

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 23 • Issue 5

GOD'S ANSWERS

Yes, no ... later

Failing Forward

The surprising path
to success

Rummaging

A trip down memory
lane

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My journey to health



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE FULL LIFE

One day, somebody asked Jesus to arbitrate in a legal dispute between him and his brother. Jesus wasn't interested in getting involved in their squabbles over an inheritance, but He did tell a story about a farmer at harvest time.

The harvest had been exceptional and this farmer found himself with more crops to store than his barns could hold. Without hesitation, he decided to tear down his existing barns and build bigger ones in their place. He swelled with pride and said to himself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"¹

But then he heard a still, small voice: "You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?"²

The farmer in this parable led a life that would have seemed successful and meaningful to everyone who looked at him. But Jesus pointed out that everything the farmer owned was temporary, and he would soon discover that he had nothing at all.

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the titular character comes to a similar bleak realization. In Act 5, Scene 5, he has just heard that the queen is dead and he knows his own death is imminent. He delivers his famous soliloquy: "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more. It is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury / Signifying nothing."

Like the farmer in Jesus' parable, all Macbeth's successes have no eternal value, and at the end of his road, he can't find lasting meaning in any of his actions.

Everyone wonders if their life has meaning, and if so, how to find it. It's a question that is sometimes asked in despair, sometimes out of cynicism, and often out of sincere curiosity and a desire to have meaningful goals and guidance in life.

Jesus understood this basic need of humankind for meaning and purpose, and He gave the secret in a comment after He'd finished the parable about the farmer: "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."³

This issue of *Activated* is all about the things that matter in life, and particularly, how to build that relationship with God. I hope you enjoy it.

1. Luke 12:19 NLT
2. Luke 12:20 NLT
3. Luke 12:21 NLT

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A WORK IN PROGRESS

BY KEITH PHILLIPS



ONE INDELIBLE MEMORY FROM MY CHILDHOOD IS OF A BOY ABOUT MY AGE WALKING ON CRUTCHES. Each time he took a step with his right foot, his left leg swung limply a few inches off the ground. He wore mismatched brown leather shoes, and the left was noticeably smaller than the right. “Polio,” my mother explained when the boy was out of earshot. “His short leg has stopped growing.” “Will it ever catch up?” I asked. “No,” she said, “the damage is permanent.” I imagined how that boy must have felt, knowing that his body would never be quite whole.

Most of us can thank God for two healthy legs. He also equipped us with two foundational pillars for life, and those are even more important to our overall well-being—“who we are,” which is our identity in Christ, and “what we do,” our character and our calling. As long as both are built on the right foundation and develop at a steady rate, our lives have symmetry and balance. But if we concentrate on one to the neglect of the other, we lose that balance. And if it is “who we are” that gets neglected, which is often the case, we can stop growing emotionally and spiritually as we should.

Fortunately, unlike physical handicaps caused by polio and other crippling diseases, we can always work at bringing our lives back into

Good habits are not made on birthdays, nor Christian character at the new year. The vision may dawn, the dream may waken, the heart may leap with a new inspiration on some mountaintop, but the test, the triumph, is at the foot of the mountain, on the level plain. The workshop of character is everyday life. The uneventful and commonplace hour is where the battle is won or lost.

—Maltbie Davenport Babcock

proper balance, and God is always happy to work with us toward that end. In fact, He wants to help us reach our full potential and become the people He knows we can be.

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. ■



Forward to SUCCESS

MANY OF GOD'S PROMISES ARE CONDITIONAL, requiring some initial action on our part. Once we begin to obey, He will begin to bless us. Great things were promised to Abraham, but not one of them could have been obtained had he waited in Chaldea. He had to leave his home, friends, and country, travel unfamiliar paths, and press on in unwavering obedience in order to receive the promises. The ten lepers Jesus healed were told to show themselves to the priest, and “as they went, they were cleansed.” If they had waited to see the cleansing come to their bodies before leaving, they would never have seen it. God was waiting to heal them, and the moment their faith began to work, the blessing came.

When the Israelites were entrapped by Pharaoh’s pursuing army at the Red Sea, they were commanded to “go forward.” No longer was it their

duty to wait, but to rise up from bended knees and “go forward” with heroic faith. Years later the Israelites were commanded to show their faith again by beginning their march over the Jordan while the river was at its highest point. They held the key to unlock the gate into the Land of Promise in their own hands, and the gate would not begin to turn on its hinges until they had approached and unlocked it. The key was faith.

