

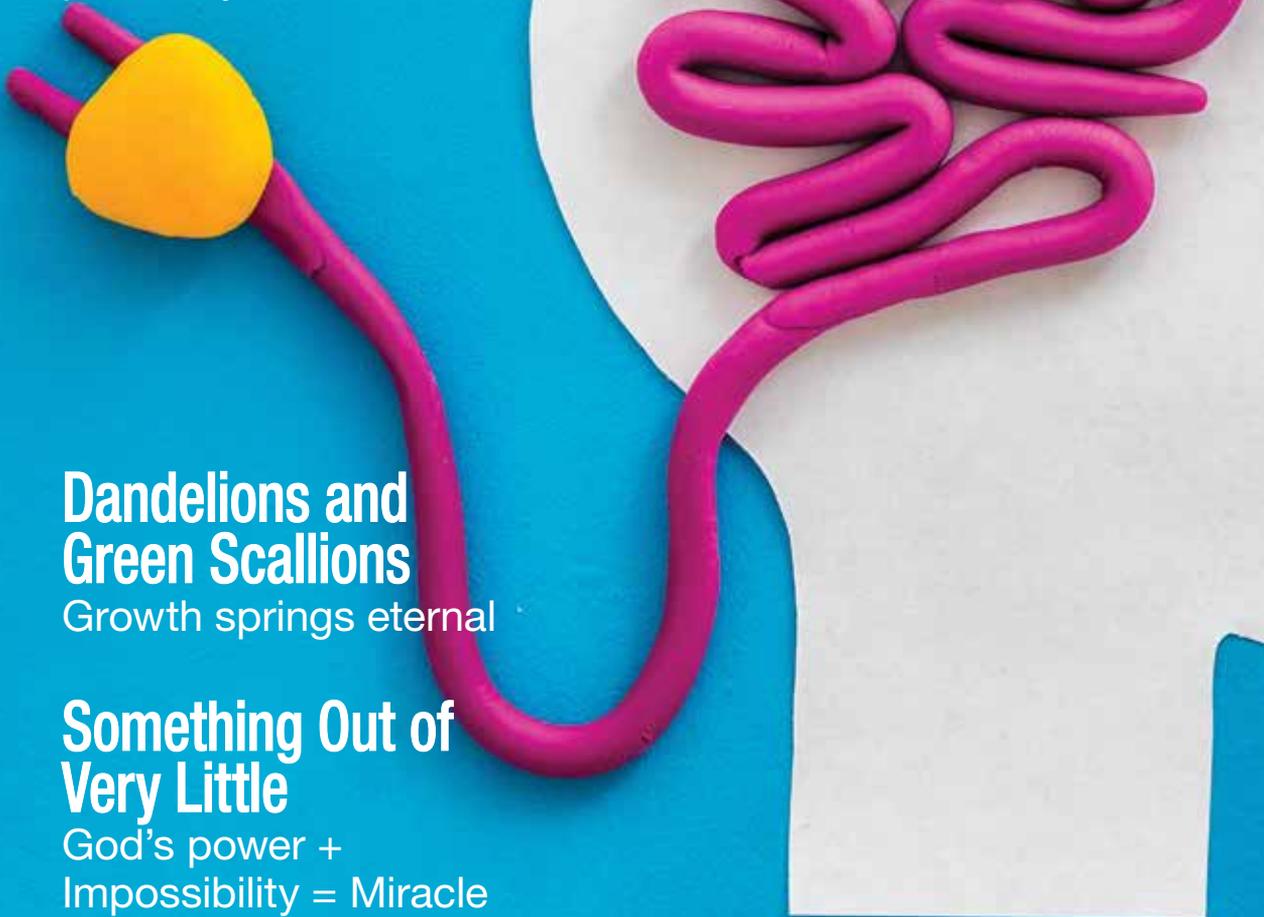
CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 23 • Issue 1

RENEWING YOUR MIND

The way to a more
positive you



Dandelions and Green Scallions

Growth springs eternal

Something Out of Very Little

God's power +
Impossibility = Miracle

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE SEARCH FOR A PLAN

As we take our first steps into 2022, I suspect many of us have a sense of relief as we ring out 2021. It's true that the last couple of years have been unusually difficult, as we've had to learn to navigate the losses and challenges of living through a global pandemic.

In last month's column, I touched on how Christians can reconcile times of such prolonged distress and upheaval with our faith: We can know that God loves us and remains close to us through it all, because He sent His Son to show us the way to Him. That's what we remember and celebrate at Christmas.

But there's another valid question that you may have been asked, or have wondered yourself: *Besides sending Jesus to save us, does God really care about what happens in our life?*

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart," God's Word says, "and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."¹ Yet, as we all know by experience, not everything is easy or happens exactly as we would like in life. Our lives at times may feel like a bumper-car ride—like we're continually running into one obstacle after another and getting bounced in every direction. Does God ever let things get *too* hard? Sometimes it can seem that way.

In the prophet Jeremiah's time, the Israelites were defeated militarily, scattered, and in exile. Even in their darkest hour, though, God reassured them that this was *also* part of His plan and that He continued to pull for them.

It's one of my favorite verses, and readers will note that I've quoted it often. "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."² Sure enough, at the appointed time, God worked in the hearts of the Persian rulers to enable several waves of Israelites to return and rebuild their lives in their homeland.

When we encounter our own setbacks and disappointments, or are lost and wondering what became of God's plan for us, let's not despair. God's plan is never defeated, and He never gives up trying to help us catch on or catch up.

From all of us at *Activated*, may your new year be filled with God's blessings, care, and direction.

1. Proverbs 3:5-6
2. Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

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BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

5 WORD PLAN

AT ANY POINT IN TIME, there's always someone looking to revitalize their life or turn over a new leaf. If that's you right now, here's a simple plan that I found to be incredibly helpful and easy to do. This idea entirely changed my outlook toward each day, month, and year: **Try something new every day.** Cook something you can't pronounce, try to write a poem if you never have before, learn a new song, say "I love you" to your spouse in a different language, change how you spend time with God, pray in a new way, talk to someone at work you've never approached before, etc. There will always be new things to add to the list, and that is one of the

things that is so amazing about the whole endeavour.

Trying something new every day not only helps to keep you out of ruts and going through the motions, but also helps to give you a new and excited spirit. It will keep your mind positive and have you looking for new opportunities, seizing unexpected or unusual chances when you're blessed with them.

I even have a small poster by my bed with those five words, *Try something new every day.* This helps keep my plan in the forefront of my mind. *What new thing am I going to do today?* is an inspiring thought to wake up to, and reflecting on the answer to that question as you go to sleep is a rewarding way to end the day.

And besides personal satisfaction and empowerment, having a fresh and new outlook on each day makes us better able to reflect God's nature. Jesus likened the Holy Spirit to living water—moving, flowing water that never runs dry. If we try something new every day, we won't be dry or dull as we bring people to the most vibrant, radical, and beautiful Man of all time.

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHERE SHE IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

GOT POTENTIAL?

WHAT CAN YOU REALISTICALLY EXPECT TO BE OR ACCOMPLISH?

That depends in part on how you define “realistic.” Nobody knows what we’re capable of better than God, and often His definition of “realistic” is “potential.”

He knows our limits—“He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust”¹—but He also sees our hearts and continually looks at us from the viewpoint of what we can become.

God expects us to do what we can, but He doesn’t expect us to be perfect. He knows we’ll never be perfect, and if we’re smart we’ll realize that it’s foolish for us to try or pretend to be. We have to do our part, but our part isn’t to be perfect—and that’s the beauty of God’s plan!

1. Psalm 103:14
2. 2 Corinthians 4:7
3. See 2 Corinthians 12:9.
4. Matthew 5:16

Once we receive Jesus as our Savior, He lives in us. And if we remember that we’re weak and imperfect, His Spirit can work in and through us. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”² His strength is made perfect in our weakness.³ God loves to do extraordinary things through some of the most unlikely, imperfect people who find themselves in seemingly impossible situations. He does that to show us what He can do. It’s never about how good or strong we are. It’s about God and His goodness and power.

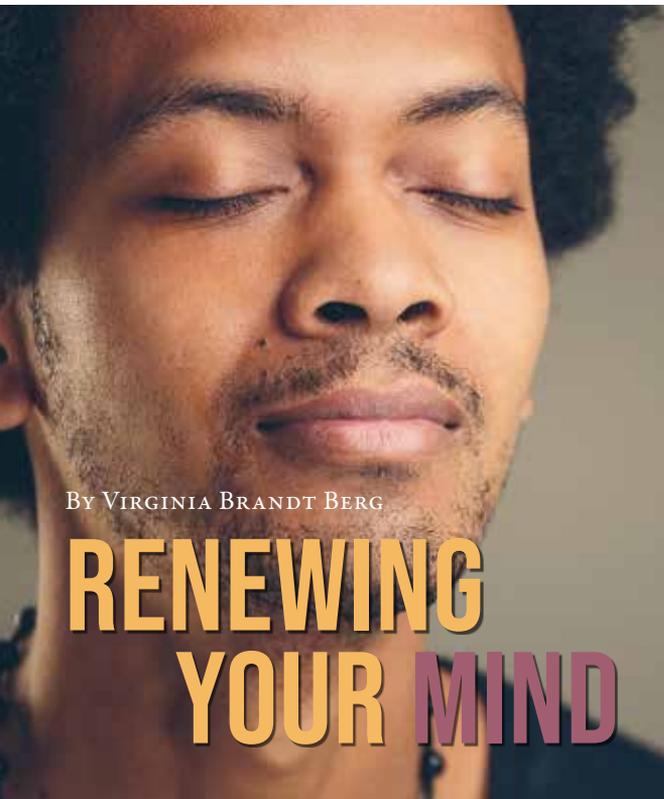
With God nothing is impossible, and He knows that no matter what has happened before or what our current weaknesses or lacks may be, we can change; He can work in and through our circumstances. We must learn to see ourselves through the eyes of faith, through the perspective of what we can become, what God’s

transformative power can do in us, what Jesus can be in us.

So what if you aren’t perfect! Who is? You can still be a fruitful Christian if you let the Spirit of God work in you and through you. His Spirit will fill in the gaps of the problems and imperfections. God doesn’t need perfection from us to work His wonders.

Make room for God to work by not looking at your shortcomings and imperfections, but rather by looking to Him to help you reach your full potential as you do your part to “let your light shine before others so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”⁴

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



BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

RENEWING YOUR MIND

I ONCE TALKED WITH A WOMAN WHO SAID SHE TRIED VERY HARD TO THINK ONLY POSITIVE THOUGHTS, but she was never able to keep it up for long. Even when she managed to appear optimistic, inwardly she was often in turmoil. Her self-help approach to positive thinking excluded God, so when things went wrong, she didn't have anything solid to hold on to.

That may seem paradoxical—faith in God being something substantial—but it's true. "Faith is the *substance* of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."¹ In the face of difficulty and disappointment, faith is far more effective than mere mental exercises, because it is backed by promises that God has made in His Word—promises that bring about tangible results when believed and applied to real-life situations.

1. Hebrews 11:1
2. Romans 12:2
3. 2 Peter 1:4
4. 2 Corinthians 10:5
5. Matthew 6:6

These promises not only have the power to change problem situations; they also have the power to change us. The Bible tells us to "be transformed by the renewing of the mind."² It is through those "exceedingly great and precious promises" that we "may be partakers of the divine nature."³

We can, by an act of our will, take our mind off of negative thoughts. Unless we fill that void, however, the negative thoughts will rush back in. What should we replace those negative thoughts with? What is more positive or more powerful than the living Word of the living God? When coupled with prayer, the uplifting, transforming Word of God can give you victory over every ugly, negative thought and its consequences.

As you make a consistent effort to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts from God's Word, it will become a habit; you will learn to—as the Bible puts it—"bring your thoughts into captivity."⁴

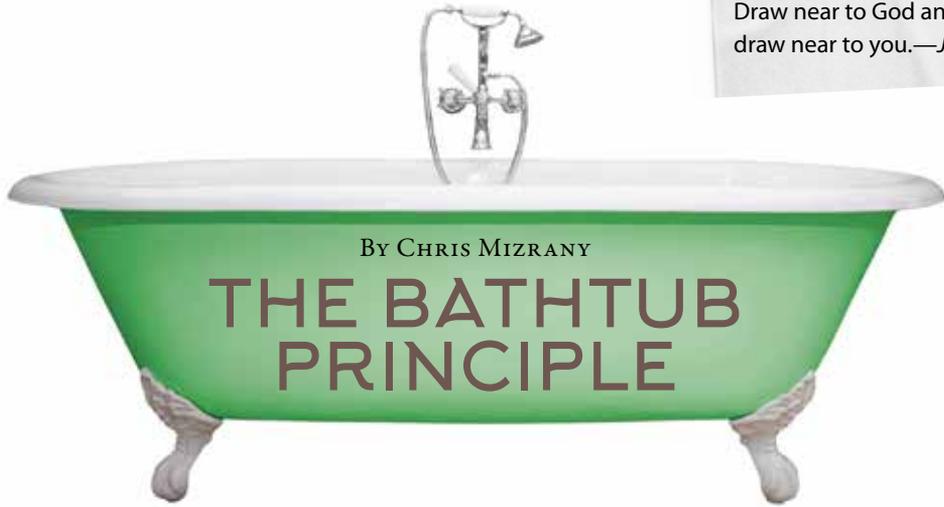
This is very difficult to accomplish in the tumult of the world. We don't find the mind of God on the streets of social life or in the hobby shop. To connect with Him, find a place where there are no distractions. "When you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."⁵

There is no place where the mind can be as fully renewed as in the secret place of prayer, alone with God. When we come away from the temporal things that distract and harass us, and we focus on the presence of God and put our mind on the things of God, the transforming power of God then begins to work in us, and we are changed, renewed.

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS AN AMERICAN EVANGELIST AND AUTHOR. READ MORE ABOUT HER LIFE AND WORK AT [HTTP://VIRGINIABRANDTBERG.ORG](http://virginiabrandtberg.org). ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.
—Romans 12:2 NLT

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.—James 4:8



IT LOOKS LIKE THE BATHTUB IS FINALLY GETTING FIXED! So I thought when I arrived back at our mission center to find a man respraying the bathtub in our front bathroom.

