

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 25 • Issue 9

THE GAME OF LIFE

Jesus is our
coach

Embracing Change

God's design
unfolds

Treasures of the Heart

What really
matters





PERSONALLY SPEAKING SUCCEEDING AT THE GAME OF LIFE

An early 20th-century American sportswriter named Grantland Rice wrote, “It’s not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.” That concept goes along with the theme of this issue of *Activated*—The Game of Life. To use some common sports analogies, throughout our lifetime there will be seasons when we are “on a roll” enjoying a “winning streak,” and other times when we are “not having a good season” and are “off our game.” But someday we will look back and see that our most precious memories did not come from our “easy wins,” but from the experiences that tested our endurance and perseverance.

While so much emphasis is placed on winning in today’s ultracompetitive world, the way the game of life is played—and more specifically, *how* we play it with other players, including our rivals—is the mark of real success. This is particularly true in team sports, which is how we as Christians play the game of life. It’s hardly ever the lone star that wins the victory, but the team as a whole. The best players are usually the ones who encourage their teammates and include others in their plays, those who pass the ball so someone *else* can finish the play and make the shot, and those who treat the opposing team members with consideration and respect.

At the time of writing this we have been reading commentaries about a political figure who passed away suddenly after a tragic accident. Though the list of this man’s accomplishments was quite impressive, the list of his personal attributes that were brought out by those who had worked closely with him was even *more* impressive. They noted his optimism, perseverance, dedication, sense of service, humility, strong convictions, and more. Some of the most thought-provoking comments were about the way he handled setbacks and failures, his deeply grounded faith and optimism when confronting challenges, and his generosity towards his political adversaries. This is a good reminder that our life is more about *who we are* than *what we do*.

How do we play the game of life? Our guidebook, the Bible, is a source of divine inspiration, strength, and guidance that will give us the fortitude to live each stage of our lives with dignity, love, grace, and glory.

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WHICH GAME ARE YOU PLAYING?

BY AMY JOY MIZRANY



“**TAKE THE SHOT!** Take the shot!!” There he stood, the football at his feet, the goal wide open, the rest of his team yelling more than enough encouragement, while the other team and their goalie were speeding back to defend.

It was a clear shot, and that goal would have put our team in the lead.

But ... he turned around and passed the ball to another teammate.

A sigh of frustration swelled from the rest of us on the team.

This is so typical of him. He's the best player here, and yet he's always slowing down if the other team is struggling, or passing the ball to other people when he has the shot, I thought.

When we were chatting after the game, his over-eagerness to share the ball came up. This was something we teased him about regularly, as he was consistently the least aggressive player on the field. He wanted to win, he loved football, and he was probably the most talented of all our friends, and still he was the least competitive person I have ever met.

When one of our little brothers joined the game, he would always make space for him to play, pass him the ball, and give him advice. If the kid was on the other

team, he would take it easy on him and make sure the other team didn't position him somewhere that he couldn't handle.

None of us had a problem with this; we all appreciated it when it was *our* little brother playing. But we didn't appreciate it as much when he'd let a point slip through our fingers during a game.

But, to be fair, regardless of how much we teased him or huffed or rolled our eyes, we respected him for it. I know that with certainty because to this day when we speak about those games, we *still* respect him for it.

Looking back, I wonder if perhaps he was thinking less about his career as an amateur football player on the streets of South Africa and more about a different kind of career. No matter what happened around him or what others deemed as important—like scoring points in a football match—he knew how he wanted to live. He knew who he wanted to be. He knew what game in life he wanted to win.

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. ■

THE GAME OF LIFE



WE AREN'T MEANT TO GO THROUGH LIFE ALONE. Throughout our lives, we develop networks of people who we depend on and who depend on us. As babies, we are 100% dependent on our parents or caregivers. We are incapable of doing anything for ourselves, except absorbing the information that floods our senses in this new and wonderful thing called “life.” Before long, we are walking and beginning to talk, developing our personality, and learning through our experiences as we grow into the unique person God created us to be.

From a young age, we tend to seek acceptance and approval from our family, teachers, and friends. We discover the joy that being accepted and appreciated brings, and the sense of belonging we can find within our family, tribe, or community. As we age, maturity and life experiences may cause us to adopt a more subtle approach to our childhood quest for acceptance and belonging. Nonetheless, the universal need for supportive and

accepting frameworks continues throughout our lives. Everyday life surrounds us with those who we depend on, who likewise depend on us.

