

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 23 • Issue 8

SMALL BEGINNINGS

The way to greater ends

Learning to Follow

A lesson in leadership

Cycles

Navigating life's ups
and downs

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE NEW YOU

The Bible is full of stories about new beginnings and starting anew. God knows that living in a fallen world isn't easy, and He understands that we will go astray and long to start over. He doesn't hold our mistakes and failures against us but continues to lovingly guide us to Himself. When you read this passage from Isaiah, you can't help but feel the excitement in God's tone: "I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."¹

God was telling the Israelites that despite all their failures, He continued to look at them with infinite love. Just like He had made a way for them when He brought them out of Egypt with Moses, He stated that He would bring them back from their captivity in Babylon and restore them to their land. And that's exactly what He did.

God granted new beginnings for us too through His Son, Jesus: "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"²

In our life journey, we will experience new beginnings, which can mean a new job, a move to a new city, a new relationship, or even a new phase of life, like becoming a parent or grandparent. Some people thrive on starting fresh and the thrill of unknown adventures, while many crave stability and feel stressed when things don't follow a recognizable pattern. But regardless of whether you welcome or dread the unknown, God has promised His support, encouragement, and strength for everything that you encounter in life.

1. Isaiah 43:19 NLT

2. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

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A woman with reddish hair, wearing a red long-sleeved sweater and white gloves, is kneeling on a concrete patio. She is painting a wooden slatted chair with a brush. A can of paint sits on the chair's seat. In the background, there are potted plants and some newspapers on the ground.

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

THE BEST YEAR

LAST YEAR, I struggled with the decision of whether or not to spend New Year's Eve with my family in Niteroi, Brazil. I couldn't remember the last time I'd spent a night away from my home and my dogs—but in the end, I decided to go. And I'm so glad I did.

My two sons, my granddaughter, and I had a great time. We shared many laughs, took great family pictures, and danced to upbeat live music. At midnight, we enjoyed the fireworks on Copacabana beach. It was a perfect evening.

The next day, which was also my birthday, I heard God's voice speaking to me: "My birthday present to you is the gift of enjoying life and doing things to care for yourself, which you often postpone in your zeal to take care of others. You need to also care for yourself, so you will have the energy and inspiration to keep giving to others."

A few weeks later, a neighbor agreed to paint my walls for a fair price. While the furniture was out of the house, I decided to varnish the items that needed it and sew new covers for the sofa. Then I rearranged the furniture and made other improvements that I'd wanted to focus on for

so long. I'd never done as much physical work as in those three weeks, but they left me feeling rejuvenated and re-energized.

A few months later, my church was looking for volunteers to participate in a new English teaching program, and I felt that familiar nudge to help out. As a result, I now teach a class of 30 teenagers and adults. We pray together, listen to Christian music, watch Christian movies, and converse, laugh, and fellowship.

The best thing I gained through these experiences is the (new to me) mindset that life is to be enjoyed at every step, hope is to be felt in the face of every challenge, and enthusiasm and courage are what keep us moving forward.

My resolution for the days to come is to trust in God for the eternal hope we have in Him. His Word says, in Jeremiah 29:11: "I alone know the plans I have for you, plans to bring you prosperity and not disaster, plans to bring about the future you hope for."¹ So I have a feeling that with His help, everything will work out in the end!

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

1. GNT

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

GIVE IT ALL TO JESUS

FORGIVING IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS FOR A PERSON TO DO. But whenever we give our hurts to God and tell Him, “Jesus, take this. I don’t want it anymore. I’m tired of it,” He covers the wounds, hurts, and pain with His love and makes us whole again.

God understands every situation and the heart of every person. We may never understand why someone acted a certain way or why they did whatever it was they did to us, but it’s not a matter of understanding, it’s a matter of forgiving. Yet forgiving is often difficult; it doesn’t come naturally. That’s why God says we need His help to do it. We receive the love and grace to forgive from Him.

Bad things happen to everyone. It’s how we handle troubles, problems, hurts, and disappointments that counts. When we allow ourselves to become resentful over things that hurt us, resentfulness will lead to bitterness. And bitterness, if it is allowed to follow its course, will weaken us spiritually. With time, the heart and mind will be more receptive to other negative thoughts about

other situations and other people. Bitterness is like a plow that prepares the heart for the seeds of dissatisfaction and discouragement. If we don’t give it to God and let it all go, it can eventually overwhelm us and do a lot of damage to others in the process.

