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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

LESSONS FROM WIZARDS

When I was much younger, some friends and I organized a party with a twist. We were a rather geeky bunch of sci-fi and fantasy fans, and we decided to stay up one night to watch through the extended versions of the entire original *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, all 11+ hours of them!

I'm not sure I'd recommend that, even with a healthy supply of chocolate-covered coffee beans to snack on. It turns out the *Return of the King's* ending is so drawn-out and slow that it felt like an exploit just to stay awake through it as the sun rose and the room began to fill with natural light, but it was a fun experience, and it's nice to be able to say I managed it.

Tolkien was a genius wordsmith, and there are many great quotes, but one of my favorites is when Frodo is telling Gandalf, "I wish the Ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened."

"So do all who live to see such times," Gandalf replies; "but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us."

I daresay most of us have felt the same as Frodo, and maybe some of us feel that way right now. Life brings many difficulties, disappointments, and setbacks, and our world has had a double ration of those in the last few years. But although it may not be obvious in the moment, our lives are a part of God's larger story. We don't see the whole picture, but we can choose to do our best in the role God has given us.

From one wizard to the next...

Like Gandalf, Albus Dumbledore has a number of pithy quotes, but it turns out the one that was my Skype status for a number of years wasn't originally in any book and was added to the *Goblet of Fire* movie, but it fits with the character's attitudes and teachings: "Dark and difficult times lie ahead. Soon we must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy."

When choices are tough, it's always easiest to just lie low and not fight for what we know is right. But injustice, cruelty, and evil are worth fighting against, even at a cost to our own comfort.

Two quotes, two authors, two characters, but a similar theme. When the time comes, may we each make the choices to do what is right, and thus participate in fulfilling God's plan.

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A photograph of a blue, textured vase on a balcony overlooking the sea. The vase is made of many small, rounded blue pieces, giving it a bubbly, coral-like appearance. It sits on a white pedestal. The balcony has a colorful mosaic railing. In the background, the deep blue sea stretches to the horizon under a clear sky with a few wispy clouds. The overall scene is bright and serene.

BY ANNA PERLINI

THE VIEW

FOURTEEN YEARS AGO, I was invited to a farewell party a friend was hosting for quite a large number of friends and acquaintances. I had never been to her house before, and that evening, as we were escorted to the large terrace where drinks and snacks were being served, I had no idea what was in store.

I still remember the feeling I experienced the first time I looked at the breathtaking view from that terrace: the deep blue sea surrounded by green hills, islands in the distance, a gorgeous sky. I remained still for a few minutes, just admiring the beauty that seemed to appear almost out of nowhere. I wasn't the only one: most of the other guests also took time to lean on the banister and comment on the view.

1. Psalm 51:12

2. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org/>

Shortly afterwards, the house with the spectacular view became my home. Due to an amazing series of events, we actually happened to rent that very property just a couple of months after that memorable “first encounter” at the farewell party!

During the course of 14 years living there, we've hosted seminars and summer camps and received streams of visitors from all around the world—and they, too, always end up at the terrace, gazing in awe at the same breathtaking view as I had done. They're out there enjoying the view, even late at night and early in the morning, and I relive through them the excitement I also experienced that first time.

I wish I could say that I maintained that sense of awe, but I confess that I've grown familiar with the view. I guess it's just part of human nature; it happens in relationships, with the material comforts

we enjoy, and even in our spiritual lives. We start taking things for granted and get used to their beauty or usefulness and eventually just grow numb to them. This brought to mind the verse, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.”¹

Sometimes that restoration happens when you watch it happening in others or you help others discover it for the first time. But however it happens, it's helpful to find ways in our own lives to appreciate and treasure that freshness and sense of wonder.

We'll soon be moving to another house—and sure enough, I find myself spending more time on the balcony taking in the view.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE², A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA SINCE 1995. ■

BY MARIA FONTAINE

VICTORY IN TOUGH

WHEN SEEKING JESUS FOR ENCOURAGEMENT FOR ANY DIFFICULTIES THAT YOU

(or one of your friends or loved ones) may be experiencing, the Lord brought to mind *the life to come*. When I revisit some of the scriptures on the glory of heaven, compared to the pain, sorrows, and problems of this life, it's a wonderful assurance to know that, as the old song goes:

After the toil and the heat of the day,
After my troubles are past,
After my sorrows are taken away,
I shall see Jesus at last!

After the heartaches and sighing shall cease,
After the cold winter's blast,
After the conflict comes glorious peace:
I shall see Jesus at last!¹

We have a wonderful future ahead! Let's not get so focused on the difficulties of the present that we fail to keep heaven in mind. God knew that His children would need His assurances of a heavenly future to give them hope. His Word tells us to "think on the good things, the true things, the pure things, the lovely things, those things that are excellent

and praiseworthy and of good report."² What a fitting description of heaven!

John told us about the new heaven and new earth, and I think it bears repeating when we need to adjust our focus upward.

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

"I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a

1. "After," by N. B. Vandall, 1932

2. See Philippians 4:8.

3. Revelation 21:1–5 ESV

4. Revelation 7:9 ESV

5. Hebrews 11:10 ESV

6. Hebrews 11:16; 1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV

7. John 14:2–3 CEB



TIMES

things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”³

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.”⁴

In this world we have no lasting city, but we’re seeking the city that is to come: “a city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.”⁵

Eventually, we’re going to arrive in that “better place, that is, a heavenly one” that we’re desiring and looking for. “No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.”⁶

Jesus said: “My Father’s house has room to spare. If that weren’t the case, would I have told you that I’m going to prepare a place for you? When I go to prepare a place for you, I will return and take you to be with me so that where I am you will be too.”⁷

We can make God’s promises about heaven a part of our foundation of faith, just as we have done with the knowledge of our salvation.

We can stand on these promises during times when things look dark. God didn’t *have* to tell us in advance of the tremendous realities that await us in heaven. He could have kept it a surprise. But He knew that this vision of the future would motivate us and help us to continue overcoming the struggles of the daily life we face.

As blessed as we are by His salvation, and as vital as our place is in this world as His messengers, of course we can expect challenges, we can expect troubles, we can expect that there will be struggles. But, even in that, we are not alone. He showers us with His blessings as He guides us through the difficulties of this life. He is *always* greater than our troubles.

When you need renewal, when you feel weary, keep reminding yourself of the realities of heaven. Then, remind yourself of what He’s doing on this earth and the importance of your purpose and place as one of His children. Face your difficulties with faith and courage, knowing that through your example you can give others the opportunity to find hope in Jesus and the truth they hunger for.

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

bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all



WATCH YOUR WORDS

BY STEVE HEARTS

ARE YOU THE TYPE OF PERSON WHO LOVES TO TALK? If so, you're just like me. I love talking to people, both in person and by phone. I also actively engage in different forms of online messaging and social media.

The ability to talk and communicate with others is God-given. Hebrews 13:16 says, "do not forget to do good and to share with others."¹

On the other hand, a wise man once said that there is "a time to be silent and a time to speak."²

When I was a boy, I was an incessant talker. I often monopolized conversations, frequently interrupting people with comments or questions before they were finished expressing their point. Of course, I eventually encountered people who did the same to me, making me understand what it was like to be on the receiving end of this type of behavior. So I've since made an effort to talk less and listen more, and this drastically improved my overall relationships with others.

First Thessalonians 4:11 tells us to "study to be quiet."³ For those of us who love to talk, it often does take "study" or effort to be quiet when it's appropriate.

1. NIV

2. Ecclesiastes 3:7 NIV

3. KJV

4. See Genesis 37:6-9.


5. Proverbs 17:28 NIV

There have been times when I was too quick to answer questions, and ended up regretting it. One such incident happened at a social gathering I attended with coworkers. Someone asked me, half in jest, how well I was getting along with a specific coworker. At the time, I happened to be having issues with the person in question, and I openly let some of them out, thinking this person wasn't around. Since I'm blind, I recognize people largely by voice. So you can imagine my shock and embarrassment at suddenly hearing this very person's voice coming from right next to me on the opposite side: "I heard your every word, Steve."

A biblical example is that of Joseph. He also paid a steep price for his failure to hold his tongue. Joseph was his father's favorite son, which made his brothers jealous. To top it off, he had two dreams that depicted him ruling over his family, and actually thought it was a good idea to tell his brothers about those dreams.⁴ His brothers were so angry with him that they threw him into a pit and sold him into slavery.

Though holding the tongue isn't the easiest thing for some of us, it's often the most prudent. "Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues."⁵

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



BY JOYCE SUTTIN

MINIMALISM

I'M HUNGRY, but I really can't think of anything to eat. I go to the refrigerator to decide what to make for dinner and walk away frustrated. Nothing seems satisfying.

