

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 21 • Issue 11

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

Self-image issues
resolved

Abundance or Excess

Finding true
freedom

This Day

Happiness in
uncertain times



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION THE GOD FACTOR

In *God in the Dock*, C.S. Lewis included an essay entitled “Answers to Questions on Christianity.” One of the questions is on which of the religions of the world gives to its followers the greatest happiness, and he gave this famous reply:

While it lasts, the religion of worshipping oneself is the best. I have an elderly acquaintance of about eighty, who has lived a life of unbroken selfishness and self-admiration from the earliest years, and is, more or less, I regret to say, one of the happiest men I know. From the moral point of view it is very difficult!

Happiness is a great thing. But many people have the wrong idea of what it really means. C.S. Lewis' acquaintance knew the first kind of happiness—the superficial YOLO kind. But another kind of happiness endures regardless of circumstances, and is eternal—the peace and contentment that come from knowing God and being in relationship with Him.

It's natural to feel sad about the state of the world, to grieve because of loss, to struggle if you're in an unhappy relationship, and so on. God did not promise the believer a blissful life of easy enjoyment—but He did promise to be always by your side, to have His hand over your life, and that He will cause all things to work together for your good when you love and follow Him.¹

King David in the Bible had an extremely turbulent life filled with tragedies and setbacks, and we know that some of those affected him profoundly,² yet he never lost sight of where true happiness came from: “Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God.”³

May this issue of *Activated* help you draw closer to God and find true, lasting happiness.

1. See Romans 8:28.
2. See 2 Samuel 12:16–17.
3. Psalm 146:5

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BY KEITH PHILLIPS

MY THREE SONS

DRESSING MY THREE PRESCHOOL SONS ALIKE SEEMED SENSIBLE AT THE TIME. It made clothes shopping easier, for one, and because they were brothers with similar builds and complexions, they looked good in the same clothes. At home it gave a sense of order, however superficial, to a household with three little boys in perpetual motion, and in public it showcased what I was sure was the most adorable set of kids ever. On a deeper level, it appealed to my sense of equity. I didn't love one above the others, and had determined to never say or do anything that might cause them to think otherwise; I would treat them impartially in all things, big and small.

But as soon as they got old enough to make more of their own choices, coordinated clothes were out. As their individual needs changed and became more diverse, I found I continually needed to adapt and change how I gave each one my love and support. I still didn't love one more or less than the others, but I couldn't always treat them the same.

Now that those boys are grown men, in many respects they could hardly be more different from one another. My early attempts to establish uniformity now seem pure folly, and I thank God for giving each of them the sense to pursue his own interests, develop his own skills, and become his own person. Each probably has some things that he would like to change about himself—there's always room for improvement—but I love them dearly just as they are.

That's how God loves us. We compare ourselves unfavorably with others, or we fuss over something about ourselves that we don't like, but all the while He's trying to tell us, "I love you the way you are. If something needs to change, I'll let you know and will help you change that, but otherwise just be your special self." If we could all believe that, how happy we would be!

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

BY MARIA FONTAINE

MAKING A MASTERPIECE



WHEN THE LIFE OF A FOLLOWER OF JESUS IS LIVED AS JESUS INTENDED IT TO BE, it becomes a thing of beauty. Being a Christian and having a relationship with God should be something that permeates our daily experiences, is integrated into our decisions, and brings color to our perceptions of ourselves, others, and this life.

Like a beautiful painting, a Christian's greatest glory is often made up of countless little things. The tiny globs of color in the painting that appear to be so insignificant when viewed up close become breathtakingly beautiful when seen in their totality. In the same way, the countless expressions of God's love shared with others in the course of a Christian's life may at times appear to be insignificant in themselves, yet God sees them in the context of the totality of a life that glorifies Him, and He revels in their beauty.

As our lives become more centered around God, He adds more sparkle to our eyes, more bounce to our step, and gives more strength in our weakness and more grace in times of struggle, loss, or suffering.

As our dependence on Him grows, He enhances the joy of His Spirit that overcomes our sorrow. The more we are determined to strengthen our walk with Jesus, and the more we desire a deeper spiritual connection with Him, the more He will be able to manifest His Spirit through us. Paul commended some early Christians, saying:

I can testify that they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. They begged us again and again for the privilege of sharing in the gift for the believers in Jerusalem. They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do.¹

1. 2 Corinthians 8:3-5 NLT

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God.—*1 John 3:16, 18–19 NLT*



When your faith plays an integral part in your values, goals, and decisions, the love that prompted God to create the universe can stir your heart to see the need around you. It will move you to action. If God demonstrates His love for us in the beauty of a tiny flower, as well as in the immeasurable greatness of His coming to live and die for us, that teaches us that there is also great variety in the ways that our lives can show His Spirit and truth to this world.

God wants to fill our lives with His Spirit as much as we will allow Him. We are His handiwork. As we allow Him to blend the hues of His love and mercy and develop the beauty of form that He intended for us, we become His masterpiece that will speak to the hearts of many.

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Points to Ponder

FIRE IN THE HEART

Belief is a truth held in the mind. Faith is a fire in the heart.—*Joseph Fort Newton (1876–1950)*

Fear imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals; fear makes useless, faith makes serviceable—and, most of all, fear puts hopelessness at the heart of life, while faith rejoices in its God.—*Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878–1969)*

Great faith is not the faith that walks always in the light and knows no darkness, but the faith that perseveres in spite of God's seeming silences, and that faith will most certainly and surely get its reward.—*Father Andrew (1869–1946)*

I am one of those who would rather sink with faith than swim without it.—*Stanley Baldwin (1867–1947)*

The act of faith is more than a bare statement of belief. It is a turning to the face of the living God.—*Christopher Bryant*

I do not want merely to possess faith; I want a faith that possesses me.—*Charles Kingsley (1819–1875)*

Faith is reason at rest in God.—*Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892)*

It is not our trust that keeps us, but the God in whom we trust who keeps us.—*Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)*

Onward in faith—and leave the rest to Heaven.—*Robert Southey (1774–1843)*

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.—*Romans 15:13 NIV* ■

GOD'S IMPRINT ON ME

BY SONIA ESCOBAR



LATELY, when I have gone to the bank I've noticed that I now only have to show some identification and then put my right thumb on a biometric reader. This effortless action conjures up all the information needed from my personal bank account and I'm able to withdraw my money without any further procedures.

This simple technological transaction led me to contemplate the way God created each of us so that every human being has a different set of fingerprints. With billions of people upon the earth, each individual has a fingerprint that is unique and unrepeatable. An internet search revealed that even identical twins don't have identical fingerprints!

God created this uniqueness in our fingerprints, along with other

distinct characteristics that each individual possesses. We were not made in series like dolls on the assembly line. Rather, He took delight in creating us in His image and likeness and stamped upon our fingers the identifying *imprint* of His singular creation. He created us with love, and His Word says that even the very hairs on our head are numbered.¹

All around us we find God's stamp that bears witness of His perfection. All of creation carries His signature, His seal, that says we are His workmanship and, most importantly, that He loves each of us as if there were only one of us.²

SONIA ESCOBAR IS AN ACTIVE MISSIONARY DEDICATED TO SHARING THE LOVE OF JESUS WITH OTHERS. SHE LIVES IN VENEZUELA AND IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. —*Psalm 139:13–18 NIV*

1. See Luke 12:7.

2. See Ephesians 2:10.

FEEDING READING
COMPILED BY LI LIAN

10 WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR SELF-CONFIDENCE



1 Make a list of all the good things you currently have in your life.
Always give thanks for everything to our God.—Ephesians 5:20 TLB

2 Take some time to tell Jesus about how you are feeling and what you are going through.
I love the Lord because He hears my prayers and answers. Because He bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I breathe!—Psalm 116:1–2 TLB

3 Help a neighbor, join a volunteer group, or do something for the benefit of your community. Showing outgoing concern for others can boost your own level of self-confidence.
I remembered the words of the Lord Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive.—Acts 20:35 TLB

4 Listen to an upbeat, joyful song that puts a spring in your step.
It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the Most High.—Psalm 92:1 NLT

5 Spend time in nature and exercise regularly.
Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? ... God bought you with a high price.—1 Corinthians 6:19–20 NLT

6 Arrange get-togethers with friends (online and offline). Laughter is very beneficial for the heart, mind, body and soul.
A cheerful heart does good like medicine.—Proverbs 17:22 TLB

7 Spend some time with your children on their level.
Parents, don't be hard on your children. Raise them properly. Teach them and instruct them about the Lord.—Ephesians 6:4 CEV

8 Ensure that you are consistently getting enough sleep.
Then I lay down and slept in peace and woke up safely, for the Lord was watching over me.—Psalm 3:5 TLB

9 Make a list of challenging events that you have already experienced in your life and have overcome with the Lord's help.
David said, "The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."—1 Samuel 17:37

10 Read stories of how God came through for others in difficulties, which will encourage your faith that God will come through for you too.
Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, For they are the rejoicing of my heart.—Psalm 119:111

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BY JESSIE RICHARDS

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

“THAT’S NOT FAIR” MUST HAVE BEEN MY THREE MOST-USED WORDS WHEN GROWING UP.

It seemed that someone—or everyone—always had it better than me.

By my early teens I had a well-developed measure-and-analyze mindset, and I was particularly obsessed with comparing my looks, personality, and abilities with those of other girls my age.

When I came into young adulthood and joined an office team, it was all about measuring up at work. I was convinced that the only way I would ever be accepted or appreciated was if I made up for my relative lack of skill and experience by working harder than everyone else. I was always trying to gain points (whatever those were and whoever was giving them out), and I was always frustrated with my self-assessed score.

I didn’t like myself in general, and even the things that I liked somewhat I wouldn’t give myself a passing grade for until I improved them a bit. I could always find something wrong.

Then another big source of discontentment kicked in—feeling cheated and like a loser because by my midtwenties, many of my friends were married and had children, while I still didn’t have so much as a serious boyfriend. I wasn’t sure whether that was God’s fault or my own, so I was upset at both of us.

I could hardly stand to be around other people, because almost everyone made me feel inadequate in some way, but paradoxically I also found a lot to disapprove of in everybody else. Not surprisingly, my negative attitude toward others caused them to keep their distance, which made me feel more unlikable

and hopeless. It was a vicious cycle.

At a particularly low point, I read some articles about recognizing and overcoming negative thought patterns. These made a definite impression on me, as I started to realize why I was so discontent and began to want to do something about it. Understanding the concept that I could change was the seed of freedom.

This started me reflecting on my life from a very different angle—one of thankfulness to God for all He had given me, rather than complaint





over what He hadn't given me; one of gratitude, rather than resentment.

I also asked Jesus to tell me what He thought of me, and then I tried to look at things from His perspective. Through this I learned to communicate with Jesus more deeply than I had before, and gradually I started to change—first my mind, and then my life. Through hearing from Him, I came to understand

that I had been made the way I was because that was what He wanted, that He really did love me, and that He wasn't out to punish me for anything I'd done wrong.

I also joined a small prayer group, where we would explain our struggles and then pray for one another. Those times of prayer channeled the life-changing power of God into my life. They also put me in a position to receive a lot of encouragement and support from caring friends, which in itself went a long way toward my development of a healthier self-image.

Something else that helped me gain both confidence and compassion was getting to better know some of the people whom I once envied, because I found that their lives weren't as perfect as I had imagined. In the process, I discovered that things really do even out.

I found that I could love more completely once my relationships with others weren't hampered by envy. I could appreciate others' good qualities, thank God for the wonderful way He made them, and enjoy our differences, realizing that they're

just that—differences. One wasn't necessarily better than the other.

It took some time to break old habits—nearly two years from the time I took my first steps toward change until there was a notable difference in my attitude toward life—but it happened. My perspective changed to the point that I can now say I'm truly content and don't envy anyone. I consider that a miracle.

Now several years later, I'm happy to say that my inner makeover was a lasting one. I know that some things are truly not my strong points, and I accept that. As a result, I'm not constantly getting derailed when I notice something about myself that isn't ideal.

Life continues to get better, and I continue to get happier. I've learned that more good things come to people who look for the good in life and the beauty in people. I also know that I have the power, through Jesus, to keep making progress in areas that actually matter. It's amazing how we can learn and grow when we determine to take a positive approach and overcome the fear of failure.

JESSIE RICHARDS HAD A ROLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF *ACTIVATED* FROM 2001 TO 2012, AND HAS WRITTEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES AS AN ACTIVATED STAFF WRITER. SHE HAS ALSO WRITTEN AND EDITED MATERIAL FOR OTHER CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS AND WEBSITES. ■



BY JOYCE SUTTIN

FEELING BEAUTIFUL

I LOOKED AT THE MIRRORED WALL AT THE GYM AS I MOVED THROUGH THE TAI CHI MOTIONS AND HAD THE MOST SURPRISING THOUGHT. *I never knew I was so beautiful.*

Let me explain. I may have been a pretty baby, but I realized as soon as I hit kindergarten that I wasn't the prettiest girl in my class. "Pretty" meant blonde or shiny black hair, and mine was a pale brown. "Pretty" was big blue or dark brown eyes, and mine were smallish, greenish ones. "Pretty" was dimples and a glittering smile, and mine was always a bit crooked. So I knew from a young age that I would never stand out for my beauty.

As I matured, I understood that there was something called "inner beauty." Nice people looked nice. Mean people, even if they were physically attractive, lost something in the way of real beauty. No matter how

perfect their hair or their features or their body, if they were unkind, it often showed in their faces. I decided I would try really hard to stand out for having inner beauty. I would try to be kind. I would try not to lose my temper. I would try to be loving and giving. I would not be mean.

But even so, I never felt beautiful. So I really was surprised with the thought.

Maybe it was looking at myself in the full-length mirrored wall from a distance. Maybe it was finally learning the slow, graceful movements of tai chi. Maybe it was just removing judgment and seeing myself as others might see me. But in that moment, I saw myself as beautiful, and it had been a very long time since I'd thought of myself that way.

I wasn't trying to look beautiful. I wasn't comparing myself to others in the room. I was just enjoying myself, enjoying the quiet music and the

sway of my body, the freedom and sense of accomplishment I felt as I mastered something new. But if there was one thing I learned from the thought, it was that I wished I had allowed myself to feel this way earlier on in life. I wish I'd never compared or critiqued or judged myself. I wish I'd spent more time enjoying the music and being grateful that I had a body that could move with it. I wish I'd spent more time challenging myself to do something that made me feel beautiful.

Maybe I saw myself as God saw me in that moment, an older woman feeling youthful, a woman feeling the joy of discovery and the freedom of learning, a child of God, grateful for her life and another day to praise Him.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. ■



BY DAVID BOLICK

A QUESTION OF PERSPECTIVE

I READ A POST BY RABBI EVAN MOFFIC THE OTHER DAY THAT MADE A LOT OF SENSE TO ME.

Here's the last paragraph:

“Life,” philosopher Søren Kierkegaard once said, “is lived forward and understood backward.” The power to understand the backward part of lives lies within us. We can't change what happened, but we can change what it means. What we choose to remember helps shape who we decide to become.¹

A good example of someone who did that was Joseph in the Old Testament. This is what he said to his brothers who had wronged him terribly: “Don't you see, you planned evil against me but God used those same plans for my good, as you see

all around you right now—life for many people.”²

I have noticed that, like Rabbi Moffic, I also tend to rewrite history, and that I use what you could call a “nastiness filter” that airbrushes out a lot of the bad stuff, or even if it leaves it in, relegates it to a place of less prominence than it had at the time.

There are some things, however, that I have to make a conscious effort to reframe by catching myself when I notice I'm heading toward the dark side of memory lane. I have to reroute my thoughts by deliberately giving the person, or the situation, that's bothering me the benefit of the doubt, or by pointing out to myself that even if I can't see anything good about it right now, that doesn't invalidate God's promise to work all things together for my good as His child.³

A tactic that has proved very effective for me is to say something like, “So-and-so really rubbed me the

wrong way, but I'm sure I must have rubbed her the wrong way too, and it was probably every bit as hard for her to work with me as it was for me to work with her.”

Living life is a very nuanced and complex affair! I've had to acknowledge that I've been simplistic in many of my assessments and embrace the reality that I am not well enough informed at present to be able to pass righteous judgment on many matters. I think by easing off on trying to understand people and situations via my own limited powers of perception, and by relying instead on what I know to be true of them from what God's Word has to say, I'm actually able to comprehend a lot more.

DAVID BOLICK IS A LANGUAGE CONSULTANT AND TRANSLATOR. HE LIVES IN GUADALAJARA, MEXICO. ■

1. <http://michaelhyatt.com/we-are-what-we-remember.html>
2. Genesis 50:20 MSG
3. See Romans 8:28.

BY GEORGE SOSICH

MY FATHER HAD PROFOUND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES WHICH CAUSED HIM, my mother, and us seven siblings much grief. I had a very unhappy childhood.

When I was two years old, I was seriously scalded by a pot of boiling water. To this day I still bear the scars over several parts of my body.

At 17, I developed glomerulonephritis, a chronic kidney disease which rarely occurs in people so young.

At 20, I contracted salmonella, which kept me hospitalized for six weeks, from which I barely survived and which further damaged my already diseased kidneys.

At 37, I had total kidney failure. I had to be kept alive artificially via a dialysis machine that cleaned the toxins from my blood three times per week for four hours at a time at a local clinic. Without this treatment, I would be dead within a week.

Two and a half years later, I received a kidney from my sister, which freed me from the dialysis machine, but which required me to take life-preserving immunosuppressive drugs every twelve hours and make regular hospital visits to monitor the new organ.

Five months after that life-saving transplant my beautiful wife passed away suddenly at 34 years old, leaving me

THE DIFFERENCE FAITH MAKES

1. See Mark 7:37.
2. See Hebrews 13:5.
3. See Hebrews 4:15.
4. Romans 8:28
5. Psalm 30:5
6. Proverbs 24:16
7. Revelation 21:4
8. Romans 10:17



with our five young children and my health issues. It was a devastating loss, but I persevered with life and remarried several years later. My lovely wife and I have two beautiful young children together.

Unfortunately, my transplanted kidney failed two years ago, and again I must be kept alive artificially by a dialysis machine. I'm 57 and waiting for a second kidney transplant.

My medical journey has included prolonged periods of poor health and being bedridden, life-threatening emergency episodes, hundreds of hospital visits, about a thousand needles, mountains of drugs, countless blood tests and other procedures, several surgeries, many complications, and many admissions to hospitals. And this is ongoing.

I'm aware that there are a lot of people who have had much tougher lives than me. But to me, my life has been more difficult than just about anyone I know. Yet, in spite of it all, my life has been great. In the midst of all this, I have been happily married to two wonderful women, had seven beautiful children, have served God as a missionary and volunteer worker for 38 years, and have lived in or visited 18 countries with many adventures along the way.

So how have I managed to keep positive and keep getting up off the canvas after it seemed that adversity had landed me a killer blow? The answer lies in having faith in God and the afterlife:

- You know that even if you don't know the reasons why you've been so "unlucky," God does, and that He does all things well.¹
- You know that even if your family and friends cannot understand what you are going through, God does.
- You know that He still loves and cares for you and that even in the midst of terrible adversity and heartbreak, He will never leave or forsake you.²
- You know that Jesus Himself was not insulated from suffering and therefore can understand how you feel and sympathize with you, having Himself been

rejected, betrayed, mocked, tortured, and eventually brutally executed.³

- You know that the Bible promises that "All things work together for good to them that love God."⁴
- You know that you can find joy after despair because He promised that "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning."⁵
- You know that a knock-out blow is not a killer blow. With His help you can get up and fight again. "The righteous falls seven times and rises again."⁶
- You can find comfort in the biblical story of Job, the wealthy Old Testament landowner who lost his vast fortune, his flocks, his home, his children, and finally his health, through a series of terrible natural and personal disasters; yet he kept his faith in God.
- You know that your suffering can teach you many precious life lessons, including empathy for others who are suffering, and that you can be a source of encouragement to them.
- You know that this life is preparation for the next life and that the lessons you learn here have eternal value.
- You know that you can look forward to an eternity free of tears, trouble, sickness, and pain. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."⁷

If you are a nonbeliever, get connected to God now through receiving His Son, Jesus, into your heart and start your journey of faith today. If you are new to the Christian faith, work on growing in and strengthening your faith by studying the Bible and other faith-building Christian materials. "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."⁸

Faith makes all the difference in the world as to how you handle adversity. It will be well worth the time and effort you put into growing a strong faith in God.

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



BY RUTH MCKEAGUE

ABUNDANCE OR EXCESS

WHEN I WAS 19, my then-boyfriend told me that his mother, on a recent business trip, had been in a restaurant where people paid \$50 for lunch—which would be three times that in today’s dollars. He said that he dreamed to one day be in a position to buy that kind of lunch. “That’s freedom!” he said.

The words “freedom” and “abundance” sum up what I ultimately want. But I haven’t always been clear on where a free, abundant lifestyle stops and addictive, wasteful excess begins. I’ve often thought of freedom in terms of the freedom to indulge—whether in food, drink, entertainment, shopping, or travel.

I recently heard a similar message from three different pastors that relates to the line between abundance and excess, freedom and bondage. When I hear the same message from three different sources within a fairly short period of time, I pay close attention. The first two, I heard via

YouTube, the third in church this past Sunday:

Andy Stanley: “Your appetites aren’t meant to be satisfied.”