When you have bitterness or resentment in your heart, you often don’t see things clearly. Even special little things, gifts of God’s love, don’t mean as much to you because bitterness can blind you to the good. But once you give that to God, you can see things more clearly and experience God’s love a lot more.

Nothing can change the fact that those bad things happened, but the effect that they have on you today can be changed. They can be buried, they can be left behind, they can be shed, and God can bring good out of the experience. You can find freedom in letting those things go and not allowing them to control your life. It’s not as though that hurt or pain never happened, but God is able to take those circumstances—as dark, sad, hurtful,



1. See Romans 8:28.

2. See Mark 11:25–26.

painful, or unjust as they may have been—and work them together for good in your life.¹

When you truly give all your cares and burdens to God, He can soothe the hurts, He can mend the wounds, He can heal any hurt, any pain, anything from the past that you struggle with. All that He asks is that you let go.

It's also good to remind ourselves that we need forgiveness too. Jesus says that if we forgive those who have wronged us, our Father in heaven will also forgive

us.² Realizing that you have also made mistakes or wrong decisions that have hurt others and that you also need a lot of forgiveness and mercy helps you to extend forgiveness and mercy to others.

And, of course, once you've given it all to God, you need to *keep* giving it to Him. Once you have forgiven, you need to carefully guard your spirit and avoid critical thoughts that could lead to future resentment and bitterness. You have to resist the temptation to dwell on hurts and think bad thoughts about people who wronged you.

Keep coming to God and loving Him and committing all to Him, and He will never fail you. Even if people fail or situations fail or you feel like you've failed, God *never* fails! His plan never fails, His love never fails, and He has His hand on your life. If you can believe and act on that, you'll be a lot happier.

Forgive, let go, forsake bitterness, and move forward. As you do, He can give you a more loving, compassionate, and giving heart; He can help you to become a stronger, better person and a pillar that others can lean on. In other words, He will make you more like Him!

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



POINTS TO PONDER

Forgiveness and mercy

THE WEAK CAN NEVER FORGIVE.

Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.—*Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)*

He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass; for every man has need to be forgiven.—*George Herbert (1593–1633)*

When we finally repent of our sin and forgive those who have hurt us—as God calls us to do over and over again in his Word—then the light of God shines like a bright, healing beam in our hearts and clears the vision of God before us.—*Matt Brown*

Mercy and forgiveness must be free and unmerited to the wrongdoer. If the wrongdoer has to do something to merit it, then it isn't mercy, but forgiveness *always* comes at a cost to the one granting the forgiveness.—*Timothy Keller (b. 1950)*

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.—*Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002)*

Forgiveness is a redemptive response to having been wronged and wounded. Only those who have wronged and wounded us are candidates for forgiveness. If they injure us accidentally, we excuse them. We only forgive the ones we blame.—*Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002)*

You may feel that what you've suffered is unpardonable, beyond forgiveness, but God can lift that burden and give you a change of heart. The miracle-working love of God is love enough to forgive—and to help you forgive.—*Gabriel Sarmiento*

The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy.—*James 3:17 NIV*

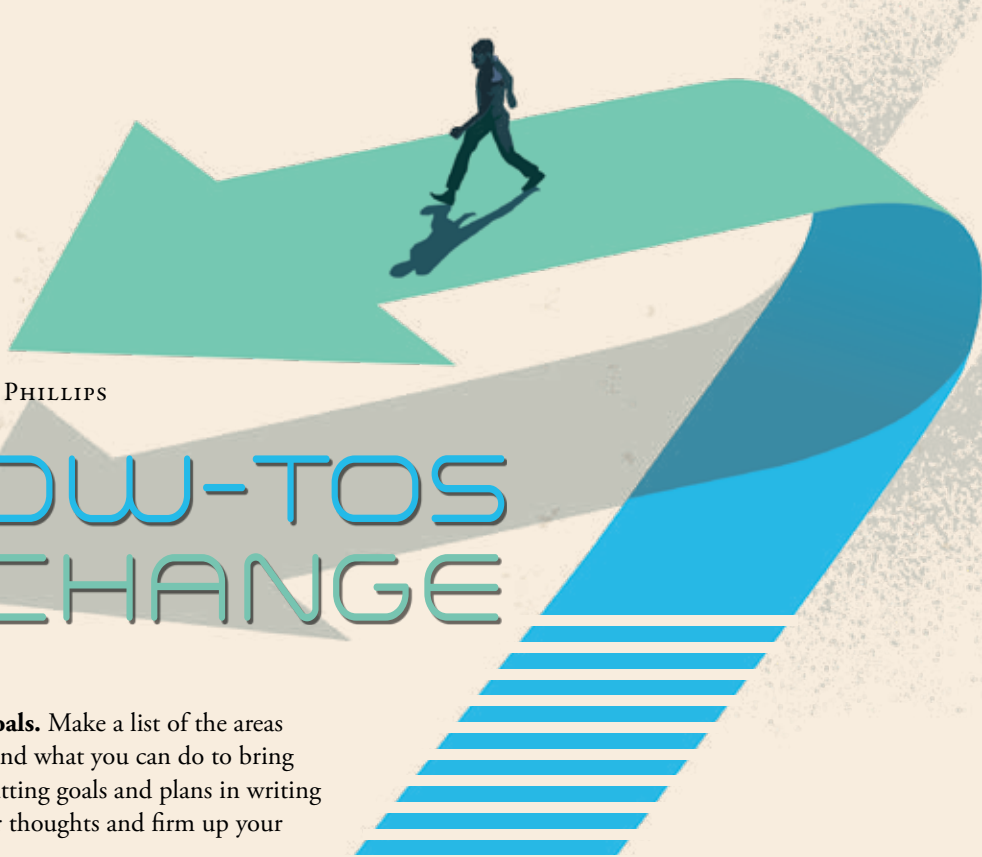
Forgiveness is for you—not the other person. It's something you do inside yourself that you feel in your body and heart that releases you from your past and frees you to live life fully.—*Barbara J. Hunt*

Forgiveness does not mean we minimize the sin or ignore the consequences that occurred as a result. It means we maximize our faith, trusting that both justice and mercy will be extended at God's hand towards those affected.—*Richelle E. Goodrich (b. 1968)*

He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.—*Titus 3:5 NIV*

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.—*Luke 6:36 NIV*

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.—*Matthew 5:7 NIV* ■



BY KEITH PHILLIPS

9 HOW-TOS OF CHANGE

1 Take stock and set goals. Make a list of the areas you want to change in and what you can do to bring those changes about. Putting goals and plans in writing will help crystallize your thoughts and firm up your commitment.

2 Program the changes into your daily or weekly schedule. Without a definite plan, good intentions will probably soon be forgotten or get lost in the press of everything else you have to do.

3 Depend on Jesus first and foremost, not just willpower, intellect, or natural ability. The Bible tells us, “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”¹

4 Find instruction and encouragement in God’s Word. God promises, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.”² An online Bible-search site, concordance, or Bible study can help you find what the Bible has to say about specific topics related to the changes you want to make.

5 Join or form a support group. Being around like-minded people provides positive reinforcement and moral support—two catalysts of change. “Two are better than

one, because they have a good reward for their labor.”³ “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”⁴

6 Ask others to pray for you. The Bible tells us that united prayer produces results. “If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you.”⁵

7 Thank God by faith for answering your prayer and strengthening you in your time of need. “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise.”⁶

8 Don’t give up. When you fall short, ask God to help you keep trying. “A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again.”⁷ “Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand.”⁸

9 Keep believing that you can change, with God’s help. Claim verses that increase your faith, such as “God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him,”⁹ and “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”¹⁰

1. Matthew 6:33 NLT
2. Psalm 32:8
3. Ecclesiastes 4:9
4. Proverbs 27:17 NIV
5. Matthew 18:19 NLT

6. Psalm 100:4
7. Proverbs 24:16
8. Psalm 37:24
9. Philippians 2:13 NLT
10. 2 Corinthians 5:17

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. ■



SMALL

BEGINNINGS

BY IRIS RICHARD



COUNTLESS STORIES AND PARABLES ARE TOLD OF SMALL BEGINNINGS THAT LEAD TO GREATER ENDS. This is my own small beginnings story.