We are destined to fight certain battles, and we think we can never be victorious and conquer our enemies. Yet as we enter the conflict, One comes who fights by our side. Through Him we are “more than conquerors.” If we had waited in fear and trembling for our helper to come before we would enter the battle, we would have waited in vain. God is waiting to pour out His richest blessings on you. “Go forward” with bold

confidence and take what is yours. “I have begun to deliver ... Now begin to conquer and possess.”

—*J. R. Miller (1840–1912)* ■



When I look back over every struggle, heartache, disappointment, failure, and moment of fear, I recognize that God has been with me through it all. And I know that He will continue to be with me. There is no promise in Scripture that our lives will be free from pain or that everything will always go smoothly. But there is the promise that He is always with us, even in the darkest storms of our lives. We can find some peace in the middle of the hardest experiences because He is there in the middle of the storm. I can’t imagine living my life without the truth of that promise.—*Ryan Stevenson*



LESS IS MORE

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

Your body is the baggage you must carry through life. The more excess baggage, the shorter the trip.
—Arnold H. Glasow (1905–1998)

ONE DAY I WAS OUT AND SAW A NEW ELECTRONIC SCALE THAT TAKES A PERSON'S WEIGHT, correlates it with his or her height, and plots a graph that shows whether that person is underweight, the correct weight, overweight, or obese.

The people selling the scale were eager for me to try it, so I did. To my horror, the heartless thing pronounced me obese. OBESE! What were those slim, trim salespeople snickering at? I had a clear mental picture of what "obese" looked like, and I didn't fit it! Or did I?

When I got home, I considered the evidence. Yes, my trousers had become so tight that when I sat down, I had to loosen the belt. But at my age, I reasoned, it was normal to fill out a little. I went shopping

for larger trousers, but when the first store didn't carry my new size, I was forced to face reality. As I reflected on the matter, I was reminded that the Bible says our bodies are "the temple of God."¹ Clearly, my temple was due for remodeling.

I read on the subject, and the solution seemed pretty straightforward. If I wanted to lose weight, I needed to eat less and exercise more.

Easier said than done. I like food, and as everyone knows, it's hard to give up something you like. The crux of my problem, I realized, was that even though I'd reached middle age, my servings were still the size of a teenager's. I didn't need to cut back on the enjoyment of eating, only the size of my meals.

My goal was to lose 25 kg (55 lb) in order to get back to the "normal zone." I bought a scale and kept track of my weekly progress, which encouraged me as I began to shed weight.

I also adopted a few slogans to keep me on track: "Eat to live; don't live to eat" helped me eat smaller portions. "It's okay to feel hungry" helped me break the habit of eating something the moment my stomach began to growl. "A day without panting is a day without progress" helped me fight the other giant—exercise. Getting in the daily exercise habit was hard at first, but eventually I began to look forward to it. "Healthy living means healthy lifestyle choices" reminded me that losing weight and then keeping the weight off would require a long-term commitment to eating better and exercising more.

A few months down the line, I'm still a work in progress (15 kg off—10 more to go), but I feel much better already.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST² IN GERMANY. ■

1. 1 Corinthians 3:16

2. <http://elixirmime.com>

BY WILLIAM B. McGRATH

GOD'S ANSWERS

CHRISTIAN AUTHOR HENRY W. FROST, who worked with the China Inland Mission, wrote a book on healing titled *Miraculous Healing*, first published in 1931. Although it was written nearly a century ago, the book is still considered by many to be an excellent resource on the topic of miraculous healing. The book not only contains detailed accounts of individuals who received healing, but it also includes accounts of others who had made all the same preparations and seemed just as worthy, but who did not receive the physical healing that they had requested.

What I find most interesting is that many, if not all, of those who were not given the physical healing testify to the fact that they received something *else* of great value in their spiritual lives. Sometimes it came in the way of a special experience with God's love, or some other break-

through in their desire for close fellowship with Him. It brings to light how God always answers a sincere, seeking soul in some way, as it is promised in His Word: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."¹

For many years, I asked God for something repeatedly. And I shared my heart with Him about it several times as it seemed to pop up over and over. *Why should so many others have what I longed for, yet not I?* I wondered. I also shared with Him that I thought my need was not really too selfish. *Couldn't You please help with just this one thing?* I would try to politely insist. Yet His reply seemed to be an ongoing silence.

