

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

Vol 21 • Issue 4

## KEEPING THE FAITH

6 tips to help yours thrive

## The Secret Place

Perfect protection, perfect peace

## Spiritual Growth

Is it something you can plot?

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION AN ANCIENT Q&A

I'd venture a guess that the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk isn't very well known nowadays, but he sure knew what it meant to trust in God no matter how badly things were going:

“Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the Lord! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!”<sup>1</sup>

I was curious about what might have been going on in Habakkuk's life and times to inspire him to pen such a beautiful statement of faith, so I read the entire book. It's a short book, only three chapters long, and it turns out this passage comes at the very end, as a conclusion to Habakkuk's dialogue with God.

The book offers very little detail about Habakkuk's personal life, but it's evident that he lived at a difficult time in the history of God's people, and he starts off by openly questioning God's wisdom.

Habakkuk tells God that he sees nothing around him but injustice and violence and destruction by invading armies, and he asks the same question God often gets asked by all of us—usually, with much less justification than he had: Why does God not make things right, and why does He allow evil to seemingly triumph? God's patient replies eventually bring Habakkuk back to a position of trust in God and His promises that enables him to put everything in his loving Father's hands.

The same timeless lesson is the topic of this issue of *Activated*. We can choose to rejoice in God and in our salvation even in the midst of life's most trying experiences, “because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”<sup>2</sup> We can trust in His timeless promises to bring us through each and every one of life's storms.

For more information on *Activated*, visit our website or write to us.

**Website:** [activated.org](http://activated.org)  
**Email:** [activated@activated.org](mailto:activated@activated.org)

Local contacts:

*South Africa:*

Tel: (082) 491 2583

Email: [sales@bigthought.co.za](mailto:sales@bigthought.co.za)

*India:*

Email: [activatedindia@activated.org](mailto:activatedindia@activated.org)

*Nigeria:*

Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333

Email: [activatednigeria@activated.org](mailto:activatednigeria@activated.org)

*Philippines:*

Cell: (0922) 8125326

Email: [activatedph@gmail.com](mailto:activatedph@gmail.com)

EDITOR Ronan Keane

DESIGN Gentian Suçi

© 2019 Activated. All Rights Reserved.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. Other Bible quotations are from the following sources: New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1978, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission. New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. Contemporary English Version (CEV). Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

1. Habakkuk 3:17–18 NLT

2. Hebrews 13:5 NIV



BY CHRIS MIZRANY

# How to Run From Waves

**ONE FINE DAY**, my wife and I took Kristen, our 13-month-old daughter, to the beach. It was perfect, beautiful weather. As we strolled down the sand, each holding a little hand, she excitedly smiled and chattered in that special encrypted language of hers.

As we got to the water and the first little wave rolled over her feet, her expression suddenly changed. The water was considerably more frigid than the sand, and unsure of what to do, she stood absolutely still until the sand eroded under her and she fell on her bottom with a thud. We picked her up with a laugh and a hug, then waited for the next wave.

Now she started anticipating and would turn to run when the water began to close in. Here I noticed something interesting. Kristen would

turn and run to one of us, in spite of the fact that she had to get through more water to reach us than just running straight back to shore. Even when she had to struggle through what to her was knee-high water, she would choose running to us over what seemed like immediate relief. And we would meet her halfway, making sure she stayed safe.

What would entice a little girl to brave more of the very thing that scared her, rather than take the “quick and easy” way out? I think it is simple *trust*. She trusted that we would take care of her, and that being with us in the midst of cold water was better than trying to get to shore alone.

Often when a problem hits me, my first reaction is panic. I stand absolutely still as my mind sifts through options, and I end up falling and failing. Then, the next time I see a problem coming, I’m

tempted to run as fast as I can out of the situation. But as you know, situations have a way of catching up and still sweeping us off our feet. So what’s the solution? I need to follow my daughter’s example and face the problem boldly. That doesn’t mean facing it alone. Beside me stands my strong, capable Savior, and He can hold me up despite any “wave.” I just need to quit trying on my own and run to Him!

When I am weak, I can be strong through His strength.<sup>1</sup> Jesus is still the master of the winds, the waves, and any other elements that besiege our lives.<sup>2</sup> So let’s go to Him right away when we see the tide coming in. He won’t let us be overwhelmed.<sup>3</sup>

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

1. See 2 Corinthians 12:10.

2. See Luke 8:25.

3. See Matthew 14:30–31.

# THE VIOLIN AND THE BROKEN STRING

BY MARIA FONTAINE

**THERE IS A STORY**, versions of which can be found on several websites, about the world-famous violinist Itzhak Perlman. It illustrates a beautiful principle about God's grace and power, how He can take whatever we have to offer Him in this life and make it into something beautiful. I'd like to recount it for you.