It was a comment from a stranger that got me thinking about a change of direction in the social work we were involved in at the time. The place where we had been working hadn't yielded much lasting results and the outcome of our labor hadn't at all been what we'd hoped. Our efforts seemed wasted and the work had become increasingly frustrating.

I had no idea exactly what it was that needed to change, but one day, when I least expected it, an encounter set things in motion. While waiting in an office reception area for an appointment, I got involved in small talk with a stranger. He was a businessman from the African continent and talked fondly of his country, the scenic beauty, the people, but also the social imbalance and poverty.

Later, when thinking about this encounter, I realized that a fledgling seed had been planted in the fertile ground of my mind. At first it was just a tiny nudge, but when I gave it further attention, it began to sprout with an idea. Soon after, the idea morphed into a plan, at first scary, yet intriguing, especially since it involved a major

change in location and mode of operating. After committing this undertaking to prayer and brainstorming, the plan slowly formed and we took action. With small and timid steps, we moved in the seemingly daunting direction that God was pointing. The consolidation phase into unknown territory had begun.

In the beginning stages of setting up a community work in an African country, our faith, resolve, and patience were thoroughly tested. Countless challenges needed to be conquered and unforeseen obstacles had to be hurdled. Finally, after a number of years of trial and error, the base of a lasting aid project took shape.

Looking back down the mountain of accomplishment that started with a nudge, our time-tested work now celebrates its 27th year of service in marginalized communities. Since those first shaky steps and small beginnings, thousands of poor families have been helped, abandoned children have received education followed by job opportunities, and countless lives have been positively changed.

I have since learned not to underestimate the power of a thought, a fledgling idea, or a dream that God plants in our hearts that nudges us in a certain direction, that when followed, might lead to new and greater things. This reminds me of a story I recently read.

The first "horseless carriage" was built in 1769 by a Frenchman named Nicholas-Joseph Cugnot. It was an enormous three-wheeled, steam-powered gun carriage,

1. See <https://www.britannica.com/technology/automobile/History-of-the-automobile>.

2. Matthew 13:31–33 NIV



which traveled along at the neck-breaking speed of 3.6 kilometers per hour.

At the time one can't imagine that many people saw much benefit in Cugnot's horseless carriage. It was very expensive, very noisy, and it couldn't match the pace of even the oldest nag. Yet from that horseless carriage came a revolution. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that it's okay to start small, with an idea that seems crazy, and watch to see if, from that embryonic vision, something great might happen.¹

Jesus highlighted the capacity of small things turning big as follows:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."²

By heeding God's "whispers" in our hearts and staying in touch with His plan for our lives, even what seems impossible can become reality.

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

Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.

—*St. Augustine (354–430)*



Keep on beginning and failing. Each time you fail, start all over again, and you will grow stronger until you have accomplished a purpose—not the one you began with perhaps, but one you'll be glad to remember.

—*Anne Sullivan (1866–1936)*



Never despise small beginnings, and don't belittle your own accomplishments. Remember them and use them as inspiration as you go on to the next thing. When you venture outside your comfort zone, wherever the starting point may be, it's kind of a big deal.

—*Chris Guillebeau (b. 1978)*



It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful.

—*Alan Cohen (b. 1950)*



Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.

—*Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968)*



BY STEVE HEARTS

LEARNING TO FOLLOW

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I directed a youth singing group that consisted mostly of teenagers. They were all talented musicians and singers, and my job was to help further their musical training.

I really enjoyed my task of “directing”—too much so, perhaps. I saw myself as the leader and always had to have the last word, especially regarding how we were sounding and how we were *supposed* to sound. I was proud of my keen ear for music, and I would get extremely irritated whenever it was even slightly questioned, or when any small fault was pointed out in the way I played guitar or sang. In my mind, I was the one with the most talent and experience, and the others were trainees.