Looking back, it seems to me that He had plenty that He wanted to teach me, and I had plenty that I



needed to learn. God knows our hidden thoughts and all about our inner being. His concern for us is one reason He may choose not to grant certain answers to our prayers. I needed to grow to trust Him more, to be more grateful for all I *did* have, and to be more patient. As it says in Psalm 131, I needed to learn to calm and quiet myself, like a weaned child with its mother, happy for the closeness without the gifts.

There have been and are many saintly invalids, paralytics, disabled, shut-ins, and people who never go to a mission field, but theirs is the mission field of prayer. These same unnoticed people can

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1. James 4:8
 2. See Isaiah 61:3.
 3. See Romans 11:33.



experience God's grace in an exceptional way that overrides their apparent disability, even in the face of what appears to so many to be an impossible condition to bear. Despite their circumstances, God's love can impart to them an inner beauty that shines brightly, even out of the ashes of derailed hopes and aspirations.²

How like God to move and work among us in ways that are past finding out!³ If we could figure it all out, such as why He heals some and not others, then we could simply follow that orderly set of stipulations and then be sure to obtain the petition we desired. We would have successfully squeezed God into a box. But that will never happen.

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In Him is found
the cure for care, a balm
for bereavement, a healing
for our hurts, and a sufficiency
for our insufficiency. And the life
He would have us lead is one
of joy and fulfillment.

—Billy Graham
(1918–2018)

To many, Jesus Christ is only a person, a subject for a painting, a heroic theme for a pen, a beautiful form for a statue and a thought for a song; but to those who have heard His voice, who have felt His pardon, who have received His benediction, He is music, warmth, light, joy, hope and salvation; a Friend who never forsakes, who lifts us when others try to push us down. We cannot wear Him out; we pile on Him all our griefs and troubles. He is always ready to lift us; He is always ready to help us; He addresses us with the same love; He beams upon us with the same smile; He pities us with the same compassion.

There is no name like His. It is more inspiring than Caesar's, more musical than Beethoven's, more conquering than Napoleon's, more eloquent than Demosthenes', more patient than Lincoln's. The name of Jesus throbs with all life, weeps with all pathos, stoops with all love. Its breath is laden with perfume. Who like Jesus can pity a homeless orphan? Who like Jesus can welcome a prodigal back home? Who like Jesus can make a drunkard sober? Who like Jesus can illuminate a cemetery plowed with graves? Who like Jesus can make a queen unto God out of a woman of the street? Who like Jesus can catch the tears of a human sorrow in His bowl? Who like Jesus can kiss away our sorrow?

—Author unknown



BY STEVE HEARTS

THE WALK

THERE ARE UNDOUBTEDLY MANY THINGS IN LIFE WHICH ARE FAR EASIER SAID THAN DONE. The path of *words* is often much easier to take than that of *action*. But if words are not backed up by action, they can be empty and useless.

Jesus had much to say about this very thing: “Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”¹

When I was a kid, I took great pleasure in correcting and preaching to my family and friends. But most of the time, they had the last laugh, since I would often turn right around and do the exact opposite of what I was telling them. I was told more than once, “You need to learn to take your own advice.”

One Christmas season when I was about nine, my classmates and I were practicing a song for an upcoming Christmas program. Since it was meant to be a special surprise for those who would see it, we were not to tell anyone about it. I repeatedly reminded my classmates of this. But one day, in front of the people who were going to be our future audience, I started telling someone all about the song. One of the boys piped up, “Why did you tell us over and over to keep quiet about it if you can’t keep quiet yourself?” And they all roared with laughter.

As embarrassing as this was for me, it served as my first big lesson about “walking my talk.”

Bragging is another thing that can turn people off—especially if nothing is done to give credence to it. When I first started composing songs in my early teens, I constantly bragged about this new “talent” of mine. But when asked to actually play my song for other people, I always chickened out and refused. My mother gave me some good advice. “If you’re not willing to let people hear your songs, then quit bragging about them.”

Jesus illustrated the importance of backing up what we say with our actions in His classic parable of the two sons.

“There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the

1. Matthew 5:19 NIV
2. Matthew 21:28–30 NIV
3. 1 John 3:18 NIV
4. “The Walk,” by Steven Curtis Chapman
5. www.just1thing.com



vineyard.’ ‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will go, sir,’ but he did not go.”²

Although the eldest son verbally disobeyed in the beginning, he later had a change of heart and did his father’s bidding. The second son’s promise to obey his father turned out to be worthless, because he didn’t keep it.