Ravi Zacharias: “Daniel was setting himself up to have limits on his appetites.” (The prophet Daniel refused to eat meat or other rich foods, or drink wine, when he was in captivity in Babylon.)

Pastor Ian: “When God gives you something, it’s to fulfill the desires of your heart. When the enemy gives you something, it’s to put you in bondage to it.”

Last January, I went off desserts. Like many people starting the new year, I had a resolution to shed some pounds. The first week and a bit were tough. My cravings for a muffin or a cookie or leftover Christmas baking were intense, and I had to fight my own slick sabotaging line of thinking that I could have “just one”—because it was never just one. That’s why I had the excess pounds to lose. But

partway into the month, it wasn’t hard anymore. I had effectively “starved” my appetite for desserts.

The line between freedom and excess can be hard to identify, but I can think of three questions that might help:

- Are you able to have “just one”? If so, have one. If not, don’t have any.
- Are you counting on this to *give* you that freedom or abundant life? Then don’t. Or are you choosing it as an expression of the abundance and freedom you already have? Then go for it.
- Is what you’re left with a cranky craving? Then don’t. Is what you’re left with a genuine desire of your heart? Then go for it.

I wonder if my old boyfriend is now “free” to eat hundred-dollar lunches? I hope not. For his sake, I hope he’s found abundant freedom of much better value.

RUTH MCKEAGUE LIVES IN OTTAWA, CANADA, AND TEACHES IN A HIGH SCHOOL. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

THIS DAY

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT I'D BE WRITING AN ARTICLE ON THE TOPIC OF HAPPINESS AND SATISFACTION AFTER EVERYTHING THAT WE HAVE BEEN THROUGH THIS YEAR DUE TO THE COVID-19 VIRUS? After having experienced so much insecurity and uncertainty in the air, how could that be a time to think about happiness?

If you're like me, part of your happiness is derived from feeling like you have some control over your life. It comes from being able to anticipate events. Yeah, it comes from *knowing*. But I was reading the Bible this morning, and a passage jumped out at me: Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your

life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."¹

We're not capable of predicting what we will do or when we will do it. Jesus teaches us to pray "Give us this day our daily bread."² When God told the children of Israel to gather manna, it was something they needed to do on a daily basis (except on the Sabbath). God's just fine with us not knowing tomorrow, with us having to trust and depend on Him.

So how can I be happy in uncertain times? I've wrestled with this question over the last few weeks, and this is my conclusion: Each day, I can say "This is the day the Lord has made, I will rejoice and be glad in it!" I have *today*, and I know what to do with it.

This doesn't answer all the questions or give a ton of practical advice. But it provides a base for when things are upside-down, and the usual metrics for happiness and satisfaction

are out the window. When it's hard to think ahead, because you just don't know, you take today, and you make it the best you can.

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Jesus loves you so much that He paid the ultimate price, giving His life freely so you could have eternal life. Experience His love now and forever by praying:

Dear Jesus, thank You for giving Your life for me. Please forgive me for the wrong things I've done, come into my heart, and give me Your gift of eternal life. Fill me with Your love and Spirit, and help me get to know You better. Amen.

1. James 4:13-15 NIV

2. Matthew 6:11

A person stands in a field of tall grass, their arms raised in a gesture of praise or joy. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and lens flare effects. Several birds are seen flying in the sky above. The overall mood is one of peace and celebration.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

STRENGTH IN JOY

You have heard that the joy of the Lord is your strength.¹ How do you get this joy? By loving Me with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength, and by loving others. As long as you have a heart of love—love for Me and love for others—I will fill you with My joy and peace.

Always remember, your joy in Me will be your strength. This is My will, that you find joy and great peace in your life. It brings Me joy when I see you happy and laughing. So be happy and enjoy yourself and enjoy life and your many blessings—big and small and everything in between! For in enjoying these, you are enjoying Me.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty²—liberty to proclaim the joy that you find in Me—the joy of your salvation, the joy that comes from My Word, My Spirit and prayer, from the testimonies of answers to prayer, from your loved ones, family and friends. Freely share these joys and the love and power that My Spirit brings into your life through the liberty that only My Spirit can bring.

1. See Nehemiah 8:10.

2. See 2 Corinthians 3:17.