

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# ACTIVATED

Vol 25 • Issue 2

## LOVE LOVES THE UNLOVELY

A teacher's reflection

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Breaking down the walls

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Samaritan woman

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All things are  
possible





## PERSONALLY SPEAKING LOVING ONE ANOTHER, THE KEY

Recently, in a popular newspaper column, a well-known visual artist was asked: “Is there any belief that you have been liberated from?” She answered that, although she had been raised an atheist and now considers herself an agnostic, when she witnessed the dynamics of love and unity amongst Christians, she began to question her unbelief. She realized that there is something transcendent about love.

What a vivid portrayal of the words Jesus spoke to His followers: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another” (John 13:35). One of the single most powerful means that we have for mirroring God to others is our example of love, kindness, and genuine concern for others. How many times has someone seen Christians showing God’s love and care to others in some palpable way and thought, “Perhaps this God they talk about is true after all, and this Jesus they worship is the real thing.”

As Lucas and Irena convey in their articles, God’s love is powerful, and loving actions can melt even the hardest hearts.<sup>1</sup>

In this world of division and political strife, where trust in our fellow man appears to be at a low ebb, what a powerful witness it can be for people to see Christians supporting someone in need or accompanying a lonely one, abstaining from criticizing and tearing others down, and being kind, considerate, generous, compassionate, and respectful with one another.

Christ emphasized this mutual love that we are to have for each other when He said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). We express God’s love through our actions. So, by loving one another we are letting Jesus speak and shine through us. That’s what Iris and her co-workers did with Willie. Don’t miss this touching story in “A Small Act of Kindness.”<sup>2</sup>

This month, as we celebrate love and friendship, let’s keep this all-encompassing principle in mind and look for opportunities to share love and kindness, whether it be with our spouse, family members, friends and acquaintances, immigrants, or any stranger in need. Happy Valentine’s Day!

Gabriel and Sally García  
*Activated* Editorial Team

1. See pages 7–9.
2. See pages 12–13.

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# SHOWING GOD'S LOVE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

BY MARIE KNIGHT

EVERY WEEK WE WORK WITH LOCAL CHARITIES, delivering donations of food and clothing. For a while, among these donations we also received flowers. Not just a few flowers either—hundreds of bouquets of flowers!

I remember grumbling a few times about having to pick up the flowers. They came in buckets of water that, even though we tried to empty the buckets before loading them, would tip over and wet the carpet of the vehicle. Sometimes, after loading the food donations, it was a struggle to find space for the flowers as well.

“Besides, you can’t *eat* the flowers! They wilt, and they don’t last more than a few days! They’re *unnecessary extras!*” were a few of my mental grumbles verbalized.

Eventually the donated bouquets of flowers became sporadic, not a regular occurrence.

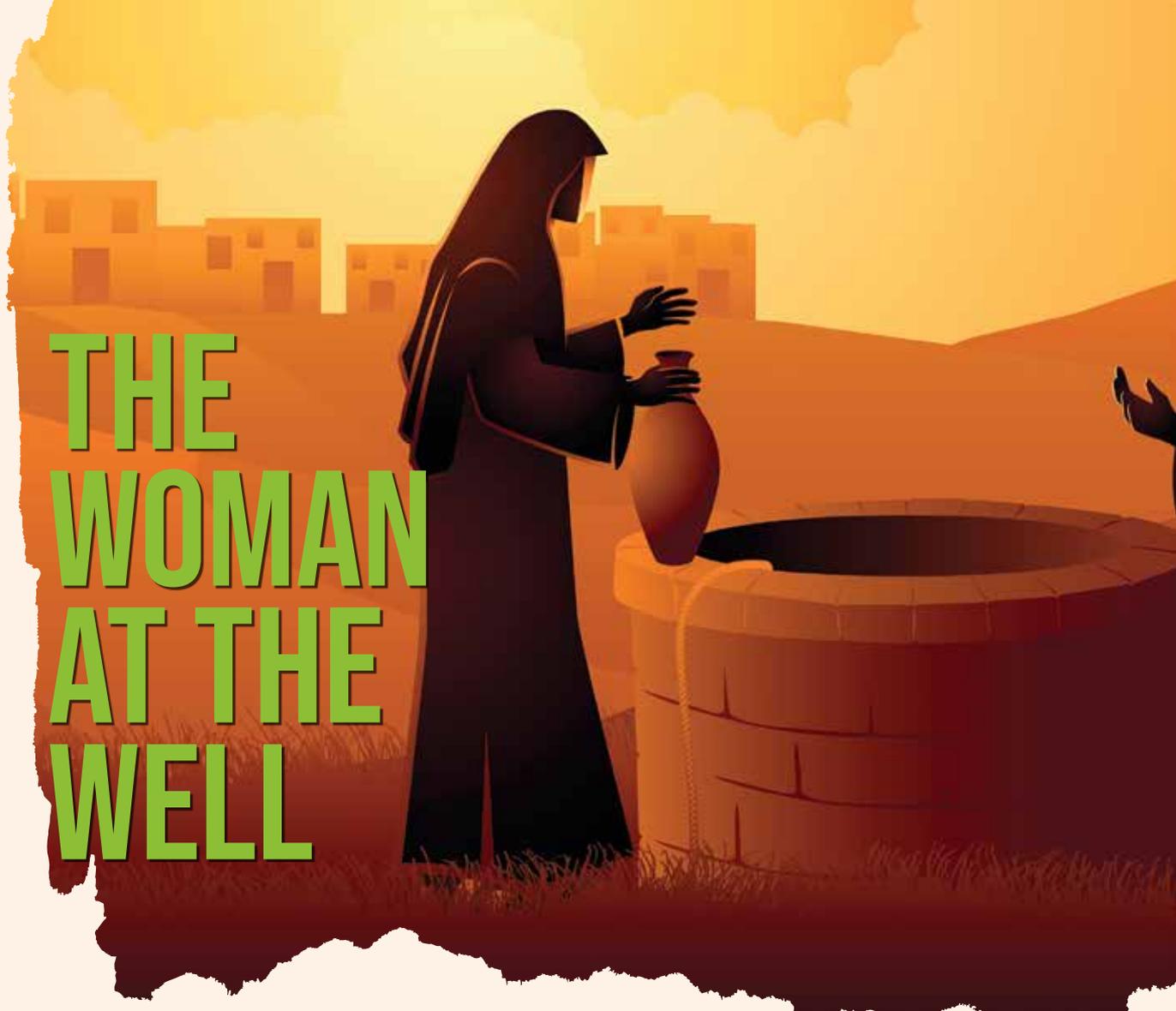
Recently I was delivering food at one of the food pantries we work with. I was waiting for one of their volunteers to help me unload, and in the meantime, I was watching a cheerful elderly woman and her funny antics. She was obviously a regular visitor to the food pantry because she talked freely with everyone and seemed to know them all by name.

After a while, she came outside and struck up a conversation with me. She expressed her appreciation for the help she received from the organization since her pension did not cover all her bills. Then her eyes took on a wistful expression as she said, “Did you know they used to give everyone flowers?! A bouquet for each person. Oh, they were beautiful!”

Then she was called in and our brief conversation left me feeling a pang of guilt. She had no idea that we were the ones who brought the flowers! It struck me that sometimes it’s those little “unnecessary, extra things” that really touch people. All this time while I was complaining, the Lord was using those flowers to show this woman, and others, that not only was He taking care of them, but that He really cared about them!

Now I have no complaints if flowers are among the items we pick up; sometimes I even ask for them! The flowers remind me of the wistful look on that woman’s face, and I pray that she gets her bouquet.

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



# THE WOMAN AT THE WELL

ALTHOUGH MOST OF US HAVE HEARD THE TERM “GOOD SAMARITAN,” we may not be aware of who the Samaritans were and the enmity that existed between the Jewish people and the Samaritans. This enmity was rooted in history.

In the year 720 BC, the king of the Assyrian Empire had invaded Israel and carried the ten northern tribes away as captives to the land of Assyria. He then brought in foreign people to inhabit the cities of northern Israel where the Jews had once lived, which then became known as Samaria. (See [2 Kings 17:22–34](#).)

Many inhabitants of this region were descendants of the northern kingdom of Israel, but had intermarried and

assimilated into the non-Jewish culture of the people who came to settle there. These people came to worship the God of the Jews, but they did not consider Jerusalem to be a holy city, nor did they worship in the Jewish temple there. For them, Mount Gerizim in Samaria was the holiest spot where God was to be worshipped, and they built a temple atop it. Because the customs and religious worship of the Samaritans were different from theirs, the Jews avoided associating with them.

On one occasion, while traveling in Judea, Jesus decided to return to His home province of Galilee. The shortest, most direct route between Judea and Galilee was through Samaria, but since the Jews would have no



dealings with the Samaritans, they would make a long detour around Samaria to avoid crossing through their land. But to His disciples' surprise, Jesus ignored such conventions and led them straight through Samaria.

After Jesus and His disciples had walked through Samaria for many miles over rough and rugged terrain, they arrived at Jacob's well, which the patriarch Jacob and his sons had dug nearly 2,000 years earlier.

The thirsty, travel-weary band gathered round the well to slake

their thirst, but they had no jug to draw water with and the well was over 100 feet deep. They were also out of food. Half a mile ahead lay the Samaritan city of Sychar, so it was decided that the disciples would go there to buy food. But Jesus was weary from the journey, so He stayed behind and sat by the well to rest (John 4:5–6).

Shortly thereafter, a woman came down the road carrying an empty water jug. As she approached the well, she was surprised to see a stranger sitting there. She looked at him suspiciously and thought, "Obviously a Jew." Hoping he wouldn't bother her, she prepared to lower her bucket into the well.

"Will you give me a drink?" Jesus asked.

Surprised, the woman looked at Him. "How is it that You, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" she asked (John 4:7–9).

Jesus answered, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that said to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water!"

The woman replied, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where can you get this 'living water' from?" Perhaps seeking to put this Jewish stranger in His place, she added, "Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and his herds?" (John 4:10–12).

Jesus responded by saying, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water that I give him shall *never* thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life!"

Now here was an extraordinary statement! Not quite sure if she understood Him, she answered, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming all the way here to draw water" (John 4:13–15).

Jesus unexpectedly replied, "First go call your husband, and come back," to which she replied, "I have no husband." Jesus then said, "You are right when you say you have no husband. You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband" (John 4:16–18).

The woman was shocked! How could this total stranger know such details of her private life unless He was a prophet? She decided this would be a good person to ask the most disputed religious question of the day.

"Sir," she said, "I can see that you are a prophet." She then pointed to the temple atop Mount Gerizim and said, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Jesus replied, "Believe Me, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem. But the time is coming—and has now come—when the true worshippers will worship the



Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him. God is spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:19–24).

The woman was astonished at His answer. “How wonderful,” she thought, “if we could just worship God in our hearts wherever we are!” She then proceeded to ask a greater question about the long-awaited coming of the Messiah.

“I know that the Messiah is coming, he who is called the Christ. When he is come, he will tell us all things.”

Jesus looked into her eyes and said, “I who speak to you am He” (John 4:25–26).

The woman looked at Jesus in amazement. Could He really be the Messiah, the Christ?

Just at that moment, Jesus’ disciples returned from town, and they marveled that He was speaking with a woman. As they approached, the woman left her water pot and ran back to the town.

When she arrived at the marketplace, she called out excitedly, “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Can He be the Christ?!” (John 4:28–29). Seeing

her conviction and enthusiasm, many people believed her account that she had spoken with the long-awaited Messiah.

Before long, Jesus’ disciples saw a large crowd of people rushing toward them, the woman in their midst. The people urged Jesus to stay with them and teach them. Jesus agreed to do so, and the Samaritans, rejoicing, led them back to Sychar.

For two days, Jesus taught in their city, and hearing the beautiful words of truth He taught, many people came to believe in Him, and remarked to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; for now we have heard for ourselves, and we *know* that this man is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world!” (John 4:39–42).

On the last day, as Jesus and His disciples were preparing to continue their journey to Galilee, a multitude from the city gathered to bid them farewell. The Samaritan woman bid Jesus farewell with a smile of joy, for now she fully understood the meaning of His words that day at the well, and a spring of living water welled up in her soul.

From this beautiful story in the Gospel of John, we learn that Jesus broke with the traditions of His day to reach lost and lonely souls with God’s love and truth. Not only did He look past the cultural, ethnic, and religious differences of the Samaritans so He could offer them the truth, He also looked past the sins of the woman at the well and saw a soul that earnestly longed for God’s love. This story teaches us that God’s love and salvation in Jesus are for all people. “For God so loved the *world* [and every person in it] that He gave His Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

This story highlights one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible—God’s gift of eternal salvation, available to every person through belief in Jesus and His death on the cross for our forgiveness.

FROM AN ARTICLE IN TREASURES, PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN 1987. ■

# LET'S SHOW COMPASSION

BY LUCAS HERNÁNDEZ

**A FRIEND AND I SAT DOWN FOR LUNCH IN A RESTAURANT.** When our waitress came to serve us, we both noticed that she did so with very little joy, as if she was annoyed at having to serve us. We kept commenting to each other about this and criticizing her attitude. We decided that she was not earning a good tip.

At the end of our not-so-pleasant lunch, my friend's phone rang and he got up apologetically to take the call in private. I am an artist and had recently drawn a picture of Jesus, written a message on the back, and printed out copies. I carry them with me and hand them out to whomever crosses my path—the cashier, the waiter, etc. I decided to give the “unfriendly waitress” one.

She asked, “What is this?” I told her, “It’s a special message for your heart.” Right then, as she stood by the table, she began to read it, and soon I saw tears falling from her eyes. When she finished reading it, I said a few words to her and we ended up sitting opposite each other. I listened to a beautiful person, whom I had so wrongly judged, as she told me about all the struggles and difficulties she had been going through.

I offered to pray with her to receive Jesus, who could help her to cope, and in His time, help provide solutions to her problems. Without hesitation she prayed a fervent prayer with me to receive Jesus into her heart.

As we were saying goodbye, I wanted to give her a good tip, but she refused, saying: “No, no, please, you

have given me *life* today! Please don't forget me!” As I live far away, I passed her contact information on to a friend who lives in the same city so that she could go see her and help her in any way she could.

This experience taught me how important it is not to make hasty judgments about others, for as this quote says: “Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always.”

LUCAS HERNÁNDEZ LIVES IN SPAIN. FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS HE HAS BEEN A VOLUNTEER AND MISSIONARY IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS. ■



Jesus loves you. He died on the cross so that, through His sacrifice, you could have eternal life. If you call on Him, He will come to you and He will never leave you. To receive Jesus, you can pray this simple prayer:

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for 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 to love You and love others and live by the truth of the Bible. Amen.

# HEARTS CHANGE THROUGH LOVE

BY IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ



**LOVE CAN BREAK DOWN THE STRONGEST WALLS**, love can bridge the widest gaps, love can melt the coldest hearts. I have had the privilege of witnessing the power of love in action in the life of a close friend of mine, which has been a great lesson and encouragement to me. Here is her story:

After receiving her diploma, Barbara started working on a cruise ship. That is where she met her husband, and after they got married, she moved to her husband's country. She came as a foreigner, not speaking the local language, not knowing the culture. She was very eager to learn, and she started making great progress.

However, there was a much bigger obstacle to hurdle: her in-laws. For some reason, they didn't like her from the start, and they let her know. They were not only unwilling to help her during her first years of adjusting to a new country and culture, they were rude and unkind to her. They didn't live in the same household, but close enough that they met each other quite often. They wouldn't greet her; they ignored her, as if she didn't exist. They talked about her behind her back.

The most difficult times were the months when her husband was away for work on the cruise ship. She had no friends, no family, no acquaintances. She was alone in a foreign country with unfriendly in-laws.

It was during one of those times when we met her. Through her tears she explained her whole situation to us. We were happy to be her friends and all along we kept encouraging her to not pay her in-laws back by treating them the same way they were treating her, but rather to keep showing them love, keep giving even when it hurts, keep greeting them with a smile even though they turn their heads away in non-response, keep doing small deeds of kindness. And she did.

She was a good baker, so she would bake them a cake for their birthdays and on other special occasions. She would do special activities with her little nephew. She would help out in little ways whenever she could. But there was no visible change, no gratitude, no response.

She knew that only love could change the situation, but when nothing changed after two years, she started to despair. Her belief in God and love helped her to not



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Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

—1 John 4:7, 21

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

—John 15:12–14

give up, even though it was tough. By then her loving and kind character had won her many friends, so at least she wasn't alone when her husband was gone. She had also learned the language and local customs, so her life got easier in that way. Yet she was still missing a relationship with her in-laws.

Then one day she called us with a smile in her voice. A breakthrough! Her sister-in-law had actually greeted her! It was a casual, half-mumbled “hi,” but in Barbara’s eyes it was the best thing that had happened to her in a long time. It was a glimmer of hope, the first sign of light at the end of the tunnel. And sure enough, since that first “hi” things snowballed quickly, and in a few months she was warmly accepted by her in-laws as a part of the family!

It was a long journey. It wasn't easy and often she felt like quitting, like there was no hope, no reason to keep trying. But she chose to not give heed to her negative feelings but rather to grit her teeth and keep going. She kept reminding herself that God's love is the only possible way to eventually win in a seemingly impossible situation and

bring about change in people's hearts. In her case, it took more than three years to see results; in other situations it might take even longer, but with God's help it's possible to keep caring, reaching out, and showing love.

Sometimes, when I am in a tough spot where I feel unloved and unaccepted by someone, and my first attempts at showing kindness are ignored or laughed at, my ego tells me to stop making a fool of myself and save my dignity. But God's Word clearly says to love not just our friends, but even our enemies and those who might not just dislike us, but actually persecute us (Matthew 5:43–44). As I remind myself of what Jesus said, I also remind myself of Barbara's story. I let that encourage me to keep showing love, because sooner or later love can make a way, love can overcome the obstacles, and love can change the hardest of hearts. “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:7–8).

IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER FOR PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE IN CROATIA AND ITALY. ■



# LOVINGKINDNESS

BY PHILLIP LYNCH

WHEN I FIRST BEGAN READING THE BIBLE, a word that captured my attention was “lovingkindness.” I felt warm inside when I read passages like the following: “I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy” (Hosea 2:19). “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jeremiah 31:3). “[God] redeems your life from destruction [and] crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psalm 103:4). “The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me” (Psalm 42:8).<sup>1</sup>

In some modern English translations of the Bible, expressions such as “steadfast love,” “mercy,” and “love” are used in place of “lovingkindness,” but I miss that word. It seems to encapsulate in a single word what God means most to me. It is the translation of the Hebrew word *chesed*, and it was coined long ago by Miles Coverdale, one of the very first translators of the Bible into English. In the Greek and Latin translations that had preceded Coverdale’s English effort, *chesed* had been translated as *eleos* and *miseriordia* respectively, the equivalents of the English word “mercy.”

Mercy is a wonderful thing, and certainly we can all agree that God is merciful, but Coverdale sensed there was a deeper, more nuanced, meaning. That is how

we now have that wonderful word, “lovingkindness.” Obviously, later scholars agreed, as the term was carried over into the other early English translations of the Bible such as Tyndale’s and the Authorized or King James Version.

At a time when love is in the air—or at least on our minds—due to Saint Valentine’s Day, I find it appropriate to recall this wonderful love that God has for us. John captured the very essence of God in that wonderful declaration, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), but clearly many of the people who wrote books of the Bible who had preceded John by hundreds and even thousands of years had also understood this. Those who knew God deeply knew that He cared for them with lovingkindness.

Some people think of God primarily in the context of His judgments in the Old Testament or as a distant God who is indifferent to the sufferings of humankind. That is a very narrow view that disregards the majority of God’s interaction with humanity. God has always loved us. It is His nature to love. Even if He wanted to *not* love, He couldn’t help Himself. He can do anything, of course, *except* go against His own nature. Therefore, He goes on showering us with lovingkindness, and I for one am glad for that!

PHILLIP LYNCH IS A NOVELIST AND COMMENTATOR ON SPIRITUAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL ISSUES, LIVING IN ATLANTIC CANADA. ■

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1. Scriptures quoted in this paragraph are from the NKJV.

# THE BISHOP'S CANDLESTICKS

BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

THE MANY STORIES VICTOR HUGO WEAVES IN *LES MISÉRABLES* ARE POWERFUL AND MEMORABLE. My favorite one is about the ex-convict Jean Valjean and a small-town bishop.

After being turned down by pretty much everyone in the area when asking for a place to stay, Jean shows up at the bishop's house. He gives the bishop a rundown of all his mistakes and the crimes he's committed, and says, "I was going to sleep in a doorway, but someone told me to come here. Will you let me in?"

The bishop takes pity on him and invites him in for supper. He calls Jean "Sir" and asks his housekeeper to make a bed for him. Jean can hardly believe what the bishop is doing. When asked for a reason, the bishop says, "I'm a man of God." He then explains that it is not his house, but Christ's.

As they eat, Jean takes note of the silver forks, spoons, and ladle. Those and the two ornate candlesticks are the only things of value in the house.

The bishop walks Jean to his room and bids him goodnight. In the wee hours of the morning, Jean wakes up and starts rifling through the house. He creeps past the bishop's room and sees him sleeping peacefully.

He goes to force open the lock of the cabinet that holds the silver, but finds that it was left unlocked. He stuffs all the silver in his bag, runs through the garden and out into the night.

The next morning, the housekeeper is distraught. She tells the bishop that all their silver is gone! Then there's a knock on the door and some policemen come in, escorting Jean Valjean. The police explain how they found



Jean with a bag of silver, but the bishop interrupts them. He smiles and says, "Ah, Jean, I'm glad to see you! I also gave you the candlesticks. Why didn't you take *them* as well?" The policemen leave.

The bishop gives Jean the candlesticks and tells him to go in peace. But first, he urges Jean to become an honest man.

Jean Valjean became known for his kindness and generosity, and he saved many lives due to his bravery and honesty. The compassion of the bishop was the turning point for Jean; it gave him hope and a sense of worth.

The most powerful part of the story is the simplicity with which the bishop displays God's love. He does so without hesitation and without expecting anything in return. This is a beautiful portrayal of 1 Peter 4:8: "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHERE SHE IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



# A SMALL ACT OF KINDNESS

BY IRIS RICHARD

**RECEIVING THE SAD NEWS OF THE DEATH OF OUR FRIEND WILLIE**, and thinking about the times we were able to help this dear man who'd had a tough lot in life, I was reminded about the importance of lending a helping hand when the opportunity arises. Since none of us can be certain about the length of time we have here on earth, I find it essential to fine-tune or readjust life's focus every so often. In other words, to determine what has lasting value, what holds a worthy purpose, and what brings fulfillment and happiness.

A quote from Marla Gibbs that I recently read brings out a good point along this line. She wrote: "In my life I've learned that true happiness comes from giving.

Helping others along the way makes you evaluate who you are. I think that love is what we're all searching for. I haven't come across anyone who didn't become a better person through love."

Like so many poor folks in Kenya where I live, Willie's story was one of hardship and suffering. It began one morning as he walked to his work as a golf caddy when a speeding car hit him. The driver fled, leaving Willie severely injured by the side of the road. A stranger, a "Good Samaritan," rushed him to the hospital, where his leg was amputated above the knee.

Because of the accident and the long painful recovery, he lost his job and received no remuneration, so Willie



had no choice but to move into a small hut in a local slum. His living conditions in the slums made it impossible to maneuver a wheelchair, and even the use of crutches proved difficult on the narrow, bumpy slum lane. Willie's poor, aged sister was the only person in his life who could help care for him, but she had little to give.

During one of our food delivery programs for poor families, we heard about Willie's need for help. With an already long list of recipients for this weekly aid and our limited resources, it would have been understandable to turn away, but we decided otherwise.

After entering his small dark hut and listening to his story, we realized that it must have been God's leading that brought us to the doorstep of this desperate soul. The tragedy of Willie's accident had sent him into deep despair and depression. Our visit and promise of regular care packages cheered him up and a broad smile rushed over his pain-stricken face. Teary eyed, he said that he felt God answered his prayers by sending us to bring light and hope into his darkness.

We were glad that we had heeded the nudge to go the extra mile, which ended up making a profound difference in one person's life. Now that Willie has passed on, I am happy that we could ease his load a little bit through the years. It pays to listen to the still small voice, our God-given conscience, that often speaks to our hearts, pointing us in the right direction.

Though as believers we intend to love one another (Matthew 22:39), we often miss opportunities to relieve others' pain. That could be because we are unaware of others' needs; or perhaps we are not practicing empathy. Empathy is the key that can unlock the door to our kindness and compassion.

We all need a nudge from time to time to continue using our gifts of compassion and doing our part to encourage and help others.

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

## POINTS TO PONDER

# KINDNESS IS NEVER WASTED

Kindness can transform someone's dark moment with a blaze of light. You'll never know how much your caring matters. Make a difference for another today.—*Amy Leigh Mercree*



The best portion of a good man's life is his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love.—*William Wordsworth*



A Christian reveals true humility by showing the gentleness of Christ, by being always ready to help others, by speaking kind words and performing unselfish acts, which elevate and ennoble the most sacred message that has come to our world.—*Ellen G. White*



Be the one who nurtures and builds. Be the one who has an understanding and forgiving heart, one who looks for the best in people. Leave people better than you found them.—*Marvin J. Ashton*



I want to challenge you to look for situations when you can show your interest in others by doing something unanticipated. When you think of something, do it without hesitation and make someone's day. ... Every time you show a genuine interest in the lives of others by committing an unexpected act of kindness, you are telling them that who they are and what they do is significant.—*Todd Smith*



Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.—*Philippians 2:4*



# LOVE LOVES THE UNLOVELY

BY SALLY GARCÍA

**IN EVERY CLASSROOM THERE IS A STUDENT WHO IS HARDER TO LOVE THAN THE OTHERS;** the rougher kid, the sullen kid, the disobedient kid, the one that is always out of step with the rest of the class. This is the teacher's challenge: Do we consider that this child could be facing challenges that we are not aware of, so we choose to show mercy and grace? Do we leave this child alone in his or her struggles or unhappiness, or do we look for the diamond in the rough? Maybe our gentleness can be the turning point in someone's life.

You have to "pick your battles" with some students. If you correct them for every mishap, it will make life miserable for you, for them, and for the rest of the class. That is the time to remember that love covers a multitude of faults. (See [1 Peter 4:8](#).)

There is a parable in the Gospels about a man who had a great debt. The administrator took the list of all that this man owed and cut it in half. He figured that the debtor could pay a portion of the debt, but if he forced him to pay *all*, the man would get discouraged and walk away without fulfilling *any* of his obligation. (See [Luke 16:1–13](#).)

This reminds me of students who drop out of school because they get so discouraged, they figure they will never be able to do *all* that is expected of them.

So, as a teacher, I make a mental list. What are the basics that I should expect of this student? At the top of the list is respect—because when we show mutual respect, we open the door for dialogue on a mature level. Respect is also a form of love and acceptance, and we all thrive on that! This is not the time to worry about messy papers, or the lost pen, or the forgotten book. But it is a time for homing in on the most important basics of the curriculum and helping the student get over a few humps until he can feel confident and enjoy the sweet taste of success in at least a few areas.

The rest of the students always seem to catch on to my tactics, and I get a quiet solidarity from them. No one has ever complained about a double standard, or why I may seem to be a bit laxer on "that kid" or give him or her a bit more attention. It's good for all of us to lend a hand to someone who is lagging behind, whether within our family or our circle of acquaintances. Life is not about who arrives first at the finish line, but about helping each other so that we *all* can reach the goal.

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# THE FULL CIRCLE OF LOVE

BY MARIE ALVERO

IF I COULD SIT DOWN WITH TWENTY-THREE-YEAR-OLD ME, newly married, careening into motherhood, oh, there's so much I would tell that girl! Young me had a somewhat unrealistic expectation of "happily ever after," and if my relationship with my husband ever veered from that, I was sure we were doomed, headed for marital ruin. I concluded that marriage was such a complicated, intricate relationship, and it was only a matter of time before we stopped loving each other. I was an anxious, insecure bride.

I would tell young me that love is a choice you make every day, a muscle that grows with use. You do this when it is hard, and you do this when it is easy. You do this because God asked you to be the person who loves your spouse like Jesus does. And loving like this, it changes you, albeit slowly, into a person who loves more deeply and more enduringly than you ever thought you could.

Love looks like bathing babies and paying bills, arguments and making up, cuddles and good-night kisses, tag teaming day after day as you make history. It looks like forgiveness and maturing, ever so slowly. It looks like learning the rhythms of your partner and figuring out what parts of this dance you do together and what parts you do alone.

Before you know it, decades have gone by, and this love you thought would eventually reach its expiration

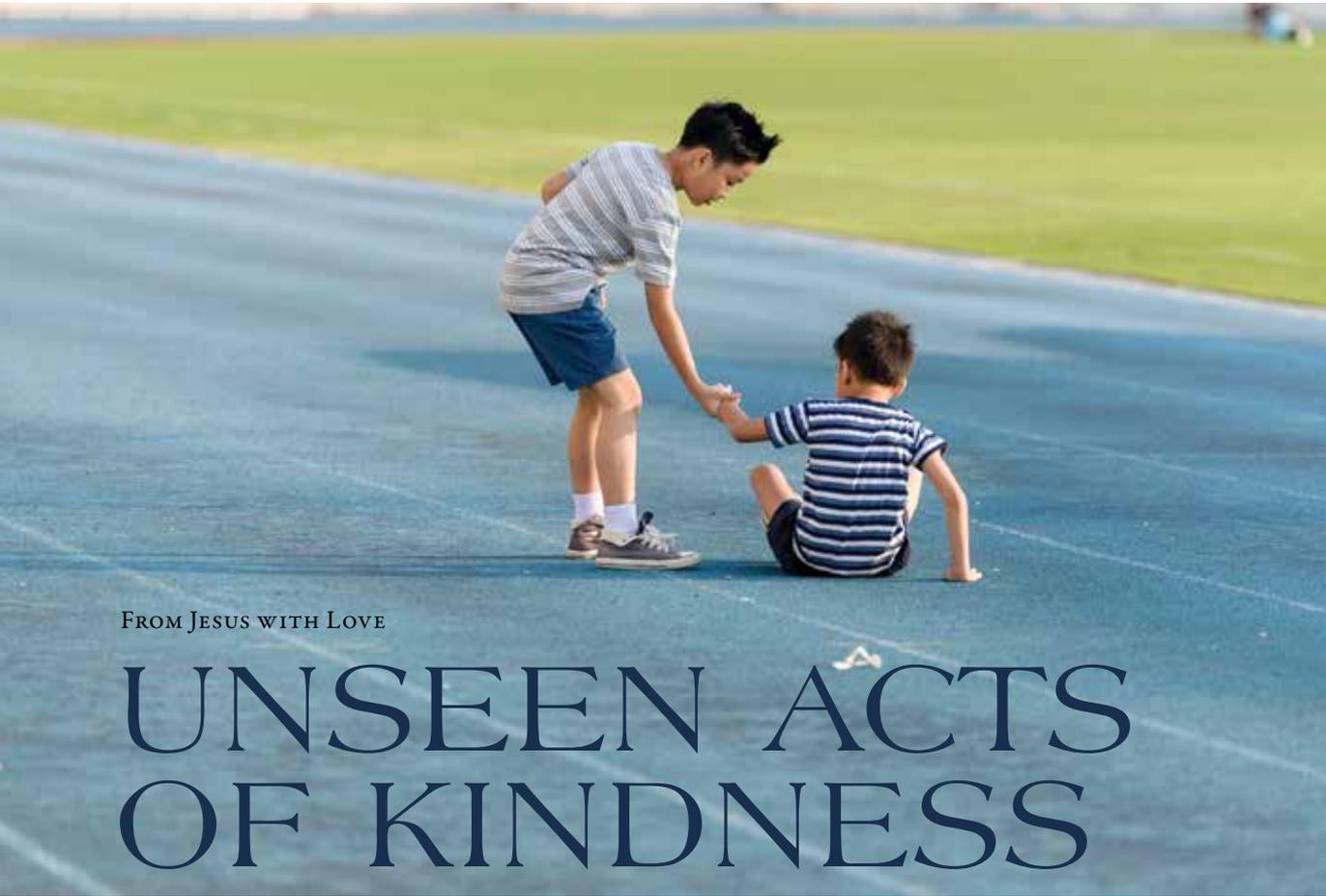
date is stronger than ever, and you are no longer afraid. You realize that as long as you both keep making the choice to love every day, this love will never die. And you also realize that you do not get to make that choice for your partner; you have to trust that they will also keep choosing to love.

This realization leads you back, full circle, to Jesus. Because you know that He is the only one who can keep your hearts, so rather than praying that your partner will keep loving you, you pray that he will keep loving Jesus and be willing to follow Him wherever He leads. And you pray that prayer for yourself as well, because you know that as long as you both keep loving Jesus the most, one way or another, everything else will be okay.

I remember when I first thought of marrying my husband and I prayed about it, the verse that God laid on my heart was [Psalm 73:25-26](#): "Whom have I in heaven but you [God]? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Way back then, right from the beginning, the message was that the one my heart needs most is Him.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# UNSEEN ACTS OF KINDNESS

Many will be surprised when they enter My heavenly kingdom to see the great importance of the often-hidden, unseen acts of kindness, the giving of one's time to love and care for others. To love your neighbor as yourself is the second greatest commandment of all (Mark 12:28–31).

Who is your neighbor, if not the person who is near you or who crosses your path each day? You will encounter many people in need on the road of your daily life. Take the time to share hope and to show that you care, as I guide you to those who need a manifestation of My love. For as you have done it to one of the least of these, you have done it to Me (Matthew 25:40).

My love can often best be shown through the kindness of another person. Opportunities will arise in your everyday life where you can reach out with kindness to a person who is in need, to listen and pray for them and offer comfort.

As you pray for My love to flow through you in your everyday life, you will experience the beauty and joy of giving and reflecting My love to others. Learn to truly see the people who cross your path each day and what lies beyond their outward appearance to their heart. Will you allow My love to pour through you to others?