Over the past few years, I've developed several food sensitivities that limit what I eat. These aren't life-threatening as some allergies are, but the discomfort I get from eating the wrong foods isn't worth the momentary pleasure of eating something I shouldn't.

The first one was lactose intolerance. After growing up on a dairy farm and always drinking a lot of milk and eating milk products, it was a shock to realize that I could no longer digest them. I can drink some non-dairy milks and eat butter and some hard cheeses, but even lactose-containing yogurt gives me digestive problems.

When I continued to have problems, I found out that I was also sensitive to gluten and fructose. This

seriously limited what I could eat. The day I came home from the doctor with the list of foods I shouldn't eat anymore, I walked around the supermarket and felt like I was grieving over all the foods I enjoyed that I wouldn't be able to eat.

It has turned me into an avid reader of ingredients, which helps me to make sensible and wholesome decisions about the food I eat. You could say that I've become a food minimalist. I have a limited list of foods that I can eat, and I try to have a well-rounded diet with a lot of vegetables and some fruits, lean chicken, eggs and fish, brown rice and a small amount of hard cheese.

But sometimes, like today, I wish I could eat something really decadent. But I won't, because I know that would result in a stomachache for a week afterwards.

I can't help but draw a comparison to my spiritual life. Sometimes I feel like I get bored limiting what

audiobooks I listen to, and I want to try something different. I love to listen to audiobooks as I fall asleep, but sometimes I try some book that I know isn't good for me, and my mind is plagued for days by images I don't want to think about.

So I'd rather be a minimalist. I'd rather eat my chicken and vegetable stir-fry. I'd rather listen to the Psalms for the 119th time as I am going to sleep than have to deal with the aftermath of some thriller that doesn't agree with me.

I'm thankful for my sensitive stomach that keeps me on the straight and narrow in my eating. I'm also thankful for a sensitive spirit that cues me to what is and isn't good for me to dwell on.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [HTTPS://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM/](https://joy4dailydevotionals.blogspot.com/). ■



BY SCOTT MACGREGOR

THE GOD FROM PODUNK

I RECENTLY REALIZED THAT MY PERCEPTIONS HAVE BEEN WRONG WHEN IT COMES TO WHERE JESUS LIVED WHEN HE WAS A CHILD AND YOUNG MAN. I've always been aware that Galilee was in the north of Israel and a fair distance from the big city of

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1. Matthew 26:73 ESV
 2. John 7:52 NLT
 3. John 1:46 ESV
 4. See Acts 5:37.
 5. www.just1thing.com

Jerusalem, but it's only lately that I've come to appreciate just how far out "in the sticks" Galilee was, and how this impacted Jesus and His followers and also the Jews of His day. Let me give you some background.

Galilee itself is largely a rugged and hilly backwater region that had been out of the mainstream of Jewish culture and life for many hundreds of years. When Israel split into two kingdoms at the death of King Solomon, Galilee was part of the northern kingdom, which abandoned

the worship of the one true God and was eventually conquered in 721 BC. At that point, the ruling class and urban dwellers were deported, but it seems that the poor were left and continued their subsistence lives.

Later, the southern kingdom was itself conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC, and the inhabitants deported. But eventually, they were allowed to return, and when they did, they rebuilt their temple and compiled the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. They then

centered their government and religion around these five books. But they still had no interaction with the remnants of the northern kingdom who lived in Galilee.

Eventually, both areas came under the dominion of the Greek Seleucids, until the Jews in the area around Jerusalem revolted and won their independence under a Jewish dynasty called the Maccabees. When the Maccabees came to power, they set about conquering the lands around them, and it was about 100 BC that they conquered the area of Galilee and imposed their laws—the laws from the first five books of the Bible—on the land. That’s how recently the Galileans had become integrated into the Jewish religion and way of life.

Clearly, the Jews from the area around Jerusalem didn’t think very highly of the Galileans. They apparently even talked differently, as indicated by the comment to Peter on the night of Jesus’ trial: “You also were with Jesus the Galilean . . . for your accent betrays you.”¹ Maybe even Jesus Himself spoke with an accent that sounded odd to the Judeans.

The chief priests and Pharisees obviously thought the idea of a prophet, let alone the Messiah, coming out of Galilee was ludicrous.

They even scorned one of their own, Nicodemus, for thinking that this could be possible: “Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!”² And it seems that Jesus’ home village was of a particularly poor reputation. John’s Gospel reports one of Jesus’ apostles, Nathanael, saying “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”³

Even the Romans didn’t have a good opinion of the place. The book of Acts notes that a certain Judas from Galilee had started a revolt there before being killed and his followers scattered.⁴ The Romans had also put down a rebellion there around the year Jesus was born, and destroyed Sepphoris, Galilee’s most important city, which was only a short distance from Nazareth.

Many people don’t realize that most of Jesus’ ministry took place in Galilee, and He’s only recorded as going very occasionally into Judea. No wonder He got such a tough reception from many of the cultural and intellectual elite of His land. I’m left to ponder sometimes if I would have been quick to embrace Him and His teachings if I had been around in those days.

But follow Him they did. And not just people from Galilee, but Jews from all over the Mediterranean

world. Just 50 days after He had been ignominiously executed in Jerusalem, thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate an important religious festival and decided that this Galilean was not just a prophet, but also the long-awaited Messiah, and eagerly embraced the fledgling Christian movement. What got into them?

The answer is God got into them in a very significant way. The Christian movement was born. And soon it was not only Jews, but people from the myriad nations of the Roman Empire and beyond who were embracing faith in the *God from Podunk*. It took over 300 years before it was acceptable, even preferable, to be a Christian in many quarters. Yet when you consider that it all began in what could arguably have been called the most insignificant part of the most troublesome province in the Roman world, with a man who preached for about three years and was executed in his thirties as a criminal, it’s astonishing.

SCOTT MACGREGOR IS AN AUTHOR AND COMMENTATOR AND LIVES IN CANADA. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST1THING,⁵ A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■



BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

THE ART OF COMPLIMENTS

MY MUSIC TEACHER WAS OVER 70, kind, old-fashioned, and somewhat fastidious. But he had a way of making you feel special. He would always take you seriously and express interest in your plans and desires for the future. If he asked “How are you?” I came to realize he genuinely wanted an answer beyond “Fine” and would be totally okay with getting a day-by-day layout of your week and what you had done.

Even though I was brash and energetic, he smiled at my reckless statements and overabundance of excitement. He said it showed I was a leader and going places.

He taught me many things, but one of the greatest things I learned from him was how to give a compliment. Here are some of the points that I observed from him:

- **He would give compliments casually, but they would always be personalized and specific.** Nothing nice he said was out of

politeness or societal “duty.” You felt as though he would rather say nothing than something generic or careless.

- **Most of the compliments he gave were an acknowledgment of some effort or positive characteristic that he wanted his students to display.** Even when he complimented an outfit, he would say something that recognized the thought and self-respect that was involved in being well-groomed.
- **He would make complimentary remarks about people, whether they were there to hear it or not.** This was one way that I understood his genuineness and sincerity, because he wasn’t doing it to stroke people’s egos or only to make them feel good about themselves, but because he honestly appreciated something about them or liked something they did.
- **If he heard someone else say something positive about you,**

If you haven’t yet experienced a personal relationship with Jesus, He wants to become a very real part of your life both here and now, and forever in eternity. You can begin that relationship with Him by praying this prayer:

Jesus, please forgive me for all my shortcomings. I open the door to my heart and I invite You into my life. Please fill me with Your love and Holy Spirit, help me get to know You, and guide me in the way of truth. Amen.

he would always pass on what they’d said. On the other hand, I never once heard him say or repeat anything negative.

His secret was that he was simply interested in people and humble enough to take time to notice them. And in doing this, he created a network of people—both peers and pupils—that loved him. He never actually talked about much that wasn’t related to music; he certainly didn’t teach or lecture on anything else—but whether his students became musicians, teachers, doctors, sports players, pastors, or engineers, we all became kinder because of his compliments.

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 VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

BEING RICH TOWARD GOD

JESUS SAID, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”¹ Some people quote that as “Where your heart is, there will your treasure be also.” But that isn’t the way it is recorded in Scripture. The Lord said where your *treasure* is, there will your heart be also.

And Matthew 6:19–21 says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where

your treasure is, there the heart is also.”

I don’t think God puts any premium on poverty, nor do riches shut the door of heaven, though Christ said, “How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.”² Note He said it’s hard for people who *trust* in riches. That’s the key—it’s where you put the trust.

