thanked God for the food and another year of His abundant provision. Then everyone would wait as patiently as possible for the serving plates to be passed around, my eye being intently focused on the large bowl of Grandma's special turkey stuffing!

While many countries around the world have a day of giving thanks, the American Thanksgiving Day is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November. The original Thanksgiving was celebrated by the Pilgrims following their first harvest in the New World. It was established as a federal holiday in 1863 when then President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a national day of "thanksgiving and

praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

I hope that people who celebrate Thanksgiving Day in these more modern times are indeed remembering the One from whom all blessings flow. It's wonderful that one day a year has been set aside for people to give thanks, but the Bible actually admonishes God's children to give thanks at all times and in everything, not just once a year.¹

Quite some time has passed since I was a boy sitting at Grandma's dining table asking for seconds on stuffing, and the things I'm most thankful for now are good health, a loving wife, and simply another day of life to serve our "beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

ANDREW HEART AND HIS WIFE, ANNA, HAVE BEEN MISSIONARIES FOR NEARLY FIVE DECADES. ■

1. See 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

BY MARIA FONTAINE

APPRECIATING AGING

SINCE TURNING 70, I've been thinking more about the *benefits* of aging. Even though many of us who are getting older have already felt some of the disadvantages or difficulties, there are also many good things to be found in this stage of our lives. I want to explore a few of these with you by sharing some of my own thoughts and experiences. Of course, you may not be at the stage in life where these things apply to you personally, but you may be interested for the sake of elderly family members or friends.

Just as with any of the other stages of life, aging will bring some challenges. Some of the things that we encounter may seem like major disruptions to our plans and desires for our lives, but if we take the time to see the potential those challenges unlock, we can actually turn the aging process into a very positive experience.

Though I admit there are times when the aches and pains and other drawbacks seem less than beneficial, I'm determined to see these years as an opportunity for growth. I want to continue to "run with perseverance the race marked out for [me], fixing [my] eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith."¹ Some people call having this positive mindset "aging gracefully," "aging victoriously," or "triumphant aging."

★ **GREATER RESPECT FOR TIME.** Aging brings a more elevated sense of the importance of using time

1. Hebrews 12:1–2 NIV





wisely. I have more motivation to set firm goals to accomplish, rather than putting them off. Leaving them until “some other time” seems much less secure now because “some other time” might not come. As the awareness of the priority of making wise use of time grows, it becomes a motivator that helps the distractions of this life to fade in importance.

★ **EFFICIENCY THROUGH SINGLE-MINDEDNESS.** For me, the key point to remember is to focus on one thing at a time. At first, trying to do many things at once appears to help you get more done. However, when you add up all the details that are often missed in this way of operating, it may not actually be the most effective.

★ **DEPENDING MORE ON OTHERS.** Feeling less independent or that it’s harder to do some things that you used to do in the past can be frustrating. However, the upside is that needing more help from others brings humility and can also help to keep you in closer communion with Jesus and closer contact with others.

★ **CHALLENGES KEEP OUR BRAINS ACTIVE.** I’m finding that the many new challenges in my life now are keeping my brain active—thinking, studying, developing new ideas, and finding workarounds to these new challenges, keeping me focused.

★ **ATTITUDES FOR STAYING VIBRANT AND FLEXIBLE IN SPIRIT.**

Being young in spirit is not dependent on how many biological years you’ve lived. What you choose to believe about yourself is what will be reflected in your thoughts, words, and actions. Choose to treat each new day and whatever changes it may bring as an opportunity to stay young in heart and vibrant in spirit.

★ **ULTIMATUMS AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES ARE BLESSINGS.** Some of my friends have had ultimatums in the form of heart attacks that have forced them to slow down, analyze, and change their lifestyle. As a result of those changes, they’ve discovered a whole new lease on life, as well as a whole new perspective on what is important.

Of course, not all ultimatums are this drastic. But I’m thankful for the ultimatums that require me to make positive changes in my lifestyle, even if they may initially be uncomfortable, inconvenient, humbling, and sometimes disconcerting.

