

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 24 • Issue 1

BRINGING GOD INTO THE DECISION PROCESS

A 7-step power-sharing
plan

Mystery Helix Staircase

Answers to prayer

The Call

A walk with a friend





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

LOOKING TO TOMORROW

Through this journey called life, we experience good, bad, ups, and downs, and often we haven't got a clue what's ahead. We make the best choices we can and try to live caring, honest lives, but every day, we make decisions that could affect our future, and it's not always clear how.

That's not easy even in simple times, but the times we live in now are anything but simple. We can safely assume this is an interesting age for scholars of culture and history, but the reality for those of us who are living it is that each new year seems to introduce new uncertainties and risks.

One thing that we can hold on to, though, is God's love and care for us, even in the darkest, most difficult times. "God has said, 'I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.'"¹

In 1939, a young preacher and musician named Ira Stanphill married Zelma Lawson, a minister's daughter who had a lovely voice and played the piano. Unfortunately, that marriage ended in 1948, and his ex-wife was killed in a car crash not long after. During the years between their separation and divorce, and then her death, Stanphill is said to have sunk into a deep depression.

He was driving one night when he began to hum a song about not knowing what the future held and trusting God under circumstances he didn't understand. Upon arriving home, he rushed to his piano and jotted down the words to the song "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow," which have resonated over the years with so many who face an unknown future.

God doesn't promise that walking with Him will be easy, but what He does promise is that every day of our lives is in His hands! In these uncertain days, what a comfort it is to realize that the one who loves us the most knows the way and will walk through it with us.

Many things about tomorrow,
I don't seem to understand;
But I know who holds tomorrow,
And I know who holds my hand.



1. Hebrews 13:5 NLT

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BEING FEARLESS

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

I WAS THINKING ABOUT BEING FEARLESS TODAY. There is so much talk about being fearless, becoming a strong, stubborn, determined person who won't be afraid of anything. But another side of fearlessness came to me.

You can't be fearless unless you face fear. You can't avoid fear, or ignore it, or turn your back on it. The key is to look straight at all the things we're afraid of and address them in prayer, directly asking God to deal with all of the aspects of whatever it is that is making us afraid.

I would like to be fearless but sometimes I think that if I just put something out of my mind, I won't let the fear in. That might work with little fears. I'm afraid of finding a snake in the garage, so I always turn on the light so it shines into all the corners and then I'm not afraid. Some fears are picked up from others, from the news, from the internet, and it's hard not to be affected by fear and let it invade your day.

This week my daughter flew across the world. I've been hearing about several airline crashes, and it's hard

not to be afraid for her as she travels, but I did what I could do. I framed a very thorough prayer, taking every scary possibility and pleading God's protection over her. I lit a candle to remind myself to continue to pray. I spent the day thinking of her and praying for her and taking all of those concerns and dealing with them straight in the face. Then when she told me she was safely at her destination with friends who will look after her, I thanked God for His protection for her every step of the way.

Facing fear requires faith, believing that God truly is in control of all the aspects of our lives and that He is greater than all of the scary things we have to face. But then, they're not so scary when we face them with faith. Faith is what makes us fearless!

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

BRINGING GOD INTO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS



A WISE APPROACH TO MAKING DECISIONS IS A THREE-STEP PROCESS.

1 First, realize that you don't have all the answers and ask the One who does—God—to help you make the right decision.

2 Second, sincerely want to make the decision according to what His will is in the situation. This is often the hardest part because it requires you to be willing to set aside your own ideas and plans, to seek His will above all things.

3 Third, receive His answer. It may come through one or more of the following means, which are listed in order of importance and reliability.