Our home is aging, and the previous occupants appear to have been fond of green enamel in their bathrooms. We'd survived this surprising color choice for some time, but now the green enamel was starting to chip, so it was finally time for a proper renovation. I admit, seeing the bathtub's renewed shiny whiteness was truly gratifying. The man worked quickly, much quicker than expected, and almost before I knew it, the bathtub looked as good as new!

And then... Well, as you might have guessed, only days after, we noticed the sparkly white was giving way to... green? It turned out that instead of removing the old enamel properly—a painstaking process—the man had simply painted a fresh layer on top. And that layer was now flaking off. No wonder the job had been completed so quickly! The glossy white appearance was just a facade, and not a lasting one. The bathtub looked worse than ever.

I like to call the life lesson this experience taught me the Bathtub Principle. It goes as follows:

- When I need to change an area of my life, I need to start by removing old habits, methods, thought patterns, and routines. Painstaking as it is, it's absolutely necessary. I cannot paint over issues or mistakes, hoping that the new look will mean all is right in my world. If I do, I'll end up being worse off than before.
- Quality matters. Improvements need to be made by the right person, using the right materials.

More than once, the Bathtub Principle comes to my mind when I'm tempted to adjust appearances, instead of putting in the effort to make true transformations. Jesus is my choice of heart-renovator, and His precious words my resources, every time.

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



BY SIMON BISHOP

SOMETHING OUT OF VERY LITTLE

THE SAYING, “Necessity is the mother of Invention,” certainly took on greater meaning lately, with the increased challenges due to the pandemic and people needing to find ways to support themselves and their families.

One of the obstacles that can often seem insurmountable at the beginning of a project is a lack of self-confidence or of resources. Along those lines, there are two stories from the Bible where people encountered a serious challenge to their abilities and resources.

The first happened when a widow who had been married to one of the former students of the prophet Elisha was threatened by a loan shark. Her husband had owed money, and now that he was dead, the loan shark was threatening to sell her two sons

as slaves to pay the debt. When the widow told Elisha, his response was immediate: “What do you have in your house?”

She was a bit surprised and said, “Absolutely nothing,” but then remembered that she did have a jar half full of olive oil, so she told him. “Go back to your house,” he replied, “and send your sons to borrow every empty jar they can get their hands on. Bring them into your house and shut your door and start filling them up with olive oil from your jar.” She did as he said, and amazingly, she filled jar after jar—every jar her sons had been able to borrow from the entire neighborhood. She was then able to sell that oil and repay her debt.¹

The next story happened when Jesus was preaching to a crowd of at least 5,000. When evening came, His disciples realized that all of them would soon need to eat, and that they were far from any place where they

could get food, so they suggested that Jesus had better send them away. But His response was: “*You* give them something to eat.”

The disciples were shocked and said that even the better part of a year’s salary wouldn’t be enough to buy food to feed the crowd—even if they had been some place where buying food was an option—to which Jesus responded: “What food have you got with you now?”

They searched and came up with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus told them to have everyone sit down, then He prayed and started to break up the bread and fish and give it to His disciples to distribute. In the end, everyone was fed—and not only that, there were 12 baskets of leftovers.²

Remember that God can make something out of very little when we place our trust in Him and commit our ways to Him by faith. ■

1. See 2 Kings 4:1–6.

2. See Mark 6:37–44.



BY IRIS RICHARD

2020



2021

LOADING...

A DIFFERENT TAKE ON GOALS

AS THE 2020 NEW YEAR BEGAN, I had a long list of goals and plans. I had high expectations and hoped to reach at least half of the items on my list. The year started off with a bang, and I was already feeling quite pleased with my progress when the Covid-19 virus surfaced, which led to curfews and lockdowns. These restrictions came as a shock, but I continued to hope that normal life would soon return.

But as we now know, things turned out differently, and with each new wave of the pandemic, it became clearer that life would not be the same again, at least not for much longer than I had imagined. The forced immobility soon gave

room to frustration and a feeling of helplessness.

A long-anticipated family reunion disappeared from my goal chart, and one after the other, the rest of the plans I had marked as “important” tumbled off the list. I was grateful to be able to make a short trip to the coast when the initial lockdown was eased during the summer, but it wasn’t long before a renewed surge of the number of infections put us back into a holding pattern and further thinned out my list of plans. I muddled through these times of uncertainty and soon realized that my way of expecting fast and efficient outcomes was somewhat outdated and not really applicable to the new

world we lived in. The new challenges in my life and work often left me feeling incapable and inadequate.

During these rapidly changing times, a new item was added to my list: to use this time to try to grow in the virtues of flexibility, innovation, greater faith, patience, and peace.

I began researching these virtues, which also clarified the areas where I needed to pray for God’s help and “coping power.” I found some helpful scriptures from the Bible to claim during my prayer times.

● The word “**flexibility**” technically means the ability to bend without breaking. However, people often use it to describe the ability to adjust to

changes in your life without creating stress or drama. Being flexible in life means that you can change your plans and adapt to new situations easily.

Don't be like the people of this world, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.—Romans 12:2 CEV

● **Innovation** means to improve or to replace something. It's a process by which a domain, a product, or a service is renewed and brought up to date by applying new processes, introducing new techniques, or establishing successful ideas to create new value.

I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.—Isaiah 43:18–19 NLT

● **Great faith** means placing your trust in God to go beyond what you are able to do on your own. It is the faith you need in adverse circumstances, times of loss, sickness, and hardships, knowing that God is with you.

Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see.—Hebrews 11:1 CEV

● **Patience** is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious; an area many of us could stand to improve in, especially in challenging times.

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making

allowance for each other's faults because of your love.—Ephesians 4:2 NLT

● **Peace of mind** is a mental state of calmness or tranquility, a freedom from worry and anxiety.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.—Philippians 4:6–7 NLT

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

POINTS TO PONDER TRUST GOD'S PLAN

This world is God's workshop for making men in.

—Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)

Walk boldly and wisely. There is a hand above that will help you on.

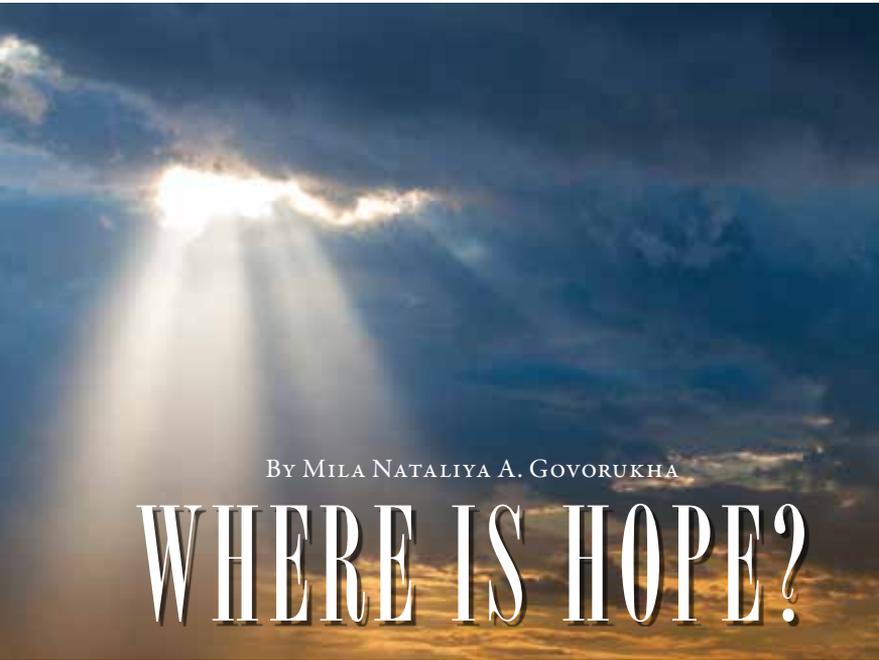
—Philip James Bailey (1816–1902)

The highest knowledge is to know that we are surrounded by mystery. Neither knowledge nor hope for the future can be the pivot of our life or determine its direction. It is intended to be solely determined by our allowing ourselves to be gripped by the ethical God, who reveals Himself in us, and by our yielding our will to His.

—Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)

To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932–1996)



BY MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA

WHERE IS HOPE?

I DIDN'T LIKE MY MOOD. It wasn't exactly cold—more like chilly with a chance of thunderstorms. Exactly like the weather that day. I knew why I was feeling that way, and it scared me. Changes were in the air, looming over me like ominous clouds. I also knew that there was hope for my situation, like I knew the sun was somewhere up there, but not being able to connect with it was unsettling.

The smell of impending rain enveloped me. I sat by a haystack at the top of a small hill, an apple orchard to my right, bushes downhill, and a little flock of sheep grazing in the clearing to my left. High above, a few needlelike rays of sunshine pierced the pewter clouds. The mountains in the distance were a palette of muted colors in the

gathering gloom—greens, grays, blues, purples. Between them and me, a light rain hung like a filmy curtain. I had to admit that even without the sun and the usual bright colors, the view was beautiful.

Exactly like today, I thought. Like this week, like the last months. So much uncertainty, like these clouds hanging over me. So many challenges, like these mountains before me. But there is still beauty to be found, even in these trying circumstances.

Just then the clouds passed, the sun came out, and it suddenly became warmer. A tiny lilac butterfly alighted on my shoe, and a woodpecker tapped out his message in Morse code—"God is love."¹ Hope had shown her face, and she was beautiful!

MILA NATALIYA A. GOVORUKHA IS A YOUTH COUNSELOR AND VOLUNTEER IN UKRAINE. ■

1. 1 John 4:8



FEEDING READING OUR GUIDE THROUGH LIFE

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.—*Psalm 23:1–3 NIV*



He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.—*Psalm 25:9 NIV*



Are there those who respect the Lord? He will point them to the best way.—*Psalm 25:12 NCV*



The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.—*Psalm 37:23*



Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.—*Psalm 31:3 NIV*



I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you.—*Psalm 32:8*



For this is God, our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even to death.—*Psalm 48:14*



You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.—*Psalm 73:24 NIV*



Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.—*Psalm 119:105*

WAYMAKER

BY STEVE HEARTS



I WAS TRULY ENCOURAGED AND INSPIRED AFTER LISTENING TO THE SONG “WAYMAKER” BY MICHAEL W. SMITH. Though I had heard it before, this was the first time I had reflected on the message.

Waymaker
Miracle worker
Promise keeper
Light in the darkness
My God
That is who You are.

I find these words very faith building, especially during this time when I’m in need of some “way making.”

Lately I had been feeling surrounded by high walls, both in my circumstances and in my spiritual life, that were preventing me from moving forward. This song gave me a much-needed boost, clearly reminding me of all that God does and is. It also made me reflect on the many biblical accounts that prove He is a *Waymaker*, like Joshua at the Battle of Jericho.

1. See Joshua 5:13–15.
2. See Joshua 2:9–11.

It’s natural to sometimes feel overwhelmed when the physical reality of circumstances and conditions sink in. I imagine Joshua and his followers must have felt somewhat like this as they approached the city of Jericho and saw how well fortified it was. They may have momentarily felt intimidated by its strong, towering walls. At least, this is how *I* would have felt if I were there with them.

But Joshua’s faith was greatly strengthened when one of God’s heavenly commanders appeared to him with a sword in his hand, just before the Israelites got to Jericho.¹

Furthermore, Rahab told the spies who had gone ahead to scout out the city how fearful the inhabitants of Jericho were, having heard of all the miracles of conquest and deliverance the Lord had worked for His people up till then.²

So Joshua and the Israelites rested assured that God was at work, and

they obeyed His instructions to march around the city for seven days—and seven times on the seventh day—then give a shout! Once this was done, God brought down the city walls, making it possible for Israel to go in and possess the place.

If you feel boxed in or surrounded by high walls that seem impenetrable, remember that we belong to the Waymaker Himself. All we have to do is patiently seek Him and follow what He tells us. As we make prayer circles around our situations, and give shouts of gratitude to Him, we can trust that in His perfect time, He will bring down the walls, whatever they may be, and make a way for us to take possession of what He has in store. He is still in the business of parting waters and bringing down walls—making a way where there is no way.

STEVE HEARTS HAS BEEN BLIND SINCE BIRTH. HE IS A WRITER, MUSICIAN, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN NORTH AMERICA. ■

THE FAITH WAY

BY KEITH PHILLIPS



If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.
—*Matthew 17:20 NIV*

Plant your roots in Christ and let him be the foundation for your life. Be strong in your faith, just as you were taught. And be grateful.
—*Colossians 2:7 CEV*

LIKE A LOT OF PEOPLE, as each new year approaches, I try to reflect on the past year and set goals for the coming one. As I was about to do that this year, a friend sent me this quote by Joni Eareckson Tada: “Faith isn’t the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It’s simply taking God at His Word and taking the next step.” That quote was a big help to me, and here’s why.

When I applied it to past years, it rang true. They all involved uneasy steps into the unknown. For example, after my wife’s health took a sudden and severe downturn, a troop of doctors spent a couple of years trying to diagnose the problem. As it turned out, she has a combination of incurable but manageable conditions, and it’s taken several more years to find the most effective treatments. During that difficult time, all we could do was pray and take one step at a time. But that was all

God needed from us. Thanks to Him and the good doctors He led us to, my wife is doing much better. It hasn’t been easy, but we can both now say without hesitation that the experience has been good for us. It’s deepened us, made us more thankful for all we have, and taught us to value each day. More than anything, I think, it’s increased our faith in God’s love and goodness.

With that as my frame of reference, the coming year doesn’t seem so daunting. The difficulties of the past are now only memories, but the good that came from them is a vital, emboldening force. “Think bigger,” it tells me. “You have nothing to fear. Take the next step. God is good—and He is with you!”

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. ■

The background features a stack of colorful sticky notes (orange, yellow, green) and several crumpled pieces of paper in pink and yellow, scattered across a white surface.

BY RUTH DAVIDSON

BEST-LAID PLANS

EVER SINCE OUR FAMILY MOVED TO SOUTHEAST TEXAS, we've been experiencing frequent hurricanes, floods, sweltering heat in the summer, and freezing temperatures in the winter. Due to these circumstances, it's a little difficult to schedule future events. As they say in this area, "If you don't like the weather, just wait an hour."