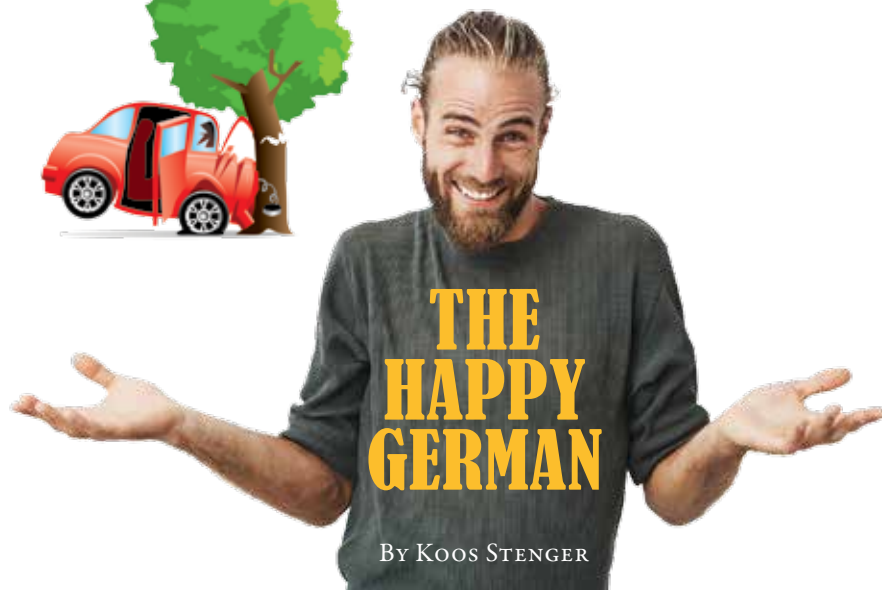
In Luke 12, the rich man with many barns was called a fool because he was not rich toward God, not because he had riches. In calling him a fool, Jesus said, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”³ There’s the crux of the whole matter: “Not rich toward God.”

I’ve been searching my own heart to see if I’m deeply, truly rich toward God. What about you? Are you

putting the emphasis on the right things, eternal things, by having a relationship with Jesus and fulfilling His plan for your life? Or are you occupying all your time and thought with the material? If so, then you’re not being rich toward God. You’re not laying up treasures in heaven. Paul said, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.”⁴

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. ■

1. Matthew 6:21
2. Mark 10:24 KJV
3. Luke 12:20–21 KJV
4. Philippians 3:8 KJV



WE CALLED HIM THE HAPPY GERMAN.

That's because he was from Germany and he claimed he was always happy. It's certainly commendable to have a positive outlook on life, and I've always been encouraged by the words of the apostle Paul, who said he had learned to be content in whatsoever state he found himself in.¹ But I thought the Happy German hadn't quite mastered that art, as his face often registered unhappiness. Still, even then, he'd maintain that he was perfectly happy.

Fine. It wasn't my place to judge his level of happiness, so I just shrugged my shoulders and agreed with him. But the nickname was quickly born and we became friends. Sort of.

All that changed on the day the Happy German wrecked my car.

"Can I borrow your Toyota? Mine is in for repairs, and I urgently need to take care of business."

"Sure. Just be careful," I told him as I handed him the keys.

When he returned later that day, he didn't look happy at all. It was hard to discern the expression on his face. Was it shame or was it a careless smirk? A weak smile formed around his lips while he stammered, "I... eh... backed up into a tree."

My heart skipped a beat. "What happened?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know. Stupid car. My foot slipped off that pedal of yours. Thankfully I'm all right. Could have been a lot worse."

I stared at the car parked in front of our house and gasped. The back fender was completely gone and the area had been transformed into a heap of twisted metal.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "But all of a sudden, that tree was just *there*. But the good news is that the car still drives."

My blood boiled. It wasn't even the fact that the car was wrecked. Obviously, that wasn't good news, but what got to me was his indifferent, happy-go-lucky attitude and that unrepentant smirk on his face when he said "I *would* pay for it if I could... but you know my finances... I am not doing too well right now."

And that was it.

To make a long story short, I did forgive him. Not right away, but eventually. I don't think it mattered much to him either way, but I gathered an important lesson from the whole ordeal, as it dawned on me what repentance really means.

I realized the attitude of indifferent carelessness the Happy German displayed as he asked for forgiveness was the same as how I sometimes approach God when I've made a mistake. How must He feel when I stray and then come to Him with less than anything but utter respect, sincere submission, and genuine repentance? Happily for me, God is always quick to forgive, but I know He expects me to do more than say I'm sorry. "Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life [and put] on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy."²

1. See Philippians 4:11.
2. Ephesians 4:22,24 NLT

KOOS STENGER IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN THE NETHERLANDS. ■



BY ROSANE PEREIRA

FORGIVING AND FORGETTING

I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.—*Isaiah 57:15 NIV*

MY OLDEST SISTER SHEILA HAD A BIG INFLUENCE ON MY LIFE WHEN I WAS YOUNG. She taught me to play the guitar and she used to write sweet melodies of love and hope. She showed me through her example that the wounds of the soul are like the wounds of the skin—they heal naturally.

Eventually, though, I realized that some people heal faster than others. Sometimes, people hold on to their sorrow until it becomes bitterness. They let sad memories dampen their minds and drain them of their joy of living. It's like they keep bumping that bruise, which prevents it from ever healing.

That also happened to me. Once

I had a grudge against someone for a few weeks, until a friend advised me to let it go and start praying for that person. He said: "If you pray for him, you'll soon feel the resentment has gone." I followed that advice, and it really happened! I don't even remember who that person was, or what he did to me, but I remember the advice and have followed it many times since.

My sister was right about the healing of the wounds, but there's a condition: we have to do the forgiving and the forgetting, the "letting go." No matter what bad things happen, God can work them for our good as we love, trust, and follow Him.


The story of Joseph in the Bible is a good illustration of all this. He forgave his brothers after they sold him into slavery for 13 years. In

Genesis 50:20, he says to them: "You planned something bad for me, but God produced something good from it, in order to save the lives of many people, just as he's doing today."¹

Note that God Himself forgives and forgets! Hebrew 8:12 says: "I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."² This principle is at the heart of the Christian message. It's what God did for us when He sent Jesus to die for our sins. If we want to be followers of Jesus, we must receive His love and forgiveness, and then learn to forgive and forget—not only for the good of others, for our own as well!

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

1. CEB
2. NLT



BY SALLY GARCÍA

MY WAR WITH THE MIRROR

MY BODY AND I HAVE BEEN AT WAR FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER. “Voluptuous” was in vogue when I was a teen, but back then, I was as skinny as a bean pole. But by the time “thin” came into style, I had gained a lot of weight. And on and on it has gone for years. I never seem to have the body that matches with the “ideal” being promoted. When I was younger, I wanted to look more mature; now that I am older—well, I wish I looked younger!

All my life, I made discouraging remarks to myself every time I passed a mirror—“My hair never stays combed!” “This dress looks horrible on me.” I wasn’t really conscious that I was having this internal conversation with my image in the mirror,

1. Romans 8:29
2. 1 John 2:6
3. See Matthew 5:16.

but I would just throw a mental dart at myself in passing.

A couple of years ago when I was lamenting my appearance in the mirror, I had a thought, *God needs grandmothers!* And it dawned on me that I look the way I am supposed to for my age and for the life I live. Young people like to meet my husband and me, a couple happily married for well over 40 years and who are at peace with God, themselves, and their fellow human beings. Apparently, our plump faces and smile wrinkles make us look rather jolly!

So it was time to come to grips with the feud I had with my image in the mirror. I decided that instead of throwing insults, I would give me a compliment every time I would pass by “myself”—“Love that gray hair!” “Nice smile!” “I like the earrings!” I was able to finally lighten up and have a good laugh! Especially whenever I