Life is a team sport, and we all have influence on other people. Our family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and other believers are all members of communities to which we belong. We go through life as a team, and if we are to play the part God has given us in the game of life, it goes without saying that learning to be a good team player is an important part of the journey.

It is impossible for human beings to flourish without these interdependencies—we were created by God for community. As Christians, our quest for acceptance and belonging finds its true home when we discover that we are God’s children through faith in Jesus Christ, and God is our heavenly Father (1 John 3:2). The Bible tells us that “God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted



to do, and it gave him great pleasure” (Ephesians 1:5 NLT). “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Peter 2:10).

The modern focus on individualism and doing life on our own is not part of God’s original design for human beings. In creating humankind in His image, He created us with the need to be part of a community with interdependencies. For most of our lives, we are surrounded by myriad influences that can affect us and our decisions, and likewise the people we interact with every day are affected by us to some extent.

As we age, our sphere of influence tends to expand, as more members are added to our life team, whether a spouse, children, friends, or associates. Our decisions often carry more weight and have more potential for impact. Others depend on us to have good judgment and are affected by our decisions. The team sport of life becomes more complex, and often continues to grow in complexity as we journey through life.

The interesting thing is that while life is a team sport, there is *one* arena where the game is played one-on-one, and that arena is our personal relationship with God. When it comes to our faith and relationship with God, we cannot hand the ball off to someone else and ask *them* to carry it for us, or “make the shot” or “score the goal” for us.

When the game clock runs out and the final whistle blows, the Bible tells us that we will each stand as an individual and give an account of our lives, our choices, and our actions to the God of heaven (Romans 14:10–12). In that moment, there will just be God and each of us individually. When we stand before the Lord at the end of our lives, we won’t stand before Him as a team, or as part of a family or a church or Christian fellowship—we will each stand alone.

For this reason, no matter what the trends of our contemporary culture, as Christians we are called to make choices and act in ways that will honor and please



God. Regardless of the choices and actions of others, the important thing is that we live in accordance with our faith and morals, loving God and others, and doing our part to bring people to a knowledge of God and a relationship with Him.

Our calling as Christians is to reflect God's love in our everyday lives to our families and loved ones, and in our workplace and community (Matthew 5:14–16). As part of our witness, the Bible teaches us to be good role models for people within our wider networks so that our influence will be a blessing in their lives (Romans 12:12–18; Philippians 2:15).

Sometimes it's difficult to do what we know is right, and to be true to our convictions when it is unpopular or could have a negative outcome for us in some way. While this might be challenging at times, the wonderful news is that when we each made the choice to become a child of God, we qualified for the winning team, with Jesus as our coach (Colossians 1:12 NIV)! Even when we fumble or drop the ball, we can always depend on Him to cause everything we face in this game of life to work together for our good—including the good and the bad, our wins and our losses, and even our failures and mistakes (Romans 8:28)!

The Lord sees and takes note of all the good decisions we make, and how each one affects our life, as well as the lives of those within our circle of influence, and how

we seek to enrich others' lives. God also sees our love for Him, our personal faith in Him, our desire to please and obey Him, and our conviction to tell others about Him and to show selfless love and care for others.

The winning game strategy is to strive to make choices in life that will stand the test of time—and the key to making right choices starts with your one-on-one relationship with God. It's just you and Him on that field or court, and the decisions you make to be faithful to Him and His Word will be rewarded when you are welcomed to your eternal home in heaven. Then you will have God's approval—and that's the ultimate approval to strive for (Matthew 25:21).

We must keep the finish line in our mind's eye as we run the race of life, "keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith" (Hebrews 12:2 NLT).

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If you have not yet received Jesus as your coach in the game of life, you can do so by praying this simple prayer:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You died for me. Thank You! I ask You to come into my heart, forgive my sins, and give me eternal life. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit. I need You to lead, guide, and train me in this game of life so that I can make the right choices and enter the next life as a champion. Please help me to run this race with my eyes focused on You, my great victorious coach. Amen.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

BY FÁTIMA SARA



WE ALL GO THROUGH SITUATIONS THAT LEAVE DEEP IMPRINTS ON OUR SPIRITS. I had one such experience several years ago.

While I was praying, Jesus told me, “Your faith will soon be tested, but don’t be afraid. This will be a time of readjustment.”

Ten days later, while on a humanitarian aid mission to a remote area of Burkina Faso, West Africa, I found myself upside down in a Land Rover that had run off the road and rolled into a ditch.

The next few days were a blur of hospitals, phone calls, recounting the accident, and thanking God for His protection. Five of us had been involved in what could have been a fatal accident, and the worst injury that any of us sustained was a broken collarbone.

God is able to bring some good out of every situation, and this accident was no exception. We experienced the hospitality and empathy that are common among African people; everyone from taxi drivers to doctors to ambassadors expressed sincere concern for our well-being. I also gained an even greater appreciation for my coworkers, who didn’t let their bumps, bruises, or broken collarbone stop them from delivering aid to orphanages and remote villages.

What left the deepest impression on me, however, was something God taught me about my spiritual life. Like the wheel alignment on the Land Rover, which had been faulty and caused our accident, my spirit also needs maintenance. If I don’t regularly check my spirit, it can get knocked out of whack by rocks and potholes in the road of life—problems, disappointment, loss, and so on. And if that spiritual misalignment is not corrected, when I hit another particularly rough spot I could lose control, veer off the road, and wind up upside down in a ditch.

Maintaining our spiritual lives through prayer, quality spiritual input, and godly living is as important to our happiness and well-being as servicing our vehicles is to safety on the road. When we work at keeping our spirits in good shape and are mindful of our strengths and limitations, we can respond better to whatever situations we find ourselves in. Our faith in God’s love and care, like shock absorbers, will lessen the bumps in the road; proper alignment will keep us on the straight and narrow; and our lives will take us wherever God wants us to go.

Have a safe trip!

FÁTIMA SARA IS A LANGUAGE TEACHER AND FOUNDING MEMBER OF SEMBRANDO VALORES GRANADA AND FAMILY EDUCATION GHANA. ■



UNOFFENDED

BY MARIE ALVERO

“GREAT PEACE HAVE THEY THAT LOVE THY LAW AND NOTHING SHALL OFFEND THEM”
(Psalm 119:165 KJV).

Let me tell you about some things I have *not* gotten offended by: My toddler getting upset with me for strapping him into his car seat. A celebrity wearing something atrocious on the red carpet. Any team winning or losing the Super Bowl or World Cup. Someone who is not a friend not liking my house.

These things don't rattle me, either because I know that I know better (such as my child in the car seat) or because I am not at all vested in the outcome, relationship, or opinion of the other party.

I have, however, been offended by others' opinions regarding my Christian-ness, smarts, politics, appearance, experiences, knowledge, skills, relationships, and more. Why? Because these things mess with my view of myself, or because I care about the topic or outcome. Many times an interaction was soured for me because I was offended, or I managed to offend another party. That happens easily when my priorities are wrong. In such moments I care more about something temporal and superficial than I do about what God has said, and before I know it, I'm careening down a path I never wanted to be on.

How much simpler it is to be grounded in truth and not offended by whatever hot topic. How can we do

that? By hearing the Word of God. The Bible tells us what is true, even if everyone else is screaming something contrary. God tells us how He sees His children, even if other opinions are coming at you.

When I hold to what God says in the Bible, the other stuff gets smaller, less offensive, less impactful. I don't always manage this well. It's hard. Sometimes the other stuff matters way too much to me. Just this morning I took offense when I didn't need to. Luckily, the Bible verse I quoted at the start of this article came to mind and reminded me of what really counts.

Modern culture looks at being offended as a badge of honor, as protecting yourself. But that attitude is producing a hostility and fragility that is destroying relationships and damaging mental health. That doesn't mean that there are not things worth discussing and defending. But it does mean that if it matters to the point that you are losing your peace, it probably matters too much.

Go back to God's Word. Remember what is eternal, unchanging, and true (Matthew 24:35). Find your peace again.

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. ■



STOPPING THE LEAKS

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

WHEN SOUTH AFRICA EXPERIENCED A SEVERE WATER SHORTAGE SEVERAL YEARS AGO, our regular wet season passed with hardly any rainfall. Coupled with an urban population increase, this caused serious problems in the water supply.

During this time, we had a shock one day when we checked our water meter, as it registered nearly *double* our normal consumption. With the municipality hiking water rates to discourage waste and even promising to publish a “name and shame” list of the highest usage households, we were in quite a stressed state. Everyone set out to find the culprit. Extra luxuriant baths? No. Water fights in the yard? Nope. We couldn’t understand where the extra water was going.

Then someone heard a faint sound coming from one of the toilets. After investigation, we found that the overflow bar had fallen just a bit too low, allowing a tiny trickle of water to flow out and be wasted. The trickle was almost imperceptible, but over the course of a month, it had a massive impact!

