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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE MASTER'S SECRET

This year, we've seen an unprecedented number of lives upended by the COVID-19 health crisis, and far too many are still being impacted.

Those who remained on the front lines heroically fighting the disease and continuing to provide vital services dealt with unimaginable amounts of stress, and we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude. Meanwhile, those who were sent home to work remotely usually discovered that their lives were not much less pressured than they had been previously. And of course it's been particularly difficult for those who lost loved ones before their time, or their jobs and incomes as companies shuttered and economies wobbled. Finally, with playgrounds, amusement parks, and beaches closed, many children didn't get to enjoy the carefree break from school they might have hoped for.

As the sun begins to set on this year, we can start to take stock of how we lived through it, and I don't think anyone will remember 2020 as a long calm river. It's not been a bumper year for "success" in the traditional sense, but it sure has been a great year for learning about coping with adversity. Each of us in our own situation and circumstances has had to deal with health scares, worries about our families and loved ones, interrupted studies, job loss, financial fears, loneliness—and at the very least, stir-craziness. Hopefully, we can look back and see the ways in which we grew and improved.

Jesus knew what stressful times were. The gospel of Mark describes a Sabbath toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry, just after He was baptized by John. He starts the day by giving a morning sermon in the Capernaum synagogue, followed by casting out an impure spirit. Then He enters His disciple Peter's house, and "at once" He's told that his mother-in-law lay sick with a fever, so He heals her as well. Later that evening, He heals *everyone in town* who was sick or afflicted.¹ And you don't get the impression from reading the Gospels that this type of day was out of the norm for Jesus.

How did He manage? The secret comes in the very next verse: "Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray."² He might have been physically exhausted, but He recognized a need for spiritual renewal more than physical rest.

This issue of *Activated* provides practical insight and tips for anyone who struggles with busyness and stress, including a feature article on time management (pp. 4–6). But let's not forget the spiritual aspects to a successful, balanced life—primarily prayer and a relationship with our Father.

May God keep you and yours in the shadow of His wings and continue to guide your lives.

1. See Mark 1:21–34.

2. Mark 1:35 NLT

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BY LI LIAN

SOLVING LIFE'S PUZZLE



FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER, I never liked doing puzzles. Viewing thousands of sky-blue, nearly-identical little pieces scattered over a wooden table was enough to make my head feel dizzy. I couldn't begin to figure out where to start.

By contrast, my brother loves puzzles. For him, the larger and more complicated the puzzle, the better. In fact, when he was three years old he would begin his 30-piece puzzle by promptly flipping all the pieces face down and assembling it without viewing the picture. Unfortunately, I never inherited that talent.

Sometimes I feel my life is like one giant, unassembled puzzle, with pieces strewn out in all directions. There are too many pieces, too many problems, too many unknowns, and at times, it can feel so overwhelming when attempting to put it all together.

One day, while watching my brother finish the last section of his new 3,000-piece puzzle, I asked him for some advice on how to assemble puzzles. Here are the three steps he gave me:

1) Start with the puzzle's borders. Like a puzzle, the first priority in our lives is our relationship with God, which provides us with a solid framework. With our

spiritual structure in place, it is easier to sort out the inner puzzle of our lives.

2) Categorize the rest of the pieces by color. Like a puzzle, our lives are made up of many different categories: work, family, career, health, finances, etc. Taking some time to sort out our life's categories allows us to focus on what we are trying to accomplish in each area of our lives and makes it easier to overcome the challenges ahead.

3) Start with one piece and keep comparing it with another until a match is found. Like a puzzle, our lives consist of trying, failing, and trying again until the pieces start coming together. This part requires perseverance and determination, but by daily committing to work hard and put in the hours, we will begin to see progress.

When we come to the end of our lives and see our beautiful puzzle completed, we will be able to enjoy the whole picture and more clearly understand how God worked on our behalf to bring order and good out of every situation.

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BY PETER AMSTERDAM

TIME IS ONE THING THAT YOU CAN NEVER GET BACK AGAIN. The Bible talks about “redeeming the time” or “making the best use of the time.”¹ That calls for some commitment to developing our time management skills.

