

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

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## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### AMBASSADORS

There's a story, possibly apocryphal, about an American woman whose son was appointed Minister to the Court of Saint James's, the term for an ambassador to the United Kingdom. At the time, it was considered the most senior and prestigious posting in the diplomatic service, and her friends remarked on how proud she must be. To their surprise, she said, "To think he could have been a minister of the Gospel and an ambassador of the Kingdom of God!"

You and I may not be part of an earthly diplomatic corps, but no matter who we are or where we're from, if we have Jesus, we are *His* ambassadors, and He depends on us to show the world what He is like. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you,"<sup>1</sup> and the apostle Paul wrote, "We are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us."<sup>2</sup> God *could* appear supernaturally to present the gospel, but He generally chooses to work through us to accomplish that.

An ambassador's job has two prongs—communication and representation. The early Christians did both. They changed minds by conveying the message of salvation. And they changed hearts by living in ways that showed God's love for every single person, no matter who or where they were. Today, the world continues to need people to fulfill both roles. That is you and me.

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1. John 20:21

2. 2 Corinthians 5:20 NLT



# AN UNEXPECTED OPPORTUNITY

BY G. L. ELLENS

ONE LATE SATURDAY AFTERNOON, I decided to go shopping at a nearby mall. As part of my daily walking routine, I wanted to see if I could make it there on foot. However, I lost my way, and night was falling. The streets were getting dark, and I was starting to get nervous being out alone.

As I walked along, I noticed a pile of what looked like leaves or garbage up ahead of me.

Suddenly, the pile moved!

First a knee appeared, then a foot! I could scarcely believe it was actually a human being—one so crippled, however, that he looked more like a human spider. He could only move by using his arms and legs in a twisted, uncoordinated way, while his spine was useless.

At first, I was taken aback. Then I saw the metal can beside him and realized his family had probably put him on the street to beg for money from passersby. My heart went out to him.

As I walked toward him, I opened my bag and took out my wallet. I put quite a large paper bill in his hand.

I didn't expect much of a response, but to my surprise, the young man looked up with lucidity and clear eyes. He made direct eye contact with me. I realized that here was a human soul. Just as alive and full of feeling as myself.

Later on, I thought back on the evening and I was grateful that I'd decided to walk to the mall, and even that I'd lost my way. If I'd taken my car, I wouldn't have seen this young man from the street.

Jesus cared deeply about the poor and the downtrodden when He was on earth. In fact, He sometimes walked miles out of His way to minister to someone. Although I couldn't do a miracle of healing like Jesus did, I could show this young man compassion and love. Never mind the shopping! This was something much more important!

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



# CATCH THE BOAT

BY MARIA FONTAINE

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THE STORY OF THE MAN WHO WAS TRAPPED IN A FLOOD AND HAD A VISION OF GOD'S HAND REACHING DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND LIFTING HIM TO SAFETY. As the water started to rise in his house, his neighbor urged him to leave, offering a ride out of the danger. When the man responded, "I'm waiting for God to save me," the puzzled neighbor drove off in his pickup truck.

This man continued to pray and hold on to his vision. As the water rose, engulfing the first floor of his house, he climbed to the roof. A boat came by with some people heading for safe ground. Coming alongside the house, they shouted to the man to climb into the boat with them. He yelled back that he was waiting for God to save him. They shook their heads in disbelief and moved on.

The man continued to pray, believing with all his heart that God would save him. The flood waters continued to rise until only the roof was visible. A helicopter hovered over the nearly submerged house and a voice came over a loudspeaker offering to lower a ladder and take him off the roof. Waving the helicopter away, the man again shouted adamantly that he was waiting for God to save him. The helicopter departed.

Finally, the water rose over the roof, caught him up, and swept him away. He drowned.

When he reached heaven, he indignantly asked, "Lord, why did You not save me? I believed in You with all my heart. Why did You let me drown?" God replied, "*I did reach down My hand!*—In the form of a pickup truck, a boat, and a helicopter—to lift you to safety, and you refused all of them. What else could I do for you?"

You may be wondering what this crazy story has to do with anything. Hang on and I'll tell you.

Some years ago, while on a trip, I developed a bad cough, which continued to get worse, despite taking a variety of natural remedies.

