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ACTIVATED

Vol 27 • Issue 11

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP
A life of praise

Faith Like a Child
The hope of heaven

Smell the Flowers
Slow down and enjoy life





Vol 27, Issue 11



PERSONALLY SPEAKING
THE PATH OF JOY

It has been said that joy is one of God's greatest gifts. And though this may sound like an exaggeration, what anguish we experience when our lives become gloomy, anxious, or bitter! Most of us have lived through one of these *dry spells,* so we understand that to lose our joy is to lose a precious gift. It is a treasure to cherish, nurture, protect, and share with others.

In sports, the team or player who competes with enthusiasm has a certain advantage over those who play solely by rote or for a paycheck. Talent, teamwork, and good tactics, combined with joy, is an effective strategy.

The same holds true in other walks of life, including from the most elevated positions of employment to the humblest routine jobs. Joy is an indispensable ingredient in the formula for fulfillment, and without it, our work and even life itself can lose its zest.

Two thousand five hundred years ago, Nehemiah, the governor of Judah, exhorted his people not to grieve, but to work with joy, while they were embarking on the huge task of rebuilding the protective wall around the city. His counsel, recorded for us in the Bible, still rings true today, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

We can find happiness in the simple pleasures of life and in being thankful for what we have rather than looking over the fence to see if the "grass is greener on the other side." We also find joy in giving to others; sometimes it may be material things, but it can also be our time, a listening ear, a compassionate response, a tender prayer, or a bit of wise advice in a time of need. And last but not least, we find lasting joy in pursuing the true spiritual riches in life through knowing Jesus and the truth in the Bible, which lifts us above the mundane and superficial.

We pray that in this month's *Activated* magazine you will find inspiration that will lead you down the path where you can enjoy not only the great pleasures of life, but also the smallest daily blessings, remembering that joy is not something we are meant to experience only at the final destination, but rather it carries us along the road as we travel life's journey.

Gabriel and Sally Garcia
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Smell the Flowers

By Curtis Peter van Gorder

Having been born "BI" (before internet), I see people frantically texting away and sometimes wonder how they would have survived "back in the day," when "texting" involved a 30-pound typewriter, messy correction fluid or an eraser, a trip to the post office, standing in line to buy a stamp, waiting a week or two for the letter to get to its destination, and waiting another week or two for a reply.

Why is everyone so darn busy? Once while I was in India, even my auto rickshaw driver was multitasking, negotiating a business deal on his mobile phone while navigating city traffic. Was he even old enough to remember when making a phone call in public meant hunting down a phone booth, having the right change, and feeding more coins into the phone if the call went longer than three minutes?

What I want to know is where does all the time go that we save by not having to go through all that? Shouldn't we be swimming in leisure time, thanks to all our time-saving modern marvels?

Is it simply a matter of poor time management? Good advice abounds: Prioritize. Delegate. Do difficult tasks first. Clear your life of clutter. Learn to say no.

But there is more to it than that. Sometimes it's not a question of what we are doing, but of what we are becoming. As Rabindranath Tagore put it, "He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good."

How can we slow things down a bit and enjoy life more, while still doing everything that really needs to get done?

The other day I was leaving for a meeting when my granddaughter grabbed my hand and asked excitedly, "Can I show you the new steps I learned in dance class?"

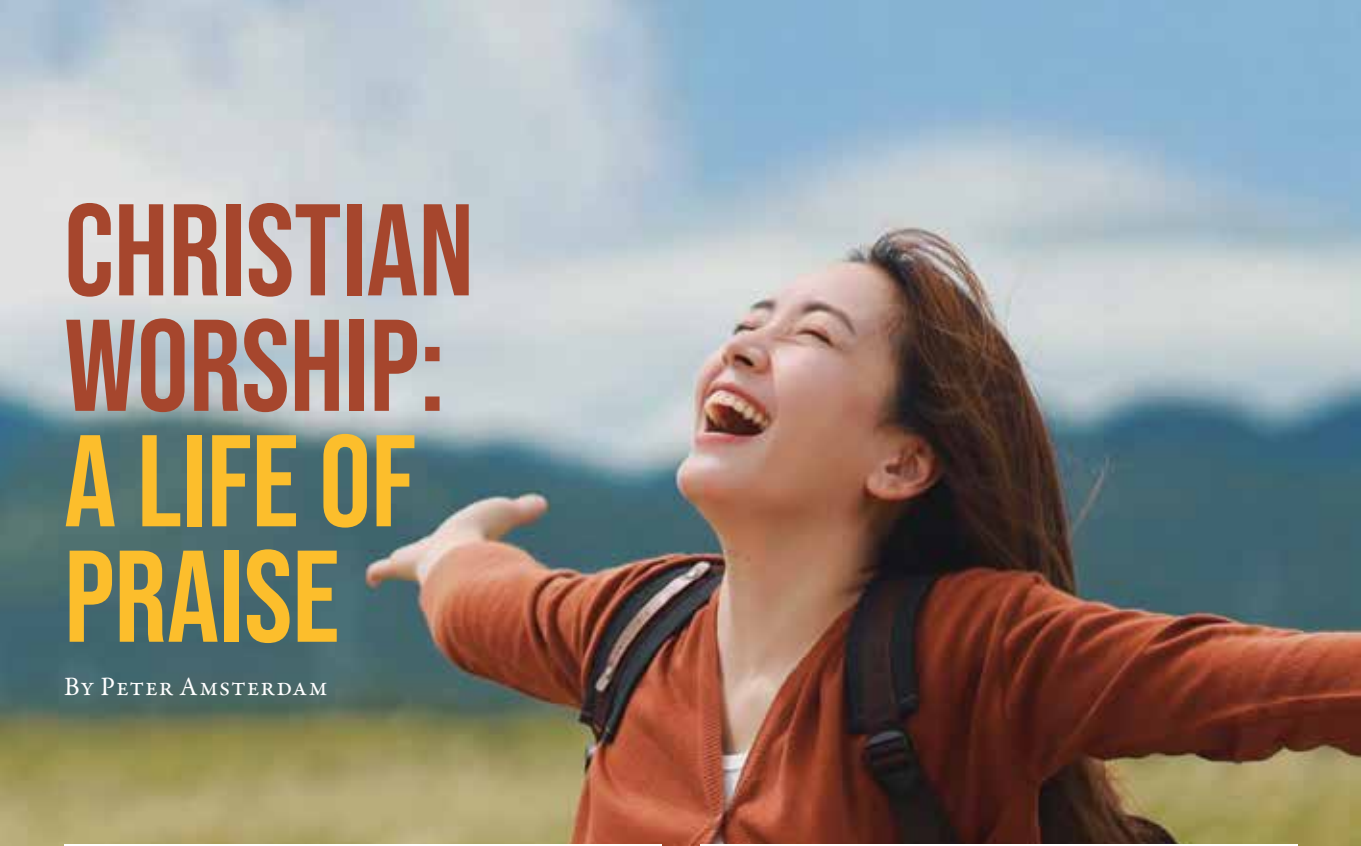
Before I could blurt out, "Sorry, I'm too busy. Show me another time," my mind fast-forwarded five years and I heard her say as she rushed out the door, "Sorry, Gramps! I'm too busy being a teen."

"Sure," I said. "Show me your moves."

Five minutes of vigorous dancing and continuous applause later, I left for my meeting feeling less stressed and more optimistic.

I had found the answer to my question. If we take time to stop and smell the flowers, their scent will linger with us throughout the day, reminding us that there's more to life than rushing to the next task.

Curtis Peter van Gorder is a freelance writer and mime artist who has been active in missions work in 10 countries since 1971. He and his wife Pauline currently live in Germany. ■



CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: A LIFE OF PRAISE

By Peter Amsterdam

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

As Christians, we are called to a life of worship and praise. We are often reminded throughout the Bible of the importance of praise and worship in our relationship with the Lord. The Bible tells us to enter into God's "gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise" and to "give thanks to Him and bless His name" for His goodness, unfailing love and faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 100:4–5).

Worship is an integral part of fulfilling the first and great commandment to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:36–38; Mark 12:29–30). That's a call for rich, deep, and full love—a love-Him-with-everything-you've-got love. It is our heartfelt response to the invitation to enter into relationship with God. The Father is so passionate about being in relationship with us that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to bridge the gap between Himself and humanity (John 3:16). That's how much He loves us, and we are called to the same love in our relationship with Him (1 John 4:19 NKJV).

Our love for God results in our desire to draw close to Him (James 4:8), to build a deep relationship with Him, and to grow into His likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18). To do so, we commit to spending regular time communing with Him in prayer and reading His Word. We express our love and gratitude to Him through our worship and praise and by living our lives in a way that will honor and magnify Him and exalt His name (Psalm 34:3).

When speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus said: "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him" (John 4:23–24). From this we learn that God, who is spirit, seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. We who love God and want to please Him will seek to worship Him—with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—because He desires this.

God alone is worthy of our worship. Worshipping Him means reverencing Him and ascribing proper



worth to Him; it is acknowledging, expressing, and honoring His unparalleled worth and excellence. "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness" (Psalm 29:1–2).

The basis of God's worth is found in His nature and character, in who He is. He is the Creator of all things visible and invisible (Colossians 1:16). He is all-powerful, all-knowing, unchangeable, infinite, eternal, present everywhere. He is wisdom, truth, faithfulness, goodness, love, mercy, grace, patience, holiness, righteousness, justice, and more. While we, as beings made in the image and likeness of God possess a small measure of some of these attributes, God *is* these attributes. He is infinitely greater than we are and is therefore worthy to be worshipped. "From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever" (Romans 11:36).

Besides being the Creator, He is our Redeemer. He made a way for us, as sinners, to be reconciled to Him. He acted through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross to bring salvation to all who believe in and accept Him as Redeemer. He redeems us from sin and death (Romans 5:10–11). Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we now have the privilege and honor of being able to come into God's presence directly in prayer, praise, and worship.

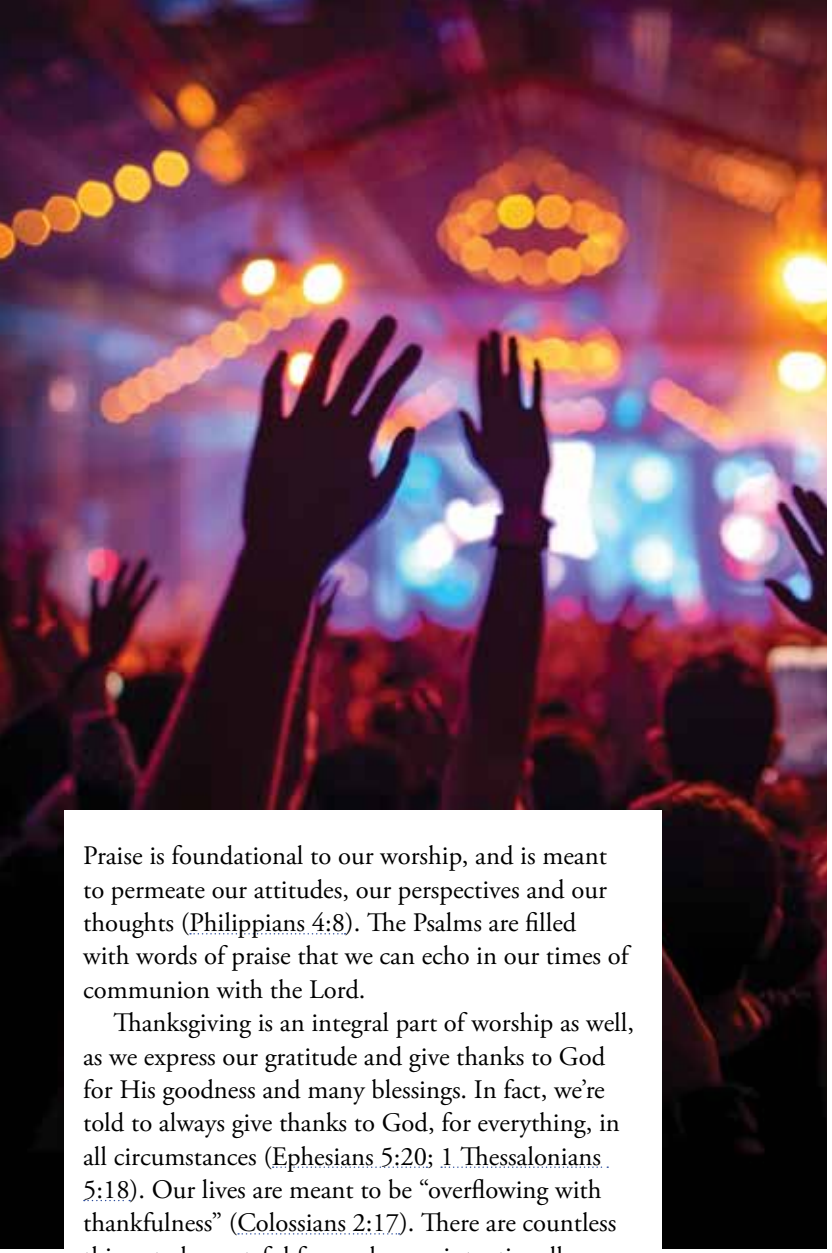
As we come to know God more, to understand His love and power, all He has done and constantly does for us, we understand more clearly that our response to Him should be praise and worship.

Expressing our worship

Christians are called to worship both privately and publicly (or corporately). The expectation is that we will worship together with other Christians at times (Hebrews 10:24–25), "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). When we gather with others to praise the Lord and to pray together, Jesus promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20 NKJV).

Corporate worship, however, isn't enough; we are called to worship Him individually as well. In the Gospels we read that Jesus often arose early in the morning and went off by Himself to commune with His Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). Being relationally close to God requires that we commune with Him in worship and prayer; that we respond to Him with love, honor, and reverence; that we praise and thank Him; that we delight ourselves in Him (Psalm 37:4).

Worship is more than a set routine of prayer, praise, and singing; it is spiritually entering into God's presence.



Praise is foundational to our worship, and is meant to permeate our attitudes, our perspectives and our thoughts (Philippians 4:8). The Psalms are filled with words of praise that we can echo in our times of communion with the Lord.

Thanksgiving is an integral part of worship as well, as we express our gratitude and give thanks to God for His goodness and many blessings. In fact, we're told to always give thanks to God, for everything, in all circumstances (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18). Our lives are meant to be "overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:17). There are countless things to be grateful for, and as we intentionally identify them and express our gratitude to the Lord for them, thankfulness becomes part of who we are.

Worship should be part of our conversation with God throughout our day. When we look at God's creation, we can give honor, praise, and thanksgiving to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful works (Psalm 107:8). When we meditate on His Word, when we think of the blessings He has bestowed upon us, the mercy He has shown us, the grace He has so freely granted us, these are all times we can worship Him (Psalm 8:3–5).

When we praise Him for His power, His presence, His omniscience, it reminds us that He is always here, that He knows everything about us, that He created us, and that He knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. Remembering this can strengthen our resolve to do our best to live in accordance with His Word, to treat others with love, and to do to others as we want them to do to us (Luke 6:31).

An important way that we worship the Lord is through our service to Him and others. The apostle Paul referred to such sacrifices as "holy and pleasing to God" and "true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1 NIV). Elsewhere, Paul wrote, "This service that you perform is … overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God" (2 Corinthians 9:12 NIV). Jesus called us to let our light shine before others, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

Worship is not simply an activity—it is a lifestyle of loving, serving, and glorifying God and reflecting His love and truth to others. As we come before Him in thanksgiving and praise; as we express our deep love for Him; as we reverence and honor Him, and live lives that glorify Him, we worship God as He seeks to be worshipped—in spirit and in truth. The more we verbalize who God is and what He has done, the more present He becomes in our daily lives, and we grow in our understanding of the breadth and length and depth of His unfailing love for us (Ephesians 3:18–19).