It’s so easy to fritter time away, to be caught up in the whirlwind of busyness, yet come to the end of the day realizing we didn’t accomplish what we had intended. It’s a tremendous challenge to consistently use our time wisely, to get the most important things done, *and* to find the right balance in the time we devote to the responsibilities and tasks—work and personal—that we are faced with each day.

There are a lot of time management buzzwords out there, and I want to mention two of them: efficiency and effectiveness. There is a big difference between being efficient and being effective. As Jeff Haden explains:

Efficient people are well organized and competent. They check things off their to-do list. They complete projects. They get stuff done.

Effective people do all that, but they check the *right things* off their to-do list. They complete the right projects. They get the right stuff done.²

While it’s great to become more efficient, if we’re missing the effectiveness component, then we’re likely *not* reaching our goals or getting the most important things done. So we need to look at becoming *effective* in all that we do, including how we make decisions, set priorities, and implement wise time management practices.

1. Ephesians 5:16 ESV

2. Jeff Haden, “9 Habits That Turn Efficient People Into Highly Effective People,” *Inc.*, October 6, 2014

3. Jeff Haden, “Success? It’s Just a Decision Away,” *CBS Moneywatch*, October 19, 2011

4. Lea McLeod, “The Job Skill You Need (That Nobody Talks About),” *The Muse*, September 7, 2014



TIME MANAGEMENT

Let’s look at five key points in the realm of time management.

NUMBER 1. PRIORITIZE.

Jeff Haden put it well: “We can’t do everything, but we can all do a few things really well. Decide what is most important to you, decide to focus on those things ... and decide to let go of the things you may want to do but realistically cannot, at least for now.”³

The first step is to accept that you won’t be able to do everything. In order to get the most important things done, you will have to set priorities and give the lion’s share of your attention and time to those.

If you look at your to-do list and see everything as equally important, it’s easy to become overwhelmed with your volume of tasks, rather than the quality of your work. But consider this: The Pareto Principle suggests that 20% of your tasks produce 80% of your results—and that means that a small fraction of your daily work deserves the majority of your attention.⁴



Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom.
—Psalm 90:12 NLT

MENT

Not everything is equally important. Not everything that comes to you should receive your attention. If 20% of what you do yields 80% of your results, this should be a key filter through which to view the importance of your tasks.

NUMBER 2. BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO.

If you want to get the right things done, the first step is to take a good hard look at what you currently spend your time on, versus what you *should* be spending your time on. This means looking at your overall life plan, being clear about your goals and what you are aiming for. You may need to give a fair bit of time and thought to this initially, as this will serve as the base plan that you work from when creating your daily, weekly, and monthly goals and plans.

Generally speaking, you want to identify your major short- and mid-term goals. You will probably identify a few work-related categories and a few that relate to your personal life. Don't pick too many. As you allocate your time on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis, it's helpful

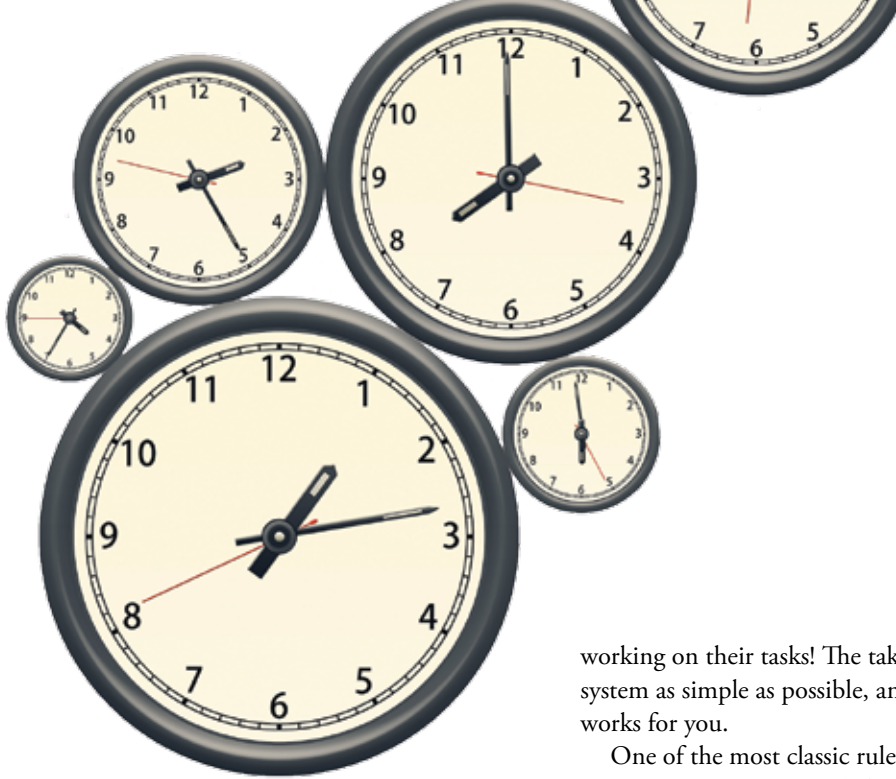
to place the majority of what you do into one of those categories of focus. This will help you to align what you do on a day-to-day basis with your overall work goals and life goals. Start with a plan, but don't be afraid to make revisions as needed.

As Benjamin Franklin said, "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." And here's Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "A goal without a plan is just a wish."

Just as important as knowing what you *should* work on is knowing what you should *not* work on. Some people call this an "ignore" list. It helps to identify and note what types of tasks come your way that you *shouldn't* be doing, even if you like doing them. Our time is limited, so we need to be judicious with it.

NUMBER 3. IDENTIFY AND REDUCE TIME-WASTERS AND DISTRACTIONS.

If you want to be the master of your time, you need to know what trips you up. There are many interruptions that come at us each day, not to mention the countless time-wasters and distractions that technology has made available to us. How do you tend to fritter time away?



Is it TV? YouTube? Social media? Computer games? Cooking shows? Tracking sports events and scores? Randomly surfing? Checking out celebrity news?

What all of the above have in common is the uncanny ability to steal away hours of your precious time. Many experts suggest that you log the amount of time you spend on activities in a week, so that you're aware of where your time goes. Then make a plan to reduce or limit your usage; even consider turning off your devices at certain times so you can harness the power of your full focus.

NUMBER 4. CAPTURE AND ORGANIZE YOUR TASKS.

Find an organizational system that works for you. The key phrase here is “works for *you*.” Unfortunately, people can end up spending a great deal of time managing and tweaking their organizational systems, which takes time away from their priority work.

The same holds true for to-do lists. If your to-do list is pages long and you add to it daily, then you will probably not find it hard to believe this stat: 23% of people spend more time organizing their to-do lists than they spend

working on their tasks! The takeaway here is: Keep your system as simple as possible, and most of all, go with what works for you.

One of the most classic rules of productivity is this: Do your most important work first. Tackle the top item on your list—which can often be the hardest thing—when you have the most energy and the freshest mind.⁵ You'll not only get more done, but you'll feel great having your priority work behind you.

NUMBER 5. DON'T OVEREXTEND YOURSELF; BE REALISTIC.

God has given us a finite amount of time each day, and no matter how much you want to accomplish something, you can only realistically accomplish so much.

Be realistic about the amount of time that a project will take, whether you can take on another task, and whether you can deliver by the deadline. Be aware of what you already have on your plate, which a well-kept to-do list should provide. And ultimately, be willing to say no when necessary. It's going to be difficult, but in the long run saying no to tasks that would overload you will protect your ability to do important, quality work, to remain focused, and to be fresh enough to contribute to discussions, creative problem-solving, etc.

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5. Trent Hamm, “Do the Hard Things First,” *The Simple Dollar*, September 17, 2014

GROWING THROUGH FAILURE

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY



IT WAS THE END OF ANOTHER LONG WORKDAY. In my first semester as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, each day brought dozens of new challenges, which I failed to conquer. The concepts I tried to pass on to my students would somehow escape them, leaving me to groan over their exams. The principal of my school had been telling me that my students weren't making enough visible progress in their English. Parents were complaining about my classroom management methods. I was a failure in every aspect of my work.

Of course, teaching isn't supposed to be easy. My colleagues told me this was normal for the first year. They said it would get better—but what about *now*? What about standing up every day in front of an unruly class, inwardly ashamed at my inability to control the students' behavior?