After we got home, my husband, Peter, kept trying to persuade me that I should go to the doctor for a checkup. I resisted, as I was sure that the doctor would prescribe medicine, and I wanted to give my natural remedies a chance to work, as I was sure they would. Finally, Peter insisted that I go to the doctor, where X-rays and an examination confirmed that I had bronchitis and was only a couple of days away from having pneumonia.

I finally took the medicine the doctor prescribed, and sure enough, in only a few days my cough was completely



cleared up, after weeks of taking natural remedies that were supposed to be effective in getting rid of the bronchitis.

God wanted to teach me something through this. He is not bound to one approach for achieving His purpose of helping us to grow, or even to one method of healing us. We just need to be open and follow His guidance.

Another incident along these lines took place several years later, when I was again away from home.

I woke up one morning with a very stiff neck, and after several days, I still wasn't able to turn my head. I was having to sleep propped up in a half sitting position because of the pain.

Peter suggested that I see a chiropractor to have it checked, but I resisted, as the thought of having a chiropractor do adjustments on my neck when it was so sore was scary to me.

Several miserable days passed and I finally acquiesced and went to the chiropractor, who turned out to be a very kind, cheerful man. I felt reassured that I would be safe in his hands and that he wasn't going to damage my neck.

In fact, it barely hurt, and with only one adjustment he pronounced me all better. One of the vertebrae in my

neck had gotten a bit out of place and just needed to be realigned.

After having resisted so vehemently going to the chiropractor, I was finally able to lie flat without any pain for the first time in a week.

I'm still learning that when I and others pray for my healing, I can't ignore the "boats" God brings along that may be the solutions. I can't decide based on whether I like them or whether they're inconvenient or don't sound good to me.

The principle of making wise, prayerful decisions applies to all aspects of our lives. We have to make decisions all the time, and we can't be stuck in the rut of tenaciously holding on to an approach or mindset just because we've used it in the past. There may be some risk and we'll have to proceed prayerfully and carefully, but we can't be closed to new things just because there's a chance that doing something new might not work. We need to be open to God's guidance and place ourselves in *His* care.

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



# THE PILLAR THAT MOVED

BY SALLY GARCÍA

**EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE**, my husband mentions another move he's thought of, and I feel my stomach tighten. They say women are "nesters," and sure enough, for me moving usually means a tremendous amount of work, especially when I feel like we've just settled in enough to begin to enjoy our present home. We're working on the garden and beginning to enjoy nice weather and some outdoor barbecues with friends.

I started thinking about the Hebrews on their way to the Promised Land after their exodus from Egypt. They wandered for forty years in the Sinai Desert and had an amazing way to know when it was time to pack up their tents and parcels and hit the dusty trail again. "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night."<sup>1</sup>

In spite of their wanderings in the desert due to their disobediences and discontent, the protective pillar was a constant in their lives. Their little ones grew up in the desert never knowing a life without the column of God. It gave them shade in the daytime and warmth and light in the night.<sup>2</sup>

When they finally crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, God's visible presence would no longer lead them, but He gave them a promise: "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."<sup>3</sup> Now it was time to "walk by faith rather than sight."<sup>4</sup>

So what happened to the pillar?

It seems like about 500 years later, the prophet Isaiah describes the pillar again, this time appearing around all those united in His name: "Then God will bring back the ancient pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night and mark Mount Zion and everyone in it with his glorious presence, his immense, protective presence, shade from the burning sun and shelter from the driving rain."<sup>5</sup>

What an encouragement for me to find this verse! I can claim the protection, leading, and guidance of His presence. Though I don't see it outside my front door, it's there just as surely as if it was visible.<sup>6</sup> I believe that when it is time to move, I will sense God's guidance and I'll be ready.

The next time my husband says something about moving, I know what I'll say: "As soon as God's pillar is in motion, we'll move right with it."

1. Exodus 13:21 KJV

2. See Psalm 105:39.

3. Deuteronomy 31:8 ESV

4. 2 Corinthians 5:7

5. Isaiah 4:5 The Message

6. See Hebrews 11:27.

SALLY GARCÍA IS AN EDUCATOR, MISSIONARY, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■



# THERMOSTAT OR THERMOMETER

BY SIMON BISHOP

I ONCE HEARD A PERSON SAY THAT WE SHOULD BE “THERMOSTAT CHRISTIANS,” not “thermometer Christians.” I was puzzled, so they explained.

A thermometer Christian is one whose temperature is constantly adjusting to whatever circumstances he finds himself in. This person is able to assess the surrounding environment and then adjust his approach to better reach people. On the other hand, a thermostat Christian is one who influences his or her surroundings, making a difference for the better.

I was thinking about this recently as I have been doing a series of Bible studies on Jesus’ well-known Sermon on the Mount. At one point, Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” But He also says, “Be careful not to perform your righteous acts before men to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from God your Father.”<sup>1</sup>

Although these two statements can seem to contradict each other at first, I think it is a good example of how we can correctly apply the principle of being a Christian

who is an influence for good. We’re clearly meant to have an effect on our surroundings—sharing God’s light and love with the world—yet, it’s so important that we do it with the motivation of glorifying Jesus and lifting Him up, not trying to show that our faith or religion makes us better than other people. Don’t forget either that all good thermostats include a thermometer as well. We do need to be able to rightly assess situations to see how we can best reach people with the good news and glorify God.

As Christians, I believe Jesus wants us to be like Him—humble, extending His love and healing to all He encountered, flaws and all. Gently leading and teaching, bringing them along at a pace that they could handle. It says in Philippians 2:7 that Jesus was not concerned about His own reputation, but rather took on the identity of a servant. I think you could say that Jesus radically adapted to His human surroundings to be relatable to those He was with, but also projected a huge force for good in creating change in each circumstance He came into. I am praying that I can follow His example in my life.

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

1. Matthew 5:14, 16; 6:1

# THE PUPPIES

BY MARA HODLER



AT 3:00 A.M., I was outside under a clear starry sky, bundled up and carrying a flashlight and two plastic bags. Tagging at my heels were two eight-week-old German shepherd puppies that needed to go to the “bathroom”—at 3:00 *in the morning!*


I was roused from a peaceful sleep at the sound of their whimpering. As much as I wanted to stay in my nice warm bed, I knew that if I didn’t get up, I would have a very messy, smelly dog crate awaiting me in the morning. So I got up, bundled up, and took the puppies out.

I used my flashlight to find the mounds of you-know-what and my plastic bags to pick it up and throw it away. After about 15 minutes outside, I called the puppies to come back inside, gave them a drink of water, and put them back in their dog crate.

Soon the puppies were asleep again, and I went back to the comfort of my cozy bed. At 6:00 a.m., my husband rose to the puppies’ whimpering and took them out for another round. He then brought them in and fed them. They were hungry and their little tails wagged happily as they devoured their food. At 6:30, after their breakfast, my son had his turn to take the puppies out for yet another potty session.

See, our family really wanted dogs. For as long as the kids can remember, they have been asking for a dog. My husband wanted two, so we have two. The kids were so excited the day we brought the tiny puppies home. They were six weeks old and very cute. The “men” of the family got to name the boy puppy, and the girls named the girl puppy (Hoss and Luna, respectively).





But they had worms and fleas; they peed, puked, and pooped in the house. My daughter got poop on her when she was trying to take them outside. You should have seen her freak out! For a few weeks, our household was in shambles. Pretty much every spare moment was spent cleaning up after the puppies, bathing the puppies, feeding the puppies, and taking them outside. Furniture was moved to accommodate the puppy crate; blankets were reassigned to them. We spent a fair bit in veterinarian fees for Hoss and Luna, not to mention collars, leashes, feeding bowls, and puppy food, treats, and toys. I tell you what, these puppies were cause for a whole lot of hoopla!

After a few weeks of puppy madness, we had a family meeting to talk about the dogs. Now that the kids knew what it meant to be pet owners, my husband and I clearly explained to them that we got Hoss and Luna for *them*, not so that we, their parents, could find something else to fill up our time. The kids agreed and we brainstormed ideas for how to best care for our dogs.

We all knew that even if it meant less free time, even if it meant less money would be available for other things, even if it meant a lot of work, even if it meant getting up in the middle of the night (thanks, Mom!), even if it meant doing gross things like cleaning up dog poop, even if it would take a lot of time to train them, we wanted the puppies.

We wanted them, because we knew that if we invested in them now by training and caring for them, in a few

months our dogs would have grown into companions, protectors, and playmates. The investment was worth it.

In Matthew chapter 7, Jesus teaches us about prayer and how to not be afraid to ask God for our needs. He says, “If your child asks you for bread, would you give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would you give him a snake? So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him.”<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, our kids are not parents, but in caring for Hoss and Luna, they have taken on a “parenting” role. As much work and hassle as this “parenting” is, they love Hoss and Luna and are always looking out for them. If the kids think the puppies need something, they do their best to get it for them.

Hoss and Luna are doing something more than providing companionship to our family. They are also illustrations of how much God wants to help us, care for us, and provide our needs. He wants the best for us, just like *we* want our puppies to have the best little doggy lives they can. We want them to thrive, to be healthy, to feel secure, to learn, and to have fun. God wants all those things for us, too!

“How much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him?”

If you have a need, ask God for it. Even if you have a *want*, ask God for it. Remember that you are even more precious to God than a child is to his or her parents. Ask, and if it’s good for you, and within His plan for your life, God will give it to you. ■

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1. Matthew 7:9–11 NLT

# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DESK

BY NATALIA NAZAROVA



I WAS SUBMITTING SOME LEGAL PAPERWORK, and to my dismay there were several discrepancies in my documents. Something that at first appeared easy to rectify instead took several weeks and numerous appointments to sort out.

At one of the offices where I had been sent, I came face to face with Olga. She struck me as efficient, but rather curt. We got off to a rough start. Mine was probably the hundredth problem she had had to deal with that day, and it seemed I would get no sympathy from her. To make matters worse, her computer froze and she had to reboot. She muttered that she was going to take an aspirin and would be back in a minute.

While she was away, I asked God for wisdom in handling the situation, and suddenly I saw things from a different perspective. For a moment I put aside my aggravation with how things were going for me and tried to imagine what it was like to sit on the other side of that desk.

As we waited for her computer to reboot, I asked Olga if she had encountered my specific problem before. That was the beginning of a dialog between two tired, frustrated women.

Olga explained that she had only been working at that job for a few months. In the past year, she and her husband had divorced, and she had gone through a very difficult time adjusting to her new life as a single parent. I sympathized and explained that I was a missionary, in the country to share God's love with people I had also come to love.

Eventually, she was able to log back into the system and enter the correct information.

Over the next few days, we spoke on the phone a number of times as I checked on the progress of my paperwork. Each time our communications grew friendlier and more relaxed, and when I visited her office to collect the finalized document, Olga took extra time to verify that everything was correct. We parted as friends.

I caught myself smiling as I stepped out into the windy evening. Taking a personal interest in someone else's problems had transformed a mutual ordeal into a mutually positive experience.

NATALIA NAZAROVA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER FROM UKRAINE WHO DEVOTED TEN YEARS TO NONPROFIT WORK THROUGHOUT EASTERN EUROPE AND SOUTH AMERICA. ■



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

*Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all my sins. I believe that You died for me. I invite You into my heart and life. Fill me with Your love and Holy Spirit. Help me get to know You and live by the words in Your book, the Bible. Amen.*



# The Greater Victory

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA

MUCH IS MADE THESE DAYS ABOUT LEARNING FROM FAILURE AND DEFEAT. Setbacks are good because they make us reflect on our life and what we need to change, and they drive us to God, to seek refuge and wisdom and strength in Him, and to realize that without Him we are nothing. But of course, the desire to overcome is hardwired in us.

The outstanding truth of the Bible is that true victory has already been given to us through Jesus: “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Let’s explore victory from the beginning of time.

In the Old Testament, victory was usually equated with military success. The Hebrews saw that it was God who fought for them and made them successful in battle. As long as they obeyed and kept close to Him, God was their invincible ally.

The prophets gave them glimpses of a much more important battle being fought, not for country and territories, but for the souls of men, and foretold the ultimate victory in this battle through the coming of the Messiah. This victory would far surpass all the conquests

of the past, a spiritual victory wrought with weapons of a different sort: love, prayer, and faith.

When Jesus came, the concept of victory took on its full spiritual meaning. The victory is no longer over enemy armies or hostile neighbors, but as the apostle put it, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”<sup>2</sup>

The victory that really counts is *God’s* victory, which comes from an entirely different realm. With Christ, we can rise permanently over the realm of temporal scrimmages. He assures us that even though there will be tribulations in our lives, we will always be able to find peace in Him, because He has already won.<sup>3</sup> His victory over sin and death is already achieved.<sup>4</sup>

Through the power of God’s Spirit, we can overcome whatever we face, even the negative attitudes that we wrestle against daily, like our pride, anxiety, depression, etc. We have the victory right now and we can claim it. So let’s smile and fight joyfully, with faith, knowing that we already have the victory, thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

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

1. 1 Corinthians 15:57

2. Ephesians 6:12 KJV

3. See John 16:33.

4. See 1 Corinthians 15:55–57.



# CLEAR SHINING

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

**THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN THE EARTH'S BEAUTY PARALLELS THE GLORIES OF HEAVEN,** when you look at your surroundings with awe and know there is a God who loves and cares about you. Growing up on a farm with a 360-degree view of the sky, I was always very in tune with nature. When I look at the clear dawn sky after a night of rain and observe the unique optical effect created by the mingling of mist and dust, I'm reminded of King David's last recorded words: "like the light of morning at sunrise, like a morning without clouds, like the gleaming of the sun on new grass after rain."<sup>1</sup>

I am also fascinated by crepuscular rays that shine with an ethereal light. These are rays of sunlight separated by darker cloud-shadowed regions, and though they are nearly parallel, they appear to radiate from a single point. They stream from behind mountains or clouds, scattering sunlight through dust particles. Sometimes these are called "God rays."

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1. 2 Samuel 23:4 NLT

Whenever I see them, I stop and give thanks to God for showing His glory in His creation and demonstrating spiritual principles through visual phenomena. Without the particles of dust or water vapor obscuring the pure sunlight, we could never see this beauty so clearly. Without the clouds trying to hide the sun, we'd miss some of the facets of its magnificence.

In our lives, the annoyances, like dust, that shroud our light and try to overwhelm our days with small distractions can actually work together to bring about a deeper beauty. If we take a moment to behold the beauties of creation, the first rays of dawn or the twilight, our lives are filled with beauty that is majestic and proudly proclaims God's love shining down on us, pure, unending, and eternal.

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/). ■

# VISIONS OF HEAVEN

BY ALFREDO CARRASCO

IT ALL STARTED WHEN MY BROTHER CALLED ME EARLY IN THE MORNING TO TELL ME THAT MY MOTHER HAD BEEN RUSHED TO THE HOSPITAL IN A SUDDEN EMERGENCY. Later, he called to tell me that my mother had passed away. After learning about this, I was crying and shocked!

Then I began to pray, and I received the most wonderful vision. I saw my mother smiling with the most beautiful and heavenly smile. She was so full of joy! It was like she was telling me, “Don’t worry. I am in heaven now, and I’m happy to meet my sons who are here.” After seeing this vision of my mother in heaven, exuding joy, I was at peace and didn’t cry anymore.

Her memorial service resulted in an extraordinary testimony. We were able to reconnect with several family members and friends that we had not seen for a long time. I was able to speak and share some thoughts about my mother. I told those present at the service about heaven and eternal life, emphasizing how Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, and how we will also be resurrected when He comes again, and explaining that the dead in Christ will be raised first.

I also spoke about the reality of the afterlife as presented in the Bible and in many experiences and books on the subject. At the end I invited everyone to pray to receive Jesus, and about 50 people accepted Jesus in their hearts.

But the story does not end there. After the service and my talk, a lady from another chapel where another person’s wake was being held approached me and asked me if I could come to speak and pray at her sister’s memorial service, as they didn’t have anyone there to do that.

I agreed, and my wife Lorena and I went into the other chapel. I proceeded to also give a talk there about heaven and pray for the family of the deceased, and about 40 people accepted Jesus in their hearts. They were so grateful that we came to pray for them. At the end they hugged each other. They were crying as they were very moved after the prayer. They also thanked me profusely.

All in all, my mom’s departure to heaven resulted in a great testimony for my relatives, friends, and these other dear people who were unknown to me, but not to the Lord, who wanted us to reach them with His love.

ALFREDO CARRASCO LIVES IN VENEZUELA, WHERE HE IS ENGAGED IN MISSIONARY WORK. ■



# THE VANISHED KEYS

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

ONE MORNING NOT LONG AGO, it all went wrong. We had a full day scheduled from dawn to dusk. First on the list, help our neighbor put up a canopy. I was up early and already a little stressed just thinking about the long day ahead. Then it happened. Between our house and our neighbors', there is a small field, and somehow, on the walk across, the car keys vanished. We had them, and then we didn't.

