

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 23 • Issue 3

YOUR TURN TO LOVE

A favor returned

Jolly Roger or Mister Rogers?

A tale of two men

Boiling Stones

Meeting the need



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

BEING THE DIFFERENCE

“A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead...”¹

So begins the parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the best-known stories in the Bible, and perhaps in literature. In the story, various pious Jews pass by the unfortunate traveler but do nothing to help. Finally, a Samaritan, a member of an ethnic and religious group shunned by the Jews in Jesus' time, has compassion on the victim, bandages his wounds, and brings him to an inn, where he promises to cover any expenses required in the man's care.

With the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught that our neighbor is anyone who needs our help, regardless of race, creed, color, nationality, condition, or location. The Gospels list many times when Jesus felt compassion toward the crowds or toward individuals and was moved to help them.

You may have heard the story of how He raised the son of the widow of Nain from the dead. “When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. ‘Don't cry!’ he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. ‘Young man,’ he said, ‘I tell you, get up.’ Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk! And Jesus gave him back to his mother.”²

Luke situates this miracle by telling us that Jesus was preaching in Capernaum one day and that He was in Nain “the day after.” Does that ring a bell? Not for me either. Sometimes the implications of these stories can be lost on modern readers like me.

It turns out that Nain is nearly *50 kilometers* away from Capernaum, with an elevation difference of *400 meters*. That seriously arduous, uphill walk takes 10–12 hours today—on paved roads—so you can imagine the time and effort it must have taken Jesus and His followers. But I suspect His heart was already “overflowing with compassion” for the widow before He even set out. He knew what He was doing and He didn't “just happen” to end up in Nain on that particular day.

“What does love look like?” Saint Augustine asked. “It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. It has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to help the poor and needy.”

The compassionate put feet to their prayers and match kind deeds to their kind words. That's what the Good Samaritan did. That's what Jesus did. And that's what we can each strive to do in our own lives and circles.

1. Luke 10:30

2. Luke 7:13–15 NLT

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OVERCOMING EVIL

WITH GOOD

BY MARIE STORY

IT'S INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE THE VERSE “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”¹ to the Christians in Rome, because there are some obvious similarities between the social climate of first-century Rome and that of much of the world of today.

Evil was rampant in Rome, and its pull was strong. The Roman Empire hadn't become the undisputed ruler of the Western world through compassion, kindness, or humility. Wealth was in the hands of a few, and they used it to control the rest. The rich and powerful lived extravagantly while the masses struggled to survive. Perversions and debauchery were practiced by some and ignored by others.

1. Romans 12:21 NIV
2. John 14:6

Christianity was just one of many religions, and Christ just one more deity. Considering the pantheon of gods that the Romans worshipped, it must have been difficult to convince anyone that Jesus was “*the way, the truth, and the life.*”²

Starting to sound familiar? It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the evil and the suffering in the world. Every day we hear about another horrible crime or injustice being committed. The media provides a seemingly endless feed of violence, sorrow, disaster, and evil, and it seems that life has lost its sanctity in the minds of many. What can we do about a world that at times seems to be overcome with evil?

This was the same dilemma that the Christians in Rome faced, and Paul's counsel to them rings true today. “Overcome evil with good.” If a dish is dirty, being angry about the situation does nothing to fix it. Neither does trying to ignore it. The

only solution is to expose that dirty dish to the power of a little soap and water.

If a room is dark, you can curse the darkness or whine over how unpleasant it is—or you can flip the light switch or open the curtains and let some light in. It's the same with society's evils. We can get discouraged, angry, or depressed—“overcome by evil”—or we can be a force for good through our personal example and sharing the light of the gospel with others.

Not every dirty dish will be cleaned, and not every darkened heart will be enlightened, but we can each do our part day by day, person by person, decision by decision.

MARIE STORY LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA, WHERE SHE WORKS AS A FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR AND VOLUNTEERS AS A COUNSELOR AT A LOCAL HOMELESS SHELTER. ■

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling broadly and looking upwards. She is holding hands with another person whose arm is visible from the top left. The background shows a rocky coastline with a blue body of water and a cloudy sky. The image is partially obscured by an orange banner at the bottom.

BY MARIA FONTAINE

HEAVENLY ENCOURAGEMENT

I WAS COLD. Having to get out of my nice, warm bed early on a brisk morning didn't seem like an ideal way to start the day.

I was tired. I hadn't slept well the night before.

I was hungry. I couldn't eat anything until after my blood tests later that day.

I was busy. I had articles to write and letters to answer.

And I especially was reluctant to go out for medical appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In short, I'm embarrassed to say that I was being anything *but*

thankful for the wonderful day which the Lord had made. As I got into the car, it took a significant effort to squeeze out the words, "—And God, please make me a blessing," since I wasn't thinking seriously about being a blessing, but more about myself.

The first stop was at the lab, where there was a long line waiting outside because only two people could enter at a time. My friend who had driven me there offered to stand in line for me, while I stayed in the car where I would be warmer.

As I watched the long line of people, I could see that they too looked

tired, weak, cold, and hungry.—And they also were not too happy to be there! I felt God speaking to my heart and helping me to feel compassion for these poor people, many of whom probably didn't know Jesus.

While I have my problems and challenges, I have Jesus, and I could pray, not only for myself, but for them too. Prayer takes effort, but I know that it can help any situation, no matter how big or small. So, I closed my eyes to pray.

Suddenly, I heard a knock on the car window. Surprised, I opened my eyes and I saw a woman smiling



MENT

sweetly. I rolled down the window and she explained that there was an empty chair beside where my friend was standing in line, and that I could sit in it if I wanted to. I thanked her, but said that I thought maybe I should stay inside the car for a little bit longer where it was warmer.

She smiled and went off to help some other people. By this time, I was very interested in what else she was doing. I could see that she seemed to be engaging with the people in the line, obviously trying to find chairs for some of them and trying to help however she could.

She kept returning to one young woman who she seemed to be with, but after a few moments she was again walking along the line. My impression was that she was trying to encourage people and cheer them up. This woman was smiling and looked very energetic and happy, and I decided that I would give her a gospel tract when I would return to my place in line.

But by the time I got out of the car and returned to the line, the woman had already gone into the lab. Fortunately, I caught her on her way out and was able to share a few words with her. I offered her the tract, saying, “Here’s something for you. I appreciated your offer of the chair and your encouragement and cheerfulness, and I’m sure the others did as well.”

I added, “You seem to have a real gift from God.” I expected her to look a bit perplexed or perhaps a bit embarrassed at this, but she quickly responded, “Oh yes, I believe that.” There wasn’t a chance to talk for long, because it was my turn to go in, but I was so happy that I could give her that tract. It was able to express what I had no time to say.

Later, we stopped at the dentist office to pick up an X-ray. We again had to wait a while, and there were several others at the desk or waiting for their appointments. So I was able to say a few brief words of encouragement to several of them.

While there isn’t a whole lot you can say to someone when you just have a minute or two with them, God can give you a little thought or question that you can express to encourage them and lift their spirits. Whatever you say to someone that shows interest in them can cheer up their day. Encouragement almost always lifts the spirits of those receiving it.

By the time we began heading home, I must say I was feeling a lot better and the previous grumpiness was totally gone.

God often draws our attention in all sorts of ways to individuals or small groups of people He wants us to talk to or give a tract to. We may have our own set of appointments planned out, but He sometimes has *His* own set of appointments for us to keep as well.

He will provide effective opportunities for us to share His love and message, not because we just happen to be there, but because He wants to use us to touch someone’s heart with His Spirit. Let’s make Jesus happy by doing our part to encourage and guide others to Him.

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



BY KEITH PHILLIPS

EXCHANGE OF YOKES

I HAD READ THAT PASSAGE FROM THE BIBLE I DON'T KNOW HOW MANY TIMES, and I memorized it years ago. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."¹ Then I read something that helped me see those verses in a new light.

Philip Yancey writes, "I used to believe that Christianity solved problems and made life easier. Increasingly, I believe that my faith *complicates* life, in ways it *should* be complicated. As a Christian, I cannot *not* care about the environment, about homelessness and poverty, about racism and religious persecution, about injustice and violence. God does not give me that option."

1. Matthew 11:28–30

2. Philip Yancey, *Reaching for the Invisible God* (Zondervan, 2000), 93–94

3. Matthew 22:37–39

Yancey goes on to quote that old familiar passage, which he explains this way: "Jesus offers comfort, but the comfort consists of taking on a new burden, His own burden. Jesus offers a peace that involves new turmoil, a rest that involves new tasks."²

What new tasks? Jesus summed them up when He summed up the Christian faith: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself"³—our "neighbor" being anyone we are in a position to help. Loving others as much as we love ourselves doesn't come naturally and seldom is easy, but it's one of the keys to happiness, fulfillment, and success in life.

Take Jesus' yoke. Give Him yours. It's the best trade you'll ever make.

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. ■

WHILE WE CAN

I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy.
—Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

Only during the few years of this life are we given the privilege of serving each other and Christ. We will have heaven forever, but have only a short time for service here, and therefore must not waste the opportunity.
—Sadhu Sundar Singh (1889–1933)

Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.—Martin Luther (1483–1546)



If you'd stop to think about it, you'd probably be surprised at how many thoughtful little things you could find to do for others that would cost almost nothing and take almost no time. Become a master of the five-minute favor.—Shannon Shayler

BY UDAY PAUL

FREE COURSE



“THE WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND!”¹ the apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy while he was in prison in Rome awaiting his execution. After the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64, it was rumored that Nero had ordered the fire to build a new and grander city. To divert attention from himself, Nero accused the Christians of arson instead and persecuted them greatly. Paul was arrested again and sentenced to death.

These words of Paul came to my mind during the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when I had to spend a lot of time indoors. I took heart from the fact that Paul wrote his second letter to Timothy and four other letters in the New Testament while he was first under house arrest, then in prison. Paul was filled with a passion to tell others about Jesus, and he didn't let his

physical circumstances limit him in pursuing his goal.

I was grateful that the internet was still working during the COVID lockdown and I could reach out to others using technology. I noticed that with the turmoil and uncertainty the pandemic had created, many people were looking for answers and were more receptive to the gospel message than before. I asked God for guidance in how to bring these people closer to Him, and He showed me to begin online sessions of prayer and reading God's Word for those who were isolated and not having much contact with others. It was also a good time for me to renew my own spiritual life.

Paul also prayed that “the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified.”² God's Word will always move freely and accomplish its purposes no matter what the situation in the world is, just like Christianity spread rapidly

throughout the Roman Empire in the face of the most brutal and inhuman persecutions.

UDAY PAUL IS A FREELANCE WRITER, VOLUNTEER, AND TEACHER BASED IN INDIA. ■



“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ... You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

—Jesus, *Matthew 5:13–16 NIV*

1. 2 Timothy 2:9 ESV

2. 2 Thessalonians 3:1 KJV



JOLLY ROGER OR MISTER ROGERS?

TO KNOW WHERE SOMETHING IS, you often have to find out where it ain't. This contrast jumped out at me recently while viewing two docudramas. One was *The Lost Pirate Kingdom*, about the "Golden Age of Piracy" in the early 1700s, and the other was *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, starring Tom Hanks as Fred Rogers, the Presbyterian minister who created and hosted the preschool TV series *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* from 1968 to 2001.

First, let's talk about buccaneers. People can't seem to get enough of pirate stories. Their vicious cruelty and hard life are often overlooked, and these adventurers are romanticized as being Robin Hood figures who rob the rich to share with the poor. And it does seem that many

pirates justified their violence by painting themselves as avengers of injustices: "They [the rich] rob the poor under the cover of law, and we plunder the rich under the protection of our own courage."¹ Despite these altruistic justifications, they were on the whole cutthroats, murderers, and pillagers.²

One of the most successful pirates was Sam Bellamy (1689–1717), who was rated by *Forbes* magazine as the top-earning pirate, with a net worth of 142.5 million dollars. At the age of 28, just one year into his career as a pirate, he had plundered 53 ships, and he had just captured the *Whydah*, a top-of-the-line English slave ship that had unloaded 312 slaves and was weighted down with a fortune in gold, indigo, ivory, and

other precious trade goods. His vessel and another two that he had taken were sailing low in the water along the Eastern coast as he made his way to see his love, Mary Hallett, who lived in Eastham, Massachusetts.

