

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 25 • Issue 1

PLAYING BASKETBALL WITH JESUS

Letting Him take
the shot

The God of Hope

A priceless gift

Stepping Forward

Moving in God's time



PERSONALLY SPEAKING FACING THE FUTURE WITH HOPE

The start of a new year often brings change and new direction, and this year is no exception. Our dear friend, Ronan Keane, who served as the editor of *Activated* for close to 12 years, is moving on to new opportunities and has passed the baton on to us.

Thank you, Ronan, for your oversight of the content of the magazines and your excellent reflections at the beginning of every issue that whet our appetite for the theme of the month. Starting this month, we have the honor of joining the *Activated* staff. We look forward to the challenge!

“A new year, a new life” is a phrase that is often used as we turn the page on the past and enter a new year. Nevertheless, to attain to such a lofty goal it does us well to consider Chesterton’s famous saying, “The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul.”

Though each new year brings a fair amount of optimism and expectancy, there are also often clouds of apprehension on the horizon, especially considering the uncertain times we live in. *Will I reach my goals? Will my family and I enjoy good health this year and in the future? Will I be able to meet all my financial responsibilities?*

The beginning of a new year is an ideal time to place the burdens that weigh us down on God’s capable shoulders. As William Carey once said, “The future is as bright as the promises of God.” God promises that He will be with us always (Matthew 28:20). What better moment than the present to *hold on* to God and *let go* of all that causes us to worry. The key is to put our confidence in Him.

This issue’s articles are meant to instill hope; and as Peter Amsterdam writes in his article on page 4, hope is not a vague wish, but a certainty. As believers, we have the certainty that whatever the year brings, God can make it work together for our good because we love and trust Him (Romans 8:28).

Let’s welcome the new year by placing ourselves and our loved ones in God’s hands and seeking His guidance and help in all our affairs. May God grant us hope and strength for each task, as we look to Him and His Word, and may we share His love and truth with those in need.

Gabriel and Sally García
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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO FIND HOPE

BY MARIE KNIGHT

I AM AN AMATEUR GARDENER, at best, but I love plants and flowers! What I have cultivated well in my flower garden are daffodils and hyacinths. Probably the reason for this is that once you plant the bulbs in the ground, they need little to no maintenance to grow. Every spring they appear in their cheery vibrant colors!

A few years ago, we needed work done on our septic field system, and thankfully we were able to take care of the problem. My only regret was that my garden was directly in the path that needed to be dug up. As I watched the backhoe tear up the ground where I had added new flower bulbs each year, I felt a pang of regret. There was no way I could have found the plants to dig them up beforehand, so I considered them lost. When the job was finished, the workers dumped the dirt back into the ditches to fill them up.

In spring, where my garden had once been, there was now a thick layer of clay mud, hard and heavy. I was certain that nothing would grow back in that spot. After a few weeks, however, I noticed sprouts making their way through the clay. Apparently, the flower bulbs had been dumped back into their original general area

and the warmth of the sun was drawing them up to the surface!

I began digging them up to plant them in a new flower plot. Some of the bulbs were under at least a foot of hardened clay, but still they broke through. It's been years, but every year I still find daffodils scattered through my yard.

This experience made me reflect on how sometimes we find ourselves in a dark place and hope seems gone, but no matter how deep our troubles, the warmth and light of God's love can reach down and draw us out.

It reminds me of what King David wrote, "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him" ([Psalm 40:2-3 NIV](#)).

Even though in our times of trouble we may feel like we've been thrown into a pit of clay with no way of escape, the Lord is able to use our dark experiences as a testimony of His love, because He will always bring us through!

MARIE KNIGHT IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY VOLUNTEER IN THE USA. ■



THE GOD OF HOPE

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

“MAY THE GOD OF
HOPE FILL YOU WITH ALL

JOY AND PEACE IN BELIEVING, so that

by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).


