

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated



Vol 21 • Issue 7

THE GUITAR LESSON

Playing with wobbly frets

Welcome to Parkville

The town run by teens,
for teens

Exercising Humility

8 tips to a new you



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

ACHIEVING GREATNESS

When you think of “great” men and women, what sort of people come to mind? Many of us would list outstanding athletes, best-selling authors, favorite movie or TV actors, music artists, politicians, and so forth. That’s natural. These are the people who dominate the media, and we’re fed a constant stream of information regarding their lives, ideas, habits, and preferences.

But in reality, while these people may appear to have a lot of accomplishments, this raises the question: *What if God’s and the Christian’s definition of greatness was something different?*

John the Baptist didn’t earn a large income or widespread adulation, he didn’t accomplish amazing athletic or intellectual feats, and he didn’t build a commercial empire. John lived alone in the desert and survived on a diet of insects. But his accomplishment was to serve as the one preparing the way for the Messiah and announcing His coming, calling the people to repentance. He was bold and uncompromising. He trained disciples who followed him and then Jesus. He was faithful in his calling and gave his life for it. Those were the yardsticks Jesus used to evaluate his life when He said: “Of all who have ever lived, none is greater than John the Baptist.”¹

Jesus taught that the road to greatness is achieved by service to others: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.”² That’s also what He did; He gave up everything and became a servant, when He left His Father in heaven and became a man and lived among humanity.

We can all strive to grow into the likeness of Christ³ by following Christ’s example, reading His Word, and spending time with Him. That’s what this issue of *Activated* is all about.

1. Matthew 11:11 NLT
2. Matthew 20:26 NIV
3. See Romans 8:29.

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

Website: activated.org

Email: activated@activated.org

Local contacts:

South Africa:

Tel: (082) 491 2583

Email: sales@bigthought.co.za

India:

Email: activatedindia@activated.org

Nigeria:

Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333

Email: activatednigeria@activated.org

Philippines:

Cell: (0922) 8125326

Email: activatedph@gmail.com

EDITOR Ronan Keane

DESIGN Gentian Suçi

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BY CHRIS MIZRANY

MY JENGA TOWER

ONE OF MY FAVORITE GAMES INVOLVES PULLING THINGS APART. It's a high-risk game, as no matter how awesomely you're doing, things can go wrong very quickly, and then it's all over.

A game of Jenga begins with a tower of crisscrossing wooden blocks stacked on top of each other, three in one direction in each level, covered by three in the alternate direction in the next level, and so on.

Each player takes a turn removing any block and placing it at the top of the tower, continuing the pattern, until the tower is so weakened that it falls. The person who moves a block and causes the tower to tumble loses. Simple and nerve-racking.

When I first started playing, I'd usually try to remove the most structurally integral blocks, just to prove that I could. Sometimes, I got away with my bravado. Often, my plans literally came crashing down. It took me some time to get the point that the safe method of playing resulted in far more consistent wins. I learned my lesson—or did I?

