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Activated Basic Course 5 • Live Your Faith

## THE DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE

Walking the walk

## Making a Masterpiece

God at work in your life

## The School of Life

Learning life's lessons

## Our Father

Praying to our God



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### THE DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE

For many people, coming to know and accept Christ is a life-changing event. For example, immediately after he met and talked with Jesus, the entire life of Zacchaeus the tax collector was turned around (Luke 19:1–10). In a matter of days, Saul went from “threatening with every breath and eager to destroy every Christian” (Acts 9:1 TLB) to preaching the gospel as the apostle Paul. More recently, many people have been known to be freed from addictions or other bad habits on the spot.

Although few converts experience such an earth-shattering change, we know that God wants believers to grow. As Billy Graham said, “Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion—it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ.” For his part Paul said: “Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life ... Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature ... truly righteous and holy” (Ephesians 4:22–24 NLT).

Of course, no one is perfect; that is a fact of life. However, we have a God who is both omniscient—He knows our future and can prepare us for the changes we’ll be faced with—and omnipotent. He also loves us unconditionally and wants to help us succeed.

All of us are changed through Christ and become new creations, with the ability to live in a new way. Of course, our personality, our mind, and our emotions don’t instantly change when we find Jesus. He lives in us, but it is our responsibility to let Him be seen and heard through us. This means learning about God through prayer and reading His Word, and then striving to think, speak, and act in a Christlike manner, so that others can come to know Him too.

We hope this issue will be a blessing to you as you work to become more like the Master and let His light shine through you into a dark world.

For more information on *Activated*, visit our website or write to us.

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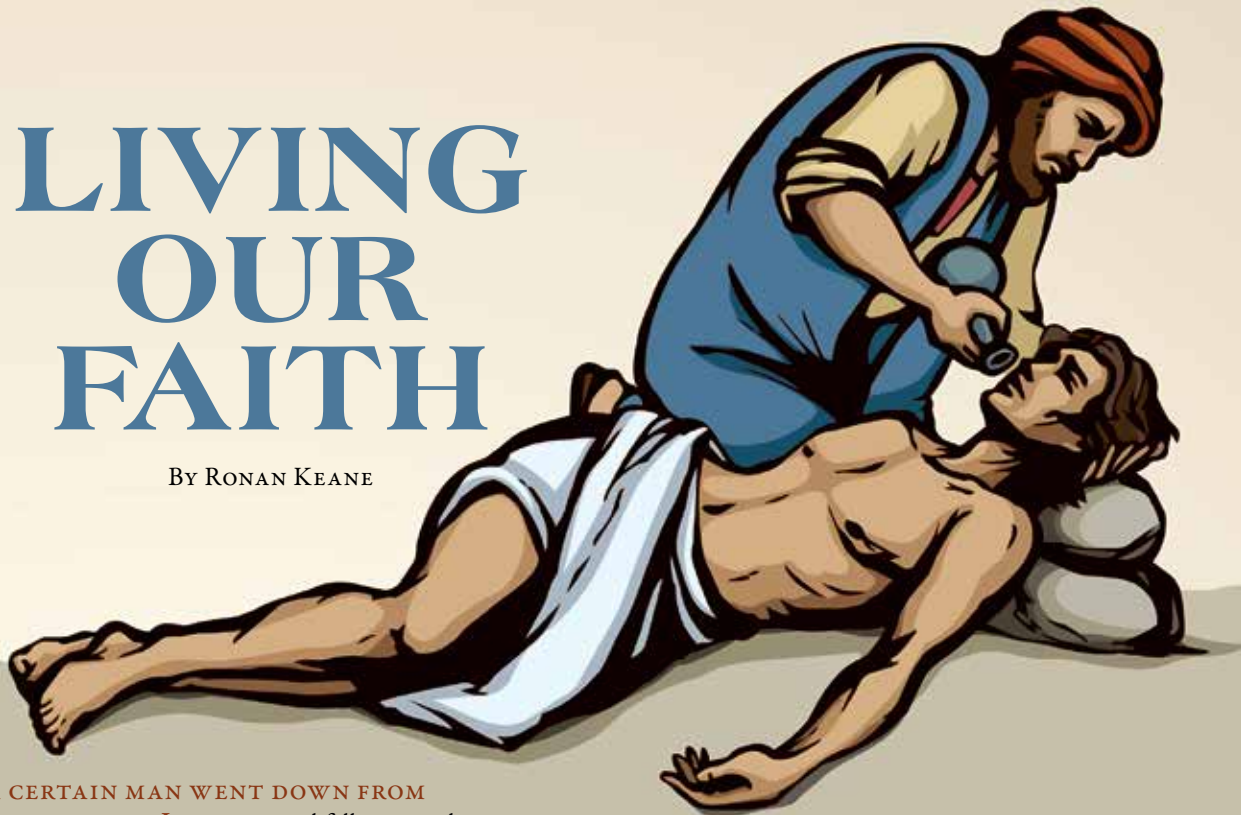
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# LIVING OUR FAITH

BY RONAN KEANE



“A CERTAIN MAN WENT DOWN FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead...” (Luke 10:30 NKJV). So begins the parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the best-known stories in the Bible, and perhaps in literature.

In the story, various pious Jews pass by the unfortunate traveler but do nothing to help. Finally, a Samaritan, a member of an ethnic and religious group shunned by the Jews in Jesus’ time, has compassion on the victim, bandages his wounds, and brings him to an inn, where he promises to cover any expenses required in the man’s care.

With the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus taught that our neighbor is anyone who needs our help, regardless of race, creed, color, nationality, condition, or location. The Gospