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ACTIVATED

Vol 25 • Issue 5

THE MARATHON OF LIFE

Looking to Jesus

The Wall

When you can't go
on

Sync with the Shepherd

Rhythms of grace





PERSONALLY SPEAKING A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

Interesting things happen as you grow older, one of which is that you slow down. Maybe not by choice, maybe not even consciously at first, but there comes a time when you must plan your day well and set a realistic pace in order to accomplish what needs to be done. And suppose everything doesn't get done? Well,

tomorrow is another day.

My husband, Gabriel, and I are learning to have more realistic expectations for ourselves as some of the activities that we thrived on in the past are not feasible anymore. We just don't have the same level of energy. But are we achieving *less*? Truth be told, I believe that we are in the *most productive* season of our lives.

We often rely on the blessing from Deuteronomy 33:25: "As your days, so shall your strength be." Each day, as we rely more on the Lord, place less emphasis on the superfluous, and are more deliberate about our goals, we are more satisfied with the results.

"Slow and steady wins the race" was the moral of Aesop's Fable, "The Tortoise and the Hare." But this advice doesn't just apply to old age. In this fast-paced world, undue pressure to accomplish more in less time has created unrealistic expectations for many.

Parents raising families these days carry an enormous load. Motherhood has often been compared to managing a three-ringed circus or to a juggling act with all the balls in the air and the plates spinning simultaneously. Marie Alvero's article on page 15 sheds some light on how modern moms can cope with the pressure by giving *love* priority over *perfection*.

Young people also have their share of stress in their studies, when choosing a life partner or entering the labor force, etc. All of us can learn to run the race with patience and endurance, not hounded by the expectations of others, but by what God expects of us. In his article, "The Marathon of Life," Simon Bishop shares his experience of learning to run "life's race" with Jesus as a personal trainer and coach.

We hope that this month's issue of *Activated* will inspire you to "run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Gabriel and Sally García
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THE WALL

BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

MY FRIENDS AND I WATCHED A MOVIE WHERE AN OVERWEIGHT, down-on-his-luck man decides, for various reasons, that he wants to run a marathon. He's a pretty unmotivated guy; he hates commitment and is generally full of excuses. The movie humorously takes you along his fitness journey, but the underlying themes of dedication and reliability are what develop the plot the most.

When it comes time for him to attempt the 42.2-kilometer run, it goes great for a while. He's making reasonable time and has the vision to make it to the end.

But then he hits "the wall." The wall is a term that distance runners use to describe a feeling of being completely unable to move forward. Your body is screaming, "No! You don't want to do this!"

In the film, the mental "wall" that the main character runs into is pictured as a massive, red-bricked thing that goes on and on. He feels as though he cannot take one more step. Then he realizes he has to remember *why* he's doing it—to develop self-discipline and perseverance—and *who* he's doing it for—his son, the woman he loves, and his friends.

Slowly, as he focuses on those who are supporting him and the importance of what he's achieving, he starts to

punch the wall down brick by brick until he finishes what he started and successfully completes the marathon. I loved that scene!

In anything new or difficult that you strive to do, there comes a time when you feel the overwhelming certainty that you can't continue. You hit your wall. It's so frustrating, and it feels definite.

But whenever I focus on *why* I'm taking on a new challenge and *who* I'm doing it for, I can always find the strength to slowly tear down that wall and push forward. When I think about everyone supporting me and what reaching my goal will achieve, I am inspired once again. Then I picture the bricks of my wall being removed by a heavenly hand that is stronger than my own.

We, as Christians, are so blessed to have the best reasons to keep running our race. Love is *why* we do it and Jesus is *who* we do it for!

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 LIFE OF SACRIFICE



IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS, Paul appeals to believers to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice ... which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1 NKJV). What does the word “sacrifice” mean in relation to a Christian’s life and service to God?

The Oxford Dictionary defines sacrifice as “*to give up one’s interests, happiness, etc., in order to help others or to advance a cause.*” The Encarta Dictionary defines it as “*giving up something valuable or important, for somebody or something else considered to be of more value or importance.*”

By these definitions, we understand that although you’ve given something up, you’ve also received something of greater value in return, which means that, really, there has been an exchange, a trade-off. No true loss was ultimately experienced.

There are many examples where this cost/benefit transaction happens in everyday life. Parents continually make sacrifices for their children’s well-being and future. Athletes sacrifice to train hard and win in their sport. Students sacrifice to make good grades and graduate. People in the workplace make sacrifices to advance in their careers and to support their families.