★ **HEALTH AWARENESS.** A part of valuing life more as I age is that I’m seeing the importance that God places on health. Even more than before, I tune in to what’s happening in my body. As I age, I’m more interested in researching health challenges, getting reliable counsel, and finding effective, natural remedies or solutions.

★ **BUILDING BONDS WITH OTHER SENIORS.** We seniors have a lot in common, and it’s helpful to find a support group. Together we can help one another appreciate the many positives of aging. We can be a witness of how God keeps us and helps us cope, and even rise above the challenges and be positive in spite of any negatives.

★ **MORE FULFILLMENT WITH A SLOWER PACE.** I have accepted that I have to go slower, because I have less energy and my body won’t go as fast or work as hard physically as it did in the past. But going slower enables me to enjoy the journey more and brings a sense of greater fulfillment.

★ **IMPARTING VALUABLE EXPERIENCE.** Being able to pass on our experiences, the wisdom that this life has

taught us, our testimonies, or our stories both to our peers and to younger generations is a priceless privilege.

I've found that many younger people will accept encouragement and counsel more easily from a grandparent figure than a peer or a parental figure. In your later years, you can be an even greater blessing to the younger generations, and perhaps even a confidant and/or mentor. (Of course, offering advice or sharing experiences with others shouldn't be in the form of preaching or lecturing.)

★ **BENEFITS OF PERPETUAL LEARNING.** Learning something new, even if I feel it's a bit of a stretch, can be a lot of fun and provide a sense of achievement. One of my friends started teaching English as a second language, because she wanted to supplement her income, only to discover that she loved teaching, and it became a passion for her.

★ **SHARING COMPASSION AND COMFORT.** As you grow older, you generally become more compassionate towards others, since you can relate to many of their challenges, having experienced them yourself.

2. See <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/emotional-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine.htm>.

See also <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-relief/art-20044456>



★ **THE GIFT OF SIMPLICITY.** Another benefit of growing older is recognizing the simpler blessings in life.

★ **OPPORTUNITIES FOR BETTER LIFE BALANCE.** As we age, we realize that we can balance our actions and effort with seeing life more as an experience to be lived than something to be endured or overcome. When circumstances require us to go slower, we can use those times to give to others through prayer and encouragement.

★ **FILLING THE EMPTY PLACES.** If you're lonely, or you can't keep up with the social circle that you used to have, you can turn the loss into an opportunity to reach out to others who may also be lonely. There's no better way to fill the emptiness in our own life than by filling the empty places in another's.

★ **BENEFITING FROM LAUGHTER.** Some of the things I do sometimes are quite humorous, such as picking up something, intending to take it into the other room, but then getting there and wondering what happened to it. Then returning to the first room, only to realize that I had picked it up, gotten distracted by something else and put it back down in the same spot where it was. Or, have you ever been looking all around for your phone when it was in your hand? I have! I've even occasionally forgotten whether I had my glasses on or not.

Laughter is a great stress releaser. Laughter is also good for your health and boosts your immune system. A good hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to forty-five minutes afterwards.²

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



A NEW START

BY MELODY CAGLE

MY HUSBAND AND I RECENTLY FOUND OURSELVES ON OUR OWN AGAIN. After raising ten children over 40 years, I didn't see this coming!

We've always been a close-knit family, but of course, as the children have grown up, one by one they've been moving on. I cried each time, as it felt like a piece of my heart was being torn away.

Now, as I waved goodbye to the "baby" of the family, I wondered *What now? How to move on or start a new life?* Every change is so difficult. Every time, we have to change our mindset, adopt new habits and new thought patterns.

I asked God why He'd given me all these children only for me to have to give them up. He told me it was my chance to let go and let Him do a new thing in my life.

After thinking and reading about it more, here are some pointers that I found helpful in my journey:

- Remind yourself constantly that it is good that a new season in your

life has begun. A new life, a new beginning.

- Expect this change to be positive, not negative.
- Now may be your chance to do some of those things you always wanted to do but couldn't.
- Start a hobby.
- Finish that project you started, but never completed.
- Study a topic that is interesting to you.
- If you've always lived in the shadow of your kids, this may be the time to shine yourself.
- Get out of yourself and help others.
- Share your life experiences with the world through writing a book, starting a blog or a YouTube channel.
- Establish a prayer or Bible study group.
- Join a gym or learn a new sport. The possibilities are endless!