Cue panic. We retraced all our steps and combed the field section by section. We got down on our hands and knees and felt through the grass. We even got my father's metal detector and marched it around, checking and rechecking. My blood pressure was rising the longer we looked and found nothing. An hour passed, and still no keys. I was totally frustrated and upset.

Finally, we stopped everything and prayed and felt that we should go ahead with the planned tent setup. Some of my friends kept looking for the errant keys, but without success. At last, the search was called off. The day continued, but a cloud hung over it.

That night, I lay in bed, still bothered by the whole situation. I couldn't understand why this had happened, especially when we already had *so* much to do. Now we needed an expensive replacement key—and couldn't use the car while we waited for it. No silver lining that I could see.

A few days later, one of my close friends suddenly burst through the door. "The keys, the keys! I found them!" she shouted. Dumbfounded, I watched her set them down and disjointedly asked, "But ... Where? ... How?" With a huge smile, she explained how she'd been crossing the field when she decided to look a bit more once again. She prayed and began to search. Suddenly, right there in front of her were the lost keys!

I have to admit I still don't know how or why this happened. But I have an inkling of how God worked this for good in my life, resulting in more patience for me, and a reminder that, even when my plans go awry, our lives are never out of His hands.

CHRIS MIZRANY IS A MISSIONARY, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND WEB DESIGNER WITH HELPING HAND IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. ■



# REST

BY MARIE ALVERO

IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS, the apostle Paul promises the church in Jerusalem that “there remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.”<sup>1</sup> What *is* a Sabbath-rest? I might not know all the things that it *is*, but I can tell you what it’s *not*. It’s not a thing that most people I know have. It seems that each year our pace quickens, we push for more, strive harder, and increasingly run on fumes. This probably sounds familiar to many of you.

God must have known that after sin separated us from Him, we would strive to control, to earn, to create, to master, and we would end up losing His peace. So He commanded His people to observe the Sabbath. This was a day where work, earning, creating, serving, and mastering ceased, and the people rested and remembered that their relationship with God was more important than anything they could accomplish. As long as His people’s hearts were right with God, Sabbath felt like a blessing—but if their priorities were off, Sabbath probably felt like something that held them back from being as productive as other nations, or as a burden of rules and regulations.

Today, we aren’t called to observe Sabbath according to the traditions in the Old Testament, but God’s

call to rest is just as needed. “Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.”<sup>2</sup>

Maybe you, like me, are at the point where your soul needs rest. I really need it. I need to let Jesus lead me to green pastures and restore my soul, but how can this happen when I’m always rushing, worrying, doing, and stressing? If I were to describe modern culture in one word, it would be “stress.” So much that we hold dear is the opposite of calm, peace, and still. And we pay for it through burnout, addiction, loneliness, and brokenness. We who have learned this culture go on to teach it to our children.

But God tells us there is another way: there remains a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. How do you get that rest? Jesus tells us: “Come to me, all of you who are tired and have heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Accept my teachings and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your lives.”<sup>3</sup> When we come to Him and learn from Him, this Sabbath-rest is a promise to us.

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1. Hebrews 4:9 NIV
2. Hebrews 4:10–11 NIV
3. Matthew 11:28–29 NCV

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# OVERFLOWING JOY

“I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” —*John 15:11*<sup>1</sup>

Fear not when the problems and challenges you face appear too big. While these may be too large for *your* strength and wisdom, remember that with *Me* all things are possible!

I will give you joy in place of sorrow, if you will ask. I have promised to give wisdom to anyone that asks, and to give it liberally and without reproach.<sup>2</sup> Ask, therefore, and trust that I will not fail to provide.

I am the Good Shepherd who shows kindness, patience, compassion, and mercy. I have protected you and kept you these many years, even when you stumbled and fell. I have overlooked your faults, failures, and shortcomings, and picked you up and shown you the way forward.

Give, and it will be given unto you! Give of yourself and of your time, trusting that everything that you spend in love for others, I will repay.<sup>3</sup> Even when you feel incapable and like you have no more to give, trust that you will receive My grace in good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.<sup>4</sup>

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1. NLT

2. See James 1:5.

3. See Luke 10:35.

4. See Luke 6:38.