When we read the Gospels, it becomes apparent that Jesus knew beforehand that He was going to suffer and be killed, and He also knew He was going to rise from the dead. (See Luke 18:31–33.) The confidence that Jesus had that He would resurrect from the dead is referred to in biblical terms as “hope.”

Nowadays, when we use the word “hope,” it is generally understood as referring to something that someone would *like* to see happen. It conveys the idea that we don’t know what is going to happen, but we *wish* for

a certain outcome. Scripture sometimes uses the word “hope” in this manner as well. But more often, this word conveys a much more substantial meaning in the Bible.

The biblical understanding of the Greek word *elpis*, translated as *hope*, is “a desire of some good and an expectation of obtaining it.” The *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* explains that “Rather than expressing the desire for a particular outcome that is uncertain, hope in the New Testament by definition is characterized by *certainty*.”

The expectancy of biblical hope is a certainty because it is rooted in the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. His death,



followed by His rising from the dead, is what gives us the assurance—or certainty—that we too will one day be raised from the dead to eternal life. Having placed our faith in Jesus as our Savior—by believing that He is the Son of God—our hope, our expectation, though not a reality right now, is a certainty. Our expectancy of obtaining God’s promise of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life with God is certain, based on the promises of God.

Faith and hope are closely connected, as the certainty of hope is based on our faith in God. The Bible tells us that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Hope, in the biblical sense, relates to the future, as it is the assurance that something promised by God will happen. It may not have happened yet, but we are assured that it will.

For example, the apostle Paul speaks of the grace of God which teaches us to live godly lives in this present age, while we are “waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12–13). The hope spoken of here is the certainty of expectation, knowing that Christ will appear in glory. Because we have the certainty of hope, we place our trust in God and His promises. We know that His promises are true, even though we haven’t seen the complete fulfillment of them yet.

An example in the Bible of a person who had such hope is found in the life of Abraham. He and his wife Sarah had reached old age, and she was past the age of childbearing when God told him that within a year Sarah would bear a son. This seemed so improbable that Abraham asked himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (Genesis 17:17).

But as the apostle Paul wrote: “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. . . . Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised” (Romans 4:18–21 NIV).

Abraham was unwavering in hope, in belief, in the sure knowledge that God would do what He had said. The Bible tells us that “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore” (Hebrews 11:12).

God’s Word is the foundation of our faith. Paul wrote about the “hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began” (Titus 1:2). Paul speaks of this hope of eternal life as a certainty which is promised by God. Since God does not and cannot lie, we know without any doubt that we will be the beneficiaries of His promises.



When we understand hope in this biblical manner, we can find strength to endure life's tests and trials. Sometimes the pathway of life takes us through very trying and difficult times. But when we place our hope in God, we have the assurance that He will help us and eventually we will overcome—if not in this life, then in the next. Such hope can give us the courage and fortitude to stay positive and praiseful through the challenges of life and the ups and downs we face.

We place our hope on the promises of God, who has promised to work all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). We are able to endure hardship with the knowledge that we will live in the presence of our Lord forever. We have the conviction that whatever we face, no matter how difficult and trying it might be, in the end we will be forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Our faith is based on the certainty of our hope, which Scripture calls “a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Hebrews 6:19). Our knowledge that Jesus died on the cross so that we can be in relationship with God, that He

is present in our lives each day, and that we are assured of eternal life with Him should guide the way we think and feel about our life.

When we remind ourselves of what lies ahead—the assurance of our salvation and blessings for eternity—we can face our challenges courageously, with the sure knowledge that no matter what the outcome, we have the hope of a future with God. When we live with this hope, we know that the eternal outcome will be glorious, and we can better face the difficulties of life, knowing that He has a purpose and a plan for our lives and for the world.

We have been given the priceless gift of salvation and will spend forever in love, joy, and peace with God. As the bearers of such hope, we are called to likewise share that hope of glory with others, to do our best to represent Jesus to them, to love them as He does, and to help them to experience His love and care through us. May we always consciously live with the hope we have through Christ, and share that hope with others, as Jesus shared it with us.

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

PLAYING BASKETBALL WITH JESUS

BY LENKA SCHMIDT

MY 18-YEAR-OLD NIECE, Tereza, had just left to go back home. We'd spent a few days together and my heart really went out to her. Her mom has a very difficult progressive disability; she is bedridden and needs a lot of assistance. She's been sick for about six years now, and it has taken a toll on the whole family. I felt so burdened for all of them!

Before Tereza left, while reading together an article which referenced the scripture "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7 NKJV), an intriguing picture came to mind of Jesus dressed in a sports uniform and me holding a ball. The ball represented my worries. The impression I got was that all I had to do was pass that ball to Jesus and He would take care of it. So, I did, and it was such a relief. Only Jesus can take that ball and shoot it into the basket for the win!

I told my niece about this. I explained how she could imagine each family member that she worries about as a ball that she could pass on to Jesus, one by one. Mom-ball—to Jesus. Dad-ball—to Jesus. Her brother-ball—again to Jesus. And yet another ball, her graduation from high school this year and going to university—to Jesus.

I explained that there is no other way that she can carry the weight of all that pressure and stress on an

ongoing basis. I believe it helped her. Thankfully, she has a wonderful close relationship with Jesus, which, I believe, is partly due to the difficulties she's been facing.

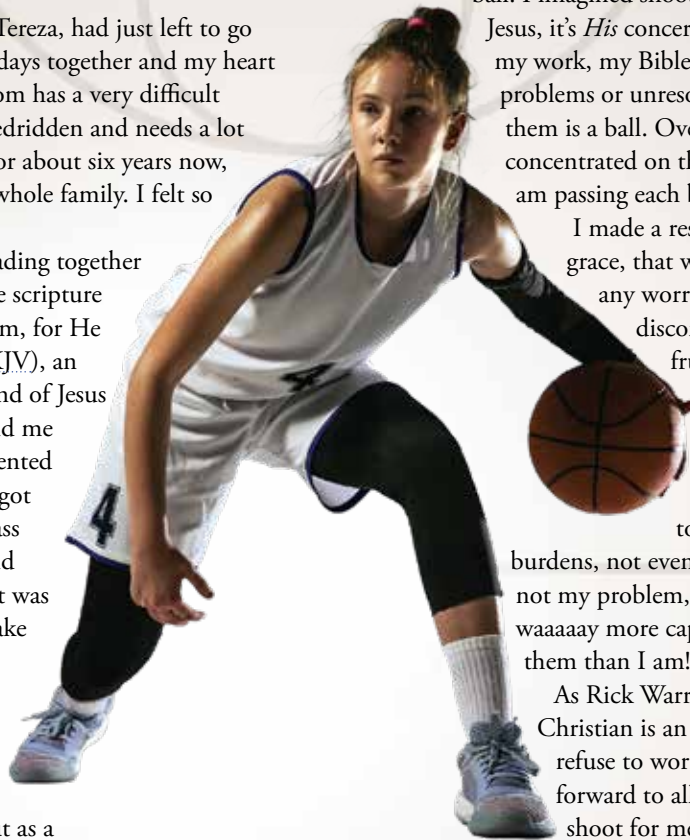
Then I reflected on my own life and tried to apply this lesson to myself. My daughter and her future—another ball. I imagined shooting it straight back to Jesus, it's *His* concern. My relationships, my work, my Bible study group, ongoing problems or unresolved issues, each of them is a ball. Over and over again, I concentrated on the mental picture—I am passing each ball on to Jesus!

I made a resolution, by God's grace, that when I encounter any worry, stress, pressure, discomfort, pain, sickness, frustration, or anger, I'll make a conscious effort to *immediately*

pass that ball to Jesus. I don't want to carry any of those burdens, not even for one minute! It's not my problem, it's *His*, and He is waaaaay more capable of handling them than I am!

As Rick Warren says: "A worrying Christian is an oxymoron." So, I refuse to worry! And I am looking forward to all the baskets Jesus will shoot for me and my loved ones!

LENKA SCHMIDT HAS DONE MISSION WORK IN MANY COUNTRIES, INCLUDING TEN YEARS IN AFRICA. SHE CONTINUES AS A MISSIONARY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC, WHERE SHE LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND AND DAUGHTER WHOM THEY ADOPTED AS A BABY WHILE LIVING IN THE CONGO. ■





IT WAS NEW YEAR'S DAY AND I WAS DOING WHAT I LOVE TO DO.

I sat rather awkwardly in a low rocking chair as I painted a landscape on my easel. Blending colors, I was thoroughly involved in what I was doing. I was totally lost in the moment. That moment stretched out into a couple of hours. Then, I rose quickly to stretch my muscles and move on to something else, and my back went from zero to nine on the pain scale. I almost screamed! I could hardly take a step; I was in so much pain!

STEPPING FORWARD

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

I have had back problems before. I have overestimated my own strength and moved heavy furniture or large plants. I have been too impatient to wait until someone else could help. I have been too proud to admit that I cannot do some things I used to do.

"Why?!" I cried out, lying in bed and applying an ice pack. "Why me? Why today?" I had thought a lot about the new year in the past few weeks. I had prayed and made my list of priorities to focus on. I was inspired about new challenges. I was ready to charge into the future.

When you are in a lot of pain and every movement hurts, it makes you think a lot about how to move. When each step causes pain from a pinched nerve in your lower back, you move cautiously, fully aware of what you are doing. You move very slowly and learn to push down impatience. Each step becomes a small victory; each movement a very carefully choreographed and structured action.

When pain management becomes part of your day, it can take over your day. Everything you do centers

around this need to minimize the pain and get through it. Suddenly, some things fall into focus. Little things that might have nagged you and spurred you to action before are very quickly put out of your mind. Things you considered priorities are suddenly not that important. The little piece of paper on the floor can wait and that exercise class you love is way down on the to-do list.

I am appreciating time and slowing down to think about what is important to me. As I rest more than I thought I could, I feel the miracle of healing and the renewal of my strength. As I think about what is really important in life, I am taking a very close look at my schedule and emptying it of things I don't need to get done. I am looking at some of my habits that drain me of energy instead of increasing it. I am looking at my tendency to push myself beyond my strength.

I am realizing that if I don't take proper care of myself, I will end up *only* taking care of myself and will not be able to help others. I am realizing that I need to ask for help and just wait until that help comes to do things that are beyond my ability. I am realizing that I tend to push too hard and charge too fast, and I need to slow down and take measured steps. Most importantly, I am applying these lessons to my relationship with the Lord. When I ask Him for help, I need to wait for His answer. I need to commit each step to Him and move in His time.

Instead of charging full steam into the new year this year, I am taking carefully measured steps. I have scrapped my new year's resolutions and have begun a short, prayerful



list, not of things to get done, but of ways I need to change. I am slowly, carefully, prayerfully stepping into the future, and I somehow know this is going to be a good year.

But he knows the way that I take;
when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.
My feet have closely followed his steps;
I have kept to his way without turning aside.
I have not departed from the commands of his lips;
I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my
daily bread (Job 23:10–12 NIV).

I instruct you in the way of wisdom
and lead you along straight paths.
When you walk, your steps will not be hampered;
when you run, you will not stumble.
Hold on to instruction, do not let it go;
guard it well, for it is your life (Proverbs 4:11–13 NIV).

The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps (Proverbs 16:9).

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM. ■

TRUE VALUES



Nothing truly valuable arises from ambition or from a mere sense of duty; it stems rather from love and devotion towards men.—*Albert Einstein*

Gandhi identified the seven sins in the world as wealth without work, pleasure before conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principle.

We must understand spiritual truths and apply them to our modern life. We must draw strength from the almost forgotten virtues of simplicity, humility, contemplation, and prayer. It requires a dedication beyond science, beyond self, but the rewards are great and it is our only hope.—*Charles Lindbergh*

The person who tries to live alone will not succeed as a human being. His heart withers if it does not answer another heart. His mind shrinks away if he hears only the echoes of his own thoughts and finds no other inspiration.—*Pearl S. Buck*

Measure wealth not by the things you have, but by the things you have that you wouldn't sell for money.—*Author unknown*

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.—*Martin Luther King Jr.*

Life in time remains without meaning if it does not find its meaning in eternity.—*Nikolai Berdyaev*

The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.—*William James*

Happiness is not so much in having as sharing. We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.—*Norman MacEwen*

If life be short, then moderate your worldly cares and projects; do not cumber yourselves with too much provision for a short voyage.—*Author unknown*

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart.—*Helen Keller*

Life becomes harder for us when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier.—*Albert Schweitzer*

Jesus said, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions" (Luke 12:15). Living, the real thing, doesn't consist of things at all, because things cannot truly satisfy. They may temporarily satisfy the body but they can never satisfy the soul or the spirit that cries out to God the Father for the joy and purpose and eternal fulfillment that only God can give.—*Alex Peterson* ■



SOMETIMES, THROUGH NO FAULT OF OUR OWN, our lives take a different turn than what we had expected. Our first reaction may be to groan, “Why me? Why now?”

Often our first reaction is negative because we’re faced with the fact that we’re not in control. Sometimes that’s even why God sends the “redirects”—to show us that, ultimately, He is the one in control.

I faced a situation like this once. I received some unexpected news that made me feel like the ground beneath my feet had suddenly given way. The family I had been working with for the past four years informed me that they would be returning to Europe in a month. I was welcome to stay in the house for the next two months, but after that, the contract was up. I felt I was on shaky ground with nowhere to live and no one to work with.

As I stood at an intersection, waiting for the light to turn green, I kept pondering this unexpected turn of events in my life. Then as I asked the Lord, “Why? What now, Lord?” an overwhelming awareness of God’s presence flooded my soul. A Bible verse came to my mind,

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

I smiled and breathed deeply. No matter what lay ahead, I knew God was with me. He had a plan for my life and, regardless of my current circumstances, He was going to work everything out.

Looking back now, four years later, I know that verse came true in my life. I’m in a better situation now than I was back then. God knew it was time for a “redirect” in my life, and He never failed me. He directed the change and got me through. All I had to do was turn my life over to Him, once again. As a result, my life was better. It was a bend in the road—not the end! From my own experience, I can honestly say that the future is as bright as the promises of God.

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. ■



HE HOLDS TOMORROW

BY RUTH DAVIDSON

WHILE WE LIVE IN A WORLD FULL OF UNREST AND UNCERTAINTIES, it's wonderful to know that we have a loving Savior who knows our every heartcry, our every need. He fills us with *certainty* from His Word, and we have nothing to fear.

As we look upon the horizon of a new year, we can do so without trepidation, knowing that we have the assurance of hope for the future. "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, Lord" (Psalm 89:15 NIV).

Our Father beckons us to walk ever closer to Him. While we are focused on our Lord and eager to change, we become transformed. He tells us to not conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Then we will be able to test and discern what God's will is—His good, acceptable, and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

The Lord said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear" (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Through the years, the hymn "I Know Who Holds Tomorrow" has been a tremendous inspiration to me whenever I waver or falter.

I don't know about tomorrow;
I just live from day to day.
I don't borrow from its sunshine
For its skies may turn to gray.
I don't worry o'er the future,
For I know what Jesus said.
And today I'll walk beside Him,
For He knows what is ahead.