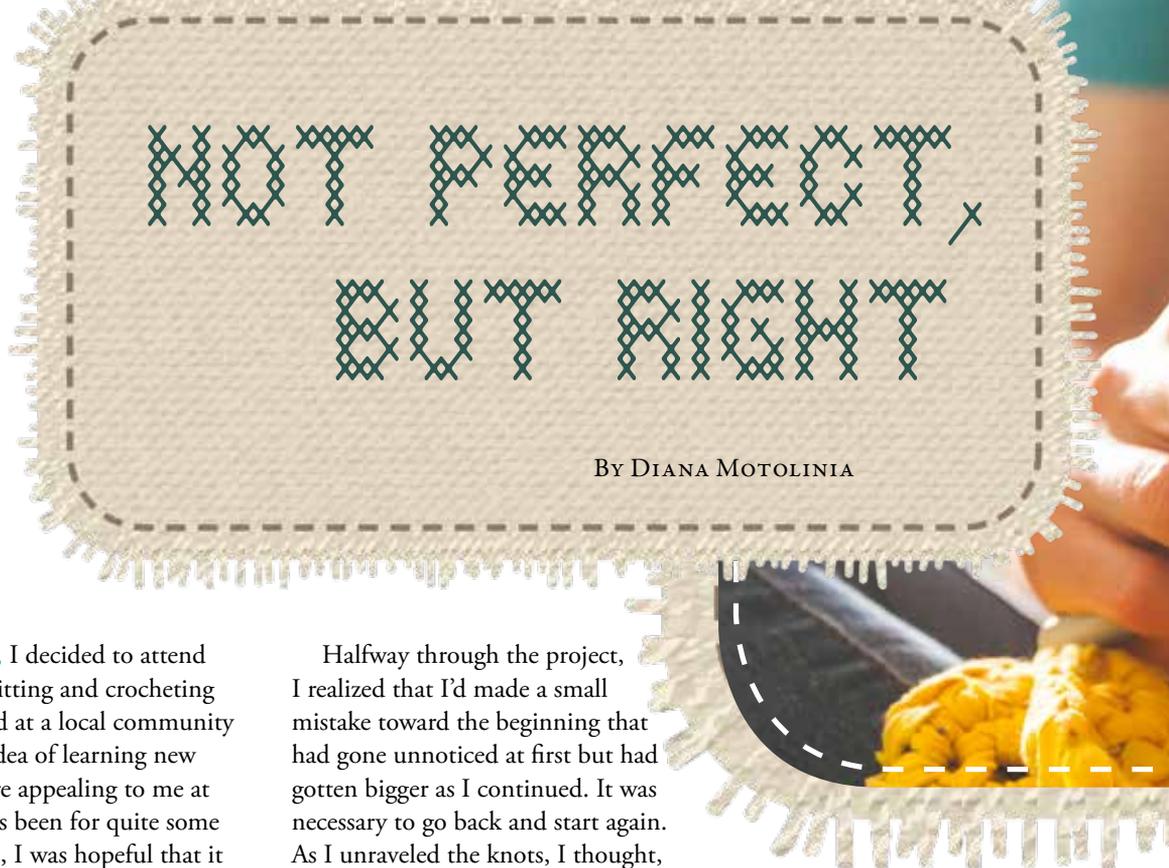
MELODY CAGLE IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL AND A MISSIONARY IN THE USA. ■

Prayer: Jesus, I accept that You are doing a new thing in my life. Help me to be thankful with whatever You send my way. I put my life and the life of my children in Your hands and trust fully in Your care. Please be very present in my life and heart. I welcome You as my Lord and Savior.

◆
For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in
another dress.
And as the evening twilight fades
away
The sky is filled with stars, invisible
by day.
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

◆
The gift of these years is not
merely being alive—it is the gift
of becoming more fully alive than
ever.—Joan Chittister

◆
You are never too old to set
another goal or to dream a new
dream.—Les Brown



BY DIANA MOTOLINIA

RECENTLY, I decided to attend some free knitting and crocheting classes offered at a local community center. The idea of learning new things is more appealing to me at 63 than it has been for quite some time. Besides, I was hopeful that it would be beneficial in combating stress, something my doctor recently warned was affecting my health.

