

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 22 • Issue 6

TREE PLANTERS

Change—one seed
at a time

No Regrets

A life worth living

Your Little Light

Let it shine!



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

STEP BY STEP

A well-known story tells of a man who was walking along a beach at sunset and noticed a young boy in the distance who kept bending down, picking something up, and throwing it into the water.

As the man approached, he was able to see that the boy was picking up starfish that had been washed up on the beach and was throwing them back into the water. The man asked the boy what he was doing.

"I'm throwing these starfish back into the ocean, or else they will die here on the beach."

"But there are thousands on this beach, and this is happening on beaches all around the world. You can't possibly make a difference."

The boy smiled, bent down, and picked up another starfish, and as he threw it back into the sea, he replied: "I made a difference to that one."

The world has so many problems that are bigger than we can fathom, and it's easy to have an overwhelming feeling that our tiny stone dropped in the ocean of chaos will make no difference at all. But everything we do has a ripple effect on the lives of the people we cross paths with, as well as the lives of those they will cross paths with.

The good news is, it's not as complicated as we may think. It all comes down to one simple rule, the "Law of Love," which Jesus expressed as loving God foremost and treating others the way we want to be treated.¹

If we measure our actions in terms of righting all the world's wrongs, it is an overwhelming, impossible task. But when we put Jesus' teaching into simple everyday terms and take it one decision, one action, one conversation, one loving gesture at a time, it suddenly is not so hard.

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1. See Matthew 22:37-40; 7:12.



BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

A CHANNEL

I WALKED SLOWLY INTO JAPANESE CONVERSATION CLASS AND PLOPPED WEARILY INTO MY USUAL SEAT. In the last semester of college, fatigue and mental overload was taking its toll. As graduation drew near, I was beginning to struggle with the foreboding prospect of job hunting while completing the last leg of my studies. And of all my subjects, this was the worst. I dreaded the three hours of twisting my tongue to capture the cadences of conversation in a foreign language.

After fumbling through a dialogue with my partner, to my surprise, I heard the girl sitting behind me reading the dialogue all by herself. Polly had sat behind me all semester, but somehow we had never talked. I glanced over my shoulder and saw that Polly's conversation partner was

absent. As I listened to Polly struggling through a long dialogue, I winced at the thought of being in her place.

"How can one person sing a duet by herself?" the teacher said jokingly. "Polly, find a partner to do the next dialogue with you."

I whispered, "Do you want to read the dialogue with me?" and Polly's eyes lit up. "Yes, thanks!" she whispered back. We read the next dialogue together, and Polly thanked me again afterwards. I turned my attention to the teacher's explanations of informal speech patterns in Japanese and my conversation with Polly slipped to the back of my mind.

When the bell finally rang, I was putting away my textbook and notes when Polly leaned over and pushed a little yellow Post-it paper into my hand. Out of the classroom, I opened the note and read:

"Dear Elsa, thank you for reading the dialogue with me today! Wishing you a happy graduation! You can make it!"

I had hardly spoken to this classmate, but in response to my very small gesture she had taken the time to encourage me with this note. I felt like God wanted to show me that I wasn't alone and that He was looking out for me even in the little details of my life.

I hope that whenever I am a recipient of kindness I will take the time to show appreciation, just as Polly did. I hope that I too can be on the lookout for everyday moments when I can be a channel of God's love to others.

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

KINDNESS AND GOODNESS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

WHEN THE APOSTLE PAUL WAS WRITING ABOUT LIVING A GODLY LIFE, HE LISTED WHAT HE CALLED THE “WORKS OF THE FLESH,” which included things like enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, and envy.¹ He then followed up with *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*² The fruit of the Spirit is the working of the Holy Spirit within us, which causes us to grow in godliness and Christlikeness.

Within this list we find two aspects of the fruit of the Spirit which go hand in hand—kindness and goodness. In reading what



Scripture has to say about these two qualities, we find that both are described as attributes of God’s nature.

Good and upright is the Lord.³

When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.⁴

Because God is kind and good, and has shown His kindness and

goodness toward us through Jesus’ sacrificial death to atone for the guilt of our sin, we are in turn called to be kind and good to others.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.⁵

Kindness and goodness are closely related, and the terms are often used interchangeably. Both express an active desire to help meet the needs of others. Jerry Bridges wrote:

Kindness is a sincere desire for the happiness of others; goodness is the activity calculated to advance that happiness. . . . Goodness is kindness in action—words and deeds.⁶

Kindness and goodness aren’t something shown only to people we love, but to all—even someone

1. See Galatians 5:19–21.

2. Galatians 5:22–23 ESV

3. Psalm 25:8 ESV

4. Titus 3:4–5 ESV

5. Ephesians 4:32 ESV

6. Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2010), 215.

7. Luke 6:35 ESV

8. See 2 Corinthians 5:17.

9. Philippians 2:4

10. Kelly Minter, *The Fitting Room* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2011), 139.



who might be seen as an opponent or enemy, because in doing so we imitate the kindness of God. Jesus made this clear when He said: *Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*⁷

Of course, we're naturally more inclined to show kindness to those we know and are close to, but the call is to develop a kind and good temperament so that we are sensitive to others and willing to do deeds which manifest love.

As believers, we are new creations in Christ,⁸ transformed by the Holy Spirit, and called to go about and do good, as Jesus did. He was devoted to

the welfare of humanity, and put that devotion into action through loving, caring, and acting in a manner which exhibited kindness, goodness, and care for others.

Kindness and goodness are often manifested on a large scale when there is some sort of emergency or great need which causes people, Christian and non-Christian, to reach out and help others. Many of us will help out in an emergency, which of course is kind and good, but the biblical understanding of this fruit of the Spirit goes beyond that. It is a transformation from our natural proclivity to look out for ourselves, to be selfish and concerned about our own needs, into a godly nature, influenced by the Holy Spirit, that is mindful of and willing to do something about the needs of others. It has to do with being transformed in a way that gives us a deep desire to mirror Christ.

Being kind and good to others is meant to be an everyday occurrence, not only a sporadic rising to the occasion and doing something unusual or heroic. Most of our opportunities for extending kindness through doing good to others are found in simple everyday activities.

Scripture teaches that we are to look not only to our own interests, but to the interests of others.⁹ This

requires fighting against our inborn selfishness and purposefully acting in ways that go against our human nature. Most of the things we do to become more Christlike butt heads with our human nature. Striving to become more like Jesus calls for change in our heart, mind, and actions; but it's in the heart where those changes must be deeply rooted.

Author Kelly Minter wrote:

*I've realized how much the heart is central to all of [the virtues]. There is simply no way to detach my heart from my actions, especially when it comes to the characteristics of Jesus. If my heart is full of pride and arrogance, I will not extend mercy and patience to the people I encounter. When my heart is tied up with jealousy and anger, kindness and forgiveness will not run freely in my life. Conversely, when God has tenderized our hearts, humbled us, and aligned us with His Spirit, we will not be able to help the overflow of kindness, joy, and love.*¹⁰

What do kindness and goodness look like? They're found in our speech when the words we say to others are laced with love and concern for others, when we listen attentively to others, giving them our full attention when perhaps we would rather be doing something



else. We recognize them in those who are self-sacrificing, who give of their resources, their time, or their attention to someone in need. They mean showing genuine interest in and concern for others. They turn the other cheek when someone wrongs us. They help us hold our tongue when someone has said something insulting or hurtful. They don't seek revenge, but forgive. Both kindness and goodness come from hearts which contain love, compassion, and mercy.

Kind people don't gossip. They don't betray trust. They display patience. They aren't self-centered. They aren't short-tempered or explosive. They don't constantly talk about nor draw attention to themselves. They aren't petty.¹¹

As those who want to imitate Christ, we are challenged to lay down our lives for others. This means giving time to others, such as our spouse, children, and other loved ones, so they feel loved and

cherished. It can mean simple things like washing the dishes, taking out the garbage, or playing with the kids so our spouse can rest. It also means being good to those outside of our own family or acquaintances; showing kindness by giving to others in need, even when it's a sacrifice; speaking a kind word to someone, even when we're struggling ourselves; and there are countless other ways we can be kind to others.

Kindness means loving words spoken and caring deeds done. It's having a compassionate heart, and putting that compassion and love into action. All of us have opportunities to be kind to others throughout the course of our days. We can offer a kind word, lend a helping hand, do a deed—perhaps even one that goes unnoticed, with the goal of acting with love, of making life a little more pleasant for others. Sure, it will cost us time and effort and sometimes cost financially, but it's well worth the sacrifice, as it reflects Jesus' love to others and it pleases the Lord.

Jesus gave us an idea of how highly God regards showing kindness

and goodness in this passage regarding the coming day of judgment:

The King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."¹²

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

11. *Ibid.*, 137.

12. Matthew 25:34–40 ESV



POINTS TO PONDER

KINDNESS

Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.—*Mark Twain (1835–1910)*

*

You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late.—*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)*

*

Guard well within yourself that treasure, kindness. Know how to give without hesitation, how to lose without regret, how to acquire without meanness.—*George Sand (1804–1876)*

*

A warm smile is the universal language of kindness.—*William Arthur Ward (1921–1994)*

*

Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.—*Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)*

*

Transparency, honesty, kindness, good stewardship, even humor, work in businesses at all times.—*John Gerzema (b. 1961)*

Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.—*Diana, Princess of Wales (1961–1997)*

*

Love and kindness are never wasted. They always make a difference. They bless the one who receives them, and they bless you, the giver.—*Barbara de Angelis (b. 1951)*

*

Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.—*Scott Adams (b. 1957)*

*

One who is kind is sympathetic and gentle with others. He is considerate of others' feelings and courteous in his behavior. He has a helpful nature. Kindness pardons others' weaknesses and faults. Kindness is extended to all—to the aged and the young, to animals, to those low of station as well as the high.—*Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994)*

*

Kind people are the best kind of people.—*Author unknown*

Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for a kindness.—*Seneca the Younger (c. 1 BC – AD 65)*

*

You can accomplish by kindness what you cannot by force.—*Publius Syrus (1st century BC)*

*

Always be a little kinder than necessary.—*J. M. Barrie (1860–1937)*

*

Kindness is more important than wisdom, and the recognition of this is the beginning of wisdom.—*Theodore Isaac Rubin (1923–2019)*

*

A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees.—*Amelia Earhart (1897–1937)*

*

How beautiful a day can be when kindness touches it!—*George Elliston (1883–1946)*

*

One who knows how to show and to accept kindness will be a friend better than any possession.

—*Sophocles (c. 496 BC – c. 406 BC)* ■

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

TREE PLANTERS



FOR SEVERAL YEARS, I was part of a theater group that often performed the inspiring allegorical tale “The Man Who Planted Trees.” It’s the story of Elzéard Bouffier, an old shepherd who reforested a large region of Southern France by planting one tree at a time as he tended his sheep. This story was made into an Academy Award-winning animation,¹ a BBC production, an acclaimed puppet show, and has inspired countless individuals to start tree-planting projects since it was first published by Jean Giono in 1953.

People like Jadav Payeng, who has been planting trees in his corner of Assam, India, for the last 30 years.² Because of a lack of trees, the Brahmaputra River Basin floods every year and causes extensive damage to crops, homes, and livelihoods. Jadav decided to transform this barren island by planting trees, and the area is now a jungle forest of over 1,360 acres—larger than New York’s Central Park.

These trees have greatly benefited the region. Farming has resumed, the flooding in that area has stopped, and wildlife such as rhinos, elephants, and tigers have made his forest their home. And he has a vision for the future—he wants to make environmental science a part of every school’s curriculum and have each student plant and care for a tree.

1. Watch this here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aY_zuNtf3_g

2. Learn more about Jadav Payeng here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkZDSqyE1do>

3. Learn more about Wangari Maathai here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yC9wZTJmDqA>

That’s not to say that it’s been easy for him. Over the years, he’s had to fend off greedy poachers, corrupt politicians, and loggers, but he says, “I don’t know exactly what I get out of this, but I feel happy when I plant trees. I will continue doing this until I die.”

Another world changer was Wangari Maathai, from Kenya, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for her environmental restoration and community development work.³

When Wangari was a teenager, she attended a mission school where she was an active member of the Legion of Mary club that did local agricultural projects and whose motto was “Serve God by serving fellow human beings.” In her early twenties, she won a scholarship to study at the University of Pittsburgh in the United States, where she met activists who were trying to rid the city of air pollution and saw that their efforts had a meaningful impact. I was growing up in Pittsburgh at the time, and I can testify to the marked change in the air quality.

Upon returning to Kenya, Wangari tried hard to improve the living conditions of women. She started the Green Belt Movement to help women become self-sufficient by growing saplings from native seeds. The beauty of her project is its simplicity. In her book *Unbowed* she says, “As I told the foresters, and the women, you don’t need a diploma to plant a tree.”

Her Green Belt Movement flourished through international cooperation with agencies such as the Norwegian Forestry Society, and over the years, representatives from over 15 countries came to see and learn how they too could implement similar projects in their own countries to fight desertification, deforestation, drought, and famine.



Now millions of trees have been grown through these efforts, and many other initiatives have sprung from this one, like the UN's Billion Tree Campaign.

Wangari Maathai passed away in 2011, at age 71, but her voice is still heard today. In her 2010 book *Replenishing the Earth*, which reads like her farewell address, she inspires us to action, "We all need to work hard to make a difference in our neighborhoods, regions, and countries, and in the world as a whole. That means making sure we collaborate with each other and make ourselves better agents to change."

But what does reforestation have to do with you and me? Of course, most of us seldom plant trees, but there is more to it than that. It's about doing our part to make the world a better place. The first step might be to find out what our "trees" are, and then nurture them while they grow.

Jesus might have put it something like this: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who goes out to plant trees in a barren wasteland and nurtures them until they become a mighty forest that enriches the earth to bring forth much fruit."

So if you're sometimes discouraged with the world the way it is, don't give up! Sometimes we can grow discouraged at the enormity of the task and think, *Who am I? What can I do? It looks like there's nothing one person can do to change things for the better, so what's the use of trying?*

But people like Jadav Payeng, Wangari Maathai, or the fictional Elzéard Bouffier show that one person *can* change the world! You may not be able to change the *whole* world, but you can change your part of the world, starting with your own heart, your own mind, your own life.

It may seem only a tiny bud at first, just one insignificant little green shoot. What is that to the forest that's needed? Well, it's a beginning of the miracle of a new life, and it will thrive, flourish and become strong, a whole new "tree," a whole new life, and maybe some day a whole new world!

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST WHO SPENT 47 YEARS DOING MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN 10 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. HE AND HIS WIFE PAULINE CURRENTLY LIVE IN GERMANY. ■

NO REGRETS

BY RUTH MCKEAGUE



ONE MONDAY MORNING, about an hour into the workday, I checked my emails. “Sad” was the subject heading of a personal message, and I opened it up, curiosity piqued. “Sad” did not begin to describe it. I learned that our friend Roy had died suddenly the day before. He had been cycling with his wife Sunday afternoon when he became the victim of a hit-and-run accident. The words swam before my eyes, and I functioned in a fog for the rest of the day.

That evening, my husband, David, and I lingered together after supper. “I think that Roy had no regrets,” I said to him, our reflections interspersed with long periods of silence. “He lived life so fully, with purpose and passion.” We had attended the same church as Roy and his family for many years before they moved to a small town. In recent years, we had only seen them sporadically, but it was always effortless to pick up from where we’d left off when our paths crossed.

The church Roy attended seats a congregation of three hundred, but late Thursday afternoon, a thousand people gathered to honor Roy’s life. David and I sat outside along with

1. 2 Timothy 4:6–7 MSG



At the end of the day, let there be no excuses, no explanations, no regrets.—*Steve Maraboli (b. 1975)*

Never regret. If it's good, it's wonderful. If it's bad, it's experience.—*Eleanor Hibbert (1906–1993)*

I have no regrets, because I've done everything I could to the best of my ability.—*Robert Redford (b. 1936)*

Never regret anything you have done with a sincere affection; nothing is lost that is born of the heart.—*Basil Rathbone (1892–1967)*

Has this world been so kind to you that you should leave with regret? There are better things ahead than any we leave behind.—*C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)*

hundreds of others, watching the service on a screen. His sons, two in their teens and one in his early twenties, spoke of a loving, fun, dedicated father as they read their letters of farewell to him. His closest friend spoke of a man who had no superficial relationships. “If you talked with Roy for five minutes, you thought of him as your best friend,” he said, and the sheer number of people in attendance confirmed his words.

Projected on a screen, notes of condolence from his place of work, from pastors of different churches, and from friends in the community painted a uniform picture of a hard-working, fun-loving, authentic man—one whose character struck those points of balance between humility and power, simplicity and wisdom, truth and love. With a baffling capacity to tune in and give of himself, he mentored individuals and led teams, inspiring people with his vision. Whether it was a church-building initiative, a determination to keep his son's hockey team afloat, or a fundraising project to send kids to camp, he led with a confidence that all things were possible.

Roy's widow remained tirelessly gracious through hundreds of

encounters with fellow mourners before and after the service. “He was very important to my husband when he was out of work and making decisions about his future,” I said to her unsteadily. “He was so encouraging—at such a difficult time—in a way that mattered.”

Printed on the program were words from 2 Timothy 4:6–7: “You take over. I'm about to die, my life an offering on God's altar. This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. All that's left now is the shouting—God's applause!”¹ In his sermon, the pastor drew parallels between the apostle Paul's race to the finish and Roy's. “Roy lived without regret,” he said, echoing the thoughts that had no doubt come to most of us in the days leading up to the funeral. I believe we all felt the need to step up—in some way to fill the void left by Roy. To ramp up and run

the race harder, live more fully, with more purpose.

As they cycled that Sunday afternoon, Roy and his wife passed by the house they had almost purchased when they'd moved to the town. Riding ahead of him, she turned her head back and asked, “Do you think we should have chosen this house after all?”

Minutes later, she would hear the collision and see her husband thrown into the air as the truck sped off. Minutes later, she would run to him and recognize immediately that he had gone. But at this moment in time, they were enjoying the sunshine of a beautiful day. “No, I love our home,” he answered, speaking what were to be his last words. “I have no regrets at all.”

RUTH MCKEAGUE IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND LIVES IN OTTAWA, CANADA. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

YOUR LITTLE LIGHT

ONE FRIDAY EVENING A FEW WEEKS AGO, my husband and I decided to set out some lounge chairs in our driveway and let our neighbors know we would be out there with drinks and snacks. I raided my fridge and found some chips and salsa, carrots and hummus, a tiny wedge of cheese, and some leftover M&Ms.

Soon we had a little crowd in front of our house, and we talked for the next few hours. We talked about what's going on in the world, about parenting, marriage, family traditions, faith—and lighter topics too. There was laughter and community, and much opportunity to lift up Jesus. He weaves into every topic and is relevant to nearly every conversation.

The next weekend we did the same thing, and gathered another great group, sharing meaningful and bonding conversations. One of the families in that group has started coming to

church with us every week. Seeing faith and a relationship with God growing in their family is wonderful!

This isn't big news, by any means, but it is also how the world is changed. I am convinced of two things:

- You can lift up Jesus in almost any conversation and interaction
- We make the greatest impact through small interactions with those immediately close to us

Jesus encourages Christians to be the light of the world, and goes on to say: **Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.**¹

I used to think that something had to be pretty significant in order to “glorify my Father,” but I don't think that anymore. I think small acts and interactions carried out in our daily lives are a big way of letting our light shine and bringing others to Jesus.

In the past years, my focus has switched from thinking that *Maybe*

one day I will do mission work again to thinking that my mission field is right outside my door. It's people who know Jesus and people who don't. It's people who like Jesus and people who are angry with Him.

It's using my gifts, whatever they may be, to welcome people into community. My gift is hospitality. I'm good at opening my home. I don't mean fancy events or an always perfect home, but welcoming people into my family's craziness and helping create a moment to share each other's joys and struggles. So I do that.

Your gifts might be quite different. I don't know what opportunity you have to lift up Jesus, but I'm sure the opportunity is there. Embrace the mission field right around you, and see what God will do.

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

1. Matthew 5:16 NIV



BY LI LIAN

SHARING YOUR FAITH

SHARING OUR FAITH IS SOMETHING THAT MANY OF US FEEL WE SHOULD DO BUT SOMETIMES DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START. Here are some helpful tips I gathered from a topical Bible guide.

ASK MEANINGFUL QUESTIONS

Asking specific questions helps steer the course of the conversation. Jesus often started His teaching by asking a rhetorical question.

He said to them, “Which of you...?”—*Luke 11:5*

LISTEN TO THE ANSWERS

Listening enables people to open up and share about their lives and the current issues they are facing.

Let every man be swift to hear.—*James 1:19*

FIND POINTS OF AGREEMENT

The apostle Paul used this approach during his famous Mars Hill speech, where he quoted Greek poets that his audience was familiar with.

1. See Luke 13:4.

2. See Acts 26:1–23.

As also some of your own poets have said, “For we are also His offspring.”—*Acts 17:28*

BE ADAPTABLE

Finding out about the people we interact with will help us better understand and relate the Gospel to them.

I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some.—*1 Corinthians 9:22*

TELL A STORY TO ILLUSTRATE YOUR POINT

Jesus was an expert at using parables and stories to capture His audience's interest and teach a lesson. There are times in a conversation where “This reminds me of a story I once heard...” can lead to a deeper discussion and witness.

He taught them many things by parables.—*Mark 4:2*

USE CURRENT EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus referred to local happenings when answering people's questions, which enabled Him to bring out God's perspective on the situations.¹

SHARE YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY

Sharing how you found Jesus or how God worked in your life makes the Christian faith a practical, living, real-world experience. The apostle Paul frequently shared his conversion story as part of his witness.²

SHOW THE FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Not everyone will understand or accept what you believe. But if the listener can see the fruits of God's Spirit alive in your life and your interactions with others, they will more likely in time be willing to consider what you have to say.

Though I speak with the tongues of men ... but have not love, I have become ... a clanging cymbal.—*1 Corinthians 13:1*

BRING THEM TO A DECISION

Everyone should be given a chance to know Jesus as their personal Friend and Savior. Sometimes a person receives Jesus on the first meeting, other times it can take years before the person is ready. While the decision is theirs to make, we can do our part to offer them the only Way, the Truth, and the Life.

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

A photograph of a young couple smiling and embracing each other. The woman is on the left, with her arms around the man's shoulders. The man is on the right, smiling broadly. They are both wearing light-colored shirts. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a window and some greenery.

BY CHANDRA REES

LOVE TAKES TIME

MY HUSBAND AND I WERE TRAVELING HOME AFTER A LONG WEEKEND AWAY WITH OUR FAMILY. Our daughters were peacefully sleeping in the back seat, and I found myself reminiscing over the past years that we'd shared as husband and wife—years that almost seemed a blur, due to the busyness that comes with juggling a family with the many demands of life and work. I'm grateful that despite the many challenges we've faced, our marriage has remained strong and the two of us well connected.

