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Vol 24 • Issue 4

THE EYEWITNESS

24 hours that changed everything

The Pearl Diver

Would you accept a priceless gift?

Shiny New Shoes

A lesson learned



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THREE SHOCKING DAYS

When we think of the days between the Passion and Easter, most of the time we're thinking about Jesus' disciples who had very suddenly lost their teacher, best friend, and the man they believed had been sent by God to redeem their people. How discouraged they must have felt, how frightened, how confused. But I'd never stopped to wonder how Satan experienced that time. Have you?

After Jesus died on the cross, everything went dark. Clouds covered the sun, the earth shook violently, buildings crumbled, the temple veil was torn, and even ghosts appeared in town. It must have been a day filled with dread and hopelessness, even for anyone who wasn't aware of the crucifixion.

But how gleeful *Satan* must have felt! God's Son was stopped dead in His tracks. No more talk of salvation. No more Light of the world. When Jesus' body was laid to rest in the tomb, a heavy stone was rolled outside the entrance, and guards were posted, how the devil must have snickered. Of course, that supposed triumph was very short-lived.

The Bible tells us that "when [Jesus'] body was put to death ... his spirit was made alive. Christ then preached to the spirits that were being kept in prison."¹ Jesus descended into the world of the dead to bring salvation to the souls held captive there. That was Satan's own back yard—how could he not have heard the message Jesus was sharing?—That His death on the cross had all been part of God's plan—that it had in fact been *the very way* He and His Father had picked to bring about their triumph—that *because* He had died and overcome death, He was now able to offer salvation and eternal life to all who believed in Him.

"In the world you will have tribulation," Jesus warned His disciples before His death, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."² That's the victory—His and ours—that we celebrate at Easter.

1. 1 Peter 3:18–19 CEV

2. John 16:33

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NO FEAR IN LOVE

BY ANNA PERLINI



HOW ENVIOUS I WAS OF THE PEOPLE WHO COULD! Not only strong men and women, but even children and the elderly seemed to enjoy it so much and feel so at ease in it, whereas I was standing on the side gripped by fear. We all have our fears, some open and some of a more secret nature. I'm not afraid to speak in front of people or climb mountains. But for 20 years, I'd lived in a beautiful and popular holiday location on the coast—and I was afraid of the sea! Specifically, I was afraid of being out of my depth in the water.

But one year, things changed.

In the spring, my prayer was that I could overcome my fear of the sea. I had “preached” a lot of sermons to others about overcoming fears, and that it's never too late to learn something new, so it was time for me to put my own words into practice.

At the beginning of summer, I practiced treading water in a swimming pool. That was a victory, and I thought I was ready to face the sea, but it wasn't quite so simple. I stood on the beach for a long time, watching that beautiful blue mass of water and again felt that fear paralyzing my legs.

I returned a few days later, and the same thing happened. The sea wasn't like the swimming pool! But eventually, I listened to my husband's invitation to follow him out a little at a time.

Finally, my feet couldn't touch the bottom and it was an exhilarating feeling, finally letting go of the shore! Tears were streaming down my face, and I was overwhelmed by the same emotion as when I won some big prize as a child.

Needless to say, this experience taught me some invaluable lessons:

“There is no fear in love.” I had to dig deep to find love for the sea. I thought I liked it enough to begin with, but there had to be more to it than that—I had to enjoy it and delight in it.

“Let go and let God.” I'd heard that quote so many times, but learning to tread water really brought it to life. The more I let go and relaxed, the easier it got.

“It's never too late to learn something new.” You have to find and admit your limits, but you also need to keep moving and progressing.

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

THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS

BY ALEX PETERSON

TO HISTORIANS, the facts regarding Jesus are as definite and evident as those of Julius Caesar. Not only do we find an accurate portrait of Him in the documents of the New Testament, but dozens of ancient non-biblical manuscripts confirm that Jesus was a genuine historical figure who lived in Palestine in the early part of the first century.


If any adjective were to describe Jesus, it would be “unique.” His message was unique. The claims He made regarding Himself were unique. His miracles were unique. And the influence He has had on the world is unsurpassed by any other.