Anything that is worth achieving will generally cost something. And the greater the value of what we’re trying to achieve, the more it’s going to cost us. Putting this into terms that relate to our lives as Christians, this means that—like the parent, the athlete, the student, or the career-focused individual—we also will have to make sacrifices to follow Jesus and fulfill His purpose for our lives. We will each face different challenges unique to our Christian faith, but we have been blessed with God’s



Word, His Holy Spirit within us, and our community of faith to help us meet those challenges.

It's not a question of whether we will have to make sacrifices in life, but *what* we choose to sacrifice for. As Christians we've adopted the Lord's goals and purpose for our lives and have made them our own. In day-to-day terms, that translates into unselfish giving of ourselves, our time, our resources, our prayers, kindness, empathy, and love—for the sake of being what the Lord wants us to be in order to do His will and reach people with His love and truth.

It's a price we're willing to pay because we place a greater value and importance on living in accordance with God's will and fulfilling His great commission (Mark 16:15) than we do on our own lives and the temporal things of this world. The Bible says that "this world is



passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17).

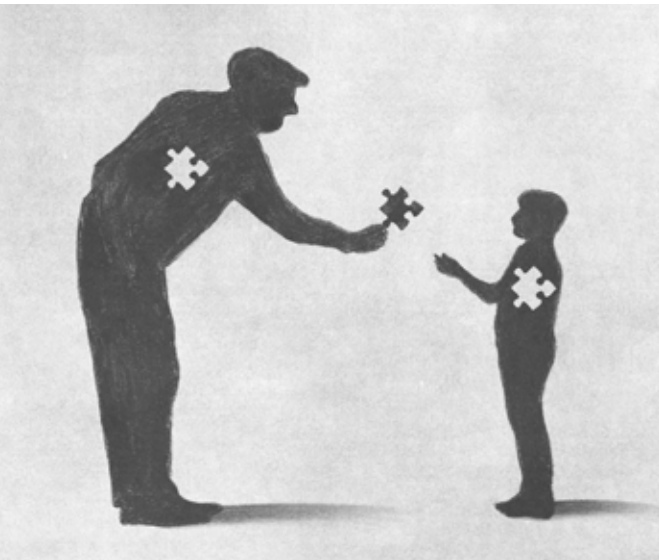
Living for the "now," pursuing immediate results, striving to receive recognition for our efforts and reap the fruit of our endeavors can seem more appealing than living for the eternal. But Jesus taught us to look beyond our everyday lives, to live and work for and invest in the eternal life to come, which starts by seeking first His kingdom and righteousness (Matthew 6:33).

That may not reap immediate results, but we know that according to God's promises, whatever we invest in His eternal kingdom will last forever. Of course, even if we don't see visible returns from our sacrifices, we still experience joy, peace, blessings, and most of all His presence in this life.

The Lord's love is always there for us, and we are richly blessed. But sometimes we can become familiar with those blessings to the point that we start to think that we are entitled to them. We come to expect good fortune in our lives and can be surprised or feel deprived when we find ourselves in a season of lack, loss, or difficulty.

We can tend to forget that the calling of an active Christian entails sacrifice. So to expect that our lives will always go well and we'll always be happy, and that there won't be times when we will experience loss, heartaches, or deprivation is not realistic or an accurate depiction of the faith life.

The apostle Paul said, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well



fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” And what is that secret? “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:12–13 NIV). The author of the book of Hebrews encourages us to therefore “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

The Lord asks us to “deny ourselves and take up our cross daily” (Luke 9:23). To deny yourself literally means “to refuse to gratify your personal needs or desires,” and instead to daily take up the cross—our life of sacrifice and service—and follow Jesus. So, we can see that the Lord doesn’t gloss over the fact that the life of a Christian is one of sacrifice and forsaking, which at times can translate into hardships, trials, weariness, and loss.

The Bible says that we are “bought with a price” by God (1 Corinthians 6:20), and we are therefore to present ourselves as a “living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is our reasonable service” (Romans 12:1 NKJV). Sacrifice is meant to be our “reasonable service.”

Giving of ourselves to the Lord and others can sometimes feel like an endless uphill climb. But let’s put that struggle and the accompanying feelings in perspective by remembering that our stay here on earth is only

for a *moment* when compared with the *eternity* we will spend in heaven. The Bible tells us that “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

A life of sacrifice can war against our proclivities for a life of comfort, gratification, and security. It can be painful sometimes when you’re “dying daily,” as Paul expressed it (1 Corinthians 15:31). Where does the courage and strength to give of self sacrificially and selflessly come from? The apostle Paul summed it up succinctly when he said, “The love of Christ compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14 NKJV).

Our love for Jesus, and His love for us and sacrificial death on the cross for our eternal salvation, are what motivate us to live for Him. Only a deep and abiding love for Jesus will inspire us to follow in His footsteps in living a life of love and service for God and others. As we seek to fulfill the Lord’s will for our lives and to pattern our lives after His example and Word, our motivation to love and serve Him and others will grow and be strengthened.

As Christians who understand God’s greater purpose and meaning of life, we realize that our existence spans beyond the earth life. Therefore, we make sacrifices in the here and now in love and gratefulness to the one who gave His life for us so that we can live in His presence for all eternity and reap eternal rewards there and then.

The life of an active Christian may not always be comfortable in lifestyle, but it is solid and can withstand the storms of life, because it has the Lord as its foundation (Matthew 7:24–25). He has promised to always be with us and to bless, protect and keep us throughout our lives. “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20 KJV).

He has also promised to reward us for everything we give up for Him with “a hundred times as much in return,” along with inheriting eternal life (Matthew 19:29 NLT). There is no greater promise or guarantee in the universe. That is the guarantee of a Christian.

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM THE ROADMAP SERIES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP ARTICLES. ■



IN GOD'S TIME

BY ANNA PERLINI

“LET US NOT GROW WEARY OR BECOME DISCOURAGED IN DOING GOOD, for at the proper time we will reap, if we do not give in” (Galatians 6:9 AMP).

The first time I read that verse, it had a real impact on me. I was an idealistic-but-confused 18-year-old student searching for meaning in life. I remember reading it over and over, trying to figure out what it meant. Something seemed hidden, like it was a secret code.

The verse talked about the future, and what I really cared about was the “reaping” part. So, I decided to embrace “doing good.” I dedicated my life to missions, which over the years took me to India, Nepal, and back to Europe to start a humanitarian organization in the war-torn countries of former Yugoslavia.

Another mission I took on was having children. The words “let us not grow weary or become discouraged” became predominant in my life. My carefree years were behind me, and I was engaged in life’s daily struggles. I remember falling apart in tears when my husband came home from work, and I hadn’t even managed to put together a simple dinner. Many years and dinners later, this memory makes me smile, but back then it was such a struggle!

At times I felt like an absolute failure or faced disappointment or loss in the projects I was involved in, like when one project ended abruptly due to political unrest,

or when a dear coworker died suddenly due to heart failure right in the middle of an event we were hosting.

But, back to that mysterious Bible verse that I always carried with me, I learned that despite whatever was failing or falling apart in that moment, I was to keep on “doing good.” I simply had to focus on that and not get weary, discouraged, or quit. In fact, so many times, turning away from my sadness and discouragement and getting involved in some needy situation was my salvation.

And what about the “at the proper time we will reap” part? Well, I believe many, if not most, of the results of our efforts will remain unseen in this life. The rewards will come in God’s time. But my kids have grown up, and they’re accomplishing things I never imagined they would. Next year we’ll celebrate the 30th anniversary of the humanitarian organization I helped to found. It has required perseverance and sacrifice to keep it going, but it certainly has been rewarding and many lives have been touched and changed through our activities.

Yes, sooner or later, in one form or another, we will reap!

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF [PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE](#), A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■

THE MARATHON OF LIFE

BY SIMON BISHOP



THE BIBLE LIKENS OUR LIVES TO A RACE RUN BEFORE THOUSANDS OF SPECTATORS: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1 NIV).

I love running. Around 16 years ago, when I needed to lose weight, I tried to run every day. Eventually I built up endurance and was able to run about six kilometers in 30 minutes. Then I had an accident; I fell from the second story of our house while trying to help someone who was locked out of their room. I ended up shattering my heel (calcaneus) bone in what the doctor called a “walnut fracture” of around nine pieces. I also sustained other injuries. I limped for two years, until I had surgery, but even after my recovery, I realized that my running days were over.

When talking about his life, Paul said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). This is a metaphor, yet it is very apropos, as anyone who has ever run knows it takes time and practice to be able to run any distance. Sometimes you must fight to continue. You have to build endurance, you have to increase stamina, and you have to cultivate mental fortitude. The same is true in life.

After my accident I had to look for new ways to exercise, and that is when I took up biking, which has been my go-to form of exercise now for years. I also had to reassess my life and service to God during this time, as the accident put certain limitations on what I was able to do.

I have come to look at the period of my life since the accident as a time when God has been able to train me more fully to run the race of life with Him as my



Running isn't easy. You can't run a marathon and expect it to be smooth and easy sailing. There will be blood, sweat, and tears. Likewise, the Christian life isn't easy. There are many obstacles in life, and we must be conditioned for the task set before us like a runner is conditioned for his task.—*Kaela Kaiser*

When life gets hard (and we know it will), may we focus on Jesus and walk with perseverance until we can run the rest of the way.—*Kia Stephens*

If you want to run the race of life with Jesus as your trainer, guide, and Savior, you can open your heart to Him by praying this simple prayer:

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for my sins. I believe that You died for me. I invite You into my life. Please fill me with Your love and Holy Spirit. Help me to love You and others and live by the truth in the Bible. Amen.

trainer and guide. I had to embrace lessons of patience, positivity, empathy for others, and looking to God for His strength, qualities which, up until that time, I had struggled with.

Although I still deal with pain from time to time, I see many good results which came from this trying time, and I believe that, with God's help, I have been able to overcome many of the physical difficulties and developed stronger character as well. Through this experience I have become a better athlete in the marathon of life, and I am able to run with perseverance, looking to Jesus, the one who truly keeps me going.

Here is another passage from Paul where he compares our lives of service to Christ to how athletes need to be serious and disciplined in their approach to training, and willing to sacrifice and let go of things which hold them back from being a winner.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

—*1 Corinthians 9:24–27 NIV*

God bless you as you continue in your marathon of life!

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



FINDING NEW HOPE

BY ALFREDO CARRASCO

EARLY ONE MORNING, a friend phoned me about an urgent situation. His neighbor, Juan, was in serious trouble. He had been falsely accused and the police came to his house and took him into custody. He went through a terrible situation; he was confined for five days in a cell with 32 prisoners. He spent those five days almost without sleeping, mostly standing in a corner of the cell. After five days they took him to court. Because there was no evidence of the charges, the judge released him. But as a result of all this, he lost his home and livelihood.

This experience led Juan to such a point of despair that he wanted to commit suicide. He was completely disillusioned with life and with the person who had accused him falsely.

My friend begged me to talk with him. Juan and I then talked for two hours. I shared with him about Jesus' love and forgiveness and gift of salvation. I told him that God had a plan for his life. He prayed with me to receive Jesus in his heart.

For 15 days he called me every day. Our communications had positive results. Little by little he was growing stronger and no longer wanted to commit suicide. But he was still very depressed and could not sleep. He wondered

why this had happened to him; he continued to experience deep sadness.

The many calls and prayers that we shared eventually got results; he was getting stronger and stronger. I read him Bible verses about the reality of heaven, and I sent him several Christian devotional books. In addition to continuing to pray with him personally, my wife and I had intercessory prayer for him daily.

Juan said, "Every time I talk with you, my mind gets clearer. Communication with you fills me with a lot of peace." Finally, step after step, call after call, prayer after prayer, the Lord has worked in his life, and Juan has grown stronger.

I am now giving him Bible classes. He still feels sadness, and has his ups and downs because of what happened, but he is working and moving on. He recently said, "With the help of the Lord, I will move forward. I will face the future with faith."

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

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

EVER PRESENT

BY RUTH DAVIDSON

WHEN WE FIND OURSELVES IN DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, when our world is shaken and it seems like everything is falling apart, we might be tempted to think that God has abandoned us. But when we call out to the Lord, we find that this is not the case. He has promised to be with us even in the middle of disaster.

We know that there will be difficult times in our lives, but God promises to be our shelter from the storm. I have often been comforted by the words of the psalmist David, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). We can avail ourselves of His continual presence and power in our lives.

When you come to Christ, it is the beginning of a whole new life! He is with us, and He wants to help us follow Him and His Word. In ourselves we do not have the strength that we need to live the way God wants us to live. But when we turn to Him, we discover that “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13 NIV).

I have never regretted a single day after receiving Jesus as my Savior. My life has become richer and fuller in every way. I am no longer alone. He fills me with joy.

There are moments when we feel like God has deserted us, but He is still with us as we go through difficult times. Jesus promised: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. ... I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18, 20).

I am reminded of a preacher who was also a carpenter. He built the family’s house with his own hands. George A. Young humbly served the Lord on a meager salary. Tragically, while he was away holding meetings in another area, some vandals burned the house down.

Instead of blaming God for not preventing this misfortune, Young never lost his faith in the Lord. It is out of this tragedy that he wrote the hymn that continues to bless us to this day.

God leads His dear children along...

Some through the waters, some through the flood,
Some through the fire, but all through the blood;
Some through great sorrow, but God gives a song,

In the night season and all the day long.—George A.

Young (1903)

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. ■



THE VALUE OF REPETITION

BY JOYCE SUTTIN



I HAVE BEEN MOVING FROM ONE COMPUTER OPERATING SYSTEM TO ANOTHER AND IT HAS BEEN A CHALLENGE. I have had to relearn and troubleshoot some things. I am challenging myself to figure it out. It is good for my mind, but it's a test for my peace of mind and my patience.

As I was searching, copying, pasting, changing fonts, and moving images, things kept going wrong. I kept having to go back and start from the beginning, remembering each step and redoing each operation over, and over, and over again.

I was getting frustrated, but I was persistent in my desire to conquer this. I knew it would be simple once I figured it out, kind of like a math problem that seems so daunting until you learn how to do it and then it's easy. So, I wasn't giving up! I just kept going through the same steps, as I worked with the different apps and programs.

I had a choice. I could either give up or I could keep trying, redoing, and learning. After I'd taken a moment for a breather, I realized that by repeating the process over and over, I was learning how to do it. Some of the steps were becoming automatic for me, and I knew what to do next without laboring over it.

Then, I thought about some of my personal struggles. Sometimes, it seems like I keep repeating the same things and I have wondered why God would allow that. But I've realized that these are training sessions. By going through the same things over and over, I have learned what to do. I can say to myself, "Okay, we've been through this before. Where did we turn and what did we do the last time to make it through?" Often a Bible verse will come to my mind, or I will review my journal and I find the answer as clear as day.

Repetition is the law of memory in mental and spiritual tasks. This morning I was learning about persistence and not getting frustrated and quitting when things just didn't seem to be working out. I learned that stepping away for a moment is not the same as giving up. Sometimes, a small pause gives you a fresh perspective and things become clear.

I will persist and learn. I will overcome, as I have before, by God's grace. "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

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

Being FAITHFUL

ONE WHO IS FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE IS ALSO FAITHFUL IN MUCH. And he said to him, “Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.”—*Luke 16:10; 19:17*

Faithfulness to God is our first obligation in all that we are called to do in the service of the gospel.—*Iain H. Murray*

Let us do our duty in our shop or in our kitchen, in the market, the street, the office, the school, the home, just as faithfully as if we stood in the front rank of some great battle and knew that victory for mankind depends on our bravery, strength, and skill.—*Theodore Parker*

Faithfulness is an everyday calling. It's regular, it's ordinary, it's taking a really long view of the Christian life. It's reshaping our desires for immediate fruit and committing to following Jesus for the long haul. It's getting up every single day and believing that God is your treasure, that the gospel of Jesus is worth your every breath, and that he is enough. Faithfulness is doing this again tomorrow and the next day and ten years from now. Faithfulness is ordinary. It's unremarkable. It plods. It is also precious in the sight of the God who works out lifelong sanctifying perseverance in your life for your good and his glory.—*Glenna Marshall*

The great thing is to be found at one's post as a child of God, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years.—*C.S. Lewis*

It's not what you do once in a while; it's what you do day in and day out that makes the difference.—*Jenny Craig*


The measure of who we are is what we do with what we have.—*Vince Lombardi*

The question for each man is not what he would do if he had the means, time, influence and educational advantages, but what he will do with the things he has.—*Hamilton Wright Mabie*

Let us remember, there is One who daily records all we do for Him, and sees more beauty in His servants' work than His servants do themselves... And then shall His faithful witnesses discover, to their wonder and surprise, that there never was a word spoken on their Master's behalf, which does not receive a reward.—*J.C. Ryle*

I know of nothing which I would choose to have as the subject of my ambition for life than to be kept faithful to my God till death.—*C. H. Spurgeon*

Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.—*Revelation 2:10* ■



PEACEFUL SAILING

By VICTORIA OLIVETTA

IT'S IMPORTANT TO PONDER LIFE FROM DIFFERENT ANGLES. The details of your circumstances are not the most important thing; what you think about them is. First you think, then you act. A common reaction to change is fear, which can be a paralyzing emotion that adds despair to our lives. If we want to change the trajectory of our lives, we must start by changing the way we think.

When my family arrived in Argentina, we had three different projects that helped us earn a living. Due to changes in the political situation, the dollar skyrocketed, and our projects didn't survive the economic crisis. So, at age 55 I had to start all over again. The economic wind had changed course, and I needed to adjust my sails to keep navigating, surviving, and growing.

After considering many options, I found my niche and started to develop a new career, then another one, and a couple of years later another one. None of these were in my sights ten years ago. The one thing we can be sure of is that things change.

I continue doing what I really enjoy, while generating enough income for a comfortable lifestyle. I'm now in my mid-sixties and I'm still developing and focusing on my projects with energy and passion. All of this is

possible because I pause from time to time to evaluate my priorities and results, and to check my course with God. He is my major associate in this adventure called life, and in my business as well. If it feels right, brings me joy, and I find scriptures to support it, these three factors confirm that I'm on course to a happy destination. If not, I need to make some adjustments.

I learned I cannot direct the wind, but I can set my sails to keep moving forward at a good speed. And if the storm grows stronger and the winds roar and I get frightened, I visualize Jesus stopping the winds, walking on the water, and calling me to follow Him. That's when I set my sails and keep going no matter what because of who is going before me preparing the way.

"I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread" (Psalm 37:25 NKJV). So, it doesn't matter how difficult, rough, or inconvenient the situation is, I can be calm, happy, and at peace, choosing a serene navigation with Him at the helm.

VICTORIA OLIVETTA IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ARGENTINA. ■

SYNC WITH THE SHEPHERD

BY MARIE ALVERO

I WAS ON A ZOOM CALL TALKING TO A COWORKER. Her work was a mess; she was not keeping up, and it was impacting her customers and department. “Tell me what’s going on,” I said to her. She told me that she was trying her best, but she had no idea how to keep up with everything. Her kids are in high-commitment sports, she insists that her house must be spotless, and she listed several other things she had to take care of. It was a lot, and my heart broke for her!

I said, “You need to pick a sustainable pace. No one can keep up with all you are trying to do.” She said she had no idea how to do that. She felt hopeless.

This is a story I see playing out all around me as people try to curate the perfect life and crush their souls under

the weight. While there are many practical things that can be done to streamline life and make things easier, true sustainability comes with a willingness to let go of the idea of a “perfect life.”

I don’t believe God intended for us to be stressed all the time. Jesus said He will give rest to the weary and heavy laden. We can learn of Him whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light ([Matthew 11:28–30](#)). This paints such a different picture than what would describe the frantic pace our culture promotes.

“I am not asking you to do all this!” Jesus would probably say. “I am only asking you to be faithful today, and to trust Me for tomorrow. Come learn the unforced rhythms of grace.”


The pace Jesus is asking of us allows time for our souls to be renewed, and for Him to lead us to green pastures. If you are moving at a pace where you don’t feel like you have time to walk with Him through a green pasture, you are probably moving faster than the Shepherd, and maybe that’s why you haven’t found the still waters that refresh you ([Psalm 23:1–3](#)).

God has been speaking this to my heart lately. I love pushing hard and feeling like I am checking all my boxes, but I’m running out of steam. It has become obvious to me that I cannot sustain “doing it all.”

I have been praying that I can stay in step with the Shepherd and linger where He is guiding me, trusting Him for the journey.

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A photograph of two male runners in black athletic wear competing on a red running track. The runner in the foreground is in a low starting crouch, while the runner in the background is in full running stride. The track has white lane markings and large white numbers '2', '4', and '5' are visible. The text 'FROM JESUS WITH LOVE' is printed in the upper left area of the image.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

RUNNING THE RACE

If two people line up to run a race and one has prepared and practiced and built up his muscles while the other has not, when they are in position at the starting line and the gun is fired, the runner who is prepared will run the race with greater confidence, speed, strength, and energy.

If you are to run the race that is set before you, it takes daily strengthening, exercising, and living the lifestyle of a runner. It takes laying aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and setting your affections on things above rather than the things of this earth (Colossians 3:2).

As you pattern your life according to My Word, and walk in My love, your spiritual muscles are strengthened, and you are able to continue running the race that is set before you with the endurance that you need for the days ahead. You can run with joy, knowing the future that awaits you.

Your time on earth is preparation for your eternal future which is ahead. Learn to walk in My Spirit and to live according to My Word. Strive to let all your things be done in love and to work in harmony with others. Draw near to Me, and I will draw near to you (James 4:8).

Remember to run the race set before you with patience and endurance (Hebrews 12:1). Make sure to come to Me when you are weary, breathe deeply and pace yourself. Learn from Me and I will give you My promised rest for your soul and strength for the journey (Matthew 11:28–29).