1. GOD'S WORD. The first place to look for the will of God is in His words recorded in the Bible and other inspired Christian writings. His Word provides principles that will help us to make godly decisions and find answers to the questions or problems we will face in life. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."¹

2. THE VOICE OF GOD'S WORD. Have you ever been thinking or praying about something when God brought to mind a certain verse or passage from the Scriptures

that shed His light on the issue? Or have you ever been reading the Bible when a verse or passage spoke directly to you, as though it were written just for you in regard to some situation you were facing? God applies His Word to you personally, and you receive the answer you are seeking. "The Word of God is living and powerful."²

3. DIRECT REVELATION. God can also guide us through dreams and messages we receive directly from Him when He speaks to our hearts, which the Bible calls prophecy. "It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams."³

1. Psalm 119:105

2. Hebrews 4:12

3. Acts 2:17



Points to Ponder

TRUST GOD'S PLAN

4. GODLY COUNSELORS. If you're trying to find God's will in a given situation, it is wise to ask advice from others who are established in their faith, have a strong personal relationship with Jesus, and are experienced in His ways. "Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established."⁴

5. CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITIONS. Sometimes obvious circumstances indicate God's leading. If something is God's will, He will usually open a door of opportunity that makes it possible. "I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it."⁵

6. STRONG IMPRESSIONS OR INNER CONVICTION. These are sometimes referred to as "the witness of the Spirit." Feelings can be deceiving, but if God wants you to take a certain course of action, He will sometimes give you a strong desire to do that or an inner conviction that it's the right thing to do. "Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart."⁶

7. SPECIFIC PREDETERMINED SIGNS. These are sometimes referred to as "fleeces." You can sometimes check or double-check your decision by asking God to give you a specific confirmation.

Above all, believe that God loves you and wants to help you make the right decision—the one He knows will be best for you and others in the long run. Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened for you."⁷ That's a promise! ■

This world is God's workshop for making men.—*Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887)*

Walk boldly and wisely. There is a hand above that will help you on.—*Philip James Bailey (1816–1902)*

Life is a tapestry: We are the warp; angels, the weft; God, the weaver. Only the Weaver sees the whole design.—*Quoted in The Angels' Little Instruction Book, Eileen Elias Freeman, 1994*

The highest knowledge is to know that we are surrounded by mystery. Neither knowledge nor hope for the future can be the pivot of our life or determine its direction. It is intended to be solely determined by our allowing ourselves to be gripped by the ethical God, who reveals Himself in us, and by our yielding our will to His.—*Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)*

To wait open-endedly is an enormously radical attitude toward life. So, too, is giving up control over our future and letting God define our life. That, indeed, is a very radical stance toward life in a world preoccupied with control.—*Henri J. M. Nouwen (1932–1996)*

We usually focus on what we are doing or where we are going, but God's primary concern is who we are becoming in the process.—*Mark Batterson (b. 1969)* ■

4. Proverbs 15:22

7. Matthew 7:7

5. Revelation 3:8

6. Psalm 37:4



AN UNUSUAL START TO THE NEW YEAR

BY G.L. ELLENS

I STARTED OFF THE NEW YEAR LOSING MY SUITCASE WHILE TRAVELING. It wasn't the greatest start, but in fact, I learned so much through the experience.

I was on a return flight back from visiting my grandkids in the U.S. for Christmas and had taken the opportunity to do some “once a year” shopping for equipment and vitamins that are hard to get or very expensive in Indonesia. So the contents of my suitcase were especially important to me. It was agonizing to think about the loss, and I clung desperately to the hope that God would work things out and help me get my suitcase back.

Looking back, it's clear there were some things I could have done better. When I first checked in, the airline personnel assured me my bag would go all the way to my destination. At my stopover, however, there was a big sign saying, “International transit passengers, please claim your baggage before checking in for your flight.” I blissfully ignored the sign, thinking my suitcase was special, because of what I'd been told at check-in.

Most likely, though, God was trying to draw my attention to that sign. However, I ignored the sign, and my suitcase got left on the baggage claim belt in Canada, while I went merrily on my way!

When I landed at my destination and realized my suitcase wasn't there, I was panic-stricken. Fortunately,

the baggage station manager assured me that they would backtrack my itinerary and try to locate my suitcase, and then send it to my house 150 km away from the arrival airport!

Then followed three long days of waiting for my suitcase to finally arrive. Those three days were filled with feelings of frustration and helplessness. I berated myself for ignoring that airport sign telling me what to do. *How could I follow God if I can't even follow directions on a sign?* Then someone sent me a note via social media with the verse “Be still and know that I am God.”¹ —That was exactly what I needed to hear. There was nothing I could do but be still and depend on God to work things out.