One very outstanding and undeniably unique aspect of Jesus’ life is that literally hundreds of detailed predictions and prophecies were made many centuries before He was born—specific details regarding His birth, life, and death—that no mere mortal man could possibly have fulfilled. In the Old Testament, over 300 such predictions about the “Messiah” or “Savior” can be found, written *centuries before* Jesus was born.

In 750 BC, the prophet Isaiah prophesied that “The Lord Himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.”¹ Seven and a half centuries later, a young virgin in Israel named Mary was visited by the angel

1. See Isaiah 7:14.

2. Luke 1:26–35



Gabriel, who announced to her that she would bear a son who would be called Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

The New Testament tells us that “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, seeing I have not lain with any man?’ And the angel answered, ‘The Spirit of God shall come upon you, and the power of the Almighty shall overshadow you. Therefore that Holy One which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.’”²

Although He was literally the ruler and king of the universe, He chose not to be born in a fine palace with the elite and powerful members of the governments of man in attendance. Instead, He was born in the humblest and most lowly of circumstances, on the dirty floor of a barn amidst the cattle and the donkeys, wrapped in rags and laid to rest in the animals’ feed trough.

When Jesus began His life’s work, He went about everywhere doing good, helping people, loving children, healing heartaches, strengthening tired bodies, and bringing God’s love to all whom He could. He not only preached His message, but He lived it as one of us. He not only ministered to people’s spiritual needs, but He spent a great deal of time ministering to their physical and material needs, miraculously healing them when they were sick, giving sight to the blind, hearing to the

deaf, cleansing lepers, raising the dead. He fed the crowds when they were hungry and did all He could to share His life and His love.

Just before He was arrested and crucified, knowing that He would soon be reunited with His heavenly Father, Jesus prayed: “Now, Father, glorify Me along with Yourself and restore Me to such majesty and honor in Your presence as I had with You before the world was made ... for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.”³

The Creator of all things willingly stripped Himself of His unlimited power and became a tiny helpless infant. The source of all wisdom and knowledge had to study and learn to read and write. He left His throne in heaven where innumerable angels worshipped Him, where all the forces of the universe were at His command, and He took the place of a servant. He was scoffed at, ridiculed, persecuted, and ultimately killed by the very ones He came to save.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is “a high priest who is touched with the feeling of our weaknesses, for He was in all points tempted the same way we are, yet without sin.”⁴ Imagine! The Son of God literally became a citizen of this world, a member of humanity, a man of flesh, in order to redeem us with His love, provide a tangible expression of His compassion and concern, and help us to understand His truth.


Deep in their hearts, most people know that something is missing in their lives. Outwardly they may seem to have everything—money, position, family, friends, all the things that are supposed to make them happy—yet they still have an emptiness, a hunger that nothing really

3. John 17:5, 24

4. Hebrews 4:15

5. See John 6:35.

6. John 14:6



satisfies. Jesus said that He is the bread of life who would fulfill our heart's "hunger and thirst."⁵ The loneliness, emptiness, and dissatisfaction so common to the human experience can be replaced with lasting peace and joy when we come to Him.

He also claims, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except by Me."⁶ This is an extraordinary claim and is in fact the heart and soul of the writings of the New Testament—that Jesus alone is the way to eternal life, salvation, and union with God.

Jesus and His life and teachings are universal. God sent His Son to show all men and women, all nations, all people, what He Himself is like, to freely bring us His great love and truth. People sometimes ask, "Can't you just speak of 'God's love'? Why must you insist on using Jesus' name? Why is Christianity so exclusive?"

If Jesus is God's Son, and God chose Jesus to reveal Himself to the world, then God Himself has insisted on it. The Bible says, "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."⁷

There is no other way to make peace with God. He will not accept any other terms, any other deal. In Jesus, the one thing necessary for the salvation and redemption

of humankind happened in such a way that it never needs to happen again. It is for this reason that we can claim with certainty that for the greatest ailment of humanity, there is only one specific remedy—Jesus.

