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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD

The formula for greatness

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Compassionate awareness

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A journey of discovery

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The future is bright





PERSONALLY SPEAKING BEING PROACTIVE IN PRAYER

As we contemplate the new year we might feel a bit of trepidation, but God, who sees tomorrow with infinite clarity, whispers to us: “There is hope for your future” (Jeremiah 31:17). This is one of the many promises in the Bible that we can use as stepping-stones as we walk into the new year. As unsure as the

future may appear, we can commit all our ways to the Lord and trust that He will act on our behalf (Psalm 37:5). We will not be disappointed.

What are your hopes for the year ahead? Have you prayed for your goals for the year and even for the more distant future? Is there something that you would like to accomplish in 2025 that you could commit to *proactive prayer* now? If you believe that a project is God’s will, you can ask Him to pave the way ahead, to put the right people in your path, and to supply whatever you need. You can ask for wisdom in your decisions and preparations.

Be specific in your prayers. Have faith and get excited about all the wonderful things that will come to pass, as the Lord answers your prayers. “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans” (Proverbs 16:3 NIV).

This month’s magazine has practical and faith-building articles to help us meet the challenges of the months ahead. Our feature article, “In Partnership with God,” gives excellent counsel on how to set our priorities and align our goals, not by traditional measures of success, but rather by looking at the “bigger picture” of our lives and focusing on what pleases and glorifies God and is a blessing to others. As 2 Peter 3:18 says, may we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.”

Gabriel and Sally García
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LESSONS FROM THE ROAD

BY SHARON GALAMBOS

I STOPPED DRIVING AFTER THE CATASTROPHIC 8.8 EARTHQUAKE and subsequent tsunami that devastated the south-central part of Chile in 2010. For a year I trudged along the Chilean coast, parts of which were impassable by regular vehicle, going from town to town with a program to promote resilience.

I lugged a backpack full of materials to comfort and motivate folks. In each area I hosted trauma workshops for children and adults. A friend who is a child psychologist would carry out more in-depth interventions. I traveled from village to village (often walking) interviewing and encouraging hospital personnel, teachers, school directors, policemen, clergy, facility directors, inhabitants of temporary housing camps, village officials, and provincial authorities.

And so began my 14 years of walking and riding buses or whatever transportation option was available. It was slow and laborious. Yet, I interacted with a lot of people, enjoyed God's creation, and was invited into many homes to share a meal or lodging.

Fast-forward to today. Now in the US, I was gifted a vehicle so I could be more effective in my volunteer work with rescued and abandoned children in northern Mexico. My life has increased in speed and intensity.

One day I was surprised to notice the car behind me stop to let another car enter the turn lane from a parking lot. It dawned on me, "That driver has *compassionate awareness*." I hadn't even noticed that someone was waiting to exit the parking lot. I was self-absorbed, whereas the driver of the car behind me was thinking about how to help someone else.

I thought about how I had been "driving" when it came to my life. I reflected on Galatians 5:22–23: "The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!" (NLT).

I realized that it is one thing for me to demonstrate these attributes in humanitarian work and programs—activities that enhance my self-image. It is much more of a challenge to manifest these attributes in the seemingly insignificant occurrences of daily life, like that man did by his small gesture of deference to another driver.

As I was awakened to compassionate awareness by seeing a kind act, my prayer is that others will see this in me and hopefully we can all slow down a bit and help our fellow man.

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In PARTNERSHIP *with* GOD

SUCCESS. GOALS. ACHIEVEMENT. These are words we hear frequently—more so at the beginning of a new year. People may define success in many different ways, whether in relation to career advancement, position, wealth, or reaching one’s goals, as it is often defined in contemporary culture. For Christians, there is a much bigger picture when it comes to measuring success, which is about living in a way that is pleasing to God and blesses others.

The Bible often uses the metaphor of bearing fruit in reference to the outcomes of our lives and our actions and decisions. The book of Proverbs teaches that “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the one who is wise saves lives” (Proverbs 11:30 NIV). Jesus also used metaphors of planting and sowing and bearing fruit in His teachings (Matthew 13:3–9; John 15:1–8). He said: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me



and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5 NIV).

When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we enter into a life partnership with God, and remaining in Him and bearing fruit includes things such as:

- Having a deep and transformative relationship with God that results in the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).
- Being a loving spouse and parent, a good coworker, friend, and neighbor (Luke 10:29–37).
- Being a faithful ambassador of Christ in our interactions with others (2 Corinthians 5:20).
- Manifesting honesty, integrity, generosity, and reliability (2 Peter 1:5–9).

The start of a new year is a good time to reflect on these points and to consider other values that would contribute to our personal “success factor” as Christians. God measures success very differently from how the world does, and the formula Jesus gave for greatness flips the narrative altogether: “It is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest” (Luke 9:48 NIV). He also told His disciples, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35 NIV). Biblical success is found in pleasing and glorifying God through our lives and actions, and in loving and serving Him and others.

These qualities cannot be developed and maintained through willpower and discipline alone. Our relationship with the Lord, and time spent in reading His Word, and prayer and worship play a vital part in how we live our lives and the decisions we make. Like most good things in life, a close relationship with God doesn’t come easily.

We have to make time for the things that matter, as the following Bible passage teaches:

“Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:38–42).

Developing and investing in our relationship with the Lord is of eternal and lasting value. If we are to truly love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind, we need to place the Lord in first place in our lives, and “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). We can assess what place He holds in our lives by considering how we invest our time, what our prayer life and time studying God’s Word looks like, and whether we strive to pattern our lives after Jesus’ life and teachings.

If we’re serious about having a life partnership with God, we need to dedicate time to building it. No matter how things may be going for us, how much success we enjoy, how fit and healthy we are, or how wonderful a family we have, we need the Lord’s help and the infilling of the Holy Spirit to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives. Growing in our dependence on the Lord is a lifelong process, which we often learn best as we weather challenges, setbacks, and difficulties.

Life can be very busy, filled with deadlines, responsibilities and tasks that require our immediate attention, to

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the point that for many of us each day is a race against the clock. If we aren't careful with how we invest our time, the inconsequential things of life can crowd out the things that are worthwhile and that will last forever. Temporal things can end up consuming our time, while God and His Word are crowded into a secondary place. When this happens, our lives can be thrown out of balance.

It is helpful to periodically ask ourselves: Are the great realities of life and my eternal future in proper perspective? Do I have a sense of the eternal values? Am I investing in the things that will last? As Jesus said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where your heart is, so will your treasure be" (Matthew 6:20–21).

Each day we are faced with many decisions, most of which are likely mundane and often nothing dramatic, and consequently we might not realize how important our day-to-day choices may be

to our future—both here on earth and in heaven. With so many other demands for our time and attention, keeping our spiritual lives in focus is no small task. Much of what surrounds us in the temporal world is at odds with the spiritual life and won't last, as "the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17).

How you live your life and how you spend your time and finances are indicators of your true priorities and your investment in living in partnership with God. The choice to live by a Christian value system and to seek eternal rewards above immediate gains or satisfaction is one that requires commitment and sacrifice. It may take giving up something of lesser importance to make room for things of greater importance. Aligning our life to biblical principles and eternal priorities requires making intentional decisions about our time, our plans for the future, and our everyday activities.

As Christians, we have the privilege of living in relationship with the Master of the universe, who has promised us an eternity of joy in His presence (John 17:3). We know the truth, we have peace in our hearts, we have the treasure of God's Word in the Bible. We have the privilege and calling of sharing the good news of His love and salvation with others. Our names are written in His book of life, a cause for endless rejoicing (Luke 10:20). He has promised to bless and provide for us and guide us, as we seek to walk with Him and work in close partnership with Him.

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



GOD'S UNFAILING PROMISES

BY RUTH DAVIDSON

AS WE TURN THE PAGE OF THE PAST, we can look forward to tomorrow with hope and expectancy. This may sound overly optimistic, but I prefer looking at the future from that perspective rather than getting down and disheartened. A lot of our overall attitude depends on which way we're looking. Viewing the present world landscape, it seems that it could hardly be any darker, but the upward view could hardly be any brighter!

While we do not know what the future holds, we do know *who* holds the future. When we look at all the promises our Creator has given us in the Bible, it gives us the assurance that everything is under His perfect control. He tells us that He loves us, and that He will protect us, guide us, and give us peace.

Our greatest hope is in knowing Jesus, the one who knows us best and cares the most for us. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” ([Colossians 1:27 KJV](#)). “God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that is set before us. This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary” ([Hebrews 6:18–19 NLT](#)).

Throughout my missionary life, the testimony of Adoniram Judson has been a tremendous inspiration to me. He was sent from North America to Burma to preach



the gospel. After seeing his entire life’s work go up in flames, his family broken down, and spending time in prison, a reporter asked Judson, “What hope do you have for Burma after all of this tragedy?” Adoniram simply responded, “The future is as bright as the promises of God.”

Similarly, we can look ahead with exhilaration because of the untapped possibilities awaiting us. Perhaps many of the things we were unable to accomplish yesterday can be achieved today, tomorrow, or in the future. When patience is coupled with hope, wonderful things can happen.

These hopes and expectations may not come right away, but if we keep our eyes on Jesus, that eventual *rainbow* will come at the end of the storm.

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](#). ■



HIDDEN TREASURES

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

OCCASIONALLY THE SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT THINGS THAT HAPPEN TO US CARRY A DEEP MEANING, if we will take the time to reflect on them. Here is an example:

We had been doing puppet shows for children in India for two years. Our theater was a contraption of PVC pipes. It was easy to assemble and take down, but it looked a bit shabby. People would say, “You have a great show; all you need is a good theater.”

We had thought of ways to improve it, and then a funny thing happened that gave us a big paradigm shift.

A year earlier, some friends had told us they were cleaning out their garage. They had two curious bundles of poles and cloth but didn't know what they were for. They offered them to us. No instructions accompanied them, so their purpose was a mystery.

The bundles sat in our storage for a year. Then one day, we took the poles and cloth out of the bag. We were like kids playing with blocks to see what we could build. We kept trying, and eventually, to our amazement, a structure started to take shape—a professional puppet theater worth hundreds of dollars!

Here we had been struggling with our homemade contraption for a year, when all along we'd had a fantabulous theater sitting in a bag waiting for us to discover its true potential.

How often we have something in our hands that would make life so much easier, but we

just don't realize it. We try to fix up the old instead of letting go and discovering a better thing just waiting for us.

Curious as to how the puppet bag had gotten there, I did some detective work and found out that several years before, a team had come from the US with the idea of doing puppet shows. They had abandoned the bag in that garage. Several years later we had it, but it still took some experimenting to realize what an asset it was.

How many art masterpieces or valuable manuscripts were discovered after years of storage in someone's attic? The owners thought they had a trinket when in reality they had a treasure. We too have great treasures, yet we don't always appreciate them as we should. They could be our family or friends that we have neglected or failed to appreciate, or perhaps God's written Word that has been gathering dust on our bookshelf, waiting for us to read it to be revitalized and transformed.

To fully utilize our resources, it can take effort and maybe some experimenting to see how the pieces fit together to create its beautiful whole, but when we do, it can transform our lives.

A few days later we did a puppet show and the hostess commented, "I heard you were good, but after seeing your performance, I must say, you were great! And I loved your theater!"

I smiled, thinking of the back story of the theater that almost wasn't.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND MIME ARTIST WHO SPENT 47 YEARS DOING MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN 10 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. HE AND HIS WIFE PAULINE CURRENTLY LIVE IN GERMANY. ■

POINTS TO PONDER

NEW BEGINNINGS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day.—*Edith Lovejoy Pierce*



Let us believe in a long year that is given to us, new, untouched, full of things that have never been.—*Rainer Maria Rilke*



We spend January 1st walking through our lives, room by room, drawing up a list of work to be done, cracks to be patched. Maybe this year, to balance the list, we ought to walk through the rooms of our lives ... not looking for flaws, but for potential.—*Ellen Goodman*



Opportunities? They are all around us... There is power lying latent everywhere waiting for the observant eye to discover it.—*Orison Swett Marden*



Expect change. Analyze the landscape. Take the opportunities. Stop being the chess piece; become the player. It's your move.—*Tony Robbins*



Each new day is a blank page in the diary of your life. The secret of success is in turning that diary into the best story you possibly can.—*Douglas Pagels*



Enjoying success requires the ability to adapt. Only by being open to change will you have a true opportunity to get the most from your talent.—*Nolan Ryan*



No, this is not the beginning of a new chapter in my life; this is the beginning of a new book! That first book is already closed, ended, and tossed into the seas; this new book is newly opened, has just begun! Look, it is the first page! And it is a beautiful one!—*C. JoyBell C.*

I AM!

BY CHLOE ROSE

MOSES SAID TO GOD, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”—*Exodus 3:13–14*

In late 2019, just before the pandemic, I moved continents. In making this huge move I reduced my worldly possessions to one small and one medium suitcase. The journey, while painful, was cathartic as I stripped away the comforts of everything that I knew to embrace a new

continent, a new life, and hopefully new friends. There was one thing, however, that remained constant: I AM!

I had never really understood why God told Moses that His name was “I AM,” but I think I kind of get it now. “I am” is constant. God was saying to Moses, “I don’t change. I am not limited to human nouns, verbs, or adjectives.”

It took a year from the time we decided to make the move until we stepped onto new shores! It was stressful and exciting at the same time. Fast-forward to the present day and we have a semblance of stability. Is it the house, the car, the job? No, not really. All these things are nice





Understanding the weight and power of the name in Exodus 3:14, “I AM WHO I AM,” is important for today’s Christian to understand the complexity of who God is. He is all-encompassing and self-sufficient. It is a name above names, one that reminds the believer that God is in control, and that He sees His children. . . . It can be easy in the struggles of everyday life to lose sight of the majesty and holiness of God, but meditating on the name He gave Himself, and all that it represents, can help put our time on earth into perspective. God is infinite, and He is sovereign over our lives, He Is Who He Is.

—*Bethany Verrett*, biblestudytools.com

If you have not yet received Jesus, the Savior who never changes and who will always be there for you, you can do so by praying this simple prayer:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me. Thank You! I want You to be my anchor, my eternal hope, my strength. I ask You to come into my heart, forgive my sins, and give me eternal life. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit. In Your Name I pray. Amen.

and needed, but the truth is that the one constant has been Jesus, and He saw us through it all.

As these major milestones were falling into place, all I could think was how amazing it is to trust the great I AM for His timing in sorting things out. I’m one to jump a few steps ahead, and I want everything *now*. But if the constant in my life never changes, why should I jump ahead? Why should I want to have something before it is time? Why can’t I trust Him now like I did yesterday?

We always want the sun to shine, but like the horrific summer of bush fires in Australia showed us, heat without rain can be devastating. Likewise, rain without sun can bring floods. So, we need the ever-changing variables in life—the weather being one of them—to provide balance, growth, and a way to move forward. However, if we have the variables with no anchor, we’d be tossed to and fro like a boat in a storm. The great I AM Himself is our anchor, something unchangeable that we can lock onto no matter what storms come our way. This is the balance that we need. We need the ever-changing winds to bring sun, rain, storms, and rainbows, and yet we need consistency in the form of a rock, something unmovable to keep us secured, come what may.

When I think of God’s response to Moses I hear: “I am your anchor. I am your sure thing. I am the only one you should keep focused on. If you lose focus, you can slip and fall, but when you stay focused, that’s when victory is assured.” So, to be victorious, we need to keep our eyes locked onto a solid anchor, a steady hope, and a source of strength that can help us move continents, uproot our life, and guide us through the inconsistent and changing terrain of life. “I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6 KJV).

The next time someone asks me if I’m worried about something, I can reply: “Why should I be? I AM changes not.”

I can be grateful when the sun shines,
I can be grateful when the storms blow,
When adversity hits or when sorrows show,
I am grateful because I have Him and He has me,
I know!

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OUR IDENTITY

BY SALLY GARCÍA

AT THE CLOSE OF THE YEAR I think about the negative habits that I would like to shed and the better habits that I would like to form. I have a “blank book” of 365 pages set before me and I want to write the best story possible. But I have been here before. What about the old habits that I tried to shed last year without much success?

I found a new insight from a book that reversed my thinking about how to bring lasting change to some of those stubborn areas.¹ The author talks about three layers in changing a habit: *the outcome*—what you wish to obtain, *the process*—the plan to achieve it, and *identity*—the core of your belief. Instead of beginning with our wish (the outcome), he gives the suggestion that we can start with our identity, who we are or want to become. He proceeds with the simple illustration of someone who refuses a cigarette by saying, “No thanks, I am trying to quit,” in comparison to stating, “No thanks, I am not a smoker.” The second statement is more powerful, allowing the person to live their new identity.

1. *Atomic Habits*, James Clear (Avery, 2018)

As Christians, there are many aspects to our identity: we are His temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), citizens of His kingdom (Colossians 1:13), His bride (Romans 7:4 KJV), children of light and of the day (1 Thessalonians 5:5), and much more. By His grace, we can learn to “put on Christ” (Romans 13:14) and walk in “newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

For example, let’s say that this year I want to be a nicer person with my co-workers. Long ago I decided that I should be a better listener, less judgmental, less harsh in my reactions—but oh, it’s so hard! Now I remember that I am an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20) and I represent Him to everyone I work with. Ambassadors go to diplomatic academies where they learn how to represent their countries. I can go to the Bible to find out how to best represent God’s kingdom. As I represent Him, I will naturally begin to see my co-workers through His eyes, I will respect them and want to listen without critical judgment. I will be gentler in my answers. New habits will form, and as I grow closer to my workmates, I will also grow in the knowledge of the Lord. This is a “win-win” situation and a great challenge for the new year!

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PREPARED FOR THE BATTLE

BY SIMON BISHOP

WHEN PREPARING FOR THE NEW YEAR, I was reminded that life is a battle, a fact which is supported in the Bible. There are many verses where warfare, battles, weapons, fighting, and overcoming are used as metaphors for the struggles of life. At first glance, this can be a little discouraging, until you realize that, while God's Word doesn't sugarcoat the struggles of life, it gives us hope and assurance because we know the following three things:

1. God is with us in every battle.

"They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the Lord, to deliver you" (Jeremiah 1:19).

"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

2. God has equipped us with spiritual weapons that help us be victorious.

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4 NIV).

"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of

salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:13–17 NIV).

3. No matter how overwhelming or difficult the fight, God has promised us victory in the end.

"I have told you this so that through me you may have peace. In the world you'll have trouble, but be courageous—I've overcome the world!" (John 16:33 ISV).

"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

It is good to go into the new year with faith and expectation, but it's also good to be prepared for struggles and difficulties. Peter wrote: "Dear friends, don't be surprised or shocked that you are going through testing that is like walking through fire. Be glad for the chance to suffer as Christ suffered. It will prepare you for even greater happiness when he makes his glorious return" (1 Peter 4:12–13 CEV).

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

GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN FAITHFUL

BY MARIE ALVERO

WE REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.—*Romans 5:3–5*

If I could sit down with 15-years-younger me and tell myself what the next years would bring, I would say:

You're going to lose a baby, go through a health crisis with your husband, be broke and struggle financially a lot, leave behind a church and whole community, watch your kids face some difficult struggles in their teen years, experience major challenges in your marriage, move five times, change jobs over and over, and some parts of this story are going to be so hard and lonely. Your faith will be shaken. You will be pretty angry sometimes.

But you will end every single year happier, more at peace and with a stronger faith than the year before. In fact, you'll get to a place where the hard things don't upset you quite as much, because your faith will have grown. You will know from experience that if you hold on patiently, your hope will not have been in vain. And that will feel so empowering!

Maybe with this explanation younger me would not have been quite so scared during all those twists and turns. Maybe starting over wouldn't have felt quite as terrifying.

My response to hard things is not what it used to be. I am less afraid, less adamant about how things should be, and more confident in God's ability to weave His plan into reality, no matter how tangled the threads seem to me.

Last year our family had two situations that involved major life changes. We thought things were going in one direction, and through no choice of our own, they totally changed from one day to the next with no notice. Honestly, both times it was very disappointing, and it impacted our faith and confidence in God's love—for a minute. But as we looked back over the years, we each could say, "God has always been faithful. We can trust Him! We will not be disappointed!"

We are still walking these stories out, but I am happy to see that trust and peace now come so much faster. I know that all the difficult experiences we endured brought us to this place, and I am truly grateful for them!

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. ■

STOKING THE FIRE

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

WE SAT DOWN AFTER DINNER ON NEW YEAR'S EVE and talked about what we would like to do to celebrate the New Year. My daughter said she would love a fire, and we soon had one blazing in the fire pit in the back yard on a mild South Texas evening. We sat around the fire, talking about the past year and our dreams and ideas for the future. It was a beautiful way to end one year and prepare for the next.

Every once in a while, the fire would begin to die, and one of us would run over to the woodpile and pull out some new pieces of wood to place on the fire. We'd had a wet fall and a recent drizzly day, so the newly added wood smoked for a while until the heat from the coals dried it and caused it to burst into flame.

That simple process made me think about how God keeps moving in our lives, making changes, adding new things, and stirring us up so that the flame of His Spirit can keep burning brightly. If we refuse the changes or don't want anything new entering our lives, our flame would quickly die out. We might burn brightly for a while, but then our flame would begin to smolder. We might resent the stirring of our coals and we might not appreciate the new wood being heaped on us, making us smoke and struggle to ignite, but all that is needed to keep our flame burning brightly.

So, as I observed the flames, I wanted to toss away my reluctance to change. I prayed to be open to the things God chooses to bring into my life. I want to keep the flame of God's Holy Spirit burning brightly this year, both to stay warm myself and to draw others to the beauty of His warm love.

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See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.—*Isaiah 43:19 NIV*

"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*

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.—*Joshua 1:9 NIV*

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

FAITH FOR THE JOURNEY

Your faith journey is all about scaling life's mountains. It takes pressing on toward the goal to win the prize for which you have been called heavenward, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead (Philippians 3:13–14). It's a choice to set your sights on a better country—a heavenly one, the place I have prepared for you (Hebrews 11:16). You have chosen to keep your eyes fixed on your eternal future and to invest in treasures that will last.

During times of change and uncertainty about your future, remember that I am your Rock—the One who will never change, and who will always be with you. You have experienced many challenges in your life and have weathered many storms. But no matter what you have faced, I have always been with you.

Whatever path your life takes, you are Mine forever. I ransomed your life through My death on the cross. I am your constant companion, and you can trust Me. You can count on My Spirit to lead and guide you. I will always love you. This will never change.

When you walk through times of uncertainty, not knowing what is in store for you in the future, trust that I will hold your hand every step of the way of your life's journey. I will provide sufficient love, faith, grace, and reassurance to meet every challenge, and your path will shine ever brighter until that perfect day (Proverbs 4:18 KJV).

