

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# ACTIVATED

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## THE ROAD TO FAITH

How I found my  
way home

## Made Whole

God does a  
miracle

## Martha Gets a Makeover

Rediscovering  
the woman of  
faith



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

As Jesus traveled throughout Palestine sharing His message of God's forgiveness and love, "Follow me" was an invitation He often extended. For example, this passage in Matthew's Gospel:

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and followed him.

A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.<sup>1</sup>

He continued to call men and women to His side throughout His ministry, and even after His resurrection, "Jesus said to Peter, 'Follow me.'"<sup>2</sup>

What does it mean to follow Jesus? It starts with our relationship with Jesus and His words. If we abide in His words<sup>3</sup> and let them influence our thought patterns, we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds.<sup>4</sup>

While Christians today can't follow Jesus physically like the disciples did, the Bible makes it clear that following Him includes applying His teaching to our lives. As Jesus put it: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>5</sup>

1. Matthew 4:18–22 NLT

2. John 21:19 CEB

3. See John 15:4.

4. See Romans 12:2.

5. John 8:31–32 NIV

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

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

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

Local contacts:

*South Africa:*

Tel: (082) 491 2583

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

*India:*

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

*Nigeria:*

Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333

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

*Philippines:*

Cell: (0922) 8125326

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

EDITOR Ronan Keane

DESIGN Gentian Suçi

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BY SALLY GARCÍA

# A VERY GOOD PLACE TO START

THE FIRST TIME I EVER HELD A BIBLE WAS AS A LITTLE GIRL SITTING IN THE WAITING ROOM OF A DOCTOR'S OFFICE. I opened the first pages and read until the story of Cain and Abel, the first murder in history. *Oh, this is scary!* thought my little grade school mind. Then as a teenager, I picked up the Bible again and decided to start from the end this time! So I began reading the book of Revelation. *This is some really weird stuff!* I thought, and once again, I closed the book, no more enlightened than I had been.

Off to college as a very confused young woman, I was gifted a booklet of the Gospel of John. Over the next couple of days I read through this amazing book on the life and

teachings of Christ, and when I was done, I could tell that a transformation had happened in my soul.

Finally I had found a part of the Bible that I could understand, and it turned out to be not at the beginning, nor at the end, but somewhere in the middle! Jesus' teachings in the Gospels aren't ordinary words. He called them "spirit and life,"<sup>1</sup> and they have the power to transform hearts.

Later I learned that the Bible isn't really *one book*, but rather *a collection of books*. The Old Testament contains books of history, poetry, and prophecy. The New Testament contains the Gospels, the story of the early church, collections of letters, and ends with a book of prophecy. Some writings teach history, others are instructional, others are inspirational or devotional.

After studying the Gospels, I was ready to start again at the beginning, the Old Testament. I was amazed by the common thread of God

reaching out to men and women with patience, forgiveness, and love. "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."<sup>2</sup> I found promises, like the one given to Joshua—"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."<sup>3</sup>—or to Isaiah—"If you stray to the right or the left, you will hear a word that comes from behind you: 'This is the way; walk in it.'"<sup>4</sup> Still, something was missing.

Then Jesus came, and all the puzzle pieces fell into place. He made a way through His sacrifice on the cross for us to be reconciled to God, for our sins to be forgiven and for us to become children of God with an eternal heritage in heaven.

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

1. John 6:63
2. Jeremiah 31:3 NIV
3. Joshua 1:9 NIV
4. Isaiah 30:21 CEB



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

# When It Gets Boring

“IF YOU ABIDE IN MY WORD,” Jesus said, “you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”<sup>1</sup> We all know that consistent time reading and meditating on God’s Word, along with prayer and hearing God’s still small voice, is critical to our spiritual health and fruitfulness. But sometimes we aren’t as *consistent* as we would like in doing those things. We skip our Bible reading, we hurry through prayer time, and we put off seeking God’s counsel on important matters.

Unfortunately, sometimes I think we can grow familiar with God’s

Word and start to take it for granted, and even feel *bored*. There’s so much to read these days, when almost any article on nearly any topic is at the tip of our fingers online. This can be a distraction, because other writings can sometimes seem more interesting than God’s Word or other devotional books. Sometimes, other books may seem more relatable to today’s world.

There’s also the constant barrage of other distractions in today’s world that may be entertaining and relaxing but can steal the time that we would normally spend reading and studying God’s Word and other spiritually feeding writings.

If you struggle with apathy or boredom in your spiritual life and

find it difficult to concentrate or stay focused when reading God’s Word, and you feel your walk with Him has stagnated, you aren’t alone. I’d venture to say this happens to everyone at some time, and for some it’s an ongoing struggle.

I think it’s even harder in this modern age to be content with quiet study due to the frenzied pace of the times we live in. We aren’t used to being ... well ... so *quiet*, and our minds tend to wander.

Sometimes, just admitting to yourself that you’ve allowed boredom to seep into your spiritual life helps. If you’re willing to recognize the problem, you can work on finding a solution or improving the situation.

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1. John 8:31-32



Then you can ask God for His guidance for a better approach and a change in attitude to enrich your time with Him.

Here are several helpful concepts I've noted after researching online sources:

**It's a meeting, not a habit.**

People refer to the *habit* of daily Bible reading and prayer. But your quiet time is really a *meeting* with the living Christ. Don't focus so much on the mechanics of the process that you miss the Person behind it. If you want to have a more meaningful quiet time, view Bible reading and prayer as daily dialogue with God.

**It's a privilege, not a duty.**

Remember, God really loves you.

And He *wants* to spend time with you. Don't focus on guilt for not "paying your dues" to Him. Rather, in whatever time you have, focus on expressing your love and devotion to Him. Soon you'll find yourself looking forward to spending time with God.

**Find a plan that fits you.** Many people say, "I love to cook but I hate to decide what's for dinner." The same principle is true when it comes to a daily quiet time. That's why it's helpful to use a daily Bible reading plan or devotional guide. Then you won't have to spend your quiet time in "menu planning," and you can experience "the joy of cooking."

**Be creative, add variety.** Even good things can become routine. To keep your daily walk with God fresh, vary your approach occasionally. Read the passage in a new Bible translation. Keep a journal of your reflections. Try a "through the Bible in one year" schedule. Sample different Bible reading plans or study one Bible book in depth using a commentary.

**Learn to listen.** Prayer is not just talking to God; it's also listening. Take time to be still in God's presence, to give your worries and concerns to Him. Think back on the experiences of the last day. How did you see God's hand at work? Reflect on what you've read in God's Word. What is He saying to you? When you love someone, you take time to listen to them.

Here are a few additional ideas that you might want to consider if you need a boost in your times of worship, prayer, and reading God's Word.

Ask God to increase your desire to know Him better through reading His Word.

Find a translation of the Bible that is clear to you and easy to understand. Whether it is more traditional or contemporary, the goal is that you enjoy reading it and it speaks to you.

Read and worship together with another person, someone who can serve as an accountability partner. Discuss what you're reading.

Meditate on what you've read; ask God to show you what it means to you personally and how it relates to your life.

Our relationship with God is similar to other intimate relationships; it's not possible to be on a spiritual high 24/7. Sometimes things are routine, and that's okay. Keeping this in mind helps us not to be unrealistic in our expectations. And by applying these simple guidelines, we can power through the occasional periods of spiritual boredom.

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

# THE ROAD TO FAITH

BY IRIS RICHARD



I WAS BORN IN 1955 INTO A FAMILY OF BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS. At the time, Germany was in reconstruction mode after the devastation of WW2. “Work hard and grit your teeth” seemed to be my family’s motto. Life was tough, supplies sparse, and my parents both worked, leaving my sister and me to ourselves most afternoons after school. There wasn’t much talk of faith or prayer, or even time for addressing our emotional needs.

Then I was diagnosed with a chronic muscular disease that deformed my back. Alone and emotionally overwhelmed during those days of endless treatment and physiotherapy, I felt small and insecure, like a boat on rough waves being tossed to and fro.

That was also around the time when a spark of faith first brightened my darkness. When I was 12, I noticed that each time we sang Martin Luther’s hymn “Ein feste

Burg ist unser Gott” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”) during the religious lesson in school, my heart warmed and my thoughts lifted with renewed courage.

On the day of my confirmation, my faith took another leap. I said the pledge and invited Jesus into my life in the village’s old stone chapel on a rainy autumn day. This experience left an imprint on my heart and brought a measure of peace and renewed confidence.

Later, like so many young people at the time, I left on a “pilgrimage” through the Middle East to India and Nepal, on a search for meaning and purpose. Unfortunately, after nearly two years of traveling with some friends in a beat-up camper, I found myself stranded all alone in a small town in northern India, having just recovered from a severe case of hepatitis. But one dreary foggy morning, a most curious thing happened.

In the shabby motel where I was lodging, I met a group of young

missionaries who invited me to stay at their home until I was better. Their kindness, dedication, and simple faith deeply touched me.

During their morning devotions, a Bible passage jumped out at me: “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”<sup>1</sup> I realized that my soul wasn’t hungry for fame, success, or wealth, but for meaning, purpose, and peace.

Life from that point on unfolded in inexplicable patterns, and I’ve experienced many ups and downs, but the treasure of faith I found all those years ago has brought me through each storm with the confidence that God is always with me and has my best interests at heart.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■

1. Matthew 13:44 NIV

BY DINA ELLENS

# MY EBENEZER STONE



“WHAT’S THAT?” my friend asked, pointing to a small brown stone on my coffee table. I had to smile, thinking how odd that plain little rock must look to her. Usually, people’s coffee tables showcase something valuable, or at least, beautiful. Instead, I had a plain old garden-variety rock.

“That’s my Ebenezer stone” I answered. “In Hebrew, *Ebenezer* means ‘stone of help,’ and in the Old Testament, God’s people would set up a stone to commemorate a special victory or event. Samuel put up an *Ebenezer* after Israel defeated their enemies, the Philistines, and Jacob also put one up after his dream about the ladder reaching into heaven.”

I flashed back to a time when I was in a new situation and was

desperate for God to show me the way. One morning, I read the Bible story of Jacob running for his life from his twin brother Esau.

The first night, Jacob dreamt he saw angels going up and down a ladder leading to heaven. Then God appeared and spoke to Jacob, giving him many beautiful, reassuring promises, including “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go... I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”<sup>1</sup>

When Jacob woke up the next morning, he was in awe and said, “Surely God is in this place.” He took the stone he had slept on and set it upright, then he made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s

household, then the Lord will be my God.”<sup>2</sup>

After reading that, I felt moved to make a similar commitment. I promised God that if He took care of me as He did Jacob, I would recommit my life to Him. To “seal the deal,” I went outside and looked for a plain brown rock that I could set upright, like Jacob’s stone, and keep as a reminder of my commitment.

Even though the present may seem uncertain and threatening, we can stand strong through faith in God. He made good on His promises to Jacob in the Old Testament, and He will keep His promises to us as well. I know, because I’ve experienced it!

DINA ELLENS LIVES IN WEST JAVA, INDONESIA, WHERE SHE IS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK. ■

1. Genesis 28:15 NIV

2. Genesis 28:20–21 NIV

BY OLIVIA BAUER

# MARTHA GETS A MAKEOVER

**HAVE YOU EVER FELT UNFAIRLY CHARACTERIZED BY OTHERS?** Perhaps you've been in a situation where someone interacts with you on the basis of what they *think* they “know” about you (meaning, what they've *heard* about you here and there), without knowing or understanding the real you—maybe without having ever met or spoken with you before.

I sometimes feel that people tend to jump to negative conclusions about Martha, the sister of Mary, based on the account of the sisters' interactions with Jesus in Luke 10.

Jesus ... came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.

She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”<sup>1</sup>

1. Luke 10:38–42 NIV
2. John 11:14–15 ESV
3. John 11:21–27 ESV
4. [www.just1thing.com](http://www.just1thing.com)



There's a vital lesson to be learned from Mary's actions in this story. It is extremely difficult to differentiate between the “best things” and the “good things”—and then to make the decision to let go of something good while you reach for what is best. So learning to be like Mary is a worthy goal.

But there's another story about Martha in John 11, and this one shows us some of Martha's strengths.

John 11 is the chapter about Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Jesus was evidently close to the three





siblings and when Lazarus became ill, his sisters sent word to Jesus, hoping that He would visit and heal Lazarus before his health got any worse.

Instead, the opposite happens. Jesus *stays* where He is. Lazarus *dies*. And *then* Jesus goes to Bethany, Lazarus' hometown.

When Jesus told the disciples that Lazarus was dead, He said: "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe."<sup>2</sup>

As Jesus approached Bethany, Martha went out to meet Him. When she reaches Jesus, she says:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet

shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."<sup>3</sup>

These statements show that Martha was a woman of strong faith. She must have been in awful anguish about the death of her brother, not to mention probably bewildered as to why Jesus didn't come to Bethany when they first asked. Also, consider that Jesus doesn't straight-out tell her, "I'm going to raise your brother from the

dead today!" He doesn't explain to her what He meant when He said "Everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die."

In spite of not knowing all the details or what Jesus is going to ask His Father for, she trusts that Jesus will act in a way that's for their good. She says, "I *know* that whatever you ask from God, God will give you. ... I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Sure enough, Lazarus (who had been dead for *four* days) gets up and walks out of his tomb! It's an incredible miracle and results in many more people believing in Jesus.

There's a lot in these two chapters to ponder and reflect on. But in relation to the comparisons between Mary and Martha specifically, I find myself thinking along the following lines:

Everyone has strengths, and everyone has flaws. We all have things we're proud of and like about ourselves; things we feel are "just the way we are"; and things that frustrate us, or that we're trying to change. But nobody wants to be characterized by one of their blunders, or to be permanently labeled based on some "flaw" or "that time" they messed up. It's unfair.

Instead of remembering Martha as the sister who "didn't choose the best part" and "was busy with serving," why not give our frame of reference a makeover and also remember Martha as the woman who believed and trusted in Jesus in the face of enormous personal loss.

I think it would be great to be a mixture of both Mary and Martha: hardworking, industrious, trusting, building my faith, sticking to my convictions, and doing my best to choose the "one thing that is needful" and to make decisions that will truly count in the long term.

OLIVIA BAUER WORKS WITH A NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN WINNIPEG, CANADA. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST1THING,<sup>4</sup> A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■



BY JASON RAE AND  
SHANNON SHAYLER



## HOW WILL READING GOD'S WORD MAKE YOUR LIFE BETTER?

**Food for spiritual strength and growth.** Just as your body needs food to survive and grow strong, your spirit needs spiritual nourishment from God's Word. This little analogy crops up repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments:

When Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,"<sup>1</sup> He was quoting Moses.

Job declared in his time of suffering, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."<sup>2</sup>

In Psalm 119, King David said to the Lord, "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"<sup>3</sup>

The apostle Peter, writing to new Christians, admonished them to "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word."<sup>4</sup>

1. Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3
2. Job 23:12
3. Psalm 119:103
4. 1 Peter 2:2
5. John 8:31-32

6. See Romans 10:17.
7. See 1 Peter 2:2.
8. John 15:10-11
9. Job 22:21
10. See Psalm 119:105.



### **Deeper relationship with Jesus.**

When you asked Jesus to come into your heart, you began a wonderful and fulfilling personal relationship with Him. He wants to be your best friend, counselor, teacher, guide, and much more! The way to get to know Him better is through His Word. The four Gospels, especially, reveal His nature, His personality, His power, and His love.

He wants His relationship with you to be a two-way, give-and-take affair. It is through reading the Bible that you will find out not only what He has for you, but also what He would like from you.

Think of His words as personal love letters to you from the one who knows and cares about you more than any other can.

**Truth and freedom.** It seems that everywhere you look today, someone is marketing “the truth” in the form of some new book, program, or product. Who are you supposed to believe—and how much will it cost you?

Well, Jesus is the real deal. “If you abide in My word,” He promises, “you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”<sup>5</sup>

You can rest assured that the Bible tells the truth. Become familiar with its precepts, and you will have a standard by which you can measure all things.

**Growing in faith.** Faith comes by hearing and receiving the Word of God.<sup>6</sup> To grow in our faith and become mature Christians, we need to read and believe God’s Word.<sup>7</sup> As you read and study God’s Word with an open mind and receptive heart, your understanding and faith will grow.

**Living in His joy.** Lasting joy comes from following Jesus’ loving example and His commandments, and you learn how to do that from His Word. Jesus said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. ... These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Contentment and peace of mind.**

By studying God’s Word, you will come to understand His loving ways. This will give you faith that whatever your circumstances may be, He is with you and has your best interests at heart. “Now acquaint yourself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you.”<sup>9</sup> When disappointments, obstacles, and setbacks wear on you, taking a little time to read God’s Word will help put things in proper perspective.

**Answers and solutions.** When you have questions, God has answers, and when you have problems, He has solutions. By reading God’s Word or hearing Him speak to your heart personally when you pray for guidance, you can find the strength you need to face every problem you will have in life. Once you become familiar with the spiritual principles, divine wisdom, and practical counsel that are in the written Word, you will find that the Lord will show you how to apply it to questions and problems that come up in your own life. His Word will be like a light, illuminating the path ahead of you.<sup>10</sup>

**Finding God's will.** God has a plan for your life. He knows what's best for you. So, if you can learn to seek His direction for your decisions, you can trust that He will work everything out in the end. But, you wonder, how do you find out what is God's best for you in a particular situation? How can you know "God's will"?

God's Word recorded in the Bible is the known, sure, revealed will of God. So, when you're faced with a decision, look at what He's said before. Pattern your decision on a similar situation in the Word, or on the foundation principles of God's Word. You can also ask God to speak to your heart directly and show you what His will is for you in that particular situation.

God's Word also has the power to change the way you see life's problems. It will cause you to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove [know] what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."<sup>11</sup>

**Models for godly living.** The Bible is full of stories about other-wise ordinary men and women whose faith and love for God saw them through thick and thin and made them great in His eyes. Much can be learned and much strength can be drawn from their examples. There are also many faith-building accounts of God's love and care for His children, His protection, and His supply of their every need, as well as examples of what *not* to do and the consequences of violating His spiritual principles. "Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."<sup>12</sup>

**God's promises.** God has promised in His Word to protect and keep His children, to provide for them, and to be with them in times of trouble. Some of His promises are universal, such as, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."<sup>13</sup> Others were originally made to certain individuals or groups of people, but we can apply the spiritual principles to our own similar situations and ask God to intervene on our behalf, as He has in the lives of others.

As you study God's Word, you will become familiar with His promises and you will learn to claim them in your prayers. When you do that, it shows you have faith in His Word.

**More love.** It is difficult to follow Christ's injunction to "love your neighbor as yourself"<sup>14</sup> when your "neighbors"—those you interact with on a regular basis—are sometimes the most difficult people to get along with, much less love. Where do you find the "Christian grace" to overlook the overbearing boss, the jealous coworker, the noisy partyers next door, or worse? How do you learn to love as Jesus loved? As you draw close to God through His Word, His Holy Spirit will help you to be more understanding, compassionate, and tolerant toward others.<sup>15</sup> ■

11. Romans 12:2

12. Romans 15:4

13. Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13

14. Matthew 22:39

15. See Galatians 5:22–23.



BY ROSANE PEREIRA

# MADE WHOLE!

**WHEN I WAS VERY NEW IN THE FAITH LIFE**, I spent some time in Nova Friburgo, in the mountains of Rio de Janeiro, along with two other missionaries. It's a beautiful city with German and Swiss architecture, nestled between some of the highest mountains in the state.

We used to go to the main square to talk with the storekeepers. One young woman named Sara caught my attention. She had just been liberated from drug addiction and had her Bible on the counter beside her colorful bracelets and necklaces. She said: "This is my sword now." Her faith was so sincere that it kindled my own.

One day, Sara asked if we could come to her home to pray for her son. "He has a stubborn fever and

bronchitis," she said, "but I know that if you pray for him, he will be healed!"

Later that afternoon, we walked with her for two blocks to the simple house where she lived with her parents and one-year-old son, who was lying quietly in a small crib. She lifted him in her arms and brought him to us. I noticed that my friends weren't sure what to do, but I didn't want to hurt Sara's faith, so I started to pray for the child.

I had prayed for healing a couple of times before, but only for myself. As I laid my hands on that fever-stricken little body, I knew a miracle was needed. I started asking for God's mercy, and claimed a few Bible verses on healing I had memorized.


When we opened our eyes, Sara's little boy was pushing his way out of her arms and promptly began running around the house like a normal

one-year-old in perfect health. His fever was gone and Sara started to praise God.

The place where we were staying was a half-hour walk up the hill, away from any city lights, and it was one of the starriest nights I've ever seen. As I walked, I talked to my dear God and thanked Him for the miracle He had performed, and He seemed to smile back at me from the thousands of little lights above us. There and then, I understood the woman who touched the hem of His garment. When she received her healing, Jesus said to her: "Daughter, be of good comfort: your faith has made you whole!"<sup>1</sup>

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. See Matthew 9:20–22.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a dark, textured Bible. The person is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a church interior with other people in the distance.

BY MARIE ALVERO

# THE BIBLE AND YOU

A FEW YEARS AGO, it came to me that I had a superficial relationship with the Bible. I was a bit taken aback, since I had spent my entire life as a follower of the Bible. I knew many verses, stories, and interpretations like the back of my hand, but I realized there was a whole lot of stuff I had no idea about.

So, I did something I'd never done before. I determined to read the entire Bible, cover to cover. I used an app on my phone to guide me through the process and keep me on schedule. I was worried I'd give up when I hit some of the "difficult" books and passages, so following through the scheduled reading each day helped me be accountable to myself.

I loved discovering the symmetry between the Old Testament and the New Testament and realizing that the former is essential to truly appreciating the message of the latter. Many of the great sermons and passages in the New Testament were delivered to people who were very

familiar with the Old Testament, and the point was to establish that Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies that the Old Testament contained.

God takes each of us where we are at in our journey with Him. Studying His Word is one of the best ways to get to know Him better and allow Him to shine a light on our hearts and lives. I know that I allowed a lot of other voices to speak to my heart—many of them were good voices that echoed God's truth, but they weren't the same as His actual Word.

Here are a few things that have helped me in my relationship with the Bible:

Spend time around people who are passionate about the Bible, and their passion will spur you on. Some people I know love reading the Bible and discovering new truths, and I also listen to podcasts of a few serious students of the Bible, and that continues to motivate me to grow and learn more about what God is telling me in those pages.

Just read. Pick up the Bible, read a bit each day. I thought studying the Bible had to be a lot more involved. I thought I needed a plan, curriculum, studies mapped out, etc. All those things are great, but if you don't have them, just read. Some Bibles have a short intro at the beginning of each book to give you better understanding of the author and the original audience.

If you come to a passage that you don't understand, ask a friend or mentor who is more familiar with Scripture, or look for an explanation or study resources online.

Stick with it. This is a long-term relationship. Make the daily habit of opening the book, reading, meditating on it, and letting it seep into your mind and heart.

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. ■



BY CHRIS MIZRANY

# MY MULTI-TOOL

**RECENTLY I'VE BEEN TRYING TO READ MY BIBLE MORE.** I've read through it cover to cover before, but something inspired me to read it again as part of a daily reading plan.

It was my Swiss Army knife.

Every night when I go to bed, I put my pocketknife, wallet, and phone on my bedside table, next to my Bible. One evening, I found myself musing over the similarities.

I use my pocketknife every day, and often multiple times a day. It has a knife, saw, can opener, scissors, corkscrew, and many other tools. Some of these, like my knife, I use practically every day, and some I use rarely. They are all quality tools, and whenever I do require them, they're up to the task. They have a lifetime warranty.

The Bible is packed with tools for our use, and many of them I've left "folded away," unused or even forgotten for some time. Not that I didn't know their value before, but this little analogy helped me rediscover the joy of study, even when it's tough.

A pocketknife needs cleaning, oiling, and sharpening to keep it in optimal condition. In the same way, our knowledge of the Bible needs continual updating, refreshing, and above all, use.

When I'm reading a passage now, I think of it as taking out another tool from my pocketknife, and making sure it's sharp and ready to use. I want to trust each promise the way I trust those tools.

Whether I need to cut a branch that's in the way<sup>1</sup> or slowly thread a string to repair something,<sup>2</sup> I've got the tools. If I need to trim away a little excess or finely divide some material,<sup>3</sup> I've got the tools.

I pray that as time goes on, my Bible will become even more a part of me, and that I will use it to the full, as the Master Manufacturer intended.

It comes with an *eternal* warranty.

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

Jesus can forgive all your sins and give you a new start through His life, love, Spirit, and energy budding and blossoming inside you. Just open your heart and say:

*Jesus, I receive You as my Lord and my Savior. Please forgive my sins and help me make a new start. Please fill me with Your Spirit and life. I want to believe in You and trust You, as well as love You. Please help me in the areas where I am lacking. Amen.*

1. See 2 Corinthians 10:5.

2. See Ecclesiastes 4:12.

3. See Hebrews 4:12.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# SEEK MY FACE



The victories, battles, triumphs, tests, problems, and obstacles you face are all part of life. Everyone faces problems, but I am the answer man, and for each problem, there is always a solution, or many solutions. For each struggle, there is always a lesson and a victory. For each test, there is always a testimony. As My followers turn to Me and lean on Me and call on Me, I will never fail to answer and provide.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and I am able to do exceeding abundantly above all the things that you ask of Me, and above all the things that you can imagine!<sup>1</sup>

So commit each and every care to Me and let Me help you carry the weight. Spend time with Me each and every day—time to come into My presence, to seek My face, and to allow Me to fill you with My peace.

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1. See Ephesians 3:20.