Itzhak Perlman was playing to a packed house one evening when, in the middle of a piece, that sound, dreaded by every violinist on stage, pierced the air—the sound of a violin string *breaking!*

The suspense was palpable as the orchestra stopped, waiting to see what Itzhak would do. But rather than calling for a different violin, he paused for a moment and signaled for the conductor to continue with the piece; as he took on what most would say was an impossible task: to play a complex piece of music on a violin with only *three* strings. He seemed to somehow be reworking the notes in his head as he played.

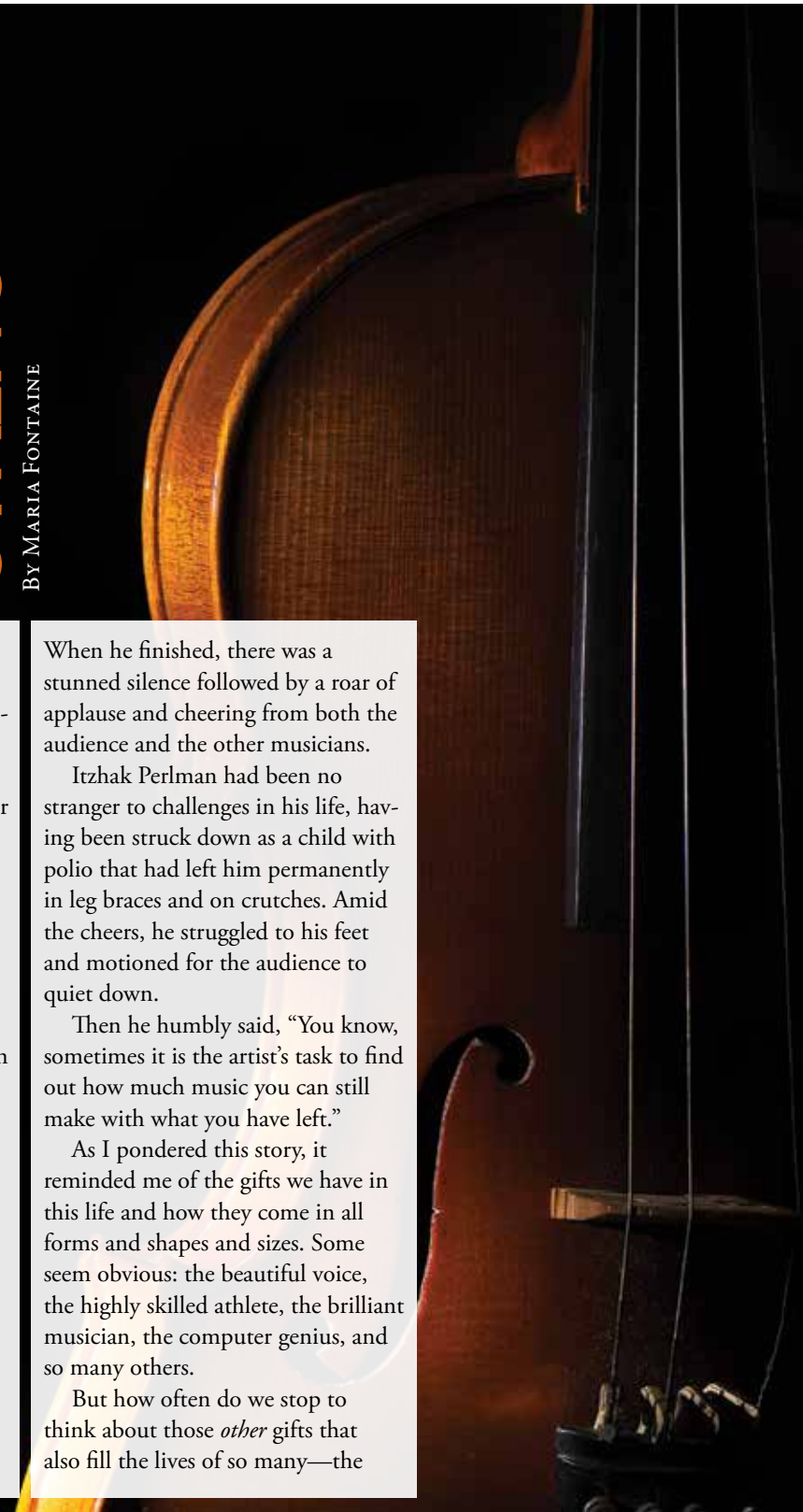
When he finished, there was a stunned silence followed by a roar of applause and cheering from both the audience and the other musicians.