Life is full of setbacks and reversals, having to cancel travel plans, family reunions, weekend barbecues, picnics, and the list goes on. Sometimes it can be frustrating, but really, all we can do is grin and bear it.

When it's come to this, I often hear myself jokingly quoting the saying, "The best-laid plans of mice and men go oft awry." I had never given these words much thought, but they seemed to fit whenever our plans didn't go the way we thought they would or the way we wanted them to.

After doing a little research, I found that the Scottish lyricist Robert Burns penned the poem "To a Mouse" in 1785. It refers to an incident that happened to the poet as he was ploughing in the field and accidentally overturned the carefully built nest of a mouse. In the original Scottish dialect, it goes thus: "The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley."

One of the things I'm learning more every day is the need to be flexible. How wonderful that in these unsure times, I can have something solid to stand on and an anchor that will not be swept away. As the beautiful Bible verse expresses it, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."¹

RUTH DAVIDSON WAS A MISSIONARY TO THE MIDDLE EAST, INDIA, AND SOUTH AMERICA FOR 25 YEARS. SHE IS NOW AN AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTOR TO THE WEBSITE WWW.THEBIBLEFORYOU.COM. ■

1. Psalm 46:1

If you haven't yet found Jesus and all that He has to offer, you can do so right now by praying the following prayer:

Jesus, I want to know You personally, so I invite You to come into my heart. Thank You for dying for me, so I can be forgiven for my sins, find peace of heart and mind here and now, and receive God's gift of eternal life. Amen.

MY ANCHOR HOLDS

By William C. Martin

Though the angry surges roll
On my tempest-driven soul,
I am peaceful, for I know,
Wildly though the winds may blow,
I've an anchor safe and sure,
That shall evermore endure.

And it holds, My anchor holds:
Blow your wildest, then, O gale,
On my bark so small and frail,
By His grace I shall not fail,
For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.

Troubles almost 'whelm the soul;
Griefs like billows o'er me roll;
Tempters seek to lure astray;
Storms obscure the light of day;
But in Christ I can be bold,
I've an anchor that shall hold.



BY JOYCE SUTTIN

DANDELIONS and GREEN SCALLIONS

NATURE IS AMAZINGLY RESILIENT. The temperature had dropped to freezing, and though I had carefully covered my plants, I was sad to discover that the frost killed quite a few. Then two days later I took a walk and saw a dandelion, reminding me that change comes, sometimes even quickly, and life bursts through once again.

The third Monday in January is supposed to be one of the most depressing days of the year. The holidays may not have lived up to our expectations, and in any case, they pass too quickly. In the northern hemisphere, the weather is generally dark and inclement, and to top it off, plants are dead or hibernating and, where I live, pollen is out in full force during the winter. But then I think of all I have—the cozy blankets

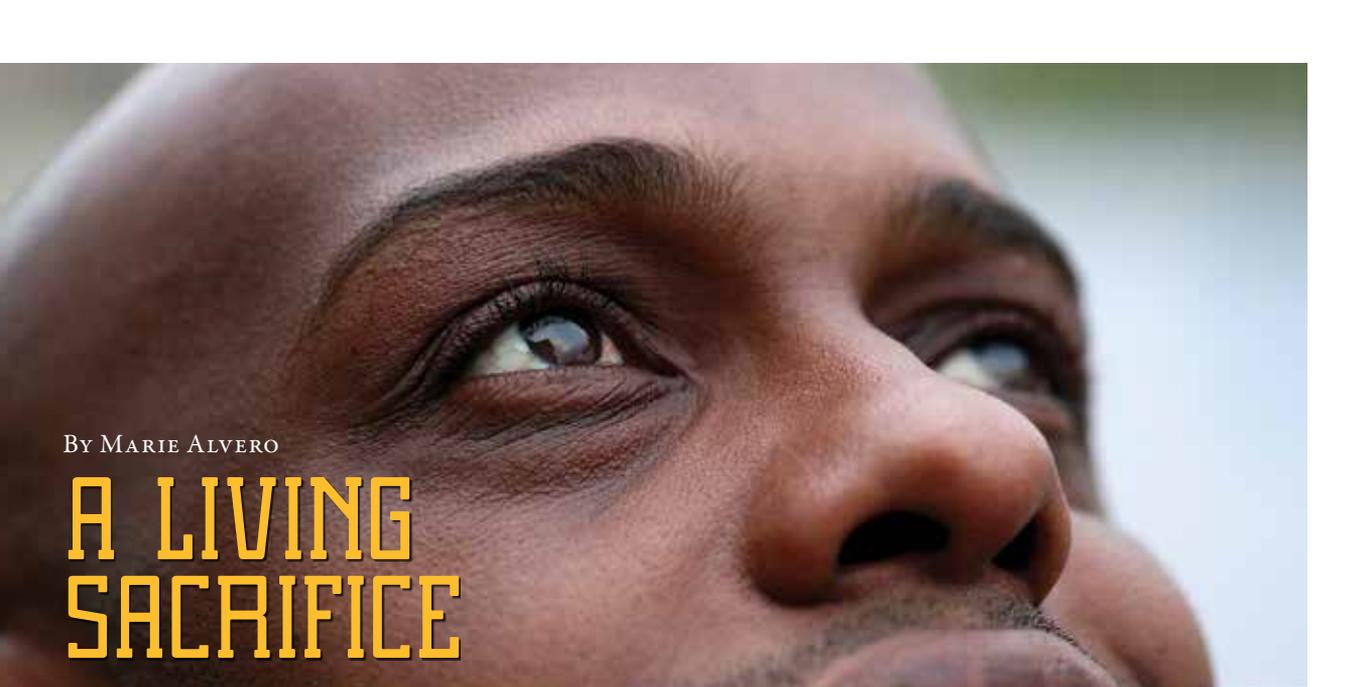
and hot beverages to keep me warm, how easy it is to fall asleep at night when it's cool and dark. There seems to be extra time in the winter to read a book, work on my art, or research topics I'm interested in.