Peter Amsterdam is a Christian author and Bible teacher and retired co-director of TFI, a Christian online network. Adapted from the original article. ■

A Candle in the Darkness

By Marie Knight



When life is beautiful, when the birds are singing and the sun is shining, praise is a natural reaction. In times like these, praise just bubbles up from the heart. But should we only praise God in our good times?

The Bible says: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

It might seem extreme to think of praising God "in everything," even hardships. But if "we know that for those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28), then we can thank Him for whatever comes into our lives.

There are many examples in the Bible of people who lifted their voices to God in their darkest moments. Their stories remind us that praise is not just a response to victory, it is often the pathway to it.

David was continually hunted by King Saul. There were times when David was discouraged, and at one point he even lamented that "I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Samuel 27:1). Yet he did not stay in that downtrodden state; his writings are full of praise and thankfulness towards God. In Psalm 42:11 he wrote, "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (NIV).

Job lost his wealth and his children in one day. Yet, in his mourning he remembered God and declared: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). And in the end, God gave him back twice what he had in the first place.

Paul and Silas were imprisoned for preaching in the name of Jesus. They were beaten, thrown into the deepest part of the prison, and their legs were put in stocks. Yet, despite their dire circumstances, the Bible tells us that "at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God" (Acts 16:25). They were praising God in the dark even though they were in pain. What happened next was nothing short of a miracle! An earthquake shook the jail and opened not only the cell doors, but even the shackles off the prisoners! But none of the prisoners escaped; they all remained. As a result, the jailer and all his family believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized. (See Acts 16:25–34.)

Praise is like a candle in our darkness. Praise strengthens our spirit, invites God to be with us and declares that He is greater than anything we could ever face.

Marie Knight is a missionary volunteer in the USA. ■

Choosing Life

By Steve Hearts

In Deuteronomy 30:19, God says, "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live." Of course, when Jesus came, He took on the curse of sin and death for us all on the cross (Galatians 3:13).

Jesus tells us in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." While Jesus broke the hold of Satan's power through His finished work on the cross, Satan, "the thief," has not been removed from the world yet. He still walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom



he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). Therefore, we have the option to choose between walking in the abundant life that Jesus came to give to all who believe in Him and receive Him and the death and destruction of the enemy.

I want to share a few examples of what the choice between life and death has meant for me over the years and what it still means to me today.

I'll start with the power of my words. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." I believe this means that however I choose to use my tongue, be it for life or death, to build people up or to tear them down, I will end up reaping the fruits of my choice.



This is a sobering warning that motivates me to seek God's help to minister life, love, and encouragement daily through my words.

I certainly haven't been perfect in this area, but through my mistakes, I have learned many lessons. For example, as a musician who has directed a few singing groups and bands, I learned a lot about being careful with my words, especially when offering constructive criticism to those I was working with. While I was well intentioned when giving this type of input, and I wanted to motivate people to improve their performance, I was sometimes too blunt. Therefore, my constructive criticism stung, causing a couple of people to get very discouraged. Thankfully, I was able to apologize to them and set things right, which restored their confidence and bolstered their desire to continue playing music. The Lord is continuing to teach me to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

I've also been making a greater effort not to gossip about people or speak negatively about them behind their backs, as in doing so, I am using my tongue for death instead of life.

It's also important that I speak the truth of God's promises over my own life, instead of negativity and pessimism.

Choosing life can also mean choosing to forgive those who have wronged me instead of holding grudges against them. This is not easy, but God's Word says we ought to forgive one another even as God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). The alternative, bitterness and resentment, is a path of death and destruction that can cause me and others to become defiled (Hebrews 12:15).

Choosing life can also mean being willing to persevere with things I may have initially failed at or fallen short in, rather than simply accepting defeat. I believe that part of the complete, abundant life Jesus came to give us is the ability to reach our full potential and be all that God called us to be. Occasional failure is part of the process of growing and learning, but allowing myself to be held back by failure will hinder me from achieving this goal. By God's grace, I'm learning to face failure, learn from it, and move on to further growth and victory.