I was fortunate that in the end, my suitcase did finally reach me—all the way from Canada to Indonesia, and then another 150 km to my home in the countryside. And all the contents were safe.

That was the best way for me to enter the new year—totally dependent on God. I also realized that I need to pay closer attention to God's “still small voice.” I could have spared myself so much worry and stress if I had paid attention. That's not the way I want to spend the next 364 days!

G.L. ELLENS WAS A MISSIONARY AND SCHOOLTEACHER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FOR OVER 25 YEARS. ALTHOUGH RETIRED, SHE REMAINS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK, AS WELL AS PURSUING HER INTEREST IN WRITING. ■



1. Psalm 46:10



THE CALL

BY KOOS STENGER

“CHARLEY! Where are you?”

At first, we weren't worried. Our black Labrador loved nothing better than to race through the forest alongside us on the dusty path, sniffing rabbit trails, and experiencing life to the full. But where was she?

Still no answer. Not even a faraway scurrying through bushes and thick undergrowth. Besides the lonely call of a cuckoo and the softly swaying trees, I heard nothing.

Something was wrong. Our furry friend never behaved like this.

I left the path and fought my way through man-sized ferns, prickly thorn bushes, and over nasty, gnarled tree roots, shouting her name at the top of my voice.

“Charley!”

An unfamiliar yelp in the distance caught my attention.

Was that our dog? My heart racing, I kept on going until I stumbled upon a curious pool. Not a lake, not a place where you sit at the shore and watch geese flying over and you are reminded of the everlasting waters of God's Word.

No, this reservoir was man-made. Dark, deep, with a peculiar, unnatural elevation. And there, desperately trying to climb over the rubber bank of this pool, was our exhausted animal. It seemed she was about ready to give up. But then, when she saw me coming, her miserable

howls changed into gurgles of doggy joy. I was able to pull her to safety and how happy we both were on our way back to the path from which she had strayed.

“Charley, where are you?”

It reminded me of when God was calling for His friend in the Garden of Eden.

“Adam! Where are you?”

Adam didn't fall into a man-made pool. He ate from the forbidden tree and brought the curse of sin upon the world. And along came God, walking in the cool of the day, desiring fellowship but not finding any, because His friends weren't there.

Unlike me with my dog, God knew where Adam and Eve were hiding. Still, the pain He experienced must have been much greater than mine. His beloved friends were hiding *from Him*.

God is still calling today. He's still uttering the same words. He's calling each one of us daily.

When I read these words, I now put my own name in there. That makes it personal. I'm not trying to hide from God, but I occasionally fall short, and the good news is that God forgives me and He still longs to talk to *me* in the cool of the day, just as He did with Adam.

KOOS STENGER IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN THE NETHERLANDS. ■

A New BEGINNING

BY STEVE HEARTS

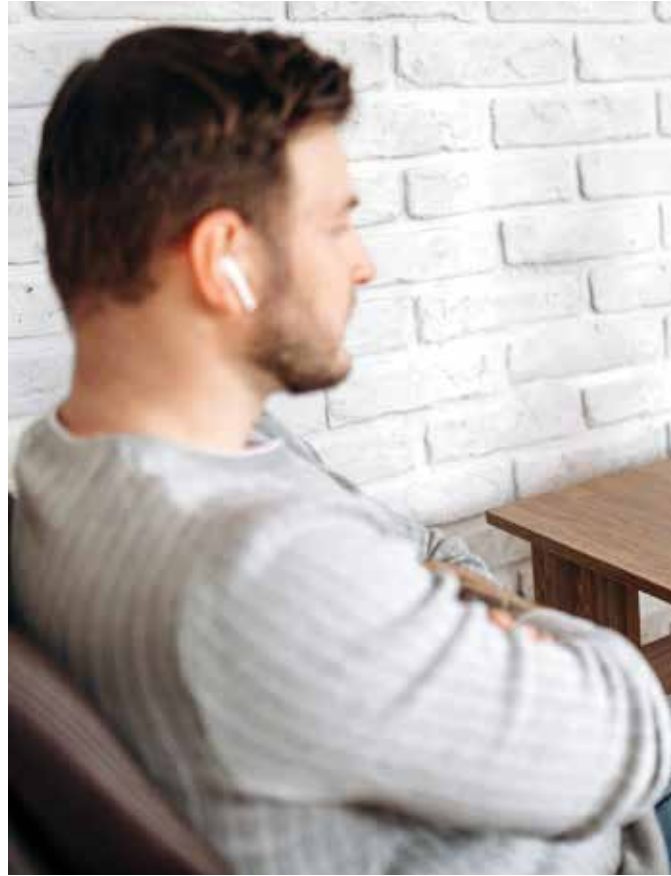
WHILE IN THIS LIFE, it is hard to understand why God allows pain, suffering, tragedy, and so on, I do know beyond a doubt that He can cause all things to work together for good, as only He is able, as we do our best to follow Him.