At this point, the weather turned, and soon the sky split with bolts of lightning. Rain and fog made visibility impossible, and worst of all, the squall winds shifted, pushing the vessels toward the treacherous shore and high cliffs of Cape Cod. Thirty-foot waves flooded the decks and washed away anything that wasn't secured.

After several desperate hours of the crew trying everything they could to save themselves, the *Whydah*

lifted high up on the waves and then slipped backward, stern first, and was smashed to smithereens at the foot of the cliffs. Then the undertow sucked it all back to sea. Samuel Bellamy and some 160 other men had perished.

So where are these vast riches now? In 1984, after sleeping in the deep for 267 years, the wreck was discovered. Today some 100,000 artifacts from the wreck can be seen at the Expedition Whydah Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Recovery and conservation of the treasure is still ongoing.³

A stark contrast to Samuel Bellamy's existence can be seen in the life and work of Fred Rogers, who came from my home town of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. On an Easter visit home, Fred saw a children's entertainment TV program where people were throwing pies in each other's faces. Being the eternal optimist, he was sure TV could be so much more than that! It was a moment of revelation that steered his life in a new direction.

Rogers considered that he had a mandate to help children develop empathy, understanding, and kindness. His programs dealt with difficult subjects that children face,

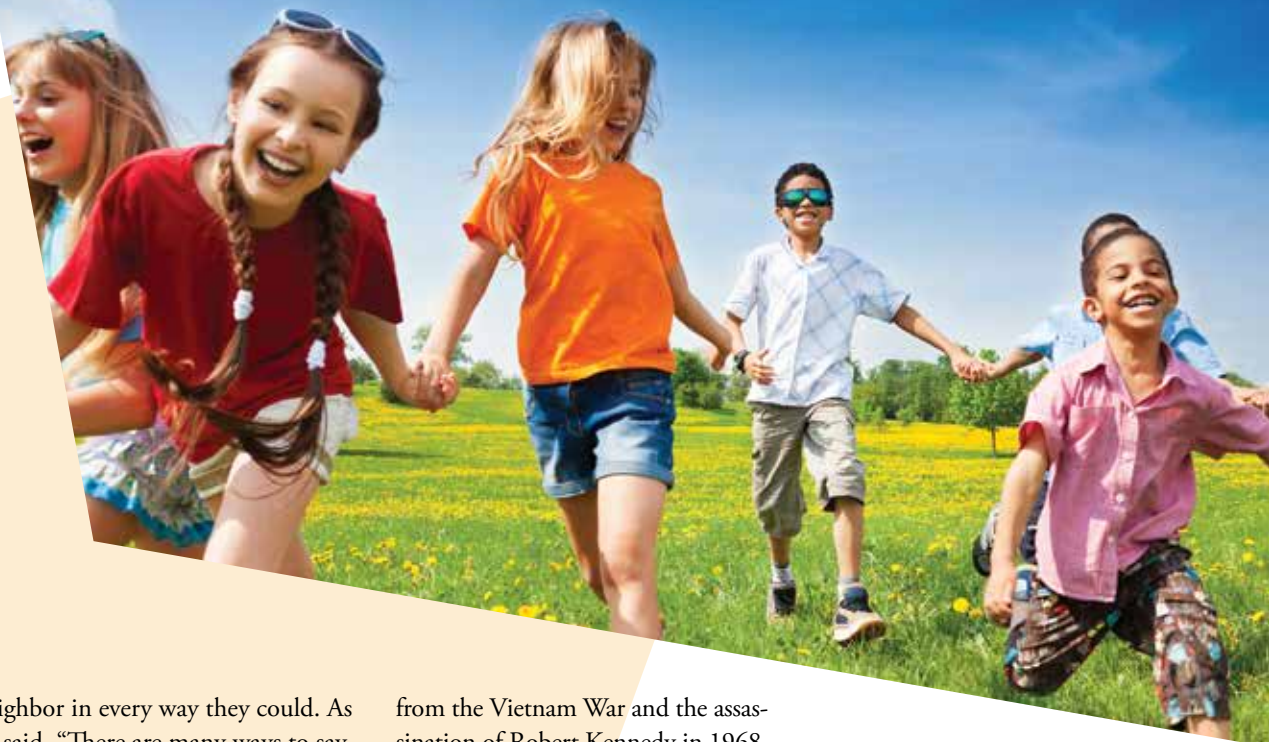
such as bullying, recomposed families, and anger management through controlling negative emotions and nurturing positive ones.

He was a Christian minister but didn't preach on his show, preferring to share God's love through his example—a sample rather than a sermon. Dwight L. Moody called it “the gospel bound in shoe leather”—and in Fred's case, it was “the gospel in a red sweater.”

Throughout the years, he remained deeply committed to the values he read in the New Testament. He emulated Jesus' example of welcoming children as they are and encouraging them to love self and

1. Samuel Bellamy speaking to Captain Beer, who was the commander of a ship that he had just captured.
2. Editor's note: “Jolly Roger” is the traditional English name for the flags flown to identify a pirate ship about to attack, during the early 18th century. Courtesy of Wikipedia.
3. Editor's note: You can take a virtual tour of the Whydah Museum at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJqii1-2_xs.
4. Robert Thompson of Syracuse University





neighbor in every way they could. As he said, “There are many ways to say I love you.”

Fred’s personality off screen was no different than the character and puppets that he portrayed on his program. For many years, he personally answered each of the 50–100 letters he received every day from his young viewers. He worked with prisons to create child-friendly spaces for family visitation, sat on hospital boards to minimize trauma in children’s care, visited people who were sick or dying, and wrote countless letters to the lonely.

In times of tragedy, people often looked to Rogers’ advice for comfort. “He took American childhood—and I think Americans in general—through some very turbulent and trying times:

5. Editor’s note: You can watch an episode of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e19QPakOGb0>.
6. Caitlin Gibson, *The Washington Post*

from the Vietnam War and the assassination of Robert Kennedy in 1968 to the 9/11 attacks in 2001.”⁴

One of his key concepts was that it’s okay to have all kinds of emotions, but that negative feelings are never an excuse for bad behavior. If we get angry, we can learn to face it and share our feelings with our loved ones so that we don’t hurt ourselves or others. Rogers called it “growing on the inside.”⁵

Fred Rogers passed away in 2003 at the age of 74, but his legacy still lives on in many ways today: “Rogers became a source for parenting advice. He was a timeless oracle against a backdrop of ever-shifting parenting philosophies and cultural trends.”⁶

Two lives, years apart and poles apart in their impact. They give us pause to ask ourselves what will be our legacy. I wonder what Rogers would have to say to us today. No doubt what he already said:

“It’s not the honors and the prizes and the fancy outsides of life which

ultimately nourish our souls. It’s the knowing that we can be trusted, that we never have to fear the truth, that the bedrock of our very being is good stuff. As human beings, our job in life is to help people realize how rare and valuable each one of us really is, that each of us has something that no one else has or ever will have, something inside that is unique to all time. It’s our job to encourage each other to discover that uniqueness and to provide ways of developing its expression. We all have different gifts, so we all have different ways of saying to the world who we are.”

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

A LIFE MULTIPLIED

AUTHOR UNKNOWN



THE REV. H. MERRIWEATHER, a missionary of the Sri Lanka and India General Mission, was visiting the United States, and the head office of the mission asked him to call upon a certain woman who supported a full-time missionary. On arrival in the city, he made his way to her address, and was somewhat surprised by the ordinary type of home found there. He had expected to find a wealthy suburb with pretentious buildings. This woman supported a full-time missionary, and it was natural to assume that she was a lady of means. Had he made a mistake?

He knocked at the door, and was greeted by a motherly old lady who beamed upon him. Even as the missionary introduced himself, his eyes were examining the room. The furniture was spotlessly clean, and yet it could hardly be described

as expensive. This was the abode of an ordinary working woman.

Ultimately his curiosity gained the upper hand, and he asked how could she—a woman with meagre means—manage to give so much money to the mission? Mutely he indicated the mediocre furnishings of the apartment, and his eloquent silence suggested that the task was beyond her capabilities.

The old lady was greatly amused as she said, “But Mr. Merriweather, I support *four* missionaries. I have one in India, one in Africa, one in China, and one in South America.”

Mr. Merriweather was shocked. “You have *four* people preaching for you? How on earth do you manage?”

Her lovely old face became grave; only her eyes smiled as she explained how she had always believed in giving one-tenth of her income to God. Then God had blessed her, for

Stop collecting treasures for your own benefit on earth, where moth and rust eat them and where thieves break in and steal them. Instead, collect treasures for yourselves in heaven, where moth and rust don’t eat them and where thieves don’t break in and steal them. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

—Matthew 6:19–21 CEB

someone had bequeathed some property to her, which greatly increased her income, and consequently her “Lord’s Fund” became larger. “Come over to the window, Mr. Merriweather, and I will show you my houses.”

She indicated a row of magnificent houses, and said, “What does an old lady like me want with such big houses? I have all I require in this little home, and the rent from those places supports my missionaries. I knew I would never be able to preach the gospel overseas, so I determined others should do it for me.”

Mr. Merriweather concluded: “Some day at the Judgment Seat of Christ, Merriweather the missionary will stand beside this kind helper from America, and I am quite sure her reward will far outshine mine. She knew how to give cheerfully. And the Lord, who loves a cheerful giver, blessed her.” ■



YOUR TURN TO LOVE

BY ALEX PETERSON

DO YOU HAVE PARENTS, grandparents, or other loved ones who are suffering from any of the long-term troubles that occur naturally in old age? Here are five ways that you can give back the love and support you received from them:

1. EMPATHIZE.

Put yourself in their place. You may think you have problems, but if you stop to think about what it might be like to be their age, that would probably give you a greater appreciation for what many elderly people go through.

Many seniors no longer have the physical capacity to do many of the things they've always done, which can be discouraging and lead to feelings of uselessness. Some are not able to see or hear or even eat or walk on their own, so they feel ashamed, humiliated, stripped of their dignity. Others are in almost continual pain or discomfort. Due to their weakened immune system, even minor ailments can turn into serious problems. Their bones are more fragile and their organs more delicate, and when those are broken or damaged, they require more time to heal.

Depending on their circumstances, they may worry about what will happen if their condition worsens and

they don't have anyone to take care of them, or they may dread becoming a burden to others.

Understanding and empathy go a long way in easing those hardships and alleviating those fears.

2. TAKE AN INTEREST.

Some seniors may not be as strong or sharp as they once were, but the intangibles that matter most, those personal qualities that make them the unique people they are have not diminished. It is often in the later years that qualities such as love, thoughtfulness, loyalty, humility, humor, optimism, and wisdom come to full fruition.

That makes seniors some of the most fascinating people in the world. So does the fact that they have lived through times in history that those who are younger can never experience firsthand. Take the time to unearth their latent treasures, and you'll be surprised at what you'll find. They may even surprise themselves.

3. SHOW LOVE AND APPRECIATION.

Sometimes simply knowing that we are loved can make all the difference in how we view and deal with our present circumstances. Seniors knowing that they are appreciated for past efforts can also help them put their

lives in perspective and counter feelings of regret over failures and shortcomings, both real and imagined.

Some of the saddest words ever spoken are heard at funerals: “I hope he knew how much he meant to me,” or, “I wish I’d told her more often how much I loved her.” Show love and appreciation while you can.

4. HELP THEM STAY ACTIVE.

Numerous studies have shown that physical activity slows the aging process, which results in both prolonged life and improved quality of life. Conversely, a sedentary lifestyle increases the chances of age-related disease and premature death. Even a daily short walk in the fresh air is beneficial.

Other studies have shown that intellectual stimulation can bolster the mind and stave off memory loss in the same way that physical exercise strengthens and protects the body.

Asked why they aren’t more active physically and intellectually, some seniors say it’s because they don’t have anyone with whom they can exercise or engage in mentally challenging activities. In the absence of someone with whom to engage in those activities, seniors need encouragement to do what they can to invest in their health and well-being.