Choosing life can also mean choosing to keep my focus on Jesus, His faithfulness, and His promises, even when it seems like things can't get any darker. For example, recently I received the sad news that a good friend had died. I was stricken with grief, but after a while, I made the decision to encourage myself in the Lord as David did (1 Samuel 30:6). After all, I knew my friend had received Jesus, and that she is now in heaven. So, I shifted my focus from grief and loss to the divine, comforting presence of the Holy Spirit, and I found the peace and comfort I needed.

While it is true that we will experience perfect love in heaven, I also know that Jesus did not come to give us life *only* in the world to come. He has plenty of good things for us here and now as well. The apostle Paul tells us, "God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Steve Hearts has been blind since birth. He is a writer, musician, and member of the Family International in North America. ■



MEDITATING ON GOD'S WORD

By Simon Bishop

I was listening to a short devotional about the need for positive self-talk. One of the verses used as an example was Psalm 42:5: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God."

If we read the rest of the same Psalm, it is interesting to see that David is quite negative in his complaints when he is talking directly to God, but when he addresses himself, it's like he's giving himself a pep talk. David was not repressing his feelings, but rather than wallowing in them, he turned them into a prayer.

Directing thoughts and feelings in a positive manner is something that many people can get confused about, as trying to think positively when we feel negative can feel contrived or fake. Actually, it can be more a matter of self-discipline and willpower, once we realize that allowing our feelings to control our conscious thoughts can be detrimental or at least discouraging.

Yes, we need self-discipline. But being a Christian and trusting in God doesn't mean we have to repress our feelings; rather we can redirect them by surrendering them to God. Once we have done that, we have to do the work of speaking positively and hopefully to ourselves.

One way to do this is to practice Christian meditation. Often when people hear the word meditation, it brings to mind Eastern meditation, which is a conscious emptying of the mind. But Christian meditation is the opposite; we are instructed to fill our minds and focus on God's Word. "Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Here are a few of my favorite meditations on scriptures:

- I seek the Lord, and I do not lack any good thing (Psalm 34:10).
- The Lord is good, and His mercy is everlasting (Psalm 100:5).
- God is restoring health unto me and healing all my wounds (Jeremiah 30:17).
- God heals my broken heart and binds up my wounds (Psalm 147:3).
- God is great and abundant in power (Psalm 147:5).

Simon Bishop does mission and humanitarian work in the Philippines. ■

Faith Like a Child

By Ester Mizrany



"Mommy, I like the kingdom of heaven!" My two-year-old daughter Lily said that to me as she cuddled up underneath the blankets.

"Mommy, I want to be born of heaven."

What a deep thought for such a little heart to come up with, I thought to myself.

"Well, darling, you *can* be born of heaven. If we believe in Jesus, the Bible says that we are born again. Do you have Jesus in your heart?"

"Yes! Jesus is in my heart. He loves me. And one day, I will be in heaven with daddy and you."

"That's right, one day we will all be together in heaven with Jesus."

"Yes, I want to be in heaven with Jesus."

That conversation with my little girl got me thinking.

The gospel is simple enough that even my two-year-old can understand it. Jesus said in Luke 18:17 that "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."

I've often asked myself: How can I receive God's truth as a child would? How can I let go of my grown-up insecurities, and just believe like a little child? My children have qualities that I can learn from.

Love: They love without limits or prejudice, just as Jesus taught us to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:39) and our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Curiosity: They are curious, yet they accept the answers we give them, trusting that we will tell them the truth. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Trust: They trust me and their daddy to look out for them and meet their needs, just as the Bible shows us in Philippians 4:19: "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Unlike my children, I am often burdened with anxiety and worry. It's almost like I forget that the antidote is faith in Jesus and the genuine hope of heaven. Those are two things we should never outgrow.

Ester Mizrany is a wife, mom, and missionary with Helping Hand in South Africa. ■

If you have not yet received Jesus as your Savior, you can do so by praying the following prayer:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died on the cross for me so that I can live forever with You in heaven. I open the door of my heart to You. Please forgive my sins. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Guide my life and help me to follow You. Amen.

REJOICE IN THE LORD

By Marie Alvero

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:4–8 NIV).