A few years ago, I took on a part-time musical gig playing in nursing homes. My music was well received, and word spread to several nursing homes in my city, causing more opportunities to open up. I enjoyed doing this. Each day, I was busy practicing songs and learning new ones. This was helping me grow and develop more as a guitarist/singer.

Unfortunately, when restrictions were put in place at the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, I was unable to continue this type of activity. I wasn't too concerned at first, as I thought things would quickly return to normal. But days turned into weeks, and weeks into months. I soon had to face the painful truth that for the time being, until things drastically changed, I was out of a job, as far as performing was concerned.

Not only did I miss doing this. I now had more time on my hands than I knew how to occupy. I momentarily felt discouraged, even upset.

However, I knew that God wanted me to rise above the situation somehow, and that entertaining negative feelings and emotions wouldn't help me accomplish this. So I began thanking God for the first things that came to mind. I thanked Him for giving me a place to live. I thanked Him for my health and that of my loved ones.



I thanked Him that I was fairly tech-savvy despite my blindness. I am able to use computers and smartphones with assistive screen-reading technology. The more I thanked Him, the more peaceful and the happier I felt as the days went by. I also found myself better able to relate to those who were experiencing job loss or upheaval due to the world situation. My heart truly went out to them, and I began praying for others more regularly.

Around this time, I began participating in online fellowship meetings and Bible studies hosted over Zoom.



These greatly inspired me and boosted my morale. I also began digging deeper into the Bible than ever before—meditating on God’s many promises contained therein.

One day, a member of one of the online groups I belonged to contacted me and suggested I start my own online Bible study group using Zoom. “You have a lot to share,” she said, “and people really need it, especially in

1. Romans 8:28 NIV

times like these.” I had to think about it for a while; and the more I did, the more I wanted to do it.

The truth was, I’ve always loved God’s Word and wished I could teach it more. I just didn’t consider myself to be a very capable teacher. This is why I pursued other things I felt more comfortable with, such as music. But in praying about this new idea, I could sense God’s voice saying that He would help me. He even showed me practical ways to carry this out. I knew how to read and write with a computer, so preparing classes was plenty doable. I would also occasionally read text out loud to people by plugging earphones into my laptop, and repeating after the screen-reader as it read the texts. I realized I could easily do the same live over Zoom.

Sharing God’s Word with others in this way has helped me continue to grow spiritually and given me a greater sense of fulfillment than anything I’ve pursued in the past. In spite of the challenges the pandemic brought, I do thank God for taking its repercussions on my life and working them out for my good. Had I been able to continue with my previous music job, I would likely not have found my new passion and calling of teaching God’s Word to others.

Are you experiencing the ending of a particular chapter in your life? Instead of giving in to discouragement and hopelessness, look up, count your blessings, and turn to Jesus. For everything that comes to an end, He has a new beginning of some sort; and God always works everything He allows to come into our lives for good. “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”¹

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



12 PRAYERS FOR THE NEW YEAR

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO

1

PRAYER FOR NEW BEGINNINGS:

Dear God, thank You for a new year and for Your care and blessings throughout the past year. I bring to You my hopes and plans, my uncompleted projects, and even my disappointments. Help me not to limit Your work in my life as I plan for the upcoming year. Give me faith to trust in You and determination to persevere according to Your will.