5. PRAY FOR THEM.

Our prayers can make a difference in the lives of others. The fact that you pray for others shows that you’re concerned about their happiness and well-being, and this puts you in a position to better understand God’s loving plan for their lives and how you can help bring it to pass. When you pray for someone to not be lonely, for example, God may give you some ideas as to how you can help alleviate that loneliness—perhaps a visit, an afternoon out together, a phone call, email, or card. ■



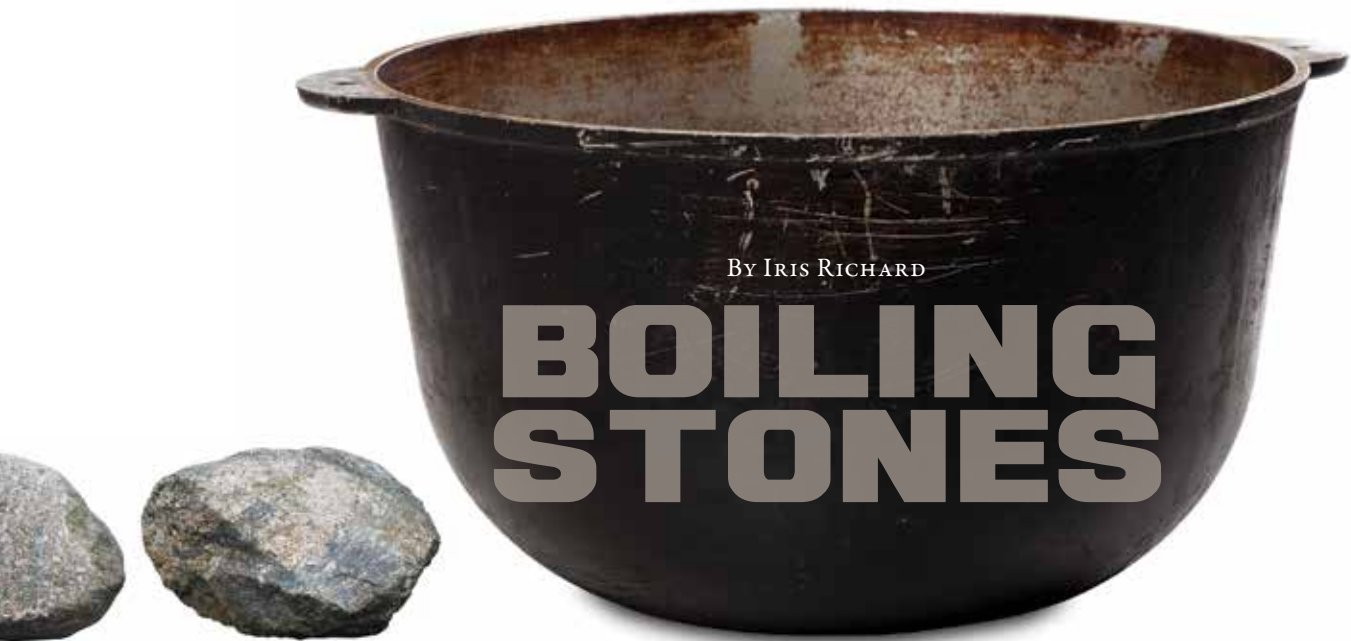
GREATER LOVE

Jesus said, “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”¹

Greater love means taking the initiative to reach out; to feel what the other person is feeling; to dry their tears; to bear their burdens; to feel their afflictions; to minister to those who are sick and nurse them back to health; to listen with a loving, open ear to those who need to pour out; to be a caring and understanding friend to those who need a friend; to pray for those in need; to let their heartaches be your heartaches.

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.—*Leo Buscaglia (1924–1998)*

1. John 15:13 NLT



BY IRIS RICHARD

BOILING STONES

BY MAY 2020, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic had created serious conditions for thousands of families who live in informal settlements in Kenya and rely on day-labor jobs. Along with the fear of contracting the virus, many people also had to deal with the very real threats of hunger and even starvation.

To make matters worse, an unusually large seasonal rainfall brought on flash floods in many regions of the country, causing landslides and loss of lives and homes, and bringing waterborne disease.

I received a call from a friend who shared a story she had seen on television of a widow with four small children who live in a rural coastal village. The children were lying on a straw mat whimpering, while the mother was busy cooking a brown watery brew on a tiny charcoal stove.

1. 1 John 5:14-15

She turned to the camera, saying that she was cooking stones since they had nothing to eat that day. She hoped that her children would think that she was preparing dinner and that they would stop crying and go to sleep while waiting.

That night, sleep evaded my friend as images of the poor mother cooking stones for her starving children kept scrolling through her mind. The next morning, she commissioned her lawyer to find the location of this poor woman. He did find her, and my friend sent some money via M-Pesa (a local mobile phone-based money transfer service) to help this poor family.

The woman called my friend, crying and thanking her profusely, saying over and over that God had heard her prayers and had rescued her children through my friend's gift.

Even though most of us have been spared from hunger during the pandemic, it has been a serious

challenge for many. However, just as God answered the plea of this poor mother, we too can have the confidence that He will answer our petitions. "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us: And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of Him."¹ And He may work through us to answer someone else's prayer, as He did with my friend.

During challenging times, we encounter desperation almost daily around the globe, often simply around the corner. Some people are in need of a meal, others of a kind word. What a difference we can make as followers of Christ by sharing His love with those in need!

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

BY MARIE ALVERO

TRUE JUSTICE



TRUE JUSTICE STARTS WITH ONE TRUTH: every human is made in the image of God. That is what gives us worth. This equalizes us across all the divides of race, gender, ability, disability, religion, politics, socioeconomics, rank, and education. Isn't that a list of hot topics!

There is a lot of messaging implying that people of faith have an impaired sense of justice, that believers subscribe to a worldview that caters to the privileged and excludes the weak or the underserved. Not true.

We are told that nature favors the strong, the survival of the fittest. This logic can be used to justify all kinds

of atrocities and to condone greed, abuse, and manipulation. All you need to do is simply be stronger than the other fellow.

Jesus turned that logic on its head with the Sermon on the Mount, where He said, "Blessed are the meek."¹ Or when He said to let the children crowd around Him, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.² How about when He took upon Himself the weight of humanity's sin and punishment and died for us? He was the strongest, but He let Himself be put to death. The weak, the broken, the lost have value to God, because they bear His image.

The conversation around social justice is so loud right now. It's easy to get confused, and even for sincere believers to disagree on the answer to the "What Would Jesus Do?"

START HERE

You can make a difference in others' lives, but Jesus in you can make a bigger difference. If you haven't done so yet, you can receive Jesus right now by praying a simple prayer like this:

Jesus, I believe in You and invite You into my life as my Savior and constant companion. Please forgive me for the wrong things I've done. Fill me with the Holy Spirit, and help me learn more about You through reading the Bible. Amen.

question. A good starting point is to remember that we are all equal in God's sight.

History shows that no matter what race, religion, culture, or gender has power, we are all equally capable of evil. What's really at the heart of the injustice and oppression we see in the world is simply the sinful nature of all humankind. Hearts need to change, and it starts with me and you. "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."³

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1. Matthew 5:5
2. See Matthew 19:14.
3. Micah 6:8 NIV



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

GIVING TO OTHERS

Embrace new opportunities to give. Your giving muscle easily grows flabby through lack of use. Try to find something to give every single day—whether a smile, a compliment, your time, a listening ear, a good meal, an item you don't need, or a kind word. There is always something you can share or give to others.

Don't be content with what you gave from your heart yesterday. See each day as a fresh new opportunity to give as much as you can.

Even simple acts of kindness and care can go a long way in bringing My love and blessings into the lives of others. Reach out in the ways that you can and drop a little of My heavenly sunshine into the lives of those you come in contact with today. The love you give is not wasted or unnoticed. Every small deed and kind action makes a difference and is a part of letting your light shine so that others will be drawn to Me.

Pour out My love; give it freely to those around you. Give it in encouragement, in praise, in lending a helping hand wherever you can. Tell someone today how much you appreciate them. Let them know how special they are. Everyone is special to Me, and you can help them to experience My love.