The historical facts regarding Jesus of Nazareth cannot be denied by anyone who seriously and open-mindedly examines them. In particular, there is no reason to doubt that after His death something incredible happened that transformed His tiny band of dejected followers into a company of witnesses that all the persecution of Imperial Rome could not stop. Downhearted and discouraged, their Lord cruelly crucified by His enemies, those disciples thought their hopes had died and their dreams had been shattered. But three days after Jesus' death, their faith was rekindled in such a dramatic manner that no force on earth was able to quench it.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus personally appeared to over 500 eyewitnesses after His resurrection.⁸ This was the resounding message that His first disciples boldly proclaimed throughout the world, "God raised Him from the dead."⁹

And that lowly handful of His original followers went on to tell the entire world the good news that God not only sent His Son into the world to teach us His truth and show us His love, but also that Jesus suffered death for our sake, and then rose from the grave. So we who know and believe in Him never need to fear death again, for we are saved and on our way to heaven, thanks to Jesus. ■

7. John 5:23

8. See 1 Corinthians 15:6.

9. Acts 13:30



THE REWARD OF JOY

BY DAVID BOLICK

THE PAGES OF HISTORY AND FICTION ARE POPULATED BY THE LABORS, sacrifices, and heroic deeds of countless men and women who were rewarded in a variety of ways, ranging from material prosperity to requited love, glorious victory in battle, and even immortality. The Bible is likewise adorned with references to reward, from God telling Abram that He would be his “exceeding great reward,”¹ to Jesus’ descriptions in His Sermon on the Mount of the spectrum of rewards that His followers could expect.²

“Reward” in most cases refers to either payment for services rendered, or payback for wrongs or grievances.³ God’s justice is often affirmed in Scripture by His faithfulness to reward everyone according to their works.⁴

Since believers are said to be joint heirs with Christ,⁵ I find the rewards attributed to Him to be of particular interest. In Hebrews 12:2⁶ it says that “for the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross,” and we read

1. Genesis 15:1

2. See Matthew 5–6.

3. See Job 34:11.

4. See 1 Corinthians 3:8.

5. See Romans 8:17.

6. NIV

7. NLT

8. Romans 8:22–23 NASB

9. 1 Corinthians 13:12 NLT

10. See 1 Corinthians 3:14;
Revelation 22:12.

11. See Matthew 25:21, 23.

something similar in Isaiah 53:11⁷: “When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied.”

Jesus used the *pains of labor* imagery in John 16:21, when preparing His disciples for His coming death, and Paul cosmically extended the metaphor: “We know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”⁸

As the marvels of modern medicine can enable expectant parents to view an ultrasound image of their unborn baby and anticipate the new life that is developing, so we can peer into God’s Word and contemplate, “like puzzling reflections in a mirror,”⁹ the joy that will be ours when the labors of all believers come to fruition.¹⁰ On that day, we will enter into the joy of our Lord¹¹ and join His celebration—like parents are overcome with wonder, relief, and ecstatic thankfulness when they finally hold in their arms the new life they helped create.

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THE EYEWITNESS

—An account of Jesus' arrest as told by the high priest's servant, Malchus

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER



THE PAST 24 HOURS HAVE BEEN DISTURBING, terrifying, wonderful. It started with an order from Caiaphas the high priest, Caiaphas the puppet of Rome, Caiaphas whom I serve. “Malchus, do this! Malchus, do that!” And of course, I must do as I am told. I am the puppet of a puppet, here to carry out his dirty work. And this was the dirtiest job I’ve ever been given.

My orders were to pass on the high priest’s instructions to the captain of the temple guard, go with him and his men to seize Jesus, and take Him to the judgment hall. We had done this sort of thing before when we’d arrested

other rogue teachers, but this time something in me resisted my orders.

Months earlier I had heard Jesus speak, and I tell you, no other man spoke like He did! “Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you.” Now that is a message you don’t hear often! With everyone else it’s “an eye for an eye.” The zealots want their country back. The religious fanatics want their religion back. The crooked merchants who have been out-cheated want their money back. It seems everyone wants

revenge. Jesus was different.