One thing that was repeatedly pointed out was my tendency to speed up the tempo of the songs when playing guitar. Those in the group, as well as others who heard our rehearsals, insisted I was doing that, but I refused to own up to it, until one day when

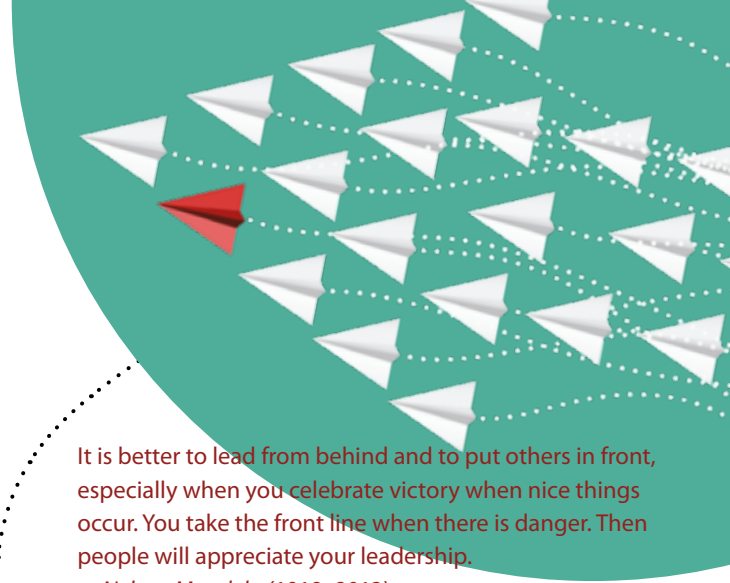
I was playing the drums while jamming with another group of more seasoned musicians. Sure enough, the bass player called a halt early on, and said, “Keep it steady, Steve. You’re really speeding up the tempo.”

I was shocked—but this time, the observation was coming from a musician whose talent and experience far surpassed mine. It got me thinking. Things had been rather tense in the singing group for a while, and I’d attributed this to nearly everyone except myself.

Later, I told one of my friends of my recent difficulties with the group I was directing, and the dawning realization that I may be to blame. When I finished, she said something about how a truly good leader needs to also know when and how to be a good follower.

Her words seemed to turn my world upside down. At the same time, they rang true. I wondered how I could possibly learn to “follow” the advice of those I was training, who were much younger and less experienced than I. But when I tried putting myself in their place for a moment, I imagined how undervalued I was making them feel.

Furthermore, I realized that if the young people I was training were to truly blossom into their roles in the singing group, they needed encouragement to embrace their full potential and push the limits of what they were



capable of. I realized that I was having the opposite effect on them, and I determined to change.

The first chance I got, I called the group together, apologized for the way I'd been acting, and let them know that from now on, I was going to start seeking and valuing their input and advice.

From then on, I did my best to see them as companions and coworkers, instead of mere trainees. Things ran much more smoothly, since there was an unhindered flow of honest communication and input from one another. Our rehearsals were fun instead of stressful, and our performances touched lives with God's love.

The memories I hold from my time in that group are priceless. Though we have since moved on to pursue different callings and careers, friendships between us remain strong.

First Peter 5:5 tells us to "be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility."¹ Though I had memorized this scripture as a child, this experience showed me how to live it.

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

It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.

—Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)

Ultimately, leadership is not about glorious crowning acts. It's about keeping your team focused on a goal and motivated to do their best to achieve it, especially when the stakes are high and the consequences really matter. It is about laying the groundwork for others' success, and then standing back and letting them shine.

—Chris Hadfield (b. 1959)

Success is never a one-man job; it takes teamwork. God wired it this way because the most important lesson he wants you to learn here on Earth is to love people. Not only that, there are some things in your life that you will never be able to change without the support, prayers, and encouragement of other people. ... We need each other to serve. Nobody has all the talents. Nobody has all the gifts. God did it that way intentionally so that you would need me and I would need you and we would need each other.—Rick Warren (b. 1954)