2

PRAYER FOR HABITS:

Dear God, I confess that I've formed habits that are not the best. I ask that You remind me when I fall into harmful routines that cause me to lose time, physical and mental energy, resources, or my health. Help me to see what good habits can be reinforced, what unhealthy habits I need to leave behind, and what new habits I can acquire.

1. See 1 John 3:16.
2. See 1 Peter 4:8.
3. See 1 Corinthians 10:13.
4. See Matthew 11:30.
5. See Psalm 68:5–6.
6. 1 John 3:18

3

PRAYER FOR RELATIONS WITH OTHERS:

Dear God, I so often fall short in the way I treat others. Help me to be more understanding, to forgive and to ask for forgiveness. Send Your Spirit to heal the wounds of our fractured relations so that I can love others with the same love that You have for me.¹ Help me to turn a blind eye to the faults of others, unless I know of a way in which I can be a help,² remembering that love is always the best route to take.

4

PRAYER FOR THE WEARY:

Dear God, these past years have been marked with sickness, death, isolation, fear, anxiety, loss of jobs, economic troubles, and division within our society. I call out to You for the renewal of my spirit. I remember that You never give us any situation that is too difficult to handle, as we lean on You, and with each challenge, You give us the strength we need.³ You promised that Your yoke would be easy and Your burden light.⁴

5

PRAYER FOR THE LONELY:

Dear God, You are a father to the fatherless and set the solitary in families.⁵ Help me to work alongside You this year to alleviate the loneliness of those who live in isolation. Lead me to ways to mitigate the suffering of those who are lonely—a child from a broken home, an immigrant far from his family, a single parent, someone who is incarcerated, homeless, sick, or elderly. Help me to be available and willing to reach out to those who need a sense of belonging.

6

PRAYER FOR THOSE WHO SUFFER:

Dear God, help me to be mindful of the cry of those that are hurting and in distress. Help us to be ever praying for their needs and to be of service in whatever way we are able. Give Your servants the fortitude to be Your hands and feet in attendance to those who suffer from violence, hunger, broken families, or dangerous surroundings. That they may know “by deed and by truth”⁶ that You remember them when it seems like the world has forgotten. That their pain has reached Your heart; that what they suffer, You also suffered, and that You understand and will always answer the prayers of those who call out to You.

7

PRAYER FOR NEIGHBORS:

Dear God, help me to reach out more to those in my neighborhood, to learn the names of those who live nearby, who serve me when I’m eating out, who fill my gas tank, or teach my kids. Help me to be a blessing to those around me and a conduit of Your love.⁷

8

PRAYER FOR WORK:

Dear God, You have believers scattered throughout every city and in every sphere of business. Help me to be a faithful steward in my job, to be a positive and unifying influence in my workplace, and to always embody Your values of honesty, justice, kindness, humility, and diligence. Give me motivation to not just earn a living, but to help others also have a better life.

7. See John 17:23.

8. See Acts 10:34–35.

9. See Hebrews 10:25.

10. See Matthew 18:20.

11. See Psalm 91:4,11.

12. See Colossians 3:23.

13. See Mark 9:35.

14. See Psalm 27:8.

9

PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY:

Dear God, help me to draw a circle of love that includes all of my brethren in the faith, without distinction.⁸ Help me not to be too busy for fellowship,⁹ knowing that wherever there are two or three gathered together in Your name, You are with us in spirit.¹⁰ Help me to not fall into the trap of criticism and gossip, but to respect each of Your dearly loved children.

10

PRAYER FOR PROTECTION AND GUIDANCE:

Dear God, guide my paths this year, and help me to follow Your example and strive to do as You would in each situation. Shine light on my path with the lamp of Your Word, and keep me from evil by surrounding me and those I love with Your angels.¹¹ Please protect me from sickness and disease, and if I do get sick, please provide healing and protection from long-term adverse effects.

11

PRAYER OF SERVICE:

As You taught us, dear God, help me to serve joyfully in any job I have,¹² to be a servant to others,¹³ and to put people before material gain. Please help my labors be fruitful, but also help me to never put my work above my love for You and the special relationship we share.