One night, as I mindlessly browsed the Internet after another intense, frustrating day of classes, I came across a quote that answered my heart's burning question: "Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing." I decided to try to see each failure as a catalyst for growth. Instead of allowing feelings of shame and despair to overwhelm me, I focused on how I could glean all that each failure had to teach me.

So I tried to remember that whenever an activity degenerated into unruliness, I had just learned more about what didn't work for my students. When my principal pointed out flaws in my teaching style, I focused on changing my attitude and approach. Whenever

the little faces looked up at me with confusion or boredom, I realized that I had to change my way of teaching a concept.

As I look back, I am grateful for each of those discouraging moments in the first year of my teaching career. The failures are now behind me, but the invaluable lessons I learned about how to present information, how to interact with students, how to handle issues in the classroom—and most importantly, how to handle my own failures—have stayed with me, and continue to strengthen me. I still make mistakes in the classroom, but I have learned not to succumb to thoughts of gloom. If I can focus on what each failure has to teach me, then failure is simply another step towards progress.

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BY IRIS RICHARD

WHEN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE BARREL

THE OTHER MORNING I READ A PASSAGE FROM ACTS, where Paul, in his farewell speech to the church of Ephesus, talked about living life generously and working hard to make sure to always have something to give to the poor, because it is more blessed to give than to receive.¹ Little did I know that I was going to be tested on those very principles a few hours later.

My friend and I enjoyed a warm spring afternoon on the balcony, sipping a cold fruit juice. We had been

chatting about the week's accomplishments and were discussing plans for the month ahead. Before taking her leave, my friend, who is a social worker in a poor neighborhood, brought up an urgent situation she had recently encountered.

"Mercy has been an orphan most of her life, and now sadly at the young age of 25 has been diagnosed with cancer. She has been making ends meet by washing laundry for people, and most months she doesn't even reach a minimum wage. With lack of funding for health insurance, she is now left stranded and has to finance the urgently needed treatment herself. She has been appealing to well-wishers, but she is still short of money for medication."


With an expectant look in her eyes, my friend paused and there was a moment of silence between us. I felt convicted about helping out, but it was the end of the month and there were bills to pay. I was glad when her phone rang and she got busy with the caller. This gave me a moment to sort out the conflict that was rapidly unfolding inside me.

Why now? I thought to myself.

As I contemplated, the thought came to mind: *Haven't we already reached our maximum of giving this month? And after meeting the bills, the plan is to finally start saving for some of our large family's needs.*

My conscience then came in: *Hasn't God supplied each time you went beyond your limits to give to someone in need?*

1. See Acts 20:32–35.
2. Matthew 5:42 NLT; Luke 6:30–31 CEV
3. Matthew 10:8
4. Matthew 25:40 CEV
5. Matthew 10:8



What does one person give to another? He gives of himself, of the most precious he has, he gives of his life. This does not necessarily mean that he sacrifices his life for the other—but that he gives him of that which is alive in him; he gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness ... He does not give in order to receive; giving is in itself exquisite joy. But in giving he cannot help bringing something to life in the other person, and this which is brought to life reflects back to him.
—Erich Fromm (1900–1980)

My mind: *That's true, but ... savings plan.*

My conscience popped up again: *Why not think of the principles Jesus taught, to "give to those who ask" and "treat others just as you want to be treated."*²

My mind: *That's right, but I urgently need to find a balance between giving and saving.*

My conscience was not giving up: *"Freely you have received, freely give."*³

My mind retorted: *It's not a cup of water! We're talking about cash, which I'm running short of at the moment.*

My conscience: *Think of another principle Jesus taught: "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."*⁴

Sighing deeply, I looked up and again met my friend's expectant eyes. "I can help."

My conscience had won, and with an unexpected feeling of peace I dug into my financial reserve and gave what was needed, trusting that God would indeed fill the vacuum which I had just created.

I had almost forgotten this incident when I bumped into an old acquaintance while out shopping a couple of days later. Before parting, he reached into his bag and gave me a sealed envelope and said, "God put it on my heart to give this to you after all you've done for me. I am sure that a generous person like you will find good use for it."

When I arrived home, I found a generous amount of money in the envelope, which made this month's cycle of giving and receiving complete.