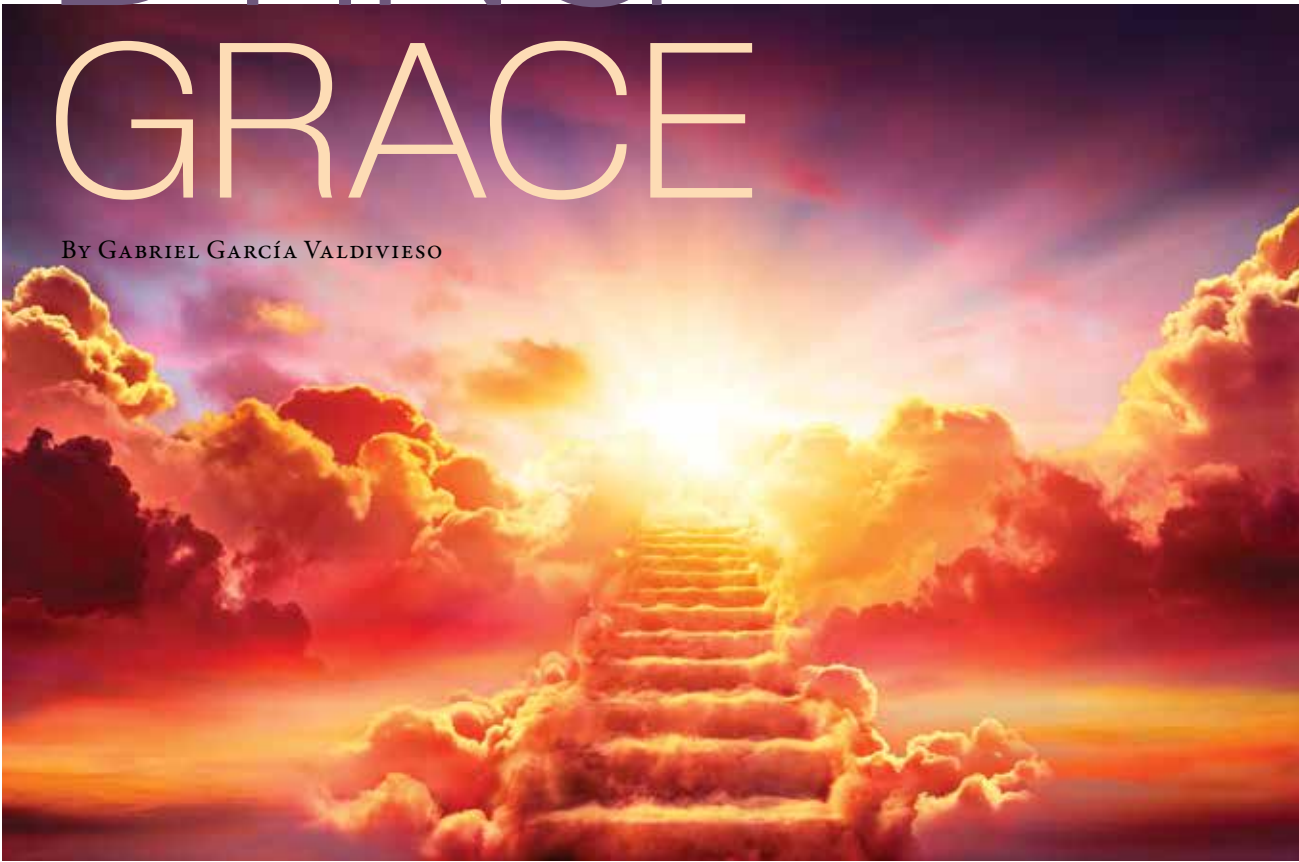
Great challenges require great teamwork, and the quality most needed among teammates amid the pressure of a difficult challenge is collaboration. Notice that I didn't say "cooperation," because collaboration is more than that. Cooperation is working together agreeably. Collaboration is working together aggressively. Collaborative teammates do more than just work with one another. Each person brings something to the table that adds value to the relationship and to the team. The sum of truly collaborative teamwork is always greater than its parts.

—John C. Maxwell (b. 1947)



DYING GRACE

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO



IN THIS STAGE OF MY LIFE, the subject of death seems to pop up more frequently than before, and it's not always a happy thought. As Christians, we know that death isn't the end of the journey; but as human beings, it's normal to worry about and even dread the process.

Personally, I haven't been spared fear and doubts about exiting this life, and I've felt the struggle to keep my faith about the glories of heaven intact. But then I think of all the apostles and great men and women of God throughout the ages who died in peace, holding onto the promises in the Bible about the afterlife.

So I have sought refuge in the truths of the Bible, tested and proven by millions throughout the centuries. Absorbing them and meditating on them has brought peace to my heart. I decided I had better prepare, building my faith on the Scriptures, which offer the right foundation to face the grave.