Caiaphas wanted us to arrest Jesus in the dead of night because he was afraid there would be a riot if the common people were around to see it. Jesus had done many miracles, and most people loved Him. In fact, the crowd called for Him to be their king upon His entry into the city just a few days ago.

The idea was to find Jesus in the garden where He went to pray, take Him by surprise, and arrest Him before He could escape. But when we got there, it was like He knew we were coming for Him and was waiting. Judas

Iscariot did what he'd been paid to do and pointed out Jesus from the group of a dozen men. What a way to betray his leader—with a kiss!

We could have saved the temple treasury the 30 pieces of silver that the chief priests paid Judas, because before we could say or do anything, Jesus asked us, “Who are you looking for?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” I answered.

“I am He,” Jesus said. His presence was so overpowering that all of us who had come to arrest Him fell to the ground. “Who are you looking for?” Jesus asked again.

“Jesus of Nazareth,” I repeated as I struggled to my feet.

“I have told you that I am the one you are looking for, so let these others go,” He said, pointing to His disciples.

But one of them—the one they call Peter—didn't want to leave without a fight. He drew a sword and swung. I dodged and thought he had missed, but then I felt a sharp pain and blood gushed from the side of my head. My ear was gone! I dropped to my knees and clutched the wound, trying in vain to stem the flow of blood. My clothes became a red-soaked mess and I began to lose consciousness.

Suddenly a brilliant light engulfed me. Someone called my name. It was Jesus, kneeling over me and covering my wound with His hand. I felt a warm tingle. The pain stopped. Jesus' eyes were full of love. He didn't say a word, but I knew then that He was my friend, not my enemy. I also knew that I would be all right—but what would happen to Jesus? I had played a part in His arrest, and now I regretted it.

“Put that sword away,” Jesus said, turning to Peter. “He who lives by the sword will die by the sword.”

I think some of the guards were as surprised as I was that Jesus could have enough love to heal His enemies. Some may even have wondered, like I did, if He really was the Son of God. Not the captain of the temple guard, though. He never doubted his orders. He jerked Jesus to His feet, and a moment later they were all gone.

Alone in the garden, I contemplated the miracle that had just taken place. My ear was restored perfectly whole, but my blood-soaked robe and skin were proof that something amazing had happened. How could the others have dismissed that miracle so quickly? How could they have been so callous?

Back home, as I washed the caked blood from my face and arms and changed clothes, I couldn't shake the thought that I had just been an accomplice to a horrendous crime.

I ran to the high priest's palace to see what would happen to Jesus, and found the place filled with people. News of Jesus' arrest had spread quickly.

“Where is He?” I asked one of the guards.

“The trial has begun. Caiaphas is already convinced that this Jesus fellow is guilty of blasphemy. He will pass judgment quickly. Jesus doesn't have a chance,” the guard answered matter-of-factly.

I kept feeling my ear. There was no pain, no damage. I ran my fingers over the spot, but couldn't even feel a scar. How could that be?

Then that thought came back, even stronger than before. I'm responsible for this! I felt like I was the one on



trial. He healed me. He showed me love and mercy. Now He is surrounded by wolves crying for His blood. What have I done?

The guard was right. Caiaphas and the chief priests were quick to pass judgment, but they didn't have authority under Roman law to condemn Jesus to death.

I followed as Jesus was taken to stand trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. Jesus' accusers were a bit like we were in the garden—nearly bowled over every time He spoke. They knew Jesus was no ordinary man.

"I find no fault in Him at all," Pilate declared after his interrogation. But when he saw that the crowd had been incited by the priests to demand Jesus' execution and were about to riot, he called for a basin of water and washed his hands, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man. If you want Him crucified, you see to it!"

Then Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified, and the whole garrison of Roman soldiers gathered around Jesus. They dressed Him in a scarlet robe and put a crown of thorns on His head. They spit on Him and mocked Him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" Then they put His own clothes back on Him and led Him away to be crucified.

I was pushed along by the crowd as it surged through the narrow streets of Jerusalem until we came to the hill called Golgotha—"the place of the skull"—just outside the city. By the time I pushed my way to the front of the crowd, the soldiers had already nailed Jesus to a cross and hoisted Him up to die like a common criminal. His face

and body were splattered with blood, like mine had been in the garden.

In my mind I traveled back several months, to when I had heard Him tell a crowd, "I have come to seek and save the lost."

Even though I was sure He wouldn't be able to hear me over the noise of the crowd that had gathered to watch Him die, I called out to Him, "I am lost, Jesus. Forgive me for what I did!"

Then He looked straight at me with the same love in His eyes that I had seen in the garden. I knew I was forgiven. It had been a miracle when He healed my ear, but an even greater miracle when He healed my heart.

A moment later, Caiaphas arrived to taunt Jesus and gloat over his victory. He was so different from Jesus—so filled with hatred and malice. "If You are the king of Israel, as You claim, come down from the cross! Then we will believe. You trusted in God—let Him deliver You now!"

The sky turned dark, the wind blew, thunder shook the hillside, and Jesus cried out, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Even as He hung there dying, He forgave His executioners.

Now I know what I must do. I must find some way to serve my new Master out of love and gratitude.

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1. <http://elixirmime.com>

WE KNOW THE ENDING

BY MARIE ALVERO

I'M THE GAL WHO LIKES TO READ THE LAST PAGE OF THE BOOK. I like to know the ending before I commit to reading the entire story. I enjoy looking up spoilers while watching a movie. I hate suspense; I just want to know if I'm going to like the ending or not. I'm happy to go through all the twists and turns of the story, as long as I know it has a good outcome. You follow the story totally differently when you know how the story ends.

Think back to the night Jesus was crucified; we know what happened. We know that He rose from the dead three days later. But as it all played out, the disciples *didn't* know how the story would end. Peter was so scared of what was transpiring that he denied Jesus three times in the hours leading up to His death. All the other disciples fled, putting distance between them and Jesus in His hour of need. Jesus' followers didn't know how the story would end, and they were scared out of their minds!

They didn't know that three days after that horrible, gruesome death, Jesus would rise from the dead in the single, most defining, glorious event in the history of the world! But when it happened, it was such a shocker to them that they never stopped talking about it. It literally

never got old for them. They lived and died by the truth of that story!

As you go through the Easter season this year, try to imagine it as the disciples experienced it. Let your heart fall in the horrible news that Jesus was captured and dragged off to be tried. Feel the fear and horror as He is sentenced to death and marched through the streets, bloody and broken. Weep and hurt as He cries out in the pain and anguish of crucifixion. And let your whole world and hope fall apart as He dies in agony. Just for a moment, experience it as if you didn't know the end of the story.

And then hopefully you will experience the end of the story with a measure of the same awe, joy, and wonder the disciples had when they discovered that He had risen! Try to bring fresh eyes to this familiar story, because it's the story that matters the most. It's the story that changed the trajectory of mankind. It's not just hope, it's hope fulfilled!

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■



THE GIFT OF FAITH

BY J.M. STIRLING

RECENTLY, while I was waiting for my appointment in the lounge of a local business, I watched a large screen displaying the company's products. Each one was given a "before/after" treatment, with first a rather glum experience, then a much better one after using the product. This is a basic staple of advertising which has proven remarkably successful.

When I was a young boy, my heart was usually thrilled with expectancy. My family lived in a rural setting and my favorite pastime was to roam through the hills exploring nature in all seasons. I loved everything about life, and I was blissfully unconcerned about all the evil that might have been lurking out in the world.

But by the time I became a teenager, those feelings were fading. Nature hadn't changed, nor my love for it. But those early feelings of joy and excitement had been pushed aside by anxious thoughts.

I turned twenty on my uncle's cattle ranch in central British Columbia. My uncle was away for the winter and left me with the house and a few animals to watch over. That may spark imaginations of adventure in the rugged western Canadian back country, and there was some of that. But in fact, it was a low point in my life, and I'd gone there hoping to find purpose and lasting peace of mind.