When my husband and I were first getting to know each other, I had a blissful, if slightly naïve, view on marriage. I assumed that if we were meant to be, then our marriage would simply flow. I despised the thought of having to work to build our relationship; after all, scheduling

times to meet and spend together is what we did when we were dating. Once we were married, we'd see each other all the time, and I expected that to be enough to defuse any issues. Spontaneity was important to me, and I really wanted to allow our marriage the freedom to blossom on its own.

I soon realized, though, that like all things that matter most in our lives, even our marriage took time to maintain and nurture. Making my deadlines, keeping my appointments, and being thorough in my work have always been important to me, but that same concept has been so difficult to translate into my marriage. I realized that making time to build my marriage was a vital element of staying connected with my husband, and I had to accept that this wouldn't just happen on its own.

While there are the romantic moments in a marriage—those tender times and special occasions that seem to encapsulate the love and respect you feel for each other—there also often need to be thought, effort, and time put into it—even if it means spontaneity has to play second fiddle.

The reality is that if we make time for each other—time to talk about ourselves, time to relax in each other's company, time to express our love, time where we can put aside the busyness of our day and share a quiet moment together—we're giving ourselves the opportunity to grow in our relationship.

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BY CHRIS MIZRANY

SPREAD THE LOVE

THE BIBLE HAS LOTS OF ADVICE ON THE TYPE OF PEOPLE TO SURROUND YOURSELF WITH.

“Walk with the wise and become wise; associate with fools and get in trouble,”¹ for example, and, “Do not be deceived: evil company corrupts good habits.”²

I’d usually taken that kind of scripture to mean “Don’t get involved with bad company who will push you to do drugs, steal, harm others, etc.” And, for sure, we should stay away from people caught up in those kinds of behaviors. But upon reflection, I’ve begun to grasp a further, more “everyday” understanding of this warning.

The other day, I read a very interesting article about moods. A study led by the University of Warwick indicated that, like a cold, good and bad moods can be “picked up” from

those around you. “Evidence suggests moods may spread from person to person via a process known as social contagion,” said Public Health statistics researcher Rob Eyre, who led the study. In addition to good or bad moods, even symptoms of depression like helplessness and loss of interest can spread. As you would expect, friends and family have the greatest impact.

Day by day, the choices we make and the company we keep contribute to who we will become. God has wonderful, loving plans and a special, unique destiny for us to fulfill. So let’s not allow ourselves to soak up or disperse negative vibes, habits, or moods. Let’s find joy in good company and, at every opportunity, spread His love to others!

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Be the living expression of God’s kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile.—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

Spread love to the north, kindness to the south, compassion to the east, and goodness to the west. Spread love throughout the whole world.—*Matshona Dhlwayo*

If you would like to experience Jesus’ love, joy, comfort, and peace, you can. It starts with accepting Him as your Savior and inviting Him into your life, which you can do by praying this prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so I can have eternal life. Please forgive me for every wrong and unloving thing I have ever done. Come into my heart, give me Your gift of eternal life, and help me to know Your love and peace.

1. Proverbs 13:20 NLT

2. 1 Corinthians 15:33

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

THE SOURCE OF JOY

When you accept Me into your life and come to know Me, you come to experience profound and intense happiness. The apostle Peter described this as “joy unspeakable and full of glory.”¹

When I died on the cross, I paid the price for the sins of the world—including every wrongful deed you have ever committed. And because I did that, whoever believes in and receives Me will live forever—and that includes you too.

When you understand what that means, when you realize that all is forgiven, that I love you unconditionally, that I will be there for you through thick and thin, that I will never give up on you, and that no matter what turns this life may take, you can look forward to eternal happiness in a truly perfect world—now *that* is something to get happy and excited about!

You can find joy in knowing that the nagging problems and imperfections of this present world will soon pass away, and then everything will be made perfect in love. You come to that realization by focusing on Me and My power and My promises.

And if you experienced that joy in the past but have somehow lost it, you can regain it the same way. Just think about Me, all I have done for you, and all I have promised you. I told My first disciples, “These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full,”² and that same joy can be yours.

1. 1 Peter 1:8 KJV

2. John 15:11