John tells us in his first epistle, “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”³

When I was 14, I got to know a dear woman of faith who, at the time, was battling cancer and not expected to live much longer. I accompanied my dad on a quick visit to the hospital she was staying at. Since this was my first time to come face to face with someone so ill, I

felt unsure of what to say or do. So, other than the initial greetings, I said nothing as I sat by her bedside holding her hand. I later berated myself for not attempting to be a bit more expressive and communicative.

By a miracle, this woman pulled through and is still alive today. The last time we discussed that hospital visit, I apologized for being silent the whole time. She replied, “Don’t worry. You did the right thing. All the other folks who came by to visit me would constantly bombard me with advice on what to eat and what not to eat. Though I knew they meant well, I was growing tired of their constant input. When you came to see me that day, your silence was a comfort and a relief as you sat there just holding my hand.”

The formula to ensuring your words match your deeds and shining God’s light to those around you is simple: Walk your talk.

Be sure of your convictions and principles—and daily put them into action.

As the Steven Curtis Chapman song goes:

*Well, you can run with the big dogs
You can fly with the eagle
You can jump through all the hoops
And climb the ladder to the top
But when it all comes down
You know it all comes down to the walk.*⁴

Let’s do some walking!

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FAILING FORWARD

BY DENNIS EDWARDS

MY WIFE AND I WERE ON A THREE-WEEK HOLIDAY OF REST, relaxation, and spiritual refilling while we visited her family in the sunny clime of Tenerife. As we relaxed by a natural pool at the north of the island, a group of young female surfers gathered in the water not far from the shore to get some last-minute instructions from their instructor. The tide was high and a little rough, but the young women bravely went into the water with their surfboards.

The instructor didn't have a board but instead two sponge supports to keep her afloat. She stayed in the water to position the girls and help them to catch the waves. As I watched, I noticed that some of the girls would attempt over and over again and be thrown from their boards *over and over again*. And yet they persisted. Others seemed to be content to sit on their boards and watch from the sidelines.

Finally, one girl managed to mount her board and came roaring toward the natural pool near where I was. She had fallen numerous times before, but in the end, she had success. I clapped enthusiastically and a big smile spread across her face. She had done it. She had persevered and succeeded.

Watching these novice surfers reminded me of a lecture I had listened to on YouTube by John Maxwell just a few days before.¹ In the talk, Maxwell shares the importance of failure in relation to success. In order to succeed, you have got to occasionally fail. The key is to fail forward, not backward. Failing forward means that even though we fail, we know we are closer to success because of it. We've learned something important from the failure which will help us in our next attempt. Everyone who ever succeeded failed at some point in the process, but they didn't let failure pull them down.

Young George Bernard Shaw couldn't speak publicly, and he became a famous public speaker only *after* forcing himself to confront his difficulty by joining a debating club where he made a fool of himself innumerable times. The girl who surfed to the beach had made a fool of herself in her attempts. But she knew those failures were the price of success. She had failure in its proper perspective. Every time she fell off that board, she knew she was

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9N6VL_b3hk

2. See Ephesians 3:20.

3. John C. Maxwell, *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success* (Thomas Nelson, 2000).



getting closer to victory, closer to learning the trick of keeping her balance, closer to mastering the board and improving as a surfer. She was failing forward.

Unfortunately, the others who stayed comfortably on their boards didn't get any further. They never made a fool of themselves, or swallowed water as they fell into the surf, but they also never tasted the savor of success. They never tasted the thrill of mounting both board and wave to race ecstatically toward the shore.

So pick up your board and try again! The water is great, and you'll come home fulfilled and sleep well, even though you may have aches and pains from the repeated falls. And tomorrow you may just get up on the board and mount that wave and ride further than you ever thought. Remember, our Instructor has told us that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think.² But we've got to get up on that board, even if we fail over and over! In the end, we will fail forward and make it!

Here is a segment from John Maxwell's book *Failing Forward*:³

I don't know what obstacles you are facing in your life right now. But whatever they are doesn't matter. What *does* matter is that your life can change if you're willing to look at failure differently. You have the potential to overcome any problems, mistakes, or misfortunes. All you

have to do is learn to fail forward. Look at the way any achiever approaches negative experiences, and you can learn a lot about how to fail forward.

Think about a recent setback you experienced. How did you respond? No matter how difficult your problems were, the key to overcoming them doesn't lie in changing your circumstances. It's in changing yourself. That in itself is a process, and it begins with a desire to be teachable. If you're willing to do that, then you'll be able to handle failure. From this moment on, make a commitment to do whatever it takes to fail forward.