This instruction from Paul is difficult to live out, but it is central to our Christian faith. A life that follows Jesus is a life that knows peace and joy. But verse eight also indicates that there's some curating of our thoughts that has to happen in order to keep our minds focused on the things that cultivate that joy and peace.

Human nature does not default to what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable. We quite like scandalous gossip. We like narratives that portray us as the hero or the victim. We hold on to our illusion of control.

There's this idea that Jesus followers should be known for their constant positivity.—Always upbeat, always happy. In today's culture it has become associated with being fake. The idea that you are oblivious to anything negative or evil so that you portray only positive things is not what Paul is talking about. He's not preaching toxic positivity.

He's saying to rejoice in the Lord. Yes, the world is a mess, but God is sovereign! Yes, we hurt sometimes, but God is faithful! Yes, we are afraid and anxious, but our hope is in the Lord! We only have that joy and peace because we focus our minds on who God is and what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

The ability to focus on what is good, true, and just comes from knowing who God is and letting Him be the biggest presence in our heart and minds. If you're out in a wide-open field on a sunny day, it's easy to focus on the sun. You feel its heat, you see its light, it's not obscured by structures or trees.

Like the sun, God is bigger than all of your problems, or even the world's problems. And we can rejoice in the Lord because we know that He will fulfill His promises.

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. ■

WHEN YOUR MIND PULLS A SCAM



By Sam de la Cruz

Scammers are everywhere these days. It seems that the more technology advances, the sneakier they get. I spend a lot of time on my computer, so I've become a bit of a scam-spotting pro. Still, one day I was in the middle of a writing project when suddenly my entire screen went red with a bold flashing message:



"WARNING! YOUR COMPUTER IS INFECTED. CALL THIS NUMBER IMMEDIATELY OR YOU WILL LOSE ALL YOUR DATA!"

I'll admit, my heart did skip a beat. For a split second, I almost believed it. But then I took a breath, rolled my eyes, and did what experience has taught me to do. I clicked the little "X" to dismiss the warning and got back to work. Scam defeated.

Unfortunately, not everyone reacts that way. Plenty of people panic, call the number, and before they know it, they've handed over their credit card info or social security number to some guy sitting in a dimly lit basement somewhere.

When thinking about this, I realized that sometimes our minds run their own scams. They send messages that sound urgent and believable: "You're not good enough!" "Everyone's judging you!" "This will never work!" And before we know it, we've fallen for it.

Recently, our nonprofit received a letter from a government agency saying they'd be calling me to ask about one of our staff's employment status. Simple enough, right? Except my brain didn't think so. Within minutes, it was in full disaster mode. I started imagining worst-case scenarios: audits, penalties, piles of paperwork. Basically, I turned a routine letter into a full-blown crisis in my head.

Yes, the phone call came. And guess what? The person on the other end was friendly and genuinely helpful. We talked for ten minutes, cleared everything up, and that was it. No drama. No catastrophe. My brain had just run its usual scam, convincing me that something terrible was about to happen when, really, everything was fine.

Our minds can trick us into seeing mountains where there are only molehills. But we don't have to fall for that. The Bible says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

The takeaway? Pause, breathe, check the facts, but ultimately, trust the Lord. He sees the whole picture, calms our fears, and guides us past both the scams of the world and the tricks of our own mind.

Sam de la Cruz and his wife, Diane, have operated a registered charity in Toronto since 1999, serving immigrants and low-income families with practical help, encouragement, and Christian compassion. ■

In the Desert

By Marcela Cedeño Madrigal

Life is a journey through different seasons; some are prosperous with good harvests and revitalizing sunshine, and others are stormy, with gray clouds and cold days. Other seasons are like a desert—hot, dry, dusty, and desolate.

I found myself in a desert when, during a very difficult time in my life, I lost the joy of living and the hope of a better tomorrow.

Living in a desert can result in the experience of knowing God. "I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there" (Hosea 2:14 NLT).