12

PRAYER FOR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD:

Dear God, help me to stay close to You this year, to come to You for renewal when I feel overwhelmed, to read, absorb, and meditate on Your Word, to not let any day go by without spending time in Your company.¹⁴

GABRIEL GARCÍA V. IS THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF *ACTIVATED* AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

MYSTERY HELIX STAIRCASE

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

AROUND 1880, a boarding school for girls run by the Sisters of Loretto near Santa Fe, in the American state of New Mexico, needed a stairway to connect the choir loft to the ground floor 20 feet (6.1 meters) below. Several builders were called in to look at it and assess whether they could do the job, but no one wanted to take it on because there wasn't enough room on the ground floor to accommodate a standard type of stairs.

So the sisters prayed a *novena* to Saint Joseph for nine days asking for a staircase. The novena tradition originates in the nine days that the early disciples devoted to prayer as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost,¹ and is also practiced in the Lutheran, Anglican, and Orthodox traditions.

On the ninth day, a carpenter showed up at the door ready to work. He was riding a donkey and had only three basic carpentry tools. He labored for six months totally alone, bending the wood patiently into shape to construct the staircase, and then he disappeared before the celebration party that they had planned in his honor at which he would have been paid. The sisters asked the local lumberyard and townspeople, but no one had seen him.

The helix staircase is unusual, even unique, in several ways. First, it lacks a supporting central column, and it was made without the use of nails or screws—only glue and wooden pegs. It has 33 steps, which remind us of

1. See Acts 1:12–2:4.





the 33 years that Jesus Christ lived on earth. Even the wood is uncommonly dense and the tree it comes from hasn't yet been identified, although an analysis by a Navy lab suggests it seems to be a relative to a spruce tree that grows in Alaska.

One carpenter remarked, "It's a magnificent work of art that humbles me as a master carpenter. To create a staircase like this using modern tools would be a feat. It's mind-boggling to think about constructing such a marvel with crude hand tools, no electricity and minimal resources."

In recent times, about a quarter of a million visitors come each year to admire the staircase and learn about the theories regarding the identity of the mysterious visiting carpenter. Personally, I think one of the main points of the story is that the sisters' prayers were answered. It reminds me of the stories that Jesus told of the value of importunate prayer—a woman continually pleading her case to a stubborn judge until her request is granted, and then a man who repeatedly disturbs his friend at midnight asking for bread for his visitor.² This parable teaches us about the need to pray at all times and not lose heart, but trust in God to come through for us.³

Maybe you have your own "staircase" that needs to get built but you have no idea how it will come together. Like the sisters, you can pray, and keep on praying, until the Master Carpenter works the miracle that only He can.

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. ■

2. See Luke 18:1–8.

3. See Luke 18:1.

4. Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 1864

THE BEST IS YET TO BE

By Keith Phillips

Odd, isn't it, how our perceptions change as we age. When I was very small, my brother, who was all of 18 months older, defined "big." When I was in 1st grade, I thought 4th graders were a higher life form, but by the 6th grade I was old enough to realize that the new batch of 4th graders were in fact little kids.

My parents surely knew everything there was to know until I was a teenager, when they became clueless practically overnight. I could never imagine them as children, but now it's hard to believe that my own children are parents. My grandparents always seemed old, but now I'm a grandparent myself. Age, I'm finding out, can be as much a matter of attitude as of years.

Robert Browning revealed the secret to aging gracefully when he wrote:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made.⁴

If I'd read that 30 or 20 or even 10 years ago, that wisdom would have been lost on me, but now the prospect of new experiences and perspectives as I grow older excites me. Others around my age who bemoan each birthday and complain about a few wrinkles can take to heart the next lines from Browning's poem:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, "A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

Faith in God and His loving plan for our lives changes everything. The longer I live in His love and the closer I try to follow His plan, the surer I am that "the best is yet to 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. ■



THE RIGHT PATH

BY UDAY PAUL

A FRIEND OF MINE TOLD ME ABOUT AN INCIDENT THAT OCCURRED AFTER HE ATTENDED A BIBLE STUDY AND WAS DRIVING HOME. While he was stopped at a traffic light, a delivery boy on a two-wheeler rammed into his car from the back. My friend is usually a bit aggressive, so his first impulse was to confront the delivery boy and demand compensation from him for damaging his car. But remembering that he had just been reading and studying in the Bible about forgiveness and letting things pass, he decided to forgive the poor boy and let him go.