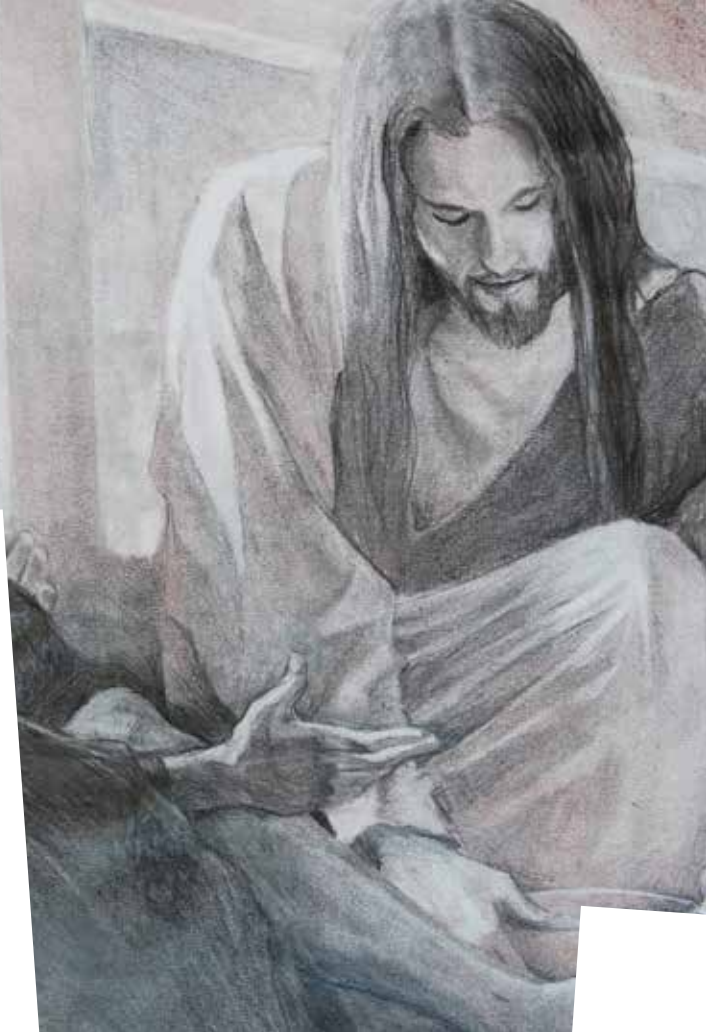
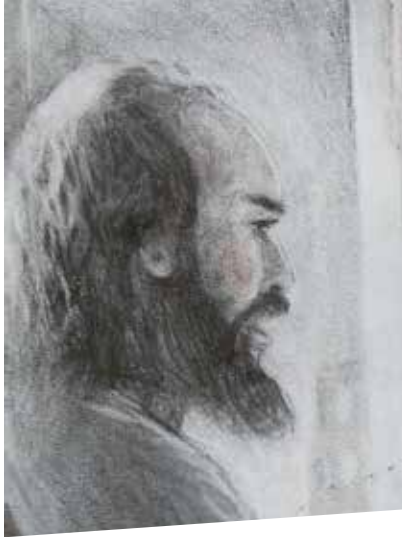
Looking at my life today, it strikes me that I still tend to play with the wrong strategy. I stack up my tasks, plans, and needs into a towering pile beyond my ability to manage. And then I start

by removing the most important blocks—starting with my time in prayer and in God's Word. Then my family, my sleep, my nutrition, my exercise. All the while, I tell myself that I'm coping pretty well, and my life-tower is still standing. I ignore the warnings that I'm playing risky and I smugly trust in my ability to balance everything on an ever-weakening foundation. But it never lasts. Eventually—and often at the worst possible time—my life-tower crumbles. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Jesus promised that whoever builds on “the Rock” will be safe and sound, and even counted as wise. The apostle Paul also admonished that “no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ.”¹ His point is clear: put first things first, and build your life-tower on the foundation that will support it. Then keep it strong by prioritizing the parts that hold it up, and if you must trim, trim in other areas. Our time is limited. Each day brings plenty of challenges, as well as the temptation to let go of what we feel we can succeed without. But Jesus, prayer, and fellowship with fellow believers are the things that will keep the tower of my life stable.

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

1. 1 Corinthians 3:11 NLT



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

MORE LIKE JESUS: HUMILITY

ONE KEY ELEMENT IN OUR PURSUIT OF CHRISTLIKENESS IS EMULATING THE HUMILITY OF JESUS. In the ancient world of

1. Luke 22:27 ESV
2. Matthew 23:12 ESV
3. Matthew 11:29 ESV
4. Katie Brazelton and Shelley Leith, *Character Makeover* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 24
5. Randy Frazee, *Think, Act, Be Like Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 217
6. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002)
7. Todd Wilson, *Real Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 58

the Greeks and Romans, humility was seen as a negative trait. It denoted a subservient attitude on the part of someone considered to be of a lower class. It was seen as a cowed attitude, one of self-belittlement or degradation. The honor-shame culture of that time exalted pride, and humility was seen as undesirable. Jesus, however, redefined humility. He, the Son of God, humbled Himself by becoming human; thus showing that it was something believers should emulate. Through His teachings and example, His followers in the early church learned to treat humility as a virtue,

an important moral attitude, and a fundamental trait of Christian character.

Jesus both preached and lived humility:

For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.¹



Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.²



Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and



lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³

A Christian understanding of humility is based on our relationship with God. In their book *Character Makeover*, Brazelton and Leith provide a definition of humility from a Christian perspective, as follows: Humility is a natural result of having an accurate view of who God is and having a

right perspective of who you are in relation to Him.⁴

And who are we to God? We're His wayward children—broken, sinful, and unable to attain full righteousness before Him. Yet despite our brokenness, He loves us unconditionally. As sinners, we can't claim His love, but He freely gives it to us anyway. He sent His Son to die for us because of His deep love for us. It's humbling to know that we are loved regardless of our sins. This helps us feel secure in our relationship with our Creator. God's love and acceptance is the basis of our self-worth.

Because we are unconditionally loved by God, we can be honest with Him and ourselves about our

strengths and weaknesses, since neither will change God's love for us. He doesn't love us more because of our talents, nor does He love us less because of our weaknesses. Knowing that we are accepted by God makes it easier to have a realistic picture of ourselves.

Secular and popular definitions of humility generally include traits such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, or being a doormat, but that's not the humility Jesus taught. As Randy Frazee wrote: A believer has a strong sense of self-worth and a secure position of identity as one who no longer feels the need to elevate the flesh or pump up personal pride.⁵

Knowing we're loved by God allows us to have a strong sense of self-esteem and be able to wear our self-worth lightly, with humility, because we are secure in God and His unconditional love for us. Being secure in God's love, we recognize that there is no reason to try to exalt ourselves in His eyes or in the eyes of others.

As individuals created in God's image and uniquely loved by God, we can have full confidence in our personal worth. We can candidly recognize and acknowledge both our strengths and weaknesses, our talents and negative habits. We should strive to have a realistic picture of ourselves, without thinking that we're either wonderful or awful. We shouldn't lift

ourselves up in pride, nor consider ourselves worthless. Either extreme—feeling that everyone is better than us, or that we are better than everyone else—is wrong. Humility lies in recognizing that we are valuable to God, that He loves us, made us, and has given us gifts and talents, while also not thinking that it's all about us, that we are better and more gifted than others. As Rick Warren said, Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.⁶

Author Todd Wilson wrote:

Humility isn't meant to make you think less of who you are, but to enable you to love others regardless of who they are. Humility is how love expresses itself toward those of a different status, rank, or position. It's the capacity to view everyone as ultimately equal. This doesn't mean denying differences between people. But it does mean looking past those differences to the underlying equality of all people. There are two important senses in which we are all equal—as creatures made in God's image, and as fallen creatures in need of God's grace. These two facts, in turn, are the foundation for true humility, because they radically level the playing field.⁷

If we're humble, we recognize that we're sinners just like everyone else, and therefore we don't feel more deserving of love or less responsible



to show love to others. Humility frees us from worrying about prestige or position, physical features or attractiveness, success or failure, and many other anxieties that come along with pride and measuring ourselves against others.

The Bible repeatedly extols humility and tells of the positive attitude God has toward the humble. Scripture also tells us that those who exalt themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be exalted.⁸

When writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul spoke of Jesus' humility:

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

8. See Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14.

9. Philippians 2:3–9 NLT

10. See Matthew 4:1–11.

11. 1 Peter 5:5–6 ESV

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor.⁹

While Jesus had the same inherent character and quality and equal “rank” or “status” with God, He set it aside and took on the nature of a servant by becoming human. While He could have claimed power and glory, as was pointed out when the devil tempted Him in the desert,¹⁰ Jesus instead chose to lower His status and humbled Himself to the point that He was willing to die the cruel, torturous death of a common criminal for our sakes. Because of what He did, God “hyper-exalted Him”—which is the literal translation of the last verse of this passage.

While we aren't on the same plane as Jesus, we can follow the principle of

humility that we see in His example. During His ministry, Jesus did many mighty works. He healed the sick, cast out demons, fed 5,000 people by multiplying five loaves of bread and two fish, and walked on water. He told Pontius Pilate that He could ask His Father to send twelve legions of angels to protect Him—such was His ability, power, and status. But instead, He humbled Himself, lived His life in submission to His Father, and avoided the glory that many wanted to give Him.

If we want to become more like Him, then we will strive to “put on” humility; and if we do, we will find ourselves blessed by God: **Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.¹¹**

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

BY DINA ELLENS

MEET THE CEO



THERE HAVE BEEN LOTS OF CHARISMATIC AND VISIONARY LEADERS AND CEOs THROUGHOUT HISTORY, but none of them come close to topping the world-changing importance of Jesus Christ. So what lessons can we learn from His example as a leader?

Jesus embodies the perfect mix of professional authority and personal humility in His example and teachings. He astonished people, because “He taught them as one who had authority.”¹ Yet He spent a lot of time in prayer, showing His dependence on His Father. At the height of His success, when His disciples were jockeying for power and position, He stopped them by saying:

Foreign kings order their people around, and powerful rulers call

themselves everyone’s friends. But don’t be like them. The most important one of you should be like the least important, and your leader should be like a servant.²

When He was spending His last evening on earth with His closest friends, He washed their feet to signify the way in which He wanted His disciples to treat those they came in contact with.³ Washing His disciples’ feet was an act of extreme humility. Yet it is also considered a key illustration of Jesus’ mission on earth.

At the same time, Jesus was no pushover. He had a vision, a strategy, and a plan. He knew where He was going and could inspire others to follow Him. He gave His followers a very clear mandate:

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.⁴

He inspired His followers by His example and He challenged them with His vision. He also trusted them and delegated the work to them. Jesus spoke with authority and also great humility. I believe His words and His example spell out some of the most profound leadership principles available.

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

If you haven’t met Jesus yet, you can do so now:

Dear Jesus, please come into my life and help me grow in the love and humility that You demonstrated while on earth. Please forgive me for the wrong things I’ve done, and give me Your free gift of eternal life. Amen.