Failing Backward: Blaming others. Repeating the same mistake. Expecting never to fail. Expecting to continually fail. Accepting tradition blindly. Being limited by past mistakes. Thinking "I am a failure." Quitting.

Failing Forward: Taking responsibility. Learning from each mistake. Knowing failure is part of the process. Maintaining a positive attitude. Challenging outdated assumptions. Taking new risks. ... Persevering.

DENNIS EDWARDS IS A RETIRED TEACHER WHO WORKS FOR A PORTUGUESE NGO INVOLVED IN HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS IN AFRICA AND PORTUGAL. ■



BY MARIA FONTAINE

LEARNING FROM GOD

WE CAN GO THROUGH LIFE AND MISS SOME OF THE THINGS THAT GOD IS TRYING TO TEACH US IF WE DON'T INTENTIONALLY SEEK TO LEARN FROM GOD. Some things are obvious, but others aren't, and we can miss the point if we don't ask Him or don't open our eyes to what He's trying to show us through our experiences.

As we commit things to God and pray about them beforehand, He can guide us and give us His wisdom, which He has promised to give generously to those who ask in faith.¹ But it's just as important to pray afterwards about the outcome, especially when things didn't go the way we expected or wanted them to. If we take time to think and pray about it, He can help us learn from every experience. The lesson is there if we will take the time to look for it; but by the same token, if we don't seek it, we may not find it.²

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.—*Psalm 143:10 NIV* ■

1. See James 1:5.
2. See Matthew 7:7.
3. Genesis 1:26

FEEDING READING

CULTIVATING CHARACTER

God created us "in His own image,"³ but He's not done yet. It's an ongoing process. We all share some basic aspects of His nature from birth—we are eternal, spiritual beings with the capacity to reason, love, and distinguish right from wrong—but developing godly character is a lifelong process. It's also a big part of why we're here. What should we strive to be like? The following Bible passages give a fairly well-rounded picture:

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.—*Galatians 5:22–23 NLT*

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.—*Philippians 2:3–4 NLT*

See also the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3–12) and the Bible's "love chapter" (1 Corinthians 13).

THE SOURCE

If you want more love in your life, go to the source. Jesus has more love than you ever imagined, and it's yours for the asking. It starts the moment you invite Him into your life by sincerely praying a prayer like this one: *Dear Jesus, I believe that You love me and died for me on the cross, so I can live in heaven for eternity. Please give me Your gift of salvation, help me to get to know You better, and help me to share Your love with others. Amen.*

DO SOME PEOPLE REALLY “HAVE IT ALL”?



Q: *Why is it that some people seem to lead charmed lives? They have good looks, great health, lots of natural abilities, and lots of friends—everything—while people like me seem to have no end of deficiencies and problems.*

A: On the surface, things often don't seem fair, but a lot goes on in every person's life that is unseen by others. The author of the Bible's book of Ecclesiastes wrote, "To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven."¹ Not everyone goes through the same rough spots or at the same time, but everyone has their share eventually.

No life is complete without a touch of suffering, sadness, and difficulty. God allows each person to

experience some sort of difficulties throughout their time on earth. He uses these times to teach us to overcome as we experience coming to the end of ourselves and then turning to Him and finding His power. It takes a desperate situation to bring that about. So, while you may look at others and think they have it so easy, you can be assured that they have troubles too.

It's also important to remember that God often sees things quite differently than we do. We consider people blessed if they have a more carefree or obviously successful life with fewer problems, illnesses, and so on. But God's blessings often come disguised as problems. He would rather we have a full life than an easy life. He wants our lives to be rich in faith, depth of spirit, understanding, self-sacrificial love, inner strength, and tenderheartedness. All of these treasures of spirit come from an

intimate relationship with Him, often by way of trials, suffering, or surviving great difficulties. That relationship and the spiritual growth that comes with it result in a deeper and more lasting joy.

If you could "have it all" at the cost of a life of peace, completeness, and the joy that only God gives, would you want that? ■

WHY TROUBLES?

Every problem is a character-building opportunity, and the more difficult it is, the greater the potential for building spiritual muscle and moral fiber. [The apostle] Paul said, "We know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character."² Your circumstances are temporary, but your character will last forever.—Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1

2. Romans 5:3–4 NCV



BY ANNA PERLINI

RUMMAGING

ATTICS ARE AMAZING PLACES.

Every once in a while, I visit my parents' attic, and in spite of repeated cleanups and giveaways, it's still full of hidden treasures. Once I pulled out some of my school notebooks, and that was quite an experience! The neat first to fifth grade workbooks caught my attention first. Such innocence permeated every page, and the pictures and handwritten cursive sentences were adorable: "I love my mommy and daddy!" "My house is the best house, and I wouldn't trade my family with any other place in the world!"

Then I found what looked like a diary. The pages were slightly torn and the calligraphy wasn't so neat. My teenage writings had taken on a more rebellious tone toward school, toward the world and its injustices, and even toward my parents. My poor parents, how could I have been so disrespectful and unloving? God

1. Timothy Keller

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

knows how many sacrifices they made for me, and they certainly didn't deserve my harsh words. As a mother of several teenagers, I felt indignation toward my haughty past self and empathy for my parents. I couldn't for the life of me remember what had motivated me to write or even think that way. In the end, I could only feel a whirlwind of mixed emotions and general confusion. Whatever had happened to the sweet little girl who used to write her parents such nice poems and cards? I felt so ashamed of myself I think I crumpled up some pages and threw them in the garbage bin.

For a few days, I carried this heaviness in my heart, till I happened to read a quote that shed a lot of light on the matter: "Your future self will always see your present self as unwise and immature. That means you are currently a fool right now, but won't realize it until tomorrow."¹

Reflecting some more on the matter, I eventually had to make peace with myself, with that old self that I

now perceived as rather unpleasant. I'm not the same person and have hopefully matured!

The truth is, life is a journey, and one day I'll probably realize some of the things I'm doing right now are foolish and see my present self as immature. I just have to do my best and keep moving forward with God's help.

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Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.—Søren Kierkegaard

The way of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, which shines ever brighter until the full light of day.—Proverbs 4:18 NLT





BY MARIE ALVERO

WHAT I KNOW NOW

I AM A MOM OF FOUR TEENAGERS AND YOUNG ADULTS. I look back over the past 20-plus years of pregnancy, babies, toddlers, kids, messes, trips, packing, school, planning, feeding, cleaning, hugging, listening (and blocking out—Nope, I don't need to hear the Minecraft story again!), sleepovers, playdates, birthdays, and everything else that goes into raising (hopefully) well-adjusted human beings.

But if I could tell my younger self one thing, I know what it would be. I don't know if young-mom me would have listened, and maybe this is not the sort of thing you can grasp at the beginning of the journey, because what I know now is so different from what I was sure of then. As a young mom, I was seeking out a magic formula. I truly believed that if we could get all the right things, in the right quantities and ratios, we would

produce great kids. But let me do you a favor and dispel that notion for you.

There is nothing you can do that will guarantee any outcome. And there you have it. The most significant thing I've learned in two decades of parenting. I know it's so counterintuitive, and maybe disconcerting. But it can also be liberating—no matter how much you mess up, your kids can still finish strong. And even if you get it all as close to right as humanly possible, they can still struggle.

Their journey is going to look a lot like your journey. They're going to learn some things from their parents the easy way, and some things the hard way. There will be others who come alongside and contribute to their story. And there will be parts that are just between them and God. He is going to pursue them and their hearts just like He pursued you. That

We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation about the glorious deeds of the Lord, about his power and his mighty wonders. For he issued his laws to Jacob; he gave his instructions to Israel. He commanded our ancestors to teach them to their children, so the next generation might know them—even the children not yet born—and they in turn will teach their own children. So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands.—*Psalm 78:4–7 NLT*

is what makes the kids of today the hope of the future.

Read all the parenting books, or don't read them. You'll do some things well, and some things you won't. But pursue Jesus, and pursue relationship with your kids. That's the secret.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

SIMPLY BE FAITHFUL

Remember what was said about the woman in the Bible, “She did what she could.”¹ Likewise, just do what you can, and then leave the rest to Me and to others. Simply be faithful with what you *can* do each day.

Do what you can, but remember that without Me, you can do nothing. To do your utmost, you must take time with Me in My Word, in prayer and fellowship. For I wish to give you greater peace, greater faith and greater love.

Your strength comes from Me, and without Me you will be like a lamp burning without oil and your wick will turn black. Your strength will be sapped, and you won't have peace. You won't have enough love. As you bring the weight of your burdens and problems to Me, they can be lightened with My strength, My Spirit, and My love.

So be faithful to make time for Me each day. I can renew your relationship with those you live with, those you work with, and those you minister to. Lift up your heart and your hands to Me, and let Me carry the weight! Put Me first in your life and I will strengthen, renew, reinvigorate, and lift you up.

1. Mark 14:8 NIV