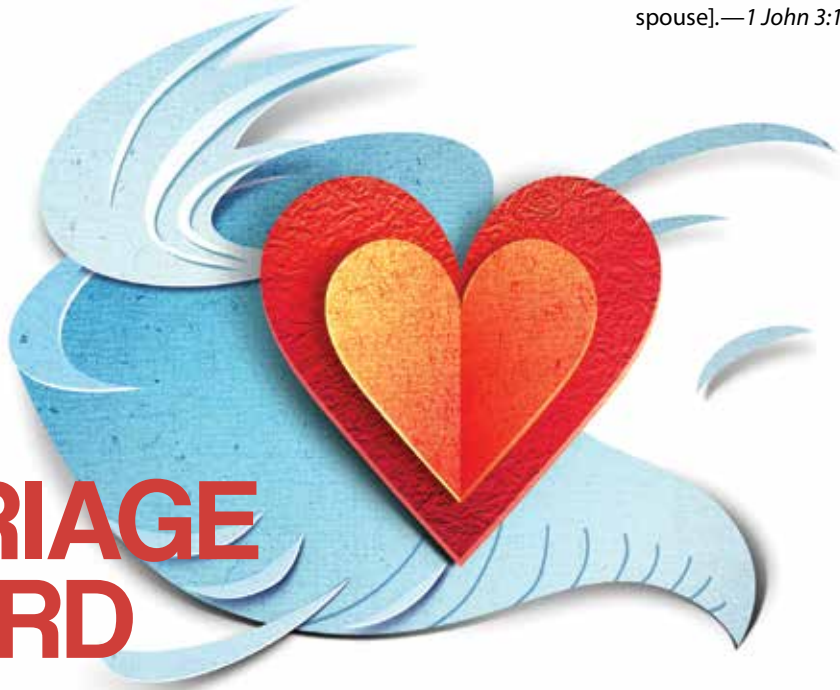
caught a look at myself in my scruffy garden clothes and had to really search for a compliment! But the breakthrough came, and a lifelong bad habit has finally been broken!

Instead of looking in other places for a model to follow, I’m learning to look to God alone to cultivate my spirit and my inward self to be “conformed to the image of Christ.”¹ I take that to mean to “walk just as He walked”² and to let His light shine through me.³

When I relax and smile and have a good laugh, it makes all the wrinkles dance on my face. I’m happy to be the grandmother that God needs, and I hope to spread a bit of His love and light in this confused world. I’m glad I’m me—the way I am, the way He created me.

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

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for [insert name of spouse].—1 John 3:16 NLT



BY MARIE ALVERO

MARRIAGE IS HARD

VALENTINE'S DAY IS COMING UP AND I'M BROWSING THE CARD AISLE LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT CARD TO GIVE MY HUSBAND ON THIS, our 20th Valentine's Day together.

I'm looking for the card that says: Marriage is Hard.

But I must not be Hallmark's target customer, as I can't find that card. They're all way perkier and sweeter than I'm feeling right now. Because, yeah, marriage is hard!

It's a long journey that started with two starry-eyed people, who were totally full of expectations of what their life together would look like and who the other person was. And then, inevitably, came

disappointment. Disappointment turns to resentment. Resentment left unchecked turns to anger.

I know I'm not the only person who has ended up traveling that road and wondering if marriage is supposed to be so hard.

The short answer is no, it's not. Marriage is a beautiful gift designed to illustrate Christ's love for His bride, the church. In many ways, marriage is the ultimate way to walk out your faith and to grow in what it really means to love like Jesus.

The Bible says to love your neighbor. Your closest neighbor is your spouse.

There are 101 tips, tricks, and books to help you have a better

marriage, even a great marriage. But the real kicker is to have a better heart, a more Christlike heart, to put God first. That's the one practical step that transforms a relationship from expectation and disappointment to understanding and joy.

This is what makes our hard marriage also a beautiful one. We are two very flawed people who push each other to seek God first.

Now can I please get a card for that?

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. ■



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

GOD'S PRESENCE

Even if you lost the entire world but still held on to your faith, then you have ultimately lost nothing. If you have faith, no unscalable heights, no uncrossable rivers, no impregnable walls, and no tsunami of economic depression can pull you under or separate you from My love.¹

Faith is the currency of the unseen world. Its exchange rate isn't subject to economic fluctuations or stock market "corrections." Faith's intrinsic value is immeasurable. Faith can change your circumstances, conditions, and your outlook on life. It doesn't disappear in any recession, pandemic, natural disaster, accident, or any other calamity. Faith can lift you up and out of any crisis, debt, or loss, even those of your own doing.

Your faith is securely placed in Me, because I will never let you down. Even when you face setbacks or seemingly insurmountable challenges, I can eclipse all loss and even bring good out of seeming defeat. I love you so much that I have promised that you will receive whatever you ask for—as long as it is good for you and within My will and plan—if you ask Me in faith.

If you would like to experience the inner peace and stability that only I can give, ask and you will receive so that your joy can be complete.²

1. See Romans 8:35, 38–39.

2. See John 16:24.