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

Every step is getting brighter
As the golden stairs I climb;
Every burden's getting lighter,
Every cloud is silver-lined.
There the sun is always shining,
There no tear will dim the eye;
At the ending of the rainbow
Where the mountains touch the sky.

Many things about tomorrow
I don't seem to understand,
But I know who holds tomorrow
And I know who holds my hand.
—*Ira Stanphill (1950)*



"I don't know what the future may hold, but I know who holds the future."
—*Ralph Abernathy*

As we meditate on these precious promises, let us march into the new year, fully equipped with the knowledge that our wonderful Savior will keep us through today, tomorrow, and beyond as we keep our eyes fixed upon Him.

RUTH DAVIDSON (1939–2023) WAS A MISSIONARY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INDIA, AND SOUTH AMERICA FOR 25 YEARS, AND WAS AN AUTHOR AND CONTRIBUTOR TO THE WEBSITE THEBIBLEFORYOU.COM. ■

GOOD NEWS

BY SIMON BISHOP



THE NEW YEAR IS OFTEN A TIME WHEN PEOPLE TAKE STOCK OF THEIR LIVES, accomplishments, goals, and progress. It is also a time to evaluate the past year, learn from mistakes, and see if a change of direction is in order.

One goal that almost everyone has in common—regardless of nationality, personality, religion, social status or the many things that make us different or unique—is happiness! To be happy, joyful, and satisfied is something that almost everyone craves.

When the angel came to the shepherds immediately after Jesus' birth he said: "Don't be afraid! I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people" (Luke 2:10 NLT).

This is the foundation of Christianity, and that good news is that Jesus came to bring us love, forgiveness, and salvation.

John 3:17 says: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

I think if we want to be faithful Christians, it is helpful to consider how we can best portray our faith to others. In a time when much of the news that people read and hear is "bad news," we have the opportunity to share a joyful faith that is full of *good news* with others.

One of my goals this year is to be happy in my faith, to make sure that as I stand strong and steadfast, that I do it in such a way that others can be drawn to Jesus, that it portrays love and joy as notable attributes of my faith. Remember the promise of good news of great joy that the angel announced at Jesus' birth is for *all people*—no matter who they are or where they are at in their life journey. Jesus' gift of salvation is for all who will receive it. Everyone needs to hear the good news, not just the

seemingly good people, not just the religious people, not just the people we deem worthy, but *all* people.

There is enough bad news in the world. I want people to feel uplifted, inspired, and happy when I spend time with them. Here are a few Bible verses on being filled with joy, happiness, and laughter.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy"
(Romans 15:13).



"You will fill me with joy in your presence"
(Psalm 16:11 NIV).



"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice"
(Philippians 4:4).



"I will be filled with joy because of you"
(Psalm 9:2 NLT).



"Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice"
(Psalm 32:11).



"For the joy of the Lord is your strength"
(Nehemiah 8:10).

I pray, as you begin this new year, that Jesus will bring you joy if you feel sad, peace if you feel anxious, healing if you are sick, love if you are lonely, provision if you are lacking, strength if you are weary, and every blessing that I know He wants to give you.

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

A HOPE AND A FUTURE

BY MARIE ALVERO



THE MEMORY OF LEAVING OUR HOME IN MEXICO CITY STILL FEELS AS REAL TODAY AS IT DID 18 YEARS AGO. I remember feeling so much loss! Big dreams we had worked so hard for and that were just starting to materialize were being left behind.

We loaded up our little trailer with all our earthly possessions. We were leaving a project that we had committed to long term. We had come with everything we had, and had invested everything we had, and just 18 months in, we were laid off. I wasn't yet 30, but this was the second time we'd had to start over. Little did I know this wasn't going to be the last time; in fact, our little family would relocate 10 times in 10 years. Whether it was a mission project or a business venture, we had as many failures as we had moves.

By the time we moved to Texas I was worn and cynical. I was much more fearful than I was hopeful. Experience had taught me that disappointment was never far away. It was hard to trust God's love or have faith in His goodness. I'm not saying our lives were utterly horrible, but we were worn financially, spiritually, and mentally. I was fragile, depleted, and so, so weary from a very hard decade.

Early one morning my toddler crawled into bed with me, I snuggled her close. It only took a few seconds for

my fearful reality to hit me. I started to pray, "Lord, have mercy on us! Care for us!" Then God spoke to my heart, "Can you imagine as you snuggle your little girl, how hurtful it would be to you to hear her *beg* you for mercy? You want nothing more than for her to thrive! Why would you think you have to beg Me for mercy, as if I don't care deeply about everything that concerns you? I am your Father!" His words pierced my heart! How could I consider myself to be a more gracious parent than God?!

The words from [Jeremiah 29:11](#) filled my mind: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future'" (NIV). I thought, *What if I would just believe that this is true? What would change if I simply believed that God's plan is to prosper us and not to harm us?* That answer was easy: I would not be afraid.

I was not completely unafraid from that moment on, but I began to believe that there was hope and a future for me and my family. And in time, that proved to be true!

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. ■



LASTING CHANGE

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

THE NEW YEAR IS MORE THAN JUST A MARKING OF TIME—OR AT LEAST IT CAN BE. Many people see it as an opportunity to make a new start in some area of their lives.

Perhaps it's our new calendars with their fresh images or our new diaries and weekly planners with their unspoiled pages. Perhaps it's the knowledge that some of the people closest to us and millions of others around the world are making New Year's resolutions and setting their sights higher. Call it what you will—a personal wake-up call, a jolt to our collective conscience, or peer pressure. It's effective—at least for a few days. We all know how that goes.

This year can be different. This year, your New Year's resolutions can be the start of wonderful lasting changes, especially if you include God in your plans and work with Him. If your motivation is to please Him most of all, then you can be sure that He will help you make any necessary changes (1 John 5:14–15). In the process, because He loves you and wants you to be happy, He will also bring other good things your way in answer to your prayers. He has promised, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4). ■

As you ponder your future, please consider that the decision to place your faith in God and accept Jesus as your Savior is the most important decision any of us will ever make, as our eternal destiny depends on it. The things of this world are temporal, our bodies will age, and we will all eventually die, but Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life... Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 14:6; John 11:25–26).

Jesus loves you. If you call on Him with even the simplest prayer, He will come to you. And in fact, He longs to live in your heart, if you'll open your life to Him. You can pray a simple prayer, such as:

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all my sins. I believe that You died for me. I invite You into my heart and life. Please fill me with Your love and Holy Spirit, help me get to know You, and guide me in the way of truth. Help me to love You and love others and live by the words in Your book, the Bible. Amen.





FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

HOPE FOR EVERY SEASON

Everyone who knows Me not only has the promise of a wonderful future in heaven but can experience peace and joy here and now. You can replace worry and fear with faith and trust, knowing that nothing can separate you from My love or the eternal future I have promised ([Romans 8:38-39](#)).

As you trust Me for every aspect of your present and future, you will experience My joy and peace. So come to Me with all your worries and cares, and trust that in times of stress and troubles, I am always with you. My joy will give you strength and will sustain you no matter what happens in the world around you ([Nehemiah 8:10](#)).

Keep your eyes stayed on Me. When you're navigating the storms of life, don't focus on the wind and the waves. If you focus on the wind, you might feel as if you're going to be blown away. If you look at the waves, it might look as if you're going to drown. But if you look to Me, you'll have faith that you will make it through the storm.

The best preparation for what lies ahead, including troubling times, is the preparation of your heart. Spend time in prayer and communion with Me. Spend time reading My Word and meditate on My Word that you've hidden in your heart. Stay close to Me and trust that I will always be with you.