The leak was fixed. Our heartbeats went back to normal.

A great victory, all in all! But that didn’t solve the whole problem. In order to make up for the extra cost of

our water bill, we needed to be extremely frugal the next month. That meant no dishwasher running, all laundry done by hand, fewer and shorter showers, and recycling water for flushing toilets and mopping floors. We got through it, but how much easier it would have been if that leak had been caught early on!

This reminds me of how I use my time. In imperceptible amounts, I let time flow out of my day, never to return. We can sense a worldwide shortage of time; and the sand clock is emptying fast. Yet, too often I let my time disappear, needlessly and without anything to show for it. Then suddenly, I’m confronted with a deadline or another matter, and I “just don’t have the time!” So I suffer for my past wastefulness.

The Bible says: “Be careful how you act; these are difficult days. . . . Make the most of every opportunity you have for doing good” (Ephesians 5:15–16 TLB). Let’s get out there and catch the “leaks” in our lives so we can live fully and make a difference in our part of the world.

CHRIS MIZRANY IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. ■

TREASURES OF THE HEART

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

IN MY TRAVELS THROUGH DISTANT LANDS SEEING ANCIENT SIGHTS, one theme resonates. It is a foreboding sense that the treasures and pleasures of this world are fleeting. It is as if the ruins call out, saying: “Trust not in uncertain riches; power and fame are an illusion!” Or as was written over one Roman nobleman’s tomb in a cryptic message from beyond: “As I am, so shall you be!”

This is a reality check not unlike the bitter experience of the author of Ecclesiastes. He said: “I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my

toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:9–11 NIV).

Each place of former glory has its own unique story buried under the rubble of centuries. On occasion a small piece of that story juts out into the sunlight and we get a glimpse of what lies beneath. Such was the case in our recent visit to the Kangra Fort in northern India, which was dubbed “the pearl of the Himalayas” by Mughal rulers who coveted its control of the region.

The narration we listened to told that people from the surrounding lands regularly brought their gifts to the temples there. As the treasures burst from the





Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

—*Matthew 6:19–21 NLT*



surplus, they dug wells to store the vast wealth that had accumulated, which of course did not go unnoticed. In 1009, Mahmud of Ghazni captured the city and, with his camels straining under the load, he hauled away seven tons of gold coins, eight tons of diamonds and pearls, and 28 tons of silver and gold utensils!

The people tried to console the former ruler of the city by each subject giving one rupee. The money collected was used to buy a pearl necklace, which was presented to him. This necklace was a family heirloom until it was handed over to the British in exchange for a small area of land to rule. Today, that necklace is among the crown jewels in London.

Like so many edifices of glory that have been shaken to the ground, Kangra Fort was heavily damaged in an earthquake that struck the area in 1905.

All this impermanence gets me to thinking: What *does* matter? What *will* last? Jesus tells us that “one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). So, what does it consist of?

At the end of Ecclesiastes, the author sums it up, saying: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 NIV).

Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is for us to love God and others, which will reap heavenly rewards.

No, we can’t take anything with us when we die, as the rich fool in Jesus’ parable found out. Instead of distributing his abundant grain stocks, he stayed up late planning bigger barns that would hold his surplus. But that night he died. (See Luke 12:16–21.)

Naked we came into the world and naked we’ll depart, but here’s the good news: Jesus promised that what we do in love for God and others will last. He will reward us now and in the hereafter.

My dad was a divorce lawyer. After a lifetime of dealing with squabbling parties, he mused: “In the end, it is all about junk. Who would get this sofa or that car? What a waste! Life is so much more than stuff!”

Paul’s advice to young Timothy was to love and trust in the living God. (See 1 Timothy 6.) We are to enjoy what we have, and even be thankful when we have precious little. We are to be generous and help those who are in need, and keep the lines of communication open to share our faith and encourage others.

Those are good principles to live by! Those are eternal treasures that an earthquake can’t bring down and camels can’t cart away.

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HUMILITY —A KEY SKILL

BY G.L. ELLENS

FORBES MAGAZINE PRINTED AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF HUMILITY FOR SUCCESS IN TODAY'S WORLD. In a society that values self-promotion and individualism, humility is often overlooked as a desirable trait. However, as the future of the workplace evolves, humility is becoming increasingly more important. By examining the changing world and exploring what the Bible teaches us about humility, we can embrace this skill and become better leaders and collaborators.

As technology and innovation continue to shape the workforce, the need for humility is more pressing than ever. The rise of artificial intelligence and automation has led to the displacement of many jobs, and the jobs that remain often require a new set of skills. Soft skills, such as communication, adaptability, and collaboration, are taking the fore. Those who are humble are more likely to be adaptable, open to new ideas, and willing to learn from others, which is essential in an industry that requires collaboration and cross-functional teams.

Christians are well fitted for the future because we recognize the importance of humility from God's perspective. The Bible has much to say about its importance and features examples of leaders who were known for their humility. Jesus is the best example of humility. The Gospel of Matthew describes His entrance into Jerusalem: "Behold, your king is coming to you,

humble and mounted on a donkey" (Matthew 21:5). Paul also tells Timothy, a young church leader, "Be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people" (2 Timothy 2:24 NLT).

Society at large might look at humility as a way to gain respect and influence others; the Bible, however, emphasizes humility as a way to serve and honor God. Believers can bridge this gap by viewing humility as a way to both honor God and to build strong relationships with others.

Cultivating humility is a lifelong process, but there are some practical steps we can take to develop this important virtue. One way

is to practice active listening, which involves truly hearing and understanding what others are saying. Another is to admit our mistakes and take responsibility for them, rather than blaming others. Finally, we can cultivate humility by serving others and putting their needs ahead of our own.

Proverbs 22:4 says, "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." By embracing humility, we honor God and can build a better world.

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





LOOKING TO JESUS

BY MARIE KNIGHT

WHEN I STARTED JOGGING FOR HEALTH REASONS, I was not very optimistic. I didn't think I could do much and almost talked myself out of the whole idea. But reluctantly I started by setting a small goal: jog for 10 minutes, walk for five minutes, and then jog again.

When I began, I immediately felt out of breath from the unfamiliar exertion, and only five minutes into the run my legs were aching. I desperately wanted to give up and stop, but I was only halfway to the first part of my goal, so I pressed on. I can't exactly say when it happened, but after pushing through the first feelings of exhaustion and discomfort, it became bearable. Ten minutes passed, then 15. Eventually I reached my goal of jogging 30 minutes straight through.

The Bible talks about running in [Hebrews 12:1-3](#): "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him

who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

This, of course, is not referring to a 30-minute jog, but is a metaphor for our lives. To run with patience means to keep going, to not quit. This is not a 100-meter dash that is over quickly; it's a marathon of endurance, and we need patience and motivation to reach our goal.

The first place we give up is in our minds. If we get discouraged and convince ourselves that something is too difficult, then usually it is. And that's often when we take our eyes off the goal, and instead start thinking about feelings and circumstances.

As Christians, there is no greater motivation than to keep looking to Jesus, who endured great suffering for us with joy because He knew what it would accomplish and mean for us. And if we stay focused, things we thought we couldn't do become possible, and one day we will say with the apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" ([2 Timothy 4:7](#)).

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



EMBRACING CHANGE

BY IRIS RICHARD

MY WORLD BEGAN TO TURN UPSIDE DOWN

when many of the familiar ways I was used to for years threatened to unravel. Our long-term housing contract ran out, and one by one the team we had been working with on community projects and missionary outreach decided to move on. Our children, now young adults, flapped their wings and flew out of the nest. There we were on a challenging African mission field, just my husband and me. We felt far from being competent and we didn't feel brave enough to weather the upheaval in our usual routine.

Even though we had to admit that God had never ceased to help us through many tests and challenges, and He had never failed in any of His promises for our

care, support, and safety (Matthew 7:7-8), our outlook wasn't all that positive. The question of how we could manage the increased workload seemed daunting, and as I tried to figure out how we would tackle the immediate situation, emptiness and worry about the future settled on my mind.

We had depended on the many skills our co-workers had brought to the team. We had always had talented people to collaborate with. As a result, I never got around to the tedious task of taking driving lessons. It would have meant learning to navigate through the frightening jungle-like traffic in our congested African city, which I gladly left to a teammate. It also had not been necessary for me to acquire the skill of designing our regular project updates and brochures. In addition, speaking in public was not something I excelled in. Previously,

there had always been gifted co-workers to tackle these tasks, which provided me with the privilege of doing what was in the range of my gifts and training.

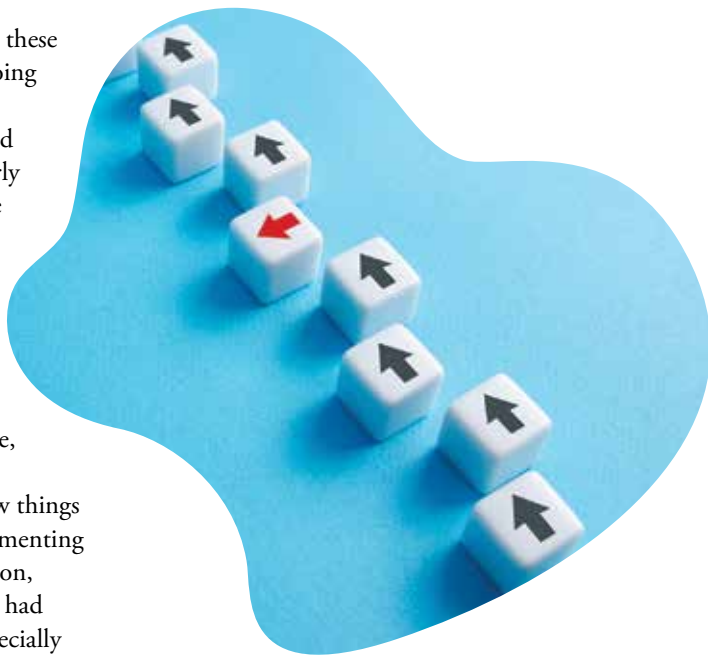
Now, as things changed so drastically, my mind protested: “Oh God, what happened to my orderly scheduled life, and when did the proverbial apple cart come to this awful tipping point?” I was worrying during my morning time of reading and prayer, when the following Bible verse popped into my mind: “Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass” (Psalm 37:5 NKJV). This was followed by another short message: “Take courage, God is in control!”

My complaints had fogged my view of the new things God wanted to do in my life. The time I spent lamenting the closed doors of the past had obscured my vision, and I hadn't even noticed the open windows that had appeared right in my vicinity. I have realized, especially since growing older, that my natural tendency is to first focus on the negative, mulling over lost opportunities, before paying attention to the good that usually comes with change.

When I finally concentrated on the positive side of the closed doors, I sensed the fresh fragrance that blew through the newly opened windows, which God was trying to turn my attention to. I remembered what a friend had recently told me: “Blessings come in different shapes and sizes; in fact, we don't always recognize them.”

So, I took the plunge. I signed up for a six-month course in counseling therapy and received my certification. I studied a tutorial to learn how to lay out brochures. I went on to pass my driving test. These newly acquired skills have been a great blessing and asset in our community work.

What seemed like such a defeat has actually proven to be a whole staircase of exciting steps upward and forward, and the “forced” learning process helped me to become a more well-rounded person and a better jack-of-all-trades, which has come in handy for some of the new assignments that life has brought my way. Best of



all, I experienced what C.S. Lewis wrote: “When we lose one blessing, another is often most unexpectedly given in its place.”

Looking back over the 29 years (and counting) that I have been working on the African continent, with all its insecurity, poverty, and unexpected changes, my faith in God's Word has been my shield. It has given me courage, adaptability, and endurance to hang on during challenging times when energy runs low and resolve wears thin. (See [Romans 4:20–21](#).)

Furthermore, I have seen an amazing design for my life unfold, which can only be accredited to God's guidance, and that is proof to me that He truly is in control, and we can let Him direct our paths.

“Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left” ([Isaiah 30:21](#)).

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This God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

—Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

EVERYDAY CHOICES THAT MATTER

An aerial photograph of a rowing team in a black boat on a body of blue water. The team consists of four rowers, each wearing a bright pink shirt and a white cap. They are all leaning forward in a synchronized rowing motion, with their oars dipping into the water. The boat is long and narrow, and the water around it is slightly disturbed by the oars.

You might feel that your life isn't very important or that what you do doesn't add up to much in the bigger scheme of things. But each player on My team is important, and I need you to do your part to be My salt and light in the world, whether it seems great or small to you (Matthew 5:13-16). The important thing is that you put your whole heart into whatever you do, and you give it all you've got (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

In many sports, the teams are large, and not every player gets a lot of playing time, and some roles may seem less important than others. I told My early followers that “the last will be first and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16). Many people will be surprised to learn the great importance of their seemingly small everyday acts of love and compassion in the advancement of My kingdom.

Everything that happens in your life is for a purpose and is an opportunity to make choices that matter. Choices made in love for Me and others will last into eternity—including the unseen everyday choices to love, show compassion, give generously, and care for those around you.