He told me that he experienced an inner conflict when he did what didn't come naturally to him. Eventually, however, he felt an inner peace with the realization that he'd done the right thing.

God often allows us to experience trying circumstances in life where our faith is tested and we're faced with a choice to react in a godly way or yield to our own impulses. It's usually easier to react in the latter manner, but reacting in a godly manner develops our character and helps us become more like Jesus.

1. See 2 Timothy 3:12.

2. See 2 Timothy 2:12.

3. See 1 John 2:17.

4. See John 15:8.

These days, we're constantly bombarded with the values of the world around us. Society and the media provide us with information and entertainment, all the while conditioning us to think and view the world through a certain mindset. Sticking to our convictions and taking a stand for what's right often means going against the tide. This can put us at odds with society and even result in hostility and persecution. The Bible says that all those who live in a godly way will suffer persecution.¹ That doesn't just refer to the type of widespread persecution the early Christians experienced under the Roman Empire, but can also be applied to the personal adversities, hardships, and opposition we may face in daily life as we take a stand for our faith.

Jesus also promises that those who endure hardships and sufferings in this life will rule with Him for eternity.² Whatever this world has to offer is fleeting and will soon pass away, but what God has to offer is everlasting.³

Choosing the right path may sometimes make us feel as though we're being squeezed into a mold, into something we aren't naturally meant to be. It may also mean a mortal blow to our ego. But it results in a closer walk with God and helps us to bear fruit for His kingdom.⁴

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



THE BOOK OF RUTH

BY MARIE ALVERO

THE BOOK OF RUTH IS A NEAT LITTLE NUGGET TUCKED AWAY IN THE HISTORICAL PART OF THE BIBLE. It's only four chapters, told in the narrative. One of the interesting things about this book is that while the characters in the story mention God, the book doesn't include anything prophetic, nor does it tell us what God says or thinks.

The story tells how God wove His purpose and His plan into ordinary people doing ordinary things. Ruth is the daughter-in-law of Naomi, whose Jewish family migrated to Moab when Israel was going through a famine, and in the years since, her husband and both of her sons have died. So far, no luck for Naomi, and now alone in the world, she decides to move back to Israel.

Ruth chooses to go with Naomi, promising to make Naomi's people her people, and Naomi's God, her God. When they get back to Israel, they're just trying to survive. Ruth goes to the fields to pick up the grains of barley the harvesters have left behind. The field belongs to a man named Boaz, who is impressed by her integrity in not leaving Naomi, and marries her. Boaz and Ruth become the great-grandparents of King David, and ancestors of Jesus.

There are no miracles in this story, nor any supernatural events, but God's hand is clearly in every part of

the story. As Naomi and Ruth try to survive, as they live godly lives, God's purpose for them was accomplished.

I believe that it's often much the same for us. God's will isn't usually something that falls on us with great fanfare; it's a purpose that is accomplished as we do our best to live according to God's truth in our ordinary circumstances, doing everyday things. Some lives, like that of the great spiritual reformer Martin Luther, are interrupted with a sudden specific calling or mission, but for many of us, we will see God's hand on our lives as we take each step daily, committing each day to His care.

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Start to discover God's plan for you by inviting His Son, Jesus, into your life today. You can pray this simple prayer:

Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me. I ask You to please come into my heart, forgive my sins, and give me Your free gift of eternal life! Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to love You and others. Amen.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

MY PLAN OR YOURS?

I want you to experience My joy and Presence in your life. I have answers to your questions, solutions to your problems, and insight into the complex situations you encounter.

When you ask for My guidance, I will give it. “If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”¹ When you’re seeking Me for help in making a decision, ask Me to help you to set aside your own ideas and plans.

I know your past, present, and future. I understand your needs and desires, your aspirations and fears. I know everything about you. The more you learn to seek and follow My plan for your life, the more you will learn to abide in My joy and find lasting fulfillment.

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