Of course, one begins as a beginner, and I haven't truly progressed beyond that, to be honest. Still, I've completed a few simple projects, and I enjoy sharing the cute, albeit imperfect, results of my work with friends and family.

When I told my daughter that I wanted to crochet a beanie for her son, she suggested I fashion it after one worn by a character in one of his favorite movies. It looked doable, so I purchased the bright red yarn and got to work.

1. Read Lot's story in Genesis chapters 11–14 and 19.
2. See Genesis 13:9–11.
3. See Genesis 14:12.
4. See 2 Peter 2:7.

Halfway through the project, I realized that I'd made a small mistake toward the beginning that had gone unnoticed at first but had gotten bigger as I continued. It was necessary to go back and start again. As I unraveled the knots, I thought, *This hat has to be perfect—well, not perfect, maybe—but right!* The doing and undoing of my crocheting seemed to have marred the yarn texture somewhat, which I thought would probably be noticeable on close inspection. Still, I wanted the actual work and finished project to be done *right*, even if the material itself had some flaws.

Upon reflection, I felt God reminding me through this object lesson of my own life with all its imperfections, some barely noticeable and others glaring. And then the sound bite came to mind, “not perfect, but right.” Jesus reminded me that my life *has* been right, that of a person made righteous by Him, regardless of the material He had to work with, my human flaws, poor judgment, mistakes, and what I perceive as failures.

Then, there's also the whole process of making things right once one has made mistakes or blunders. This can be so messy and downright convoluted, and require so much effort and even pain to disentangle. Thankfully, I feel secure in Jesus' unconditional love and acceptance. However, going to others, be they family, friends, acquaintances—acknowledging my mistakes, and often not even being able to verbalize how or why I did such and such a thing—that is where the fabric of life seems to get rubbed and marred even more. I'm tempted to not even begin to try to make amends, because it's almost always a painful, complicated process. Yet it yields a peaceable fruit of righteousness in God's perfect time. The finished product is better, even with what may seem to be imperfections to the casual observer.



To rise from error to truth is rare
and beautiful.—*Victor Hugo*

The meaning of life. The wasted years of life. The
poor choices of life. God answers the mess of life
with one word: grace.—*Max Lucado*

One biblical character I had quite honestly never held great admiration for is Lot.¹ As a young Christian, I kept him in my mental file of those unworthy of my respect. I mean, talk about selfish! He chooses the best pasture land for himself, basically leaving the leftovers for his uncle, Abraham, who had magnanimously offered him first choice when dividing the land amongst them.² This, after Abraham had taken Lot in when he was orphaned and brought him along on his journey to Canaan.

I figured Lot had it coming when he, his family, and all his goods were taken by the four kings that conquered the land of Sodom where he lived.³ I kind of wondered why Abraham would even bother to go to his nephew's rescue after the greedy, grabby way he had behaved. But

then, family is family, and love finds a way to forgive, I figured. However, instead of getting what one would think was a very clear hint in favor of leaving the city of Sodom, Lot actually returned there.

Nevertheless, Lot was considered righteous according to God's Word,⁴ because of God's grace and power to redeem, as the Bible repeatedly illustrates in the lives of many others. Many consider David and Paul to be the most noteworthy characters redeemed by God's grace in the Bible; and of course, there are others throughout history, my current favorites being St. Augustine and John Newton.

Nowadays, after more than four decades of following and serving God as a missionary, mother, and teacher, the school of hard knocks has given me quite a degree. I can

relate much better to Lot and his story. Like him, I've followed God, often not knowing where I was going. I've also been selfish and weary in well-doing. I wince now to reflect on times that I've lacked courage to stand up to opposition and do the brave and unpopular thing. My heart aches when I reflect on the occasions when I've failed to nurture, strengthen, protect, or care for those I love as I should have, and how they've been hurt because of that failure. Yet, God has taken these lacks and broken purposes to illustrate His great mercy and longsuffering with me as His child.

We are made *right* in Christ, according to His mercy and grace and divine design—and that is what matters, really, at the end of the day. ■

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

LOVE WHILE I CAN



ARGUMENTS WITH MY PARENTS MARRIED MY COLLEGE YEARS. We argued about how much time I spent on expanding my social life, my newfound love for television talk shows, my desire to buy a motorcycle, and a myriad of other things that are trivial in retrospect but were highly emotional issues for me. At the time, I saw my parents as old-fashioned guardians who were blocking my way to the full enjoyment of the prime of my life.

In my last semester, I took an anthropology course. During a class that focused on cultural beliefs about death, my professor showed us a documentary produced by Japan's national broadcasting network (NHK) called *The Phone of the Wind: Whispers to Lost Families*. The documentary discussed the belief some people had that they could connect with lost loved ones by speaking into a disconnected rotary phone, which they called "The phone of the wind." A man named Itaru Sasaki originally set up the device in 2010, in an attempt to maintain contact with his cousin who had died that year. After the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan, survivors started frequenting the phone booth to leave messages for the loved ones that the catastrophic natural disaster had snatched from them.¹

1. Editor's note: This documentary (with English subtitles) can be watched here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9ZOuP1vByU>

I couldn't help choking up as I watched scene after scene of heartbroken people crying into a disconnected phone as they expressed the pain of loss and their feelings of abandonment. They asked, "Why did you die?" They begged, "Come back to us." Towards the end of the documentary, a mother and her three children visited the booth to talk to their husband and father who had died in the earthquake. The daughter had had a tumultuous relationship with her father when he was still with them, and she asked her brother, "What should I say?" as she twiddled the phone in her hand. Tears flowed down her face as she apologized to her dad for picking on him. Her mother said knowingly, "She loved him the most." Her brother, surprised, remarked, "I thought she hated him."

I thought back to my recent disputes with my parents. What if some kind of natural disaster swept me or one of them away? In the comfort and convenience of my modern life, I'd forgotten how fragile life can be. Seeing the tragic image of a daughter sobbing as she blurted out the words that she wished she had said to her dad reminded me that I needed to do my best to put my annoyances into perspective. I don't know what might happen tomorrow, so I must show love today. I can't let irrelevant disagreements crowd out what is truly important to all of us—the familial love that we share.

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

A LESSON IN KINDNESS

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

A FEW YEARS AGO, our neighbors gave their female dog to a friend of theirs. Some time later, this old man died and the dog journeyed to our street, but our neighbors no longer lived there. As time went by, the dog got scrawnier and more forlorn. Soon she dug a hole under our fence and started to eat what our two dogs left in their dishes or on the ground nearby.

When winter arrived, she started to sleep in our old dog house at night. One day, my teenage son said to me: “She is going to die in our yard!” By this time, she was only skin and bones and looked like she barely had the strength to walk around anymore. So I started feeding her twice a day along with my other dogs, and soon she regained her strength and was out and about.

We named her Chiquita and adopted her until we could find her another owner. When my older son came to visit, his wife gave her extra attention, and the next time she came, Chiquita welcomed her with so much excitement that I felt jealous. After all, I was the one who saved her and was feeding and bathing her and all the rest! But Chiquita’s pure joy at my daughter-in-law’s visit got me thinking,



Sure, I’d saved Chiquita from hunger, maybe out of duty or pity, but I hadn’t shown her much love. That lesson stuck with me and I started to include her in the daily playtime with my other dogs. Soon, I began looking forward to her welcoming little jumps and cuddles every time I got home.

Eventually, the municipal kennel found a new home for her, and I agreed to let her go, but my heart ached for the next three days. It felt similar to when my grandchildren come for a vacation and I get accustomed to the sound of their happy feet and joyful gurgles, but then school starts again, and off they go back home. That sweet sorrowful squeeze in the heart lasts for a few days.

I still think of Chiquita, pray for her, and wonder where she is now. I sometimes look at the yard and miss her funny antics and assurances of love.

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



BY DEREK AND MICHELLE BROOKES

EACH ONE UNIQUE

A NEW BABY FILLS OUR LIVES WITH A SPECIAL JOY, a special hope. A baby is a living soul, formed through the union of a spirit created by God with the physical elements of your body. William Wordsworth put it beautifully:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.

Science can describe how children come into being, but when you first hold your baby and look into those little eyes, you are looking at one of the great mysteries of the universe—a glimpse of heaven and the creative power of God. There in your arms is tangible proof of the love God has for you, for He has chosen you to parent a new soul.

1. See John 3:1–8.

FIRST STEPS OF A JOURNEY

Each baby is the first and only one of its kind: a special someone who has entered your life, someone who has something important to do, someone who will live on into eternity with you. Having a child is the beginning of a relationship and blessing that will last beyond the boundaries of this present life.

Each of us is special to God and has a unique purpose for being here. This world is a place of learning through which we all must pass on our journey home to God. Your baby, too, has a special purpose in life. As parents, our job is to help the new arrival to this world get settled and safely started on his or her journey through life.

The question mark and promise and wild possibility that exist in each newborn infant remind us of that which is godlike in us—godlike in reason, in apprehension, and in vision. There are magic and mystery in that frail bundle of flesh. He has genius in his tiny head. He can grow and he can learn. The beauty of the world is in his face; he sleeps with the innocence of snow; and his brave little flower of a fist will grow to hold the plow, drive the ships, heal the sick, sway the multitudes, and perhaps even point the way to a happy new world.—*Author unknown*



A BABY ONCE AGAIN

Birth marks the entrance to life. The celebration of a birth is also a good time to reflect on our own spiritual rebirth and growth.

Nicodemus, an elderly religious leader, once came to see Jesus in the secret of night. All of his learning had not brought him joy or peace of mind, and he had a question for Jesus. He wanted to know how he might find eternal life. Jesus answered him simply that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven he needed to be born again. This puzzled him.

“How can I become a baby in my mother’s womb and be born again, for I am an old man?”

Jesus assured him that the birth He spoke of was a spiritual one; it was a rebirth of his soul by the infilling of God’s own Spirit.¹

Just as we must be born to enter this life, so each of us must also be born anew to enter the kingdom of God, that eternal world of happiness that awaits us beyond this life.

What a life! What a journey!

ADAPTED FROM *KEYS TO BABIES* BY DEREK AND MICHELLE BROOKES, WHICH CAN BE READ IN FULL STARTING HERE: [HTTPS://ACTIVATED.ORG/EN/BOOKS/PARENTING/KEYS-TO-BABY/KEYS-TO-BABY-INTRO/](https://activated.org/en/books/parenting/keys-to-baby/keys-to-baby-intro/). ■



THE BABY

Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into the here.

Where did you get those eyes so blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.

What makes the light in them sparkle and spin?
Some of the starry spikes left in.

Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.

What makes your forehead so smooth and high?
A soft hand stroked it as I went by.

What makes your cheek like a warm white rose?
I saw something better than any one knows.

Whence that three-cornered smile of bliss?
Three angels gave me at once a kiss.

Where did you get this pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.

Where did you get those arms and hands?
Love made itself into bonds and bands.

Feet, whence did you come, you darling things?
From the same box as the cherubs’ wings.

How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me, and so I grew.

But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here.
—George Macdonald (1824–1905)

BY MARIE ALVERO

CREATING FAMILY

IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE WHERE I WORK, we have a regular patient by the first name of Blender. That is her legal, given name. I haven't had an opportunity to ask about the back story, but I am so curious as to what made parents name their child after a kitchen appliance. Maybe it means something beautiful in another language. I have no idea!

We don't get to choose our birth family. Some people seem like they've won the family lottery, if there were such a thing, either genetically, economically, talentwise, or even just in the form of a loving, happy family life. Others, not so much. We all know someone whose family story breaks our heart. And we all know our own stories; how parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins have impacted our lives both positively and negatively. Or maybe we grew up without knowing our biological family, or know of someone who did.

As my children grow into teenagers, I'm recognizing more deeply the importance of being intentional with our family and putting in the time and effort to create the family we want. Life is also full and extremely busy, so I'm learning that I need to reexamine my priorities. Here are some things I am learning:

Do what you can with who you can.

We can't always wait for the whole family to be together in order to engage. All the dynamics and combinations of our family are important and contribute to the family "vibe."