Being there provided time and opportunity to reflect on life, and I wrote my thoughts in a diary. The book is

long gone, but I do remember the title and a few lines of a poem I worked on. "Taking Yourself Higher" expressed my growing awareness of the negative spiral that exists in this world and my need to rise up and away from it. But the poem was left unfinished, as I lacked any answer as to how to achieve that. I had not yet discovered the way.

This is the picture of my "before" experience. Thankfully, when I surrendered to the offer of the Shepherd's extended hand, I was given grace to believe and was lifted up and out to safety.

Faith is and always will be the key to victory. Believing we're not alone and have help is the first step. Studying and absorbing the promises in God's Word is a practical aspect of possessing and increasing faith. When we've done what we can, God will do what we can't.

J.M. STIRLING AND HIS WIFE ANNA RAISED TEN CHILDREN WHILE WORKING IN A GOSPEL MINISTRY ACROSS SEVEN COUNTRIES. THEY CURRENTLY LIVE NEAR TORONTO, CANADA. ■

Every child of God can defeat the world, and our faith is what gives us this victory.—1 John 5:4 CEV



How Inner Change Works

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Q: YOU SAY THAT GOD CAN AND WANTS TO TURN MY PERSONAL WEAKNESSES INTO STRONG POINTS. I'VE PRAYED FOR THAT, BUT SO FAR NOTHING HAS CHANGED. WHY DOESN'T GOD ANSWER MY PRAYER?

A: It sounds like you expect God to work an overnight wonder in you, with nothing required of you beyond wanting and praying to do better. That's not the way it works. God will do for you what only He can do, but He also expects you to do what you can. It takes both. Personal growth is a partnership.

God heard your prayer and brought the desired answer into the realm of possibility the instant you prayed, but now it is up to you to put the answer into effect and make it a reality. You need to start acting changed, even if you don't feel changed. If you prayed to be less negative and critical of others, for example, you need to make an effort to be positive and see the good in others. God will inspire positive thoughts and help you catch yourself when you begin to become negative or critical, but then you have to follow His lead and deliberately choose the good and reject the bad. Desiring to change and praying for that was the right choice, but now you need to make that choice over and over until it becomes second nature.

Inner change is a process that takes commitment, time, effort, and patience, but it is one of the most rewarding experiences in life.

Add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge.—*2 Peter 1:5 NIV*

You can't have a physical transformation until you have a spiritual transformation.—*Cory Booker (b. 1969)*

Change can be hard. It requires no extra effort to settle for the same old thing. Auto-pilot keeps us locked into past patterns. But transforming your life? That requires courage, commitment, and effort. It's tempting to stay camped in the zone of That's-Just-How-It-Is. But to get to the really good stuff in life, you have to be willing to become an explorer and adventurer.—*John Mark Green*

No matter what has happened to you in the past or what is going on in your life right now, it has no power to keep you from having an amazingly good future if you will walk by faith in God. God loves you! He wants you to live with victory over sin so you can possess His promises for your life today!—*Joyce Meyer (b. 1943)* ■

THE PEARL DIVER

BY SIMON BISHOP

I ONCE READ A STORY ABOUT AN INDIAN PEARL DIVER WHO REFUSED TO BE CONVINCED BY HIS FRIEND, a foreign missionary, that salvation could be as simple as accepting Jesus as his savior. He believed it should involve sacrifice and great personal cost.

What changed his mind was when he tried to give the missionary the gift of a pearl that had cost his son his life, and he was met with an offer of purchase instead. He was offended that something that he considered priceless could be degraded to a monetary transaction. The missionary was then able to use this circumstance to show that just as the pearl diver could never sell the pearl for any price, so God through His Son Jesus can only offer salvation as a gift, since it cost everything to bring it to us.¹

This story reminded me of the one Jesus told of a treasure hunter who found a pearl for sale that was so precious that he ended up selling all his property and possessions so he could buy that one pearl.² Jesus said this is an illustration of what the kingdom of God is like to those who want to be a part. He wasn't telling us that we have to pay for it, but rather that we should value it so highly that nothing else can possibly compare to it.