1. Mark 1:22 NIV
2. Luke 22:25–26 CEV
3. See John 13:3–5.
4. Matthew 28:19–20 NIV

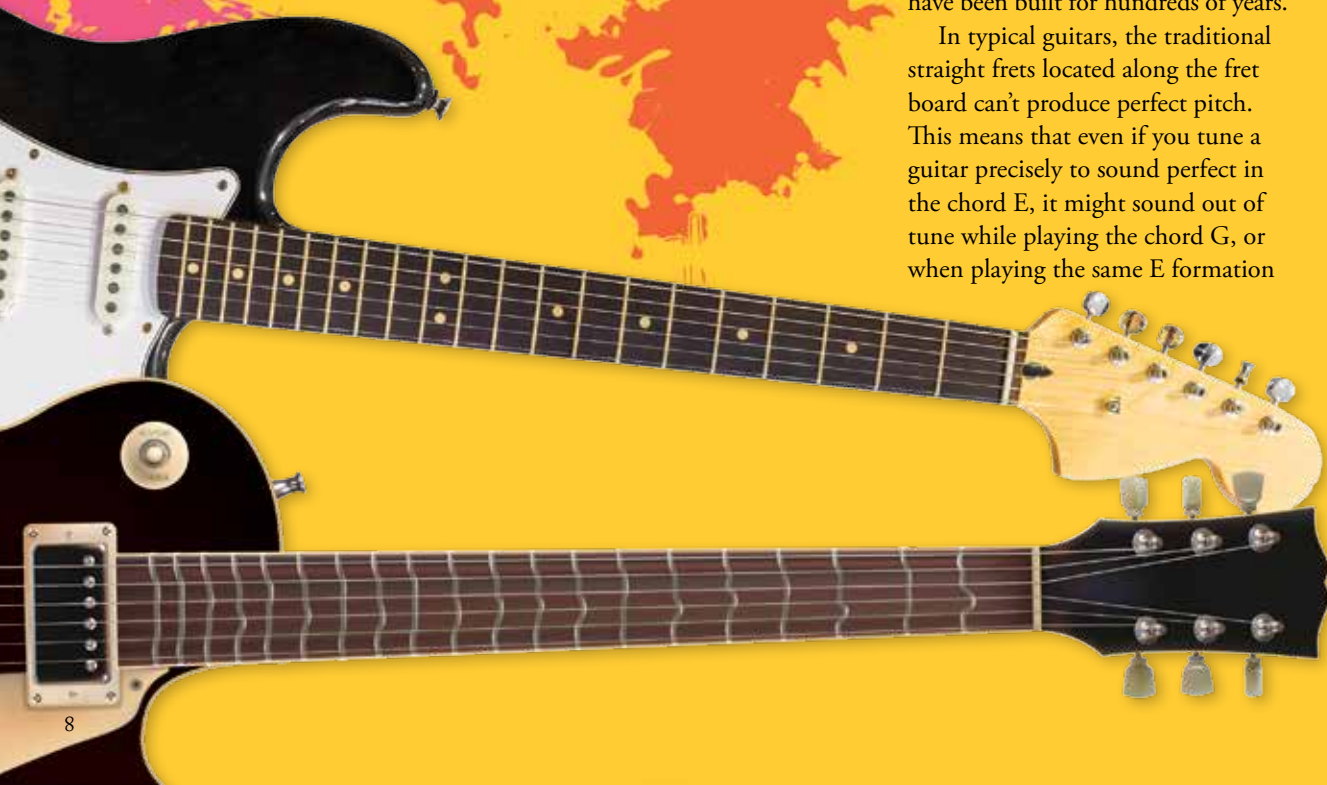
THE GUITAR LESSON

BY GEORGE SOSICH

TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT THE TWO GUITARS PICTURED BELOW. If you were a guitarist, which would you pick up to play? Probably the one on the top with the straight frets (the thin metal pieces along the fret board that the strings are pressed down onto), right? Well, you might be surprised to hear that it's the one at the bottom that some leading guitarists say makes the best sound. Odd, isn't it?

Experienced guitar players know that it's actually impossible to tune even the best-quality guitars to produce perfect pitch in every note and chord everywhere along the fret board. This is because of the way that guitars have been built for hundreds of years.

In typical guitars, the traditional straight frets located along the fret board can't produce perfect pitch. This means that even if you tune a guitar precisely to sound perfect in the chord E, it might sound out of tune while playing the chord G, or when playing the same E formation



further up the fret board. This is true of other chords and notes as well. This is an annoyance that guitarists have to deal with and is one of the reasons that they often retune their guitars between songs.

Some guitarists tune some strings slightly out of tune in such a way as to strike a happy medium so that no matter what note or chord is played anywhere on the fret board, it's close enough to perfect pitch to sound good overall. Others adjust tuning for optimum pitch for certain chord patterns that would sound out of tune for other songs with differing chord patterns.

One luthier (guitar maker) got so annoyed by constantly struggling with this inherent weakness in guitars that he decided to create a guitar that eliminated the problem altogether. The "true temperament guitar" with the crooked frets is what he came up with. He adjusted the frets by measuring precisely the position where each note has to be fretted in order to produce perfect pitch everywhere along the fret board no matter what chord is played. This led to the frets looking rather twisted or mangled. The result, however, according to users, is a guitar that "sings."

Of what significance is this to us? At first glance, it could seem that only ignorance or incompetence would produce a guitar with such obviously misshapen frets. And yet the guitar produces a strikingly more harmonious sound than the so-called

proper-looking guitar. Isn't this so with us? The Bible tells us that what looks right and proper to the natural man might not be fit for God's use; in fact, the *opposite* might be true.

With all our weaknesses and faults, we might feel imperfect and twisted like the frets of the true temperament guitar; but in the hands of the Master Musician, we can make beautiful melodies for Him. When we believe ourselves to be good and "straight" in our own righteousness, like normal guitars with their

perfectly straight yet imperfect frets, our sound can actually become slightly out of harmony and dissonant, resulting in a less attractive melody.

God allows us to be as imperfect as we are for a purpose, so that we are more useful to help those around us, and He gets the glory for our harmony with His tune.

GEORGE SOSICH IS A CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY, MUSICIAN, AND WRITER BASED IN JAPAN. ■

The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.—*1 Samuel 16:7 NIV*

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord.—*Zechariah 4:6*

The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.—*1 Corinthians 1:25–29 NIV*

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.—*2 Corinthians 4:7 NLT*



BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

WELCOME TO PARKVILLE

AT A WORKSHOP I ATTENDED, ART AND DRAMA THERAPIST EMILY NASH¹ shared an experience she had while working with traumatized children and adolescents at a residential treatment center in the USA. The boys who attended her class were often combative, prone to negative and self-destructive behavior, and unable to trust adults or even one another. Almost all had histories

1. Emily Nash is the founder and director of Therapeutic Arts Alliance Manhattan, a forum offering workshops and seminars dedicated to the exploration of the creative arts as a healing process.

2. <http://elixirmime.com>

of severe abuse and emotional neglect.

They routinely brought their negative attitudes into the classroom, as reflected in their foul speech and rough mannerisms.

Sitting in a circle in typical group counseling fashion, some of them expressed their anger through statements like “I hate being here” or “I hate doing this!”

“Fine,” Emily would say, “but why?” She put the question to them one by one.

“There’s no respect!”

“These jerks laugh at me!”

“Nobody listens to me!”

“Too many fights!”

After listening to their reasons, Emily replied, “What I’m hearing

isn’t that you hate this class exactly, but that you hate living in a community where people don’t respect or trust one another, make fun of people they don’t like, and fight.”

They nodded in agreement as if to say, *At last someone is listening!*

“What if,” Emily asked, “we were to create a community where you *did* feel respected, a community in which your needs were met, a community in which you felt safe? What would that community be like? Let’s create it together!”

The boys’ imaginations shifted into gear.

“Let’s call it Parkville!” someone called out. Everyone agreed.

Parkville developed into a six-month project. The class made



a banner that read: *Welcome to Parkville—Where all your needs are met!* They drew a map of the town, including points of interest that reflected what they wanted in their community. They elected and appointed people to fill various roles in the town: mayor, superintendent of the school, director of the arts center, owner and chef of the community café, arcade manager, and many more. They created special events. They found solutions to Parkville’s problems in town hall meetings. Parkville became a community that they all said they would love to live in.

The first step was to draw the young people out by asking questions and listening carefully and respectfully to their answers, even though they came across quite negative at first. The next step was to challenge them to make a difference by channeling their energy into constructive projects that interested them. Emily explains Parkville’s success:

The project gave these young people an opportunity to experience living in a well-functioning community, many of them for the first time, even if only while they were together at the center. Their community

became one in which there was support, where they could express their needs and others would listen and respond, a community built on mutual respect and care, a community of possibility.

In roleplay, they found that they could be effective citizens and had something to contribute. Self-imposed limitations were stretched, and new strengths and capacities were accessed. An adolescent who was engaged in destructive behavior was transformed into a leader, a caring father, a resource to the community.

Various methods are being used today to reach youth through their own interests, such as sports programs, art and drama therapy, and community projects. Through these projects, young people can acquire lifelong skills and a positive self-image. When we help them identify goals and find ways to overcome the obstacles they encounter along the way, we help them realize their potential.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST² IN GERMANY. ■



“WHO STILL WANTS IT?”

—Author unknown

A motivational speaker started off his seminar by holding up a \$20 bill. In the room of 200, he asked, “Who would like this \$20 bill?” Hands started going up.

He said, “I am going to give this \$20 to one of you, but first, let me do this.” He proceeded to crumple the bill.

He then asked, “Who still wants it?” Still the hands were up in the air.

“Well,” he replied, “what if I do this?” He dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, now crumpled and dirty. “Now who still wants it?” Still the hands went into the air.

“My friends, you have all learned a very valuable lesson. No matter what I did to the money, you still wanted it because it did not decrease in value. It was still worth \$20.

“Many times in our lives, we are crumpled, dropped, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make and the circumstances that come our way. We feel as though we are worthless. But no matter what has happened or what will happen, you will never lose your value in God’s eyes. To Him, dirty or clean, crumpled or finely creased, you are still priceless.” ■



MY PERFECT MONTH

BY DAVID MIZRANY

RECENTLY, I came to a wholly and thoroughly unsurprising conclusion: I am not good enough.

Now, of course, I know that no one can ever be “good enough” in this life. What would be more accurate, I suppose, would be to say that I could be much better. Admittedly, I am not as bad as one could be, seeing as I was raised in the love and admonition of the Lord in a home where rules and love were both dished out in their proper helpings. But still, the inescapable fact is that I could be better.

1. Proverbs 27:17

So, recognizing this fact, I decided that I *should* do better. *Could* do better. *Would* do better.

And so began my mid-year resolution. I determined that I would go one month being as perfect as humanly possible. I wouldn't get mad. I would be helpful. I would be encouraging. I would take initiative at work. I wouldn't contradict unnecessarily. I'd clean up after myself religiously. Et cetera.

It all started off so well. I did the dishes every night. I bit back every angry or unhelpful word that sprang to my lips, no matter who I thought was right. I was on time every day for

every scheduled event. I read God's Word more than usual. I could often be seen cleaning and tidying.

This lasted for almost a complete fortnight. Then, as happens, the challenge began to grow old. I'd done well so far. It had been tough, but not extremely so. All it required was a bit of discipline. I had this under control. Of course, this train of thought obliterated my discipline, and I became relaxed and laid back in my focus.

That's how I began to deviate a little from my righteous track. I spoke in anger once, then twice. A few pieces of clothing or other



Striving for excellence motivates you.
Striving for perfection is demoralizing.
—Harriet Braiker (1948–2004)

Perfection consists not in doing
extraordinary things, but in doing
ordinary things extraordinarily well.
—Marie Angélique Arnauld
(1591–1661)

To demand perfection is a sure way
to be disappointed in everybody,
for you will be bound to think ill of
others.
—Monica Fairview

Have no fear of perfection—you'll
never reach it.
—Salvador Dali (1904–1989)

items began to take up residence outside of their allocated cupboards and drawers. I showed up late at work one morning. Then the next evening, I piled the dishes in the sink—and let them sit overnight.

By then, I realized I'd already failed to keep my resolution. So what followed was a complete abandonment. What difference would that make?

As you can tell, my “perfect” month was far from perfect.

But I noticed something else when the month finished and I looked back. During the first two weeks, I'd noticed people being cheerful, helpful, appreciative, and less nagging. In the third week, I felt a distinct

withdrawal of all these improvements, and by the final week, it seemed to me that everyone else had allowed their previous good attitudes to be replaced once again by impatience, unhelpfulness, and nagging.

If only people had stayed helpful throughout, I sighed wistfully, I might have been able to do it.

But of course, I soon realized that my slide back to my old bad habits hadn't been a reaction to how other people were acting. Rather, the way that I perceived people changed as I began to slip. As my patience with others dwindled, I was quicker to mentally label them as “impatient” or “judgmental.” As love begets love and “iron sharpens iron,”¹ my attitude and behavior not only affected others' behavior toward me, but also affected how easy I was to work with and to be around.

My perfect month was a failure, right? Well, yes and no. As far as it being a perfect month, yes, I messed up, no two ways about it. But in failing I learned some important lessons that will stick with me for a long time, and that caused me to grow and—dare I say it?—do better.

I don't have to be perfect to do better. I don't even have to *be* better to *do* better. I just need to be ready with an ear open to God's still, small voice and a willingness to listen and learn.

I can never be perfect, but I can always do better.

That's what my perfect month taught me.

DAVID MIZRANY IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND SOUTH AFRICA. ■



EXERCISING HUMILITY

BY LI LIAN

1. After a disagreement, take the first step toward reconciliation, and be willing to apologize if you discover that you've made a mistake.

Don't hold grudges.—Leviticus 19:17 CEV

2. Make an effort to show kindness and courtesy on a daily basis; for example, by holding the door open for the person behind you, picking up something that someone else accidentally dropped, or offering your seat to another passenger on the bus.

Be tenderhearted, be courteous.—1 Peter 3:8

3. If you encounter a situation where someone needs help, pause what you're doing and assist them. While this may not be practical or feasible in all circumstances, taking time to help another person can broaden your perspective and help avoid the mentality that your own plans and priorities are always the most important.

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.—Philippians 2:4

4. If you don't know about something, ask someone who does.

Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others.—Proverbs 12:15 NLT

5. Ask a good friend or pastor for prayer when you're facing a difficult situation. Sharing what's on your mind and heart will not only enable you to get the problem off your chest, but also help you realize your need for God and others.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.—Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

6. Take time to listen. You never know what you can discover and learn when you hear other people out.

Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life.—Proverbs 19:20 NLT

7. Express gratitude by writing a note of appreciation to your spouse, your children, a coworker, or a friend. Describe in detail their qualities and how they've added value to your life.

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.—John 13:35 NLT

8. Pick up a new skill, learn a foreign language, or start a new hobby. Even if you feel like you're not very good at it, stepping out of your comfort zone gives others the opportunity to teach you something new.

If you are already wise, you will become even wiser. And if you are smart, you will learn to understand.—Proverbs 1:5 CEV

LI LIAN IS A COMPTIA CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL AND WORKS AS AN OFFICE AND SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR FOR A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION IN AFRICA. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

THE JOY OF COMMUNITY

TODAY I GET THE PRIVILEGE OF HOSTING FIVE FAMILIES FOR DINNER. We've known each other for the better part of our lives, and tonight we'll all come together in joyful community. I look forward to these kinds of evenings relaxing with friends and family. This is where my true wealth lies!

We are coming together in celebration, but none of us are free from struggles and sorrows. My oldest friend in the room just lost her niece to cystic fibrosis. We miss our eldest son, who recently joined the military. Another friend struggles with a recent diagnosis. We all have kid problems, job problems, money problems, marriage problems, health problems. I know we're all kinda stressed, because life is busy and throws stuff at us every day. Some of us have good news, and some of us have sad news.

Romans 12:15 says "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." I can't think of a

better way to do community than that. There will never be a time when both happy and difficult things aren't happening in our lives.

I want to hear your good news, even if juxtaposed against my hard news. I will be happy *with* you and *for* you! I don't want you to downplay your joy, just because, at that exact moment, my news is different. We will rejoice together!

If you have hard news, I will cry with you and come alongside you in your sorrow, and together we will remember that joy will return.

There is richness in sharing each other's highs and lows. It adds depth to our happiness, not unlike the way that residual income adds to our wealth. It is an additional revenue of highs and lows, expanding our lives beyond the boundaries of our personal experiences.

I'm about to go into the kitchen to get my pasta sauce started, before leaving it to simmer for the next

several hours. I will fuss a minute over my home being welcoming and tidy, but just for a minute. No one is coming here to see my home. I will spend a minute in the mirror, but just enough to look refreshed. No one is drawn here by my beauty.

What draws us together is the friendship. The history we have built, layer by layer, in sharing each other's joys and sorrows. These are shoulders I have cried on, friends I have laughed with, and vice versa.

Community is a vital ingredient to a happy, fulfilled life. God didn't intend for us to do life alone. In community we compound our happiness and share the burden of struggle.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

WEATHERING THE STORM

Remember the time when I calmed the sea?¹ 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, of My wisdom to guide you, you will find the answers you need. These worries about the future are like the waves washing over you and your little boat. The situation around you is like a menacing storm. At times you might be tempted to think you will capsize.

If you ask Me to calm the storm, I will. Or I will show you how to weather it. I will do it, just as I have always done it for all those who have trusted in Me.

1. See Mark 4:37–41.