Community is important to family.

As the saying goes, "It takes a village to raise a child." Our kids receive so much from having other wonderful people in their lives, and so do we parents. So we invest in, and spend time with, our community.

Day by day. Family culture is developed in the little things; praying

for the night together, group texts, chores, laughs, hugs, debates, and all the everyday stuff. These are the threads that weave the fabric of family much more than the annual vacation or grand events. Appreciate the value and the beauty of these things.

The family that prays together stays together. One of the best ways to teach our children to depend on God is for them to see us lean on Him.

Strong families create a strong society. I firmly believe that God is vested in our families and wants to help us build strong, happy families, even amid the challenges that abound.

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. ■

OPA AND I

BY IRIS RICHARD

MY GRANDFATHER, whom I called “Opa,” and I were best buddies. He sharpened my instincts and shared his love for nature during our weekly hikes in the woods.

Each weekend, I eagerly awaited the moment when I was dropped off at Opa and Oma’s one-bedroom apartment in a small town at the heart of Germany’s industrial center.

It was 1960 and I was five years old. Opa worked as a foreman at a steel mill, and on Friday afternoons I sat on the hill by the giant iron wrought gates of the factory, impatiently waiting for the siren to belt out its husky call or signal, announcing the end of the working week. I watched as hundreds of blue-clad workers streamed out of the wide gates, bustling with excitement at the weekend of storytelling and fun ahead.

As soon as I spotted Opa, I scrambled down the hill and sprinted towards him, throwing my arms around his neck as he twirled me around. He carried me a small distance, before setting me back on my feet, when I skipped alongside him, chattering all the way.

By the time we reached the fourth floor of the old apartment block with its red-stained wooden stairs and a communal toilet one flight of stairs down, he was already well-informed about all that transpired in my life that week.

Opa would listen to me with endless patience, nodding and smiling from time to time. When it was finally his turn to speak, he could tell hours’ worth of exciting and animated stories that always started with, “Once upon a time...” His stories weren’t always happy. He told of difficult times during the war, of food rationing and hardship, cold winter evenings huddled in blankets without coal in the stove.

We loved our Saturday and Sunday morning walks in the nearby forest, where Opa taught me the names of trees, berries, and shrubs, and best of all, how to find my way back home by remembering landmarks.

Oma cooked on her big coal stove, which also served as the apartment’s only heating. In winter, the heat barely reached the adjacent bedroom. She had a big heavy iron weighted with coals, which she used to iron Opa’s shirts and work uniform.

During the freezing winter months, we would dress in flannel pajamas when it was time for bed and quickly jumped under the large puffy quilts. Those were happy, carefree days, but also days that formed my character and instilled in me a thankful heart.

Opa died when I was 12 years old, leaving a void in my life, but his departure taught me to pray, and at times I felt his presence, like a small voice of conscience that directed and encouraged me.

Having experienced the value of time with a grandparent, I also try to make time for undivided attention to the grandchildren who live near me. It’s a wonderful investment that blesses both me and them, as Opa taught me all those years ago.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

TAKE A LESSON FROM CHILDREN

Many adults have looked at a child blissfully enjoying playtime, and have, for a moment, wished they were children again. They look so peaceful, so happy, with hardly a care in the world. Children laugh easily, they enjoy what they do, and they get excited about the simplest things. They generally have minor, temporary worries that rarely last more than a few minutes or an hour. They likely spend so much more time than you do just being happy and engaged.

Why do kids appear to be so much more at peace? Obviously, they have a whole lot less work to do, but that's not the root of the reason. What gives them so much peace of mind and heart is not so much the absence of work as it is the almost complete absence of fear of the future.

Take a nice, deep breath. Take another one. Now take a few minutes and think happy thoughts. Forget your troubles. Forget your day. Appreciate the good things in life. Feels good, doesn't it? Or if it doesn't feel good yet, it will, as you make it a habit to enjoy the simple things in life.

I want you to enjoy life all throughout. I want to bless you with happy moments and happy memories that will sustain you through the tough times. I want you to spend time laughing with others and loving them. I want you to love, to live—to enjoy something every single day.