Itzhak Perlman had been no stranger to challenges in his life, having been struck down as a child with polio that had left him permanently in leg braces and on crutches. Amid the cheers, he struggled to his feet and motioned for the audience to quiet down.

Then he humbly said, “You know, sometimes it is the artist's task to find out how much music you can still make with what you have left.”

As I pondered this story, it reminded me of the gifts we have in this life and how they come in all forms and shapes and sizes. Some seem obvious: the beautiful voice, the highly skilled athlete, the brilliant musician, the computer genius, and so many others.

But how often do we stop to think about those *other* gifts that also fill the lives of so many—the





blindness that develops other senses to such a degree that the person is able to accomplish even greater feats, or the weakness of body that with God's love creates a compassion and wisdom that is able to turn the lives of countless others around and bring them new hope, direction, and joy?

Life is filled with blessings—things we see as good—and setbacks—things we see as bad—but whatever we face, when we do it with God's help, becomes an opportunity to use what we have in order to create something wonderful.

Itzhak's ability to turn defeats into greater accomplishments didn't just happen by chance. He chose to turn his own lifelong suffering into a tool for good that then became a passion to see every obstacle as an opportunity to go even further. His physical struggles produced a humility that helped to shield him from the corruption of pride, even in the areas where he was highly accomplished.

Too often people turn to self-victimization when faced with hardship, blaming everyone and everything else, even God. The better choice is to ask God for His wisdom, strength and grace to help us deal with the challenges in our lives, and thereby develop qualities that can enable us to shine brightly with His love right where we are.

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

### **Faith in God Is...**

...believing in the unseeable.

**Faith** is tranquil when it's very stormy.

**Faith** is not passive; it acts out what it believes.

**Faith** is asking God for what you need.

**Faith** is taking God at His Word, and trusting that what He has promised He is able to perform.

**Faith** is creating a vacuum in your heart for God to fill.

**Faith** is not only believing that God *can*, but that God *will!*

**Faith** is not surprised at the answer. Faith expected it to happen.

—David Brandt Berg (1919–1994)

## A CHILD'S FAITH

"Jesus loves me, this I know  
For the Bible tells me so."  
Little children ask no more,  
For love is all they're looking for,  
And in a small child's shining eyes  
The Faith of all the ages lies.

And tiny hands and tousled heads  
That kneel in prayer by little beds  
Are closer to the dear Lord's heart  
And of His kingdom more a part  
Than we who search, and never  
find  
The answer to our questioning  
mind.

For Faith in things we cannot see  
Requires a child's simplicity  
For, lost in life's complexities,  
We drift upon uncharted seas  
And slowly Faith disintegrates

While wealth and power  
accumulate.

And the more man learns, the less  
he knows,  
And the more involved his thinking  
grows

And, in his arrogance and pride,  
No longer is man satisfied  
To place his confidence and love  
With childlike Faith in God above.

Oh, Father, grant once more to men  
A simple childlike Faith again.  
And, with a small child's trusting  
eyes

May all men come to realize  
That Faith alone can save man's  
soul  
And lead him to a Higher Goal.  
—Helen Steiner Rice



BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

# THE MEASURE OF FAITH

**A FRIEND OF MINE ASKED THE MANAGER OF A SUPERMARKET IF HE HAD EVER CASHED A BAD CHECK FOR A STRANGER.** “No, I never did,” he said, “because I never look at the check—I look at the man. If I can trust the man, I take his check.” What a lesson in faith!

In Hebrews 10:23 we find these words: “He who promised is faithful.” Who makes the promises in God’s Word?—God does. Look at the Maker of the promises, and then there can be no question as to their absolute validity. God’s Word says, “Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you.”<sup>1</sup>

To know God is to be sure that He keeps every promise He has made. Abraham knew God and

“did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith ... being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.”<sup>2</sup>

Some people think of faith as something very mysterious and far beyond their reach. Others think of faith as a gift assigned at birth—some have it to a great degree, while others don’t. Both of those are misconceptions.

God has dealt to each person a measure of faith,<sup>3</sup> but many people don’t use their faith. If you don’t use your faith, it becomes flabby, just like muscles when you don’t use them. For faith to grow, you’ve got to keep exercising it.

Faith operates in an entirely different realm from our five senses, but some of the same principles apply. Faith conveys to us evidence of spiritual truths, just as our five senses convey evidence of physical things. Just as we accept what our five senses tell us, we must accept as evidence what our faith tells us. When we

do, our faith brings that thing to pass and makes it real. “As you have believed, so let it be done for you.”<sup>4</sup>

Take God at His word. When the troubles and trials come, instead of letting them grow and grow, open your Bible, find a promise, and claim it in Jesus’ name. Here’s one that’s surely too big for me to comprehend, but I often claim it: “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”<sup>5</sup> And here’s another one: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”<sup>6</sup> No wonder the Bible calls these promises exceedingly great and precious and tells us that through them we can “participate in the divine nature.”<sup>7</sup>

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS AN AMERICAN EVANGELIST AND AUTHOR. READ MORE ABOUT HER LIFE AND WORK AT [HTTP://VIRGINIABRANDTBERG.ORG](http://virginiabrandtberg.org). ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

1. Job 22:21
2. Romans 4:20–21
3. See Romans 12:3.
4. Matthew 8:13
5. John 14:13
6. Jeremiah 33:3
7. 2 Peter 1:4 NIV

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

# KEEPING THE FAITH

## Question:

My family and most of the people I'm around every day aren't interested in spiritual matters. How can I "keep the faith" in what seems to be an increasingly skeptical world?

## Answer:

Faith is at the core of our spiritual lives, so it's worth fighting for. Here are a few tips that can help your faith not only survive, but thrive:

### FEED ON THE WORD OF

**GOD.** Faith is built by faithful study of God's Word. As you read and absorb it daily, as you think about its truths and how they apply to you, your faith will grow. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."<sup>1</sup> Jesus promises, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."<sup>2</sup>

**PRAY AND MEDITATE.** God wants to have a personal relationship with you through His Son, Jesus. "There is

one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."<sup>3</sup> Communing in spirit with Jesus—sharing your heart with Him and receiving His love, encouragement, and answers in return—will strengthen your connection and deepen your relationship and your faith in Him.

**LIVE YOUR FAITH.** "Faith without works is dead,"<sup>4</sup> but conversely, putting faith into action brings it to life. As you apply God's Word to daily living, its principles and promises will prove to be true time after time, and your faith in it and its Author will grow.

**LOOK FOR THE GOOD.** Our faith can be sorely tested when we face adverse circumstances, but the Bible promises, "All things work together for good to those who love God,

to those who are called according to His purpose."<sup>5</sup> Look for and focus on that good, and your faith will be buoyant enough to face your challenges.

**DRAW FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS.** Reading accounts of what God has done for others will increase your faith. What God has done for them, He can do for you!

**THANK GOD FOR HIS GOODNESS.** Praising God for His goodness propels us into His presence. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name."<sup>6</sup> The more you thank God for His goodness, the more you'll find to be thankful for and the more He will bless you. It's an upward spiral that helps you to draw near to God so that He can draw near to you.<sup>7</sup> ■

1. Romans 10:17
2. John 8:31–32
3. 1 Timothy 2:5
4. James 2:26
5. Romans 8:28
6. Psalm 100:4
7. See James 4:8.

A MEDITATION ON PSALM 91  
BY RONAN KEANE

# The Secret Place

**PSALM 91:1:** HE WHO DWELLS IN THE SECRET PLACE OF THE MOST HIGH SHALL ABIDE UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE ALMIGHTY.

Where is the “secret place of the Most High”? It is found in intimate fellowship with God. The phrase “shadow of the Almighty” symbolizes God’s protection. When you’re in close personal fellowship with God, you’re under His shadow, under His protection.

That promise comes with a condition: we have to do our part by staying close to Him. We do that by reading His Word in the Bible and doing our best to follow it, by keeping Him and His guiding spiritual principles present in our thoughts and decisions.

**VERSE 2:** I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.”

In Bible times, stone fortresses provided the best protection in times of trouble or war, but God is an even surer defense.

1. John 17:17
2. Ephesians 6:16
3. Hebrews 12:11
4. See Romans 8:28.
5. See Matthew 18:10.



**VERSE 3:** Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.

This passage promises deliverance from those who intentionally seek to snare God’s people and from physical maladies such as plagues or epidemics.

**VERSE 4A:** He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.

The picture is of God keeping His children safe, like a hen spreads

her wings over her chicks to protect them.

**VERSE 4B:** His truth shall be your shield and buckler.

A buckler was a small shield, about the size and shape of a dinner plate, which protected a soldier’s wrist.

What is the truth of God? Jesus once said in a prayer to His Father, “Your word is truth.”<sup>1</sup> Another passage tells us to carry “the shield of faith with which you will be



et



able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”<sup>2</sup> Faith in God’s promises is our best protection.

**VERSES 5–8:** You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.

Even if danger is on every side, God will care for you and can bring you through it unscathed.

**VERSE 9:** Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place...

If the Lord is your refuge and dwelling place, in a sense you’re already dwelling in His presence, because you’ve made your home with Him.

**VERSE 10:** No evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling.

Of course, bad things *do* happen, even to people who pray for God’s protection. They get hurt, seriously ill, and have plenty of other problems. How could the statement “no evil shall befall you” be true?

Well, consider what is “evil.” When God lets seemingly bad things happen to His children, they often teach us something or strengthen and build our character. When our wise and loving heavenly Father allows this, He does so for our own good, and it “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”<sup>3</sup> He also promises that *all* things work together for good to those who love Him.<sup>4</sup>

**VERSES 11–13:** For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone. You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.

God’s angels watch over you continually, including your personal guardian angel, whose job is *you*.<sup>5</sup>

**VERSE 14,** *God speaking:* “Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name.”

There are conditions attached to God’s promises: He protects those who know and love Him. Your love, trust, and faith in God and His ability to deliver you give you the privilege of His protection.

**VERSES 15–16:** “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation.”

There are six things God will do for us when we call on Him for help: 1) He will answer us, 2) He will be with us in trouble, 3) He will deliver us, 4) He will honor us, 5) He will give us a long, full life on this earth, and 6) He will show us His salvation. ■



## I WAS TIRED AND HAD NODDED OFF WHILE ON THE TRAM.

When I arrived at my destination, I was startled awake and barely made it off in time. Unfortunately, it wasn't until after my dentist appointment that I realized I'd left my laptop on the tram! Yikes! Work files from the last 20 years were on that laptop, along with the backup drives in the bag with it—now all lost! I felt about 5 centimeters high, or as the saying goes, so low I'd have to reach up to scratch a worm's ankle. I began to berate myself, recalling how my wife had warned me to leave the laptop at home. The conversation replayed in my head: "You might lose it." "Nah," I'd answered, "not me."

Then the other voice, the one I call "The Living Word," kicked in: *If*

1. John 14:14; Matthew 7:7; Mark 11:24
2. See 1 Thessalonians 5:17.
3. <http://elixirmime.com>

*you ask anything in My name, I will do it. Ask, and it will be given to you. Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*<sup>1</sup>

In that particular dilemma, it was easy to know what to ask for. I called my friend Andy and told him my plight and we prayed together for the laptop to be retrieved. I gave the situation to God to take care of, praying "continually," as the Bible says.<sup>2</sup> It was all I could do anyway. I could bang my head against the wall screaming in remorse, or I could go to my next appointment. I opted for the latter.

After the dentist, I boarded another tram and headed to my next destination. I was still thinking and talking to God about what had happened when I spotted a young girl moving up to the driver with a familiar-looking bag in her hand! My laptop bag! Ecstatically,

I ran up to her and explained what had happened and recovered my laptop. I thanked her profusely for finding it and gave her an *Activated* magazine as a token of my appreciation.

I calculated that 33 trams had passed that stop during the time my laptop was lost. What were the chances of boarding the exact same tram and finding my laptop after it had been lost for three hours?

Having faith in God doesn't mean that we'll always recover lost items or have all our prayers answered, but we can know that He will be with us and help us to overcome our troubles in some way. The difference faith makes is that we aren't alone in our trials and tribulations, we have a Friend to call on!

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST<sup>3</sup> IN GERMANY. ■

# THE PRESENCE

BY ALEX PETERSON



## Abide with Me

—Henry F. Lyte (1793–1847)

I need Thy presence every passing hour.  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

**SIR ERNEST HENRY SHACKLETON** (1874–1922) was an Irish explorer who is best remembered for his Antarctic expedition of 1914–1915 in the ship *Endurance*, described in his book *South*. Less known is that Shackleton had an unseen source of strength to draw from—his faith.

The journey over the frozen deep was fraught with danger. The *Endurance* became trapped in pack ice and was ultimately destroyed by it. The crew had to abandon ship. After trekking over the ice, dragging three of the ship's lifeboats they had salvaged from the wreck, they managed to get to Elephant Island. From there, Shackleton and four other men set out to summon help. In the largest of the three boats, they journeyed 750 miles (1,200 km) through rough seas to the southern Atlantic Ocean island of South Georgia, where Shackleton and two others crossed glaciers and razorback ridges to reach a whaling station. Of that epic journey, Shackleton wrote:

“When I look back on those days I have no doubt that Providence guided us. I know that during that [final] long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed

mountains and glaciers of South Georgia, it seemed to me often that we were four, and not three. I said nothing to my companions on the point, but afterward Worsley said to me, ‘Boss, I had a curious feeling on that march that there was another Person with us.’ Crean confessed to the same idea. One feels ‘the dearth of human words, the roughness of human speech’ in trying to describe things intangible, but a record of our journeys would not be complete without a reference to a subject so very near to our hearts.”

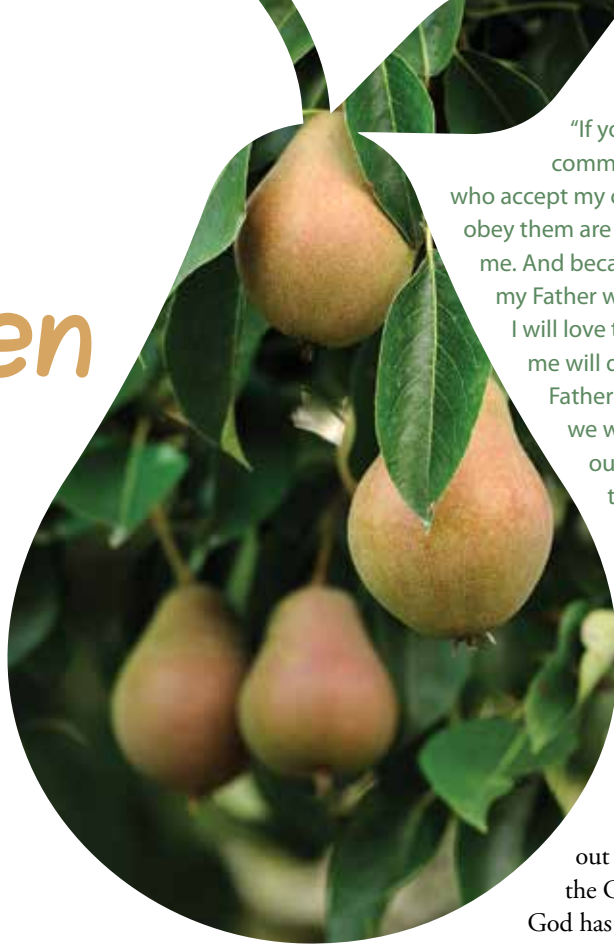
Shackleton made one last expedition, from which he did not return. Just before leaving, he repeated his testimony concerning their unseen companion and quoted the Bible. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.”<sup>1</sup>

On his last voyage, Shackleton took a recording of the song “Abide with Me.” A London writer commented at the time, “Just think of those words—‘I need Thy presence every passing hour’—ringing out across the icebound wastes of the Antarctic!” ■

1. Psalm 139:7–10

# Forbidden FRUIT

BY UDAY PAUL



“If you love me, obey my commandments. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them. All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them.”—*Jesus, John 14:15,21,23 NLT*

IN HIS CLASSIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY *CONFESSIONS*, Saint Augustine, a theologian of the early church, narrates an incident which happened when he was a teenager. There was a pear tree near his family’s vineyard loaded with fruit that wasn’t even attractive in appearance or taste. Yet he and some friends stole pears from the tree. They did so not to eat them themselves, but to throw them to the pigs. He says that he and his friends committed the theft simply because they had pleasure in doing something that was forbidden, a tale as old as that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

1. See Exodus 14:31.
2. See Exodus 32:1–6.
3. See Jeremiah 7:9.
4. See Genesis 3:9.
5. Romans 7:21 NLT
6. See Romans 5:1.

Many generations earlier, when God brought the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and led them to the Promised Land, the people initially believed in and feared the Lord.<sup>1</sup> But when they faced difficult circumstances in the course of their journey, they had a crisis of faith and turned away from God and Moses. While Moses was at the top of Mount Sinai receiving God’s Law, they made a golden idol of a calf to worship and sacrifice to.<sup>2</sup> In the following centuries, the people of Israel and Judah continued to anger God with their idolatry and sinful actions, in spite of His goodness, miraculous protection and promises to them.<sup>3</sup>

Since the time of creation when the Bible tells us that God sought

out Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, God has desired intimate communion with mankind.<sup>4</sup> But sin caused a breach in our relationship with the Creator, and we are unable to keep His commandments no matter how hard we try. As the Apostle Paul said, “When I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.”<sup>5</sup> The Bible says that the breach between God and mankind has been bridged through Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup> Jesus’ life on earth, His death, and His resurrection paved the way for reconciliation and a new relationship with our heavenly Father. And having that relationship restored means new hearts that are responsive to God’s will for our lives.

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

# POINTS TO PONDER

# In a class by HIMSELF!

JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE MORE TO CHANGE HISTORY, the course of civilization, and the condition of man than any other leader, group, government, or empire before Him or since. He has given the love of God to billions and made the way for as many as will believe in Him to receive eternal life.

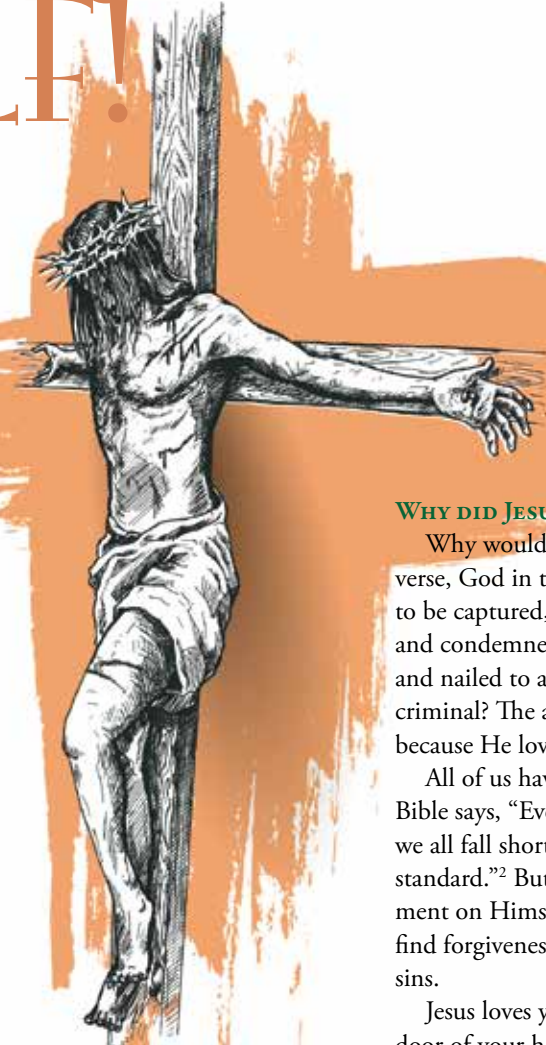
Jesus Christ is not merely a philosopher or teacher or rabbi or guru or prophet, though He has been called all these things. He is the Son of God. God the Father is a Spirit and is all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere, and in everything. He is so far beyond our limited human comprehension that He had to send His Son, Jesus, in the form of a man, to show us what He Himself is like and to bring us to Himself.

Although many great teachers have spoken about love and God, Jesus *is* love and He *is* God. Jesus is the only One who died for the sins of the world and rose from the dead. He's in a class all by Himself because He's the only Savior. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."<sup>1</sup>

—David Brandt Berg (1919–1994)

1. John 14:6

2. Romans 3:23 NLT



Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him.

—Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)

## WHY DID JESUS DIE?

Why would the Lord of the universe, God in the flesh, allow Himself to be captured, falsely accused, tried and condemned, whipped, stripped, and nailed to a cross like a common criminal? The answer is simple: because He loved you and me!

All of us have done wrong. The Bible says, "Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."<sup>2</sup> But Jesus took our punishment on Himself, so that we might find forgiveness and freedom from our sins.

Jesus loves you and stands at the door of your heart, asking to be let in. You can receive Him by praying this prayer:

*Jesus, I want to know You personally, so I invite You to come into my heart. Thank You for dying for me, so I could be forgiven for my sins, find peace of heart and mind here and now, and receive God's gift of eternal life. Amen. ■*

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH

BY SALLY GARCÍA

You can't make yourself grow spiritually. It doesn't come by self-effort. It comes by living close to Jesus, living in His Word, soaking up His love, being filled with His Spirit, and engaging in heart-to-heart communication with Him.