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1. John 11:25–26 NLT
 2. John 11:27 NLT
 3. See John 14:6.
 4. See John 11:25.
 5. 1 Corinthians 15:55 KJV



As usual, whenever we deal with doubts, there is no better way to resolve or dispel them than to go to God's Word. So I've found great comfort in various Bible passages, especially from the New Testament, such as the time when Jesus told Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die."¹ He then goes on to ask her—really, addressing each one of us: "Do you believe this?" Just hearing Jesus serenely asking me this question sets me at ease, and my answer of course is: "Yes, Lord. I have always believed."²

When facing the prospect of death, Jesus is my focal point. I know He is the way, the truth and the life,³ and He's the resurrection and the life,⁴ so why worry?

The apostle Paul's words and attitude toward death are also a great encouragement to me. Instead of dreading it, he was looking forward to it: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"⁵

Several years ago, in the months before my mom passed away, she had a pretty happy attitude and great peace about the next life. She knew she had made

many mistakes in her life, yet she had reconciled with God and had surrendered to Him. So she didn't worry; she was already in His arms, so to speak. She looked forward to heaven with a happy expectation. Her good example has helped calm my own fears.

Dr. Dwight L. Moody had a lot to say about death. When someone asked him if he had dying grace, he wisely answered: "No. Why should I? I'm not dying yet." So that's probably why I don't quite have dying grace. God will endow us with it when we need it. And if you have any unresolved issues before that day comes, bring them to God and reconcile with Him by asking Jesus into your heart, so you can fly to His arms when He calls you Home.

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THE FINAL VICTORY

Quotes by Dr. Dwight L. Moody

I find that many Christians are in trouble about the future; they think they will not have grace enough to die by. It is much more important that we should have grace enough to live by. It seems to me that death is of very little importance in the meantime. When the dying hour comes, there will be dying grace, but you do not require dying grace to live by.

Some day you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto his glorious body.

I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever.

Earth recedes, Heaven opens before me. If this is death, it is sweet! There is no valley here. God is calling me, and I must go.

Death may be the king of terrors... but Jesus is the King of kings!



BY ANNA PERLINI

THE

WE

PATHS

TAKE

IN MY SEARCH FOR MEANING AND TRUTH IN LIFE, LIKE MOST YOUNG PEOPLE, I was also faced with the challenge of finding a purposeful direction for my life. Which way would I go, what would I do, what would my beliefs be?

It's like being in front of one of those signposts you find while hiking. There are several signs that point in different directions and tell you each trail's degree of difficulty. Some routes are only for experienced mountaineers, some are medium difficulty, and others are pretty easy for anyone to attempt. I love to hike, and I've learned that even though these signs are often helpful, there are times when, after you've taken the paths they indicate, they leave you puzzled and almost disappointed with the rating. There are quite a lot of debates in the hiking community over how to grade routes, because there are so many factors that can determine the difficulty, such as age, fitness, weather conditions, and so on.

I'm pretty sure some of the life paths I decided to take turned out to be a lot more difficult than I thought, and looking back, I wonder if I would still choose them with the benefit of hindsight. I even sometimes question if I was tricked into some of them. I'm sure I wasn't really aware of all that they would entail. But life's surprises are something no one will ever be able to fully prepare you for, and today, I'm so glad I had the courage (or craziness) to embrace some of them. They're what made me who I am today.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,¹ A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■