It is not the same to know *about* God as it is to know God. It is easier to say that we know God in the good times, but I can say that I have also known Him in a desert. There, it was just God and me, and that's when that verse that had seemed so beautiful at first took on a new meaning. There, I learned to depend on God completely. There, I felt true thirst and longed for the water of eternal life (John 4:15).

In my desert I found Jesus, my good Shepherd, who in an act of love touched my feet to stop my hurried walk. The more difficult my time in the desert became, the more I understood how necessary it was for me to trust God through it. We who have passed through deserts are never the same. Our spiritual eyes are opened, and we learn to depend on God!

If you are in a desert today, hold tightly to God's hand. Trust that His plans for your life are good, that this difficult situation is not greater than the One who sustains you and will never leave you. Take advantage of this time in the desert to renew your faith, to leave behind anything that hinders you from moving forward, anything that distracts you. Ask God to strengthen you. Get to know Him intimately, give Him authority over your life. He will know when to provide a way out of the desert, and when He does, your mouth will be filled with laughter, your heart with love, and your life with joy. You will remember the crisis that made you look to God, and you will give thanks!

I pray that God will give you patience to endure the desert you find yourself in, to grow your faith, to restore your strength so that you can enjoy the new life that only He can give you. You can rest assured that when you come out of your desert, you will be ready to receive all the new and fresh blessings that God has for you.

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Life Is Like a Roller Coaster

By Rosane Cordoba

I recently had my 70th birthday and thought, "Well, now I will relax, read and write, take care of my plants, go to my seniors' group, church worship and gatherings, visit my sisters, and enjoy my children and grandchildren when they come visit me. From now on, life will be a piece of cake."

Sweet illusion! Soon, my 80-year-old sister became ill, and I am having to assist her. Other smaller emergencies came up, and I had to admit: "Life is as wonderful as a roller coaster. It is full of ups and downs. The Lord does give us times of rest and relaxation, but we also face times of trouble, hard decisions, and heartbreaks, when we must hang on tight to Him, who keeps us well strapped to our seats, so we don't fall."

As we age, we learn that it's always wise to go slow, until we are sure that our plan of action is in line with God's will. Paul teaches us to "not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6).

I remember when I was seeking a man to marry and had very high expectations. After some time, I surrendered my will to the Lord and prayed: "Jesus, please give me a good man, someone who will love You as much as I do and who wants to serve You like I do." And after a short time, I met my husband and we had a wonderful life together. He was caring, loyal, cheerful, and full of faith. I have used this surrendering principle in many other decisions, both big and small.

I often pray the serenity prayer, very well known among therapy groups: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."[1] In other words: "Show me, Lord, what I should or should not do right now. What is my part and what should be left in Your hands. And what is the best way to navigate this situation?"

After my seventy trips around the sun, in this roller-coaster experience of being human, I can guarantee that it pays to seek the Lord's will during our journey. God gives the very best to those who leave the choices up to Him!

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1. Originally composed by Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the early 1930s.



From Jesus with Love

PERSPECTIVE ADJUSTMENT

Praise gives you a perspective adjustment and helps you to filter things through the lens of faith, with the sure knowledge that I will accomplish My good purposes in all things (Isaiah 46:10). No matter what the situation, you can have faith that I am always with you. Even if you walk through the darkest of valleys, I will be with you (Psalm 23:4).

Praising Me is not looking through rose-colored glasses. It's proclaiming your trust in Me and My sovereignty. It's choosing to adopt a perspective of faith and gratitude. So when your heart is burdened with worries, problems, or stress, come to Me and enter into My presence with thanksgiving and praise (Psalm 100:4). Make room for My joy to fill your heart and renew your courage and strength. Praise and worship bring joy, and My joy will be your strength (Nehemiah 8:10).

A praise perspective can turn a difficult day into a positive one, as you choose to set your thoughts on the many good, true, lovely, excellent, and praiseworthy things that surround your life (Philippians 4:8). Choose to think on these things, and My joy will give you the strength to rise above the challenges and struggles of everyday life. Praise lifts your spirit into My presence. It gives you a better outlook and true perspective on issues—a perspective imbued with faith and the knowledge that all things will truly work together for good for those who love Me (Romans 8:28).