Even though things may go wrong, and there may have been deep losses, I can allow myself to keep growing. Like the dandelions, I can look out for the least bit of sunshine and reach out to help people move past the pain of winter. Did you know that on even the darkest day of winter you can take the bottom of a scallion, put it in water and place it in your kitchen window, and it will grow a whole new green onion? It teaches us that all our broken pieces can be renewed even in the darkest of times.

As long as there are flowers or frost, sunshine or clouds, dandelions

or green onions growing on my windowsill, I will continue to feel God's great love for me. As long as I am alive, I will thank Him for sunsets, for sunshine on cold winter days, and even for the storms that nourish the ground. I will be resilient like the nature I see all around me because I know it is a picture of the divine. Dandelions and green onions can teach me that there is really nothing to be depressed about. God's love is all around me if I have the eyes to see it and enjoy it and pass it on.

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BY MARIE ALVERO

A LIVING SACRIFICE

“DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.”¹

I believe that God has given us power and agency to make changes and choices for our lives, but I also sometimes feel how easy it is to get distracted with “self-help” ideologies. Designing our “best lives” and making five-year plans, for example, are positive actions, but we need to find a way to reconcile that with “giving our bodies as a living sacrifice.”

That’s a really interesting Bible verse, because it’s not just talking about our thoughts or our beliefs being presented to God, but our bodies too. That means what we are physically doing with our lives should be to His glory. The Bible calls that our “reasonable” service—so, not super amazing, not award-winning,

but just your “starter package” Christianity being lived out.

When you look at following Jesus in that context, it gets real. It’s not just an ideology, but something you spend your time on, something you give yourself to. “Sacrifice” doesn’t imply that life is going to be dreary or tough, without any fun or ambition or dreams. That’s not it. True fulfillment can only be found in staying close to God and following His plan.

Here comes another year. As usual, we come into it with all the hopes, dreams, and expectations the promise of a New Year brings. But I hope you take time to think about what God needs from *you*. What does a “living sacrifice” look like in your life and walk with Him?

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If a commission by an earthly king is considered an honor, how can a commission by a heavenly King be considered a sacrifice?—*David Livingstone (1813–1873)*

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Sacrifice alone, bare and unrelieved, is ghastly, unnatural, and dead; but self-sacrifice, illuminated by love, is warmth and life; it is the death of Christ, the life of God, and the blessedness and only proper life of man.—*Frederick W. Robertson (1816–1853)*

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The Christian faith is meant to be lived moment by moment. It isn’t some broad, general outline—it’s a long walk with a real Person. Details count: passing thoughts, small sacrifices, a few encouraging words, little acts of kindness, brief victories over nagging sins.—*Joni Eareckson Tada (b. 1949)*

1. Romans 12:1 NLT

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

MY PLAN OR YOURS?



I have a plan and a purpose for your life—and I want to help you discover it and walk within it. I have answers to your questions, solutions to your problems, and insight into the complex situations you encounter. I have promised in My Word that if you will seek Me, you will find Me, and I take great pleasure in guiding you into all truth.

When you ask for My guidance, I give it,¹ but you must first be willing to set aside your own ideas and plans.² That can be difficult, especially if you have your heart set on something but you aren't sure that it's the right time or that I will agree that your plan is best for everyone concerned. When faced with such tests, remind yourself of these promises in the Bible: "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart,"³ and "No good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly."⁴ If your desire is truly to find and follow My plan, I will give you the best.

I know your past, present, and future. I understand your needs and desires, your aspirations and fears. I know everything about you. The more you learn to seek and follow My plan for your life, the more likely you will be to find genuine happiness and fulfillment. The choice is yours.

1. See Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7; James 1:5.

2. See Isaiah 55:8–9.

3. Psalm 37:4

4. Psalm 84:11