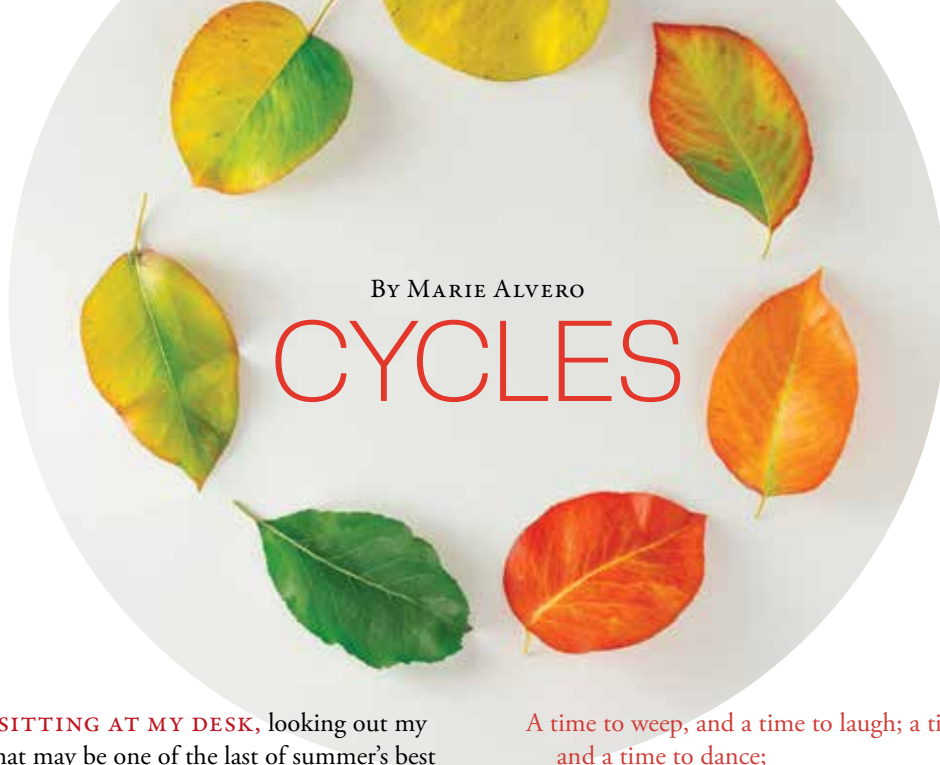
1. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>

God has purpose for your pain, a reason for your struggle and a gift for your faithfulness. Don't give up.—*Anonymous*

Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful.—*Joshua J. Marine*

It's only after you've stepped outside your comfort zone that you begin to change, grow, and transform.—*Roy T. Bennett (1939–2014)*

You can know Jesus personally by inviting Him into your life:
Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so I can have eternal life. Please forgive me for the wrong things I have done. Come into my heart, grant me Your gift of eternal life, fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to know Your love and peace. Thank You for being with me always, from this moment on. Amen.



BY MARIE ALVERO

CYCLES

TODAY I'M SITTING AT MY DESK, looking out my window at what may be one of the last of summer's best days. The first cold front is expected next week, and I'm already bracing for the inevitable change of weather.

This cycle of nature is something I've learned to expect. But it's funny how I'm always blindsided when it happens in my actual life. To be fair, life's changes aren't as predictable as the seasons. Not only does my life not shut down every fall, only to start up bigger and better in the spring, but in reality, the natural cycle is much more multifaceted.

Some plants hibernate through winter, while some actually bloom in that season and some are evergreen. Some only live for one cycle, some grow pretty much anywhere there's sun and soil, but others require precise conditions to grow at all—and those conditions aren't the same from plant to plant. The more I observe nature, the more I see the parallels and the more at peace I feel, even when my life feels like it's heading into a downturn. The Bible speaks of this in a profound passage:

To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.¹

No matter what's going on in your life, this amazing passage has you covered. It's applicable when you're at the top of the world, and it fits when you're starting over. It reminds us that both these situations are part of the stream of life, and that there is at least a portion of these seasons that is completely outside of our control.

If you're starting over, take some advice from the trees in the fall: be still. Let the old fall away. Let the roots reach deep, and be OK with a season that doesn't look like much on the outside. The work goes on deep in the roots. Old, spent parts are falling away, making room for the new. You will bloom again.

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1. Ecclesiastes 3:1–8



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

ALL IS FORGIVEN

Do not be disheartened by the mistakes and sins of your past, for the past is the past. In the very moment that you seek My forgiveness, in the very instant that you call out to Me, I immediately grant My forgiveness, and there is no more need to worry or fear or carry the burden yourself.

If you were to stand before Me now, you would be so engulfed and overwhelmed by My love that all the hurts and pain and misunderstandings of the past and the present would completely vanish. So great is My love for you that there is no room for sorrow or condemnation. If you were standing before Me, you would feel only total acceptance and total love, because you would know that all is forgiven. I wash away all fear; there is no fear in My love.

Even though you are still in your human body, trust that My love for you is no less at this moment than it will be when you stand before Me. I am always with you, even though now you only see through a glass darkly.¹ You are My dear one, My beloved.

1. See 1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV.