

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# ACTIVATED

Vol 26 • Issue 3

## THE CORNERSTONE OF FAITH

Putting Jesus first

## The Parable of the Sower

Receiving God's Word

## It's Not Odd, It's God

He's one smart CEO



## PERSONALLY SPEAKING IN STEP WITH GOD

On a recent family visit I took a walk around the neighborhood with my grandson and had a great opportunity to hear some of his deepest yearnings and thoughts. This allowed me to get to know him better and to enjoy an invaluable moment of closeness and companionship with him. The same thing happens when we walk with God. We find His will for us, and we feel His presence, intimacy, and assurance, which deepens our knowledge of Him.

This month's *Activated* magazine explores the different aspects of walking closely with God—not “afar off” (Matthew 26:58 KJV), but side by side, communing and conversing with Him, maybe planning together, or simply enjoying each other's company. To be in step with God we need to maintain a dialogue with Him in our everyday actions, as brought out in the articles of this issue.

When the Bible speaks of “walking,” it often refers to a lifestyle. If we want to incorporate Christian principles into our life, we will walk with Jesus, follow Him, and live for Him. Walking with God must be a daily exercise if we are to stay in close fellowship with Him. In the article on page 3, Marie Alvero compares it to consistently working out at the gym. It also means to glorify God daily, as brought out in the feature article on pages 4–6.

To walk with God means that we are in agreement, that we are walking in the same direction (Amos 3:3 NKJV). And if we are to enjoy its full benefits, we must walk humbly (Micah 6:8).

The biblical term “walking” also evokes the image of a journey or a pilgrimage—it's more than saying, “I'm going for a walk in the park, I'll be right back.” It means that our hearts are set on a pilgrimage, walking side by side with Jesus, gaining strength daily, until we encounter Him face to face in Heaven.

All this “walking” might sound tiring, but paradoxically, walking with God leads to rest and renewal, as the Shepherd leads us by still waters (Psalm 23:1–2). It is a fascinating adventure! True, it has its challenges, but God promises to give us the strength, guidance, and wisdom to navigate them.

May the articles in this issue bless you as you walk daily with Jesus.

Gabriel and Sally García  
*Activated* Editorial Team

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# SHOW UP

BY MARIE ALVERO



I love those who love me; and those who seek me diligently find me.  
—Proverbs 8:17

MY HUSBAND AND I RECENTLY STARTED GOING TO THE GYM ON A REGULAR BASIS. For years I have worked out at home where I have a modest collection of workout equipment. This is my first foray into the gym, and I find it quite intimidating. But in the past few weeks I have seen improvement in my level of fitness, the kind of improvement that consistency and showing up earns.

There are some gym skills I want to master, and I think it's going to take me a long time to build the strength and abilities I want. I haven't even touched some of the machines at the gym yet, so it will be a long journey. One workout at a time.

So how does this tie in with my faith? It's the *showing up* part. One of the things I think all of us who love Jesus need to chase after is intimacy with Him, really knowing Him. And the only way to do that is to make the practice of communing with Him an everyday event.

But maybe when you approach Jesus you feel like me at the gym, kinda outta place. Perhaps you pick up the Bible and it just feels like a big book that you don't understand. You know some people who seem to really know how to pray and who understand the Bible better

and appear to be so much closer to the Lord, but gosh, it looks like a lot of effort!

Well, my advice to you is: Just start.

Some of the most renowned personal trainers say that the best thing you can do for yourself at the gym is to master five or six basic exercises and learn to do those moves well and with greater resistance on a progressive basis. Ignore all the trends and hype and focus on mastering the basics. And there could not be more effective advice for your faith walk as well.

My practice is simple. Every morning, I walk outside with my cup of coffee and sit in my not-so-beautiful yard. I put down my phone and read from the Bible or a devotional book. I pray for a few minutes, I sit quietly. Sometimes I literally spend less than 10 minutes there, other days I linger. I start my day getting to know Jesus a little better, surrendering my thoughts to Him, in all their mumble jumble. In this quietness our closeness grows.

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. ■

# GLORIFYING GOD IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

BY PETER AMSTERDAM



THE BIBLE INSTRUCTS US TO ENTER INTO GOD'S PRESENCE WITH PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING (Psalm 100:2–4). The Hebrew and Greek words translated as praise are, by their definitions, essentially telling us to give God the praise He deserves because of His qualities, deeds, and attributes, which means to bless, adore; give thanksgiving, appreciation, and commendation. We can regularly express our admiration, gratitude, awe, appreciation, and love, as we come before Him in humility, realizing what an awesome and loving God He is.

We can contemplate what God has told us about Himself and His nature through His Word—that He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—God in three Persons. He's told us what He's like, what He's done, how to be reconciled with Him, how to have His Spirit dwell in us. Through His Word He's shown us how to know and love Him, how to trust Him, what pleases Him. He has expressed His love, His faithfulness, His care for us. We



can therefore know Him, love Him, rely on Him, and confidently believe in, trust, and obey His Word.

In our *inner* lives, in our spirits, we can worship God by always remembering that He is God—the Creator of the universe who made us, who knows everything about us, and who, as majestic as He is, loves each of us personally. In the book of Revelation, Jesus invites each of us to have a personal relationship with Him when He says: “I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends” (Revelation 3:20 NLT).



We can respond to God's love for us by loving and glorifying Him from within our inward being, with all our heart, soul, rational mind, and all that is within us (Mark 12:30).

The Bible teaches us to "draw near to God and He will draw near to us" (James 4:8). Every day we can seek to dwell in His presence, to live in the awareness of God and all that He is and has done. We can remind ourselves of His attributes, His power, and His love. We can look with amazement at His creation and reflect on its beauty and magnificence. We can appreciate the goodness He has shown to all people and marvel at His love for every person. We can live in awe of the grace and mercy He has bestowed upon us through salvation. We can rejoice that we are adopted into His family through Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. We can be profoundly humbled that the Holy Spirit dwells within us (1 Corinthians 3:16).

We can understand that He is personal and has created us to be personal as well, and to have a relationship with Him. We can consistently strive to nurture and strengthen that relationship. We can seek to dwell in His presence, to love Him, express our gratitude, communicate with Him in prayer, and listen to Him as we read the Bible and hear His still small voice as He communicates

with us. We can echo the words of the psalmist: "One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

In our *outer* lives, we can worship and glorify God in our actions. We glorify Him when we embrace and follow what His Word teaches and tells us to do, when we live in accordance with it, and put biblical principles into everyday action (John 14:15). Because we are personal beings who have a relationship with God, we can also follow Him by seeking His guidance in prayer, making godly decisions, and doing those things He shows us to do. Each of us is different, and the Lord can give guidance that is specific to each of our lives (Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV). We show Him honor when we ask Him to lead us and when we follow His leading by faith.

We worship God when we live our lives in a manner that reflects God's love and the principles of His Word. The Bible instructs us to let our lights shine before others, so that they can see what we do and how we live, and experience God's love and give Him glory because of it (Matthew 5:16). Our godly interactions with others, our everyday living in alignment with the teachings and principles of His Word, when seen by others can shine the light of God's love and truth and draw others to Him.

We also glorify the Lord before others when we share the good news of the gospel, when we tell our personal testimony of how we came to faith in Christ. When we share Christian literature or teach or by any means inform people about God and His love for them, we are fulfilling His Great Commission to His followers



([Matthew 28:19–20](#)). We worship Him when we help those in need, the widows and orphans, the needy, the poor—when we give of ourselves in any way that reflects God’s love and concern for others ([James 1:27](#)).

When we pray and ask Him for help for ourselves or others, when we seek His guidance, we are giving Him glory and honor. We are acknowledging our belief in His care and concern for us, in the truth of His Word, and in the dependability of His promises. We acknowledge our need and declare through our prayers that we trust that He will both hear and answer them ([1 John 5:14–15](#)). When we confess our sins to Him, we honor Him by acknowledging that we have done wrong and are in need of His forgiveness.

We glorify God when we love our neighbors as we love ourselves; when we do to others as we’d have them do to us ([Luke 6:31](#)); when we love in deed and in truth ([1 John 3:18](#)); and when we love, obey, and revere God and do the things He says, for this is the whole duty of man ([Ecclesiastes 12:13](#)). Theologian J. I. Packer expressed it this way: “All life activities, too, must be pursued with the aim of giving God homage, honor, and pleasure, which is glory-giving on the practical level.”

When we live in the awareness that God created us in His image, it should motivate us to do our best to pattern our lives after the example Jesus gave us and to live in a manner that brings Him glory. Living a God-glorifying life, however, isn’t a one-way street, with all the benefits going to God. There are blessings received in this life and in the life to come for those who live to love and glorify Him, as we read in the Psalms: “Surely goodness and

mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” ([Psalm 23:6](#)).

As Christians who understand that the Lord desires us to live in a manner that will be blessed by Him and will bless others, we have the opportunity to fulfill the purpose of our Creator in this life, and to dwell in His presence forever in joy and happiness, always being able to give Him the glory He deserves.

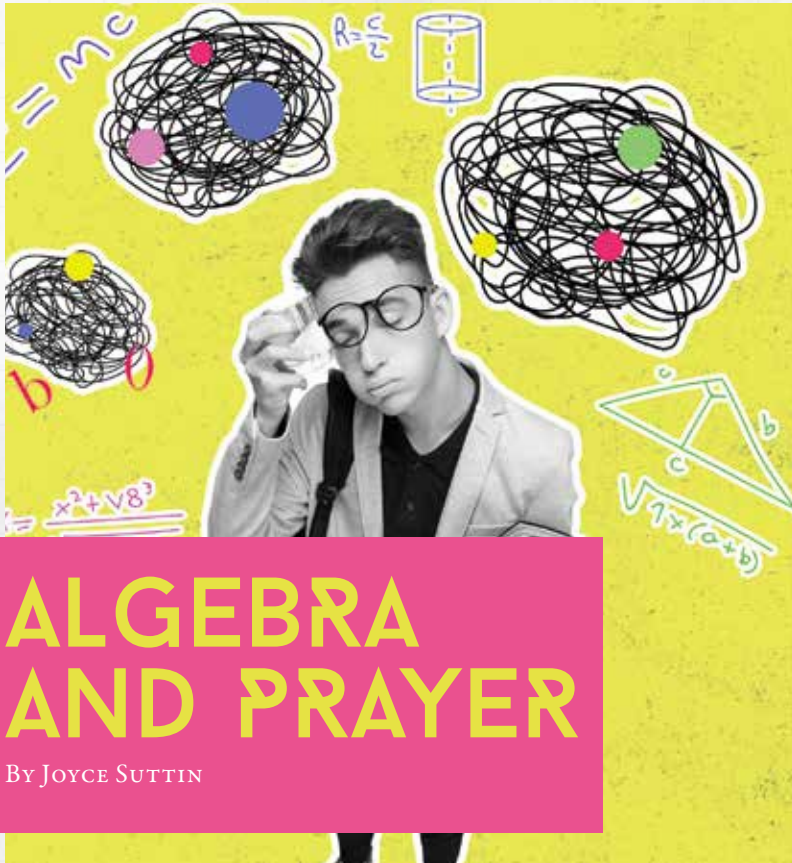
PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■



Worthy are You, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by You will they existed and were created.—[Revelation 4:11](#)

If you do not yet have a personal relationship with Jesus, you can invite Him into your life by praying this simple prayer:

*Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God. Thank You for dying on the cross for me so that, through Your sacrifice, I can live forever with You in Heaven. I ask that You forgive my sins, and I open the door of my heart to You. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit and help me to live in a way that glorifies You. Amen.*



# ALGEBRA AND PRAYER

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.—*Psalm 143:8 NIV*

Learn well how to wait so you will be strong and complete and in need of nothing.—*James 1:4 NIV*

FOR THE LAST FEW WEEKS, I HAVE FELT LIKE GOD HAS KEPT SAYING NO. It seems like my prayers just aren't good enough. I'm not seeing results, or if I am seeing results, they are not what I expected. It has been a test of my faith.

I have been praying, but the Lord's answers to my prayers seem unclear to me. I feel like I am sitting in algebra class, listening to the teacher and I just don't get it. I feel like all the other kids in the class are getting the answers right and understanding the lesson, but I am just confused and frustrated. I feel like a failure.

I feel like a kid who has soared through math until I hit this conundrum of a subject that I am just not understanding. It destroys my confidence. I feel like the kid who throws up his hands and says, "I hate math!"

It is not math or algebra I hate, or in this real-life analogy, it certainly is not prayer that I hate. Prayer is something I have depended on. Prayer is something I

have breathed. It is a part of me, and I imagine that my dying breath will be a prayer.

The frustration comes from not understanding *why* I have this waiting time, while others seem to keep moving forward with their plans. Maybe it's like sitting at a red light and having to wait for cars to pass until it is safe to go ahead. Yet so often in my life I have looked back and been glad that God didn't answer my prayer quickly. In retrospect, I could see His plan more clearly, and then I could see the way I was supposed to go.

It all comes down to gratitude and trust—gratitude that the Lord has always shown me the way and trust that it will again be made clear in His perfect time. So, in the meantime, I wait. And I thank Him for all of His many, many blessings in my life, and I trust that He is in perfect control.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM). ■



# THE CORNERSTONE OF FAITH

BY G.L. ELLENS

**NURTURING A DEEP PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH.** We can cultivate habits that keep us connected to Jesus, allowing His presence to permeate every aspect of our lives. Here are some daily practices that have helped me strengthen my relationship with the Lord.

I start each day by putting Jesus first. Before I check my phone or email, I'll have my time with Jesus. I sing a song of praise and express my gratitude. This simple act of worship and thanksgiving shifts my focus to God

and helps fill me with His peace and joy. It's a powerful reminder that He is worthy of all honor and glory, regardless of my circumstances.

Gratitude transforms our perspective and opens our hearts to the goodness of God. Each day, I write down at least five things I am thankful for in my gratitude journal. Whether it's a beautiful sunrise, a kind word from a friend, or an answered prayer, acknowledging my blessings reminds me of God's faithfulness. This habit helps me focus on the positive aspects of life, reinforcing my trust in Jesus and His provision.



Before diving into my work, I take a moment to pray over my “to do” list. I ask the Lord for guidance, wisdom, and strength to accomplish what needs to be done. This practice not only helps me prioritize my tasks, but it also reminds me that I am not alone in my endeavors. By seeking His direction, I can approach my day with confidence, knowing that He is with me every step of the way.

I am determined to stay close to Jesus throughout the day by looking to Him for guidance and thanking Him when things work out well. This continuous dialogue with Jesus keeps me attuned to His presence and helps me navigate challenges with trust and reliance on Him. Whether it’s a quick prayer for patience or a moment of gratitude for a small blessing, these intentional pauses keep my relationship with Jesus vibrant and alive.

Jesus calls us to love and serve others, reflecting His love in our actions. I try to do acts of kindness every day, whether big or small. This could be helping a neighbor, volunteering at a local charity, or simply offering a listening ear to someone in need. Serving others keeps my heart aligned with Jesus’ heart and helps me live out His command to love one another as He has loved us (John.. 15:12).

Ending my day with Jesus is as important as starting it with Him. Each evening, I spend time reflecting on the day, thanking the Lord for His blessings, and confessing any sins. I ask for His forgiveness and for guidance for the next day. This practice helps me to end the day with my heart at peace, resting in His grace and preparing for a fresh start the next morning.

Developing these daily habits has helped deepen my relationship with Jesus. They keep me grounded in His Word, attuned to His voice, and aware of His presence. By prioritizing time with Jesus each day, I am reminded of His love, grace, and purpose for my life, which not only strengthens my faith, but also helps me be a vessel of His love and light for others.

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. ■



## JESUS AND JIM

The story is told of a certain minister who was disturbed to see a shabbily dressed old man go into his church at noon every day and come out again after a few minutes. What could he be doing? He informed the caretaker and asked him to question the old man. After all, the place contained valuable furnishings. “I go to pray,” the old man said in reply to the caretaker’s questioning.

“Come, come now,” said the other, “you are never long enough in the church to pray.”

“Well, you see,” the old man went on, “I don’t know how to pray a long prayer, but every day at twelve o’clock I just come and say, ‘Jesus, it’s Jim.’ I wait a minute and then come away. Even though it’s just a little prayer, I think He hears me.”

When Jim was injured some time later and taken to the hospital, he had a wonderful influence on the ward. Grumbling patients became cheerful, and often the ward would ring with laughter.

“Well, Jim,” said a nurse to him one day, “the men say you are responsible for this change in the ward. They say you are always happy.”

“That I am! I can’t help being happy. You see, it’s my visitor. Every day he makes me happy.”

“Your visitor?” The nurse was puzzled. She had noticed that the chair in Jim’s room was always empty during visiting hours, for he had no relatives. “Your visitor? But when does he come?”

“Every day,” Jim replied, with a light in his eye. “Yes, every day at twelve o’clock He comes and stands at the foot of my bed. He smiles and says, ‘Jim, it’s Jesus.’”

# NO BARRIERS

BY UDAY PAUL

I OFTEN HAVE FRIENDS ASK ME TO PRAY FOR THEM IN MATTERS PERTAINING TO THEIR PERSONAL LIVES. One friend even stops me in the street whenever he sees me and asks me to pray for him right then and there! I like to pray for people as it releases God's power into their lives and situations. Intercessory prayer also benefits me as it exercises my faith in God and helps keep me connected with Him. Jesus said, "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:19–20).

While it is good to ask others for prayer, every Christian should also have a vibrant personal connection with the Lord. We have a mediator, Jesus Christ, who intercedes with the Father on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:5). As God's children, we can each approach the throne of God with confidence and receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16).

Through Jesus' sacrifice we have been given the privilege of entering the very presence of God. At the moment of Jesus' death on the cross, the curtain which separated the holy place from the innermost sanctuary in the temple was torn in two (Matthew 27:51). Under the Old Covenant only the high priest could enter the inner sanctuary; it was forbidden for others to enter. Now, through Jesus, the high priest of the New Covenant, anyone who believes in Him has access to the holy of holies of God's true temple in heaven. All believers are together "a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5 NIV).

So, while I reassure my friends that I will indeed pray for them, I also encourage them to draw close to the throne of God through prayer. Jesus said that great miracles are possible through faith the size of a tiny mustard seed (Matthew 17:20), and all things are possible for those who believe (Mark 9:23). The Bible also says, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). When we stir ourselves up and pour out our hearts to God, He hears us and answers our prayers as He knows is best.

UDAY PAUL IS A FREELANCE WRITER, VOLUNTEER, AND TEACHER BASED IN INDIA. ■

# IT'S NOT ODD, IT'S GOD!

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

**MY FRIEND MICHAEL HAS A FAVORITE SAYING** for when God does something inexplicable in answer to prayer: It's not odd, it's God.

For some months, Michael and a few others of us have been working on a major new endeavor. One of the first



things Michael and another partner did was map out the entire project. The plan looked terrific on paper—so simple, so straightforward, so sure. We soon found out, however, that God had a somewhat different plan and timetable. And part of His plan seems to be to teach us to depend more on Him as our all-wise CEO.

Each partner brings something to the project. When none of us have what's needed next, we have to find someone else who does. Or more precisely, we have to pray for God to send us just the right person to fill that need. He has done exactly that several times already, working in unexpected ways to help us meet someone we didn't even know, but who He knew would be the perfect person to help us over the next hurdle.


Those "It's not odd, it's God" moments have set a different tone for the project, a more prayerful, patient, positive, and trusting one. When we come to an impasse, when we have done all we can but need something more, when all we can do is wait for God to work, we are now more likely to get excited than discouraged, knowing that He must have something better in mind than we could ever figure out or try to push through ourselves.

A surprise bonus for me has been how this new attitude is carrying over to other areas of my life. I find it easier to trust God when problems arise, and that helps me stay calmer, be more positive, and think more clearly. God's plans, I'm learning, are much broader and better than mine. He's one smart CEO!

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS ACTIVATED'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■

When you are troubled and worried and sick at heart  
And your plans are upset and your world falls apart,  
Remember God's ready and waiting to share  
The burden you find too heavy to bear...  
So with faith, let go and let God lead the way  
Into a brighter and less troubled day.

—Helen Steiner Rice



# THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

WHEN SPEAKING TO THE MULTITUDES, JESUS OFTEN TAUGHT THEM IN PARABLES, seemingly simple stories about everyday events, circumstances and concepts that His listeners could easily relate to. He would often follow the parable with an explanation of its meaning—whether to the crowd or just to His disciples, as even though the parables used concepts the hearers could understand, they didn't always understand the point that was being made.

The Parable of the Sower is one of the few parables that is found in three different Gospels: Matthew 13, Mark 4 and Luke 8. This parable reveals four different responses people can have to the message of the gospel.

“A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, (1) some fell along the path, and the birds of

the air came and ate it up. (2) Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. (3) Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. (4) Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times.”

Jesus finishes the story by saying, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear” (Mark 4:2–9 NIV).

After presenting this parable to the multitude, Jesus interprets it for His disciples, who had not understood its meaning. He said, “This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away



the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:11–12 NIV).

When the life-giving seed of the Word of God is sown on this first kind of hardened and unreceptive ground, Satan snatches it away before they can understand it and it is able to take root in their lives. The Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17 NKJV), but “the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4 NIV).

Regarding the second kind of ground Jesus describes, He says, “Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root in themselves. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away” (Luke 8:13 NIV).

This second kind initially hears God’s Word joyfully and they begin to grow, but when a time of testing or trial arises, their enthusiasm wanes, their faith withers. They simply “have no root in themselves” and they never grow and become fruitful. They sort of die out spiritually and fall away when a time of testing comes, as their response to the gospel isn’t rooted in personal conviction and faith. They haven’t truly received God’s Word and let His truth sink deep in their hearts and take root.

In Jesus’ explanation of the third kind of ground, He says: “Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Mark 4:18–19 NIV).

The thorny ground represents those who receive the Word, but allow it to be choked out by the cares and concerns, and riches and desires of this temporal world. The things and affairs of this world take their time and attention away from the Word of God, and their spiritual growth is severely stunted, and the thorns of this world choke out their fruitfulness.

Finally, the fourth kind of ground that Jesus describes points the way to lasting growth and true fruitfulness: “The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!” (Matthew 13:23 NLT).

Unlike the other unfruitful grounds, this fourth kind of ground hears, receives, and understands God’s Word, and patiently perseveres until their faith grows and becomes fruitful for God’s glory. Fruitful Christians are those who hear and understand God’s Word and allow it to transform their minds, hearts, and lives. As a result, it bears fruit in their lives and the lives of others, and accomplishes His will and purpose (Isaiah 55:11).

May our lives be a living example of the “good soil” in the Parable of the Sower.

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# LET THE WATER DO THE WORK

BY DANIEL OLENDER

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, MY MOM WOULD ASK ME TO HELP WITH THE HOUSEHOLD CHORES.

Sometimes I was reluctant, my focus still on my unfinished tower of blocks. But I would try to put my heart into it. After all, I could see that my mother was very busy. She seemed overwhelmed by a lively family of six children.

My preferred work was cleaning the windows. I would slide my squeegee again and again until I could admire the reflections on the glass. I made sure there was nothing between me and the beautiful view of the sky.

But this day my mom gave me the task of cleaning the kitchen floor. What?! Down on the floor?! No glory! No reflection! And as soon as it was cleaned, it would almost immediately get dirty again.

But I wanted to help my mom. So, with a mop that was larger than me, I worked heartily on all those dirty stains. What a job! I was proud, though, because I was doing a service, and it was hard work that my mom wouldn't have to do.

Coming to check on me, she noticed my struggle. "Daniel," she said, "let the water do the work!" Showing me, she passed a very wet mop all over the floor. Everything was soaked. "Now wait," she said. After a few minutes, she encouraged me to wring out the mop very well and pass it over the floor again. She assured me, "The water loosened the dirt. You can pick it up effortlessly now."

It looked like a miracle! The stains came right up as if by magic. Even the places where there was flour, eggs, and chocolate from our memorable pancake party the day before became instantly clean!



Years have now passed. Sometimes now I sit in silence, reading the Bible. I have a new Father and a new life. But alas, my heart is far from that of God's Son! It seems that too much "dirt" of sin clings tenaciously to it. And how can I clean it? Then I heard the still, small voice of the Lord saying:

"Let the water do the work! Fill your heart and mind with the living water of My Word. Let it flow into every corner. Then wait. Don't worry about so many things, just stay with Me. There you go. You can clean it up effortlessly now. My Word has done the work, and the 'dirt' of your sin is fading away."

"Father, sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17. NIV).

DANIEL OLENDER WAS A MISSIONARY IN EUROPE FOR MANY YEARS. HE NOW CREATES CHRISTIAN BOARD GAMES THAT HELP MAKE LEARNING THE BIBLE FUN AND EASY. ■

# The Tangled Bird

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

**MY WIFE AND I WERE WALKING IN A GRASSY FIELD IN AUSTRALIA.** We passed a fence that enclosed some horses calmly grazing, when suddenly we heard a pitiful racket. A small sparrow was tangled in some string. Somehow its foot had gotten caught in a string that was dangling from the wire fence, and the sparrow was flapping and spinning around, trying its best to get free, to no avail.

We tried to get close enough to free it, but the helpless thing would have none of that. The closer we got to it, the more it squawked and flapped in frantic desperation. My wife and I looked in our pockets for something that would cut the string. She found a key, which cut the string without any trouble. The sparrow flew away as fast as it could without ever looking back to thank us.

Sometimes we might feel like that sparrow. We feel trapped in hard circumstances and conditions. It seems that when we're least prepared, troubles come calling. Maybe we get laid off at work, are stricken with illness, or argue with someone we love. Maybe we get hit with depression, pressures at work, or financial difficulty.

Perhaps if we remembered the plight of this little sparrow it would help us realize that God is always there for us, just as He is for the tiniest bird. "Not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it"

([Matthew 10:29](#) NLT), He is always trying to help us—if we would only let Him. Trusting in God means that our spirits are freed from worry and can be at rest, knowing He will work things out. All we need to do is believe and receive His help from heaven. Like the sparrow, we can experience a happy ending to our troubles.

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If you are going through a storm right now, hear this encouragement: You are not alone. God is with you in the storm. Look to Him for what you need. Cry out to Him; ask Him for help as [Psalm 50:15](#) instructs: "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Our heavenly Father is a faithful, trustworthy Deliverer. And even on the stormy days, He is working on our behalf to watch out for us, carry us and rescue us.—*Crystal Paine*



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# DWELLING IN HIS PRESENCE

Your work and life on earth is but for a moment in comparison to the infinite span of eternity. Your earthly sojourn is an opportunity for spiritual growth and to make choices that will draw you closer to Me. Your life is a journey of spiritual development, which works to transform you into My image with ever-increasing glory (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

Take advantage of your time on earth to contemplate My glory and to grow into the person I created you to be for eternity. Abide in Me and My Word (John 15:7), be faithful to dwell in My presence through times of prayer and communion with Me, and be vigilant to not allow the things of this world to encroach on your walk with Me (1 John 2:15–16). As you cultivate the vision for eternity and the awareness that your actions and decisions have eternal consequences, you will not be conformed to the things of this world. You will be transformed by My Spirit, and you will be able to discern My good and perfect will (Romans 12:2).

Your love for Me will inspire you to draw close to Me, as you let My Word dwell in you more richly (Colossians 3:16). When everything else has passed away, My Word will still remain (Matthew 24:35). Even as this world fades away with all its desires, everyone who seeks to do My will shall abide forever (1 John 2:17).