When we create a vacuum through sharing and giving, it draws not only financial blessing into it but also happiness and a feeling of accomplishment. It fosters friendships and camaraderie. It protects us from the sickness of hoarding and teaches us the cycle of giving and receiving. "Freely you have received, freely give."⁵

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STUNTED GROWTH

BY PETER STORY

WHEN I WAS A KID, I saw plenty of goldfish in the houses of my friends, and I remember wondering why so many people would want to keep such small, unexciting creatures as pets.

Then one day, when I was about ten years old, I went on a school field trip to a botanical garden that had a pond stocked with fish. One especially large, brilliantly colored fish stood out to me.

“What kind of fish is that one?” I asked our guide.

“That’s a goldfish,” she replied.

I was confused. “Aren’t goldfish supposed to be small?” I asked with a note of nine-year-old sarcasm.

“Not at all,” she replied. “Goldfish will grow even larger than these. It really just depends on the size of their environment.”

I took in the information and determined to never again show

myself so ignorant about goldfish, but it was years before I understood the broader lesson.

How often have I been like a goldfish in a fishbowl? How often have I limited myself by my perception of my world? Worse still, how many times have I put others in a small bowl in my mind? How many times have I written off someone as insignificant or unexciting? How many times have I failed to see others’ potential to grow?

How much more could I achieve if I forgot my perceived limitations and dared to swim beyond the boundaries I’ve set for myself? And what would happen if I moved others from their small bowls into the ocean of possibilities that Jesus offers? Just imagine a world full of people with that perspective, who truly believe that with God all things are possible. ■


Some people see a wall, and assume that’s the end of their journey. Others see it, and decide it’s just the beginning.—*Angeline Trevena*

If you are facing a new challenge or being asked to do something that you have never done before, don’t be afraid to step out. You have more capability than you think you do, but you will never see it unless you place a demand on yourself for more.

—*Joyce Meyer (b. 1943)*

If you haven’t yet received Jesus and all that He has to offer, you can right now by praying the following 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.



BY MILUTIN BUNČIĆ

STRESS BUSTERS

THOUSANDS OF PAGES HAVE BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF STRESS, so I wonder if there's really anything new I could possibly say to help someone who is struggling with it. Most likely not. I myself am still fighting that "beast" that tries to pull me down and take away my joy of living. But over the years, my defense wall has grown higher and stronger and I've learned some tricks along the way. Though I haven't completely overcome stress, I think I can safely say that it doesn't control my life anymore. With God's help, I've managed to tame the wild beast. It can't harm me anymore, but I have to constantly be on guard.

Unfortunately we can't just snap

our fingers and make stress disappear from our lives. But let's take a look at a few things that have helped me minimize the negative effect of stress.

Faith in God: God is like a coach that knows how to strengthen us, both physically and mentally. Though we might feel like we're "dying" and that we can't take it anymore, He cheers us on and encourages us to endure just a bit more and not give up during our most trying times. He will never give us more than we are able to bear,¹ and if we hold on a little longer, we will come out stronger and more capable of fighting our future battles. Jesus doesn't expect a perfect performance from us; He only wants us to trust Him and not give up. Trust your Heavenly Coach.

Regular exercise: It's well known that exercise causes your body to

increase the production of hormones that fight stress and stress-related sicknesses. Whenever I was stressed out, I would experience pain on the left side of my lower abdomen, but since I started exercising regularly, that pain is completely gone. Though any kind of exercise is better than no exercise at all, group activities/sports have the added bonus of engaging our mind and personal skills as well.

Prayer and meditation: Taking time to talk to God and unload all our worries and concerns on His shoulders is essential. Our heavenly Father loves us and wants to help us. All we have to do is ask.²

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1. See 1 Corinthians 10:13.

2. See Matthew 7:7.



MASTER PLANS AND WAITING FOR AWESOME

BY ROALD WATTERSON

IN 2007, the Netherlands instituted a two-hundred-year plan for adapting to and preparing for climate change.¹ With two-thirds of the Dutch population living below sea level, changes in climate can have a drastic and tragic effect on this nation—hence the extreme caution. The plan, from my understanding, consists of 20

1. "Dutch to draft 200-year plan against warming," Associated Press
2. NIV
3. Psalm 139:16 NIV
4. Job 14:5 NLT
5. The biblical story of Moses can be found starting in the book of Exodus.
6. Romans 15:5

billion dollars being put toward the research and construction of better water defenses along their shoreline—the scope of this plan reaches till the year 2200. Their reason for this elaborate plan is simple: due to changes in climate—and greater risk of floods—there is no guarantee that the Netherlands will continue to exist in 200 years unless such measures are taken now.

This got me thinking about long-term planning. It's easy to see when something wasn't planned right—poverty-stricken areas that aren't developed properly, company events that drag on and on, bits of kitchen machinery that take much coaxing to work. Conversely, everything

that runs well, that completes its function—from aqueducts to social and welfare systems to computer programs—is a result of a lot of foresight and good planning on the part of developers, inventors, and creators.

There are many reasons why we plan, but mostly it's to bring about a desired end. Some hire wedding planners because they want the wedding of their dreams; governments contract engineers who come up with reliable blueprints for constructing bridges and public highways, so that transport from one end of a country to another is safe and reliable. With the Dutch, it's quite easy to see the intended end

result of their planning: their survival as a nation.

There's someone else, though, who leaves all other plans and planners in the dust. In Acts 17:26 the apostle Paul talks about a plan that encompasses every plan ever made. He said, "From one man [God] made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."² In other words, from the very beginning, God had a plan; the act of creation wasn't haphazard. God wasn't in need of something to do on a Sunday afternoon, so bang—the earth! There is a plan that is being played out every day of mankind's existence on planet earth.

But there's something even more personally awesome in this for you and me: every human put on earth was an intentional act of creation. God has plans for everyone. King David affirms, "Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."³ And Job says to God, "You have decided the length of our lives. You know how many months we will live, and we are not given a minute longer."⁴

If the point of plans is that they prepare for a desired end, and if God has plans for you, that means there's a desired outcome He had in mind when He created you—something He wanted you to be or do. Maybe you personally won't save the world tomorrow, or ever, but keep in mind that the full scope of a plan doesn't unfold on the first day. Take Moses, for example.

Imagine God planning out Moses' life. Chapter One doesn't have Moses parting the Red Sea. It actually doesn't even start with Moses receiving God's directives at the burning bush on Mount Horeb. There are roughly 80 years' worth of chapters and pages that come before either of those events. When studying Moses' life it's easy to marvel at the 40 years Moses spent tending sheep—we think of how patient he must have been at the end of that. I'm realizing now that it was really God who had patience in this story. Imagine creating a character and knowing that they'll only be ready to do what you want them to do 80 years after their creation. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't display the kind of patience that God had for Moses.⁵

I'm comforted at the realization of God as a planner. Here's why: even if you feel like nothing is happening for you right now, and it's hard to wait, it could be that you're on page 200 of your book of life, and the heroic stuff is on page 492. Or perhaps your "awesome" is a life simply filled with days lived well and to God's glory. Whatever the case may be, the great thing about God's plans is that even when nothing seems to be happening on the surface, He has all these intricate plans going on. He's at work even on ordinary days when the most exciting thing to happen is your cat making friends with a new cat. He's working in your life toward you reaching page 492 of your book, and beyond that as well.

In a letter to the Romans, Paul calls God "the God of patience."⁶ God is described as patient and longsuffering in the Bible; it's one of the characteristics attributed to Him. God waited 80 years for Moses' awesome, the Dutch have a 200-year plan; so however long our wait may be, if God believes we're worth the wait, then we should too.

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AND CONTENT DEVELOPER. ■

RETIRED?

BY SALLY GARCÍA



Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way; walk in it.”
—Isaiah 30:21 NIV

A man’s heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.
—Proverbs 16:9

“CAN YOU TEACH ENGLISH TO MY WIFE?” I heard a voice behind me say while I was picking out veggies at the open-air market in our neighborhood in Chile. I turned around to an enthusiastic stranger who said, “My wife needs to learn English, and I think you’re the one to teach her.” I was baffled and told him that I’m not an English teacher, but he didn’t relent, so I reluctantly scribbled my phone number on a scrap of paper and handed it to him.