Easter is a good time to reflect on how costly it was for Jesus to pay for our sins by allowing Himself to be beaten, whipped, tortured, and humiliated before finally being hung on the cross and dying so that we could be forgiven for our sins and enter His heavenly kingdom.

While we can never repay the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, it's worth taking time to think about how we can



show our gratitude by loving God and others with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength.³ This means we should be open and ready when opportunity presents itself and also willing to create opportunities to put this into practice. May we all be instruments of God's love and peace to those in need.

SIMON BISHOP DOES FULL-TIME MISSION AND HUMANITARIAN WORK IN THE PHILIPPINES. ■

If you haven't yet received Jesus as your Savior, you can do so by asking Him to come into your heart and life. Simply pray:

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

1. Read the full story here: <https://www.godvine.com/read/the-matchless-pearl--718.html>
2. See Matthew 13:45–46.
3. See Matthew 22:37–40.

If God sends us on stony paths,
He provides strong shoes.
—Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983)



SHINY NEW SHOES

BY KOOS STENGER

“I DON’T WANT THOSE SHOES!” I whined. “I want *those!*” I pointed to another pair, which to my inexperienced six-year-old mind seemed a lot better than the ones both the salesperson with his insincere grin and my mother were keen on.

“But Koos,” my mother pleaded, “you have flat feet. You need shoes with the right support.”

But I was not convinced. To me, all feet seemed flat. The shoes she wanted to buy for me looked like they were worn by mountaineers starting a climb of Mt. Everest, whereas the ones *I* wanted came with bright red shoelaces and a silver buckle.

Mother sighed, and the smile on the face of the salesperson faded into a frustrated stare, because the shoes I wanted were significantly cheaper.

“These shoes will be no good on long walks,” Mother tried again. “They will hurt and frustrate you.”

But I was a pretty willful, self-centered child, and my mother was raising me and my brother alone. In the end, she nearly always gave in, as she did this time. As we walked out of the store, I proudly wore my shiny new shoes, and a group of elderly women on the street stopped to coo “How sweet.”

But the next evening, our car broke down. In those days in Holland, there weren’t that many cars on the

roads—and certainly not any 24-hour towing services. The only thing we could do was walk the seven kilometers back home and sort it out the following day.

How I hated that walk! I hated my shiny new shoes with the red shoelaces! I hated the bloody blisters all over my toes, and I complained all the way home!

I ended up with the heavy-duty leather shoes I’d needed all along. I was grateful, and even though they didn’t look nearly as fetching, I knew why I was better off with them.

Remembering the story about my shoes made me think of a lesson. How often we try to present ourselves as something beautiful. We want to walk in shoes we think will make us look beautiful, while God knows we may need something different, something that will actually be *good* for us.

At times, I’ve been a fair-weather Christian. I’ve worn shiny shoes of religiosity, boldly proclaiming the virtues of grace and condemning sin. But when the tests came, I wasn’t always able to “walk the walk” I was preaching. I’m still learning to trust and accept the type of shoes God gives me and to wear them with a gracious smile. After all, Father knows best.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

ETERNAL LOVE

When I say I love you, just you, I am talking to each of My children from every walk of life. I'm talking to those who feel far away and distant from My love. I am talking to those who feel they've failed and there is no forgiveness to be found, or who feel there is no hope.

I love you just the way you are. My love is reaching out to you right now. My love, My forgiveness, and My mercy are all right there for you, if you will just receive them. I long to hold you close to My heart of love.

If you feel weak, tired, battle-worn, and weary, this message is for you. If you feel you are fainting in your mind, fainting in heart and soul, this message, My precious one, is for you. If you think your zeal has left you, and you feel like you are all washed up, I am here for you and will never leave you or forsake you!

If you are standing on the threshold of new horizons, feeling overwhelmed at the challenges ahead, afraid of the future; if you feel you don't have it in you to meet the need that lies before you, I want you to know that I will see you through.

I am always right there by your side. I have never left you, and I will never, ever forsake you.