—Virginia Brandt Berg  
(1886–1968)



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN HAPPILY READING AN ENJOYABLE BOOK WHEN SUDDENLY A SENTENCE HITS YOU RIGHT BETWEEN THE EYES? In *The Furious Longing of God*,<sup>1</sup> Brennan Manning writes:

I've decided that if I had my life to live over again, I would not only climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets; I wouldn't only jettison my hot water bottle, raincoat, umbrella, parachute, and raft; I would not only go barefoot earlier in the spring and stay out later in the fall; but I would devote not one more minute to monitoring

my spiritual growth. No, not one.

I loved the first part, because in my older contemplative years, I enjoy poetic musings about the simple things of life. But his phrase to “devote not one more minute to monitoring my spiritual growth. No, not one”—what does that mean?

I reread the sentence a few times slowly until the word grace came to mind. Walking with God is a spiritual journey that will last this lifetime and beyond. God doesn't seem to be in a hurry, and as we go along together, He points lessons out to me. Sometimes I get it the first time around, and other times it seems like He needs to repeat the lesson several times before I get the point. Just like parents have to do with their children.

But our lives aren't about climbing a ladder to get to the top of our field of spiritual expertise, hoping we can earn extra points or more blessings if we try hard enough. Jesus said that if we seek first His kingdom, then everything else will fall into place.<sup>2</sup>

So do I need to be working toward something or not? The author finished his thought by writing:

What would I actually do if I had it to do all over again? ... I would simply do the next thing in love.

I think if I live under the shadow of His grace and His love, then everything else in my life will fall into place.

1. Brennan Manning, *The Furious Longing of God* (David C. Cook, 2009). Kindle

2. See Matthew 6:33.

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



BY MARIE ALVERO

# GREAT FAITH

**FOR MOST OF MY LIFE I'VE DESCRIBED MY FAITH AS A "JESUS-LOVES-ME-THIS-I-KNOW" TYPE OF FAITH.** Jesus said He loved me. The Bible tells me so. I didn't have a lot of questions. And when I did I was usually satisfied with answers like "only God knows" or "you just have to take this one by faith." In other words, logic may not apply here, but believe anyway. I was surprisingly okay with this.

Part of it was the fact that I received a pretty solid foundation in the Bible, and it served me well. My faith was deep and grounded. Part of it could also be classified as lethargy. I didn't always want to do the work of finding answers, defending my faith, and actually seeking a logical basis for my beliefs.

My husband is the opposite. He has a very conscientious, studious

approach to his faith. When he has a question about the meaning of a verse, or hears something quoted but isn't convinced of the context, he'll get on his Bible app looking at various translations, referencing Greek and Hebrew words, cross-referencing what he finds with supporting verses, etc. His faith has no basis in his emotions, but rather grows from his continual study of God's Word and evidence of its truth.

I admire his discipline. He's taken the Bible's recommendation to "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."<sup>1</sup>

In a podcast I was listening to recently, the speaker was saying that our faith can be supported logically. And that the modern Christian should be prepared to defend their beliefs logically. So I listen to podcasts, cross-reference verses, debate

with my husband, read my Bible, and put in the effort. Not a huge amount of work, but more effort than I ever have.

When it comes to faith, there will always be the part that is simply standing on God's Word. Hebrews 11 chronicles several great stories of faith and notes that "Every one of those people died. But they still had faith, even though they had not received what they had been promised."<sup>2</sup> These great men and women of faith may not have always been sure, but they wanted to believe and were willing to be persuaded. I pray that I will pursue faith the way the heroes of Hebrews 11 did.

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. ■

1. 2 Timothy 2:15 NIV

2. Hebrews 11:13 CEV



# THROUGH THE STORM

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Remember the account when I calmed the sea?<sup>1</sup> My disciples were panicking and thought that they would certainly perish. But when they looked to *Me* for help, rather than looking at their circumstances, I came to their rescue, in spite of the waves and the storm.

It's the same for you. There are many waves, and you may even see storms brewing on the horizon of your life, but if you look to *Me* and the assurances of My love and care for you, and My wisdom to guide you, you will find the answers you need. The situation around you is like waves washing over you and your little boat. Your worries about the future are like a menacing storm. At times you might be tempted to think you will capsize.

If you will ask *Me* to calm the storm, I will. Or I will show you how to weather the storm. I will do it, just as I have always done it in all these years you have so faithfully trusted in *Me*. Remember that I am in the boat with you.

---

1. See Mark 4:37–41.