The next morning, I awoke to my cell phone ringing. A soft voice greeted me and asked when we could start classes. I was still baffled but agreed to meet the woman in question, who happened to live only a few blocks from my house.

I *had* been a teacher for over 35 years, but I’d left the profession a couple of years earlier, telling people

that I was *tired and retired*—meaning that although I loved to teach, I didn’t feel that I had the stamina to do classroom teaching anymore.

But my new student was the best student any teacher could hope for, and though I hadn’t taught ESL (English as a second language), it wasn’t hard to find books and teaching materials. We had weekly classes for two years. Then, for the next three years, I also taught her children! They’re a lovely Christian family and we found much in common. As opportunities came up, I did other tutoring jobs as well and eventually took some courses to hone my skills and become a certified ESL teacher.

This showed me that I still love to teach! Maybe I’m not up to the hustle and bustle of dealing with a whole classroom, but I really enjoy tutoring. I love planning classes, and I’m thrilled when my students

make progress. So what started as a stranger’s voice in the outdoor market turned into a whole new profession for me.

Finally, the day came that the family had been waiting for all those years—the dad’s company transferred him to Canada. We all recognized that God had made our paths cross to prepare them for their new country. They’re thrilled to use the language that they faithfully studied all these years and often send me photos. And I’m grateful that, though I’m officially at retirement age, I have a whole new profession and plenty of job opportunities. I love the unexpected turns and surprises of life, and I can see God’s hand as He engineers these situations and events.

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THE MYSTERY OF LESS

BY MARIE ALVERO

DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE, in order to meet your own expectations and those of others, you'd have to work relentlessly, push through the tired, ignore the stress—and you still might come up short? The demands will always outweigh the resources. Just thinking about this is stressful, yet it is under exactly this stress that we spend most of our time.

“Stress management” is a term we're all familiar with. The implication is that stress will always be a part of our lives, and we just have to learn to manage it better. Today I bring you the stress management tip that will leave all the other tips in the dust: Do Less.

Just typing those words was stressful. For me, the thought of not being able to do everything creates anxiety. But who am I kidding? I really can't do it all. I know that, but I think my mantra has been Do as much as possible. Never has it been Do less. How bizarre a thought!

Recently I've focused on a “spend less” plan for our money. We cut back our expenses, dramatically for a while, to teach ourselves that less is okay. In fact, less created more. Money we didn't spend began slowly accumulating in our bank account, which was something that had never happened before. We started having money designated for expenses before those expenses came up, instead of scrambling for it as it was needed. It was truly amazing.

I began to wonder, could this concept simply be applied to other stress-inducing areas of my life, like the way I spend

my time? Could I simply commit to less—and if so, would I build up some kind of reserve? Would there be some sort of deficit if I did?

Jesus said something that I believe fits here: “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”¹ He was certainly not an example of rushing around—quite the contrary. I assume Jesus was surrounded by people even then who were rushing around trying to do everything. Parents trying to rally the kids for supper, entrepreneurs trying to start up businesses, priests trying to get to all their duties, servants trying to make it through an unreasonable workload, and on the list goes.

But Jesus says, “Come to Me ... and I will give you rest.”²

Each time you're tempted to do more, take on something else, and push harder, join me in taking a minute to ask yourself (and

Jesus) if you instead did less, would it be okay? What would “doing less” look like in this situation?

I suspect that, like me, you might learn something new, and discover some space and some rest.

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1. Matthew 11:30

2. Matthew 11:28

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

POSITIVE PERKS

When life gets to be too much, when everything around you seems to be falling apart, when you feel that nothing you do helps, think about Me. Think about how much I love you. Think about My power. Think about all your blessings. If you thank Me for all the good things in your life, the negative feelings will gradually dissipate.

You may sometimes find yourself in situations where there doesn't seem to be anything at all good to thank Me for. Then thank Me for the good that will eventually come out of the bad, because if you love Me, sooner or later it will. That's explained in the Bible, in Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good to those who love God." For those who love Me, I can bring good out of anything.

You can always find something to thank Me for even in the midst of a difficult day. Praise Me for one thing, and you'll usually be reminded of another, and another. My promised peace will find you as you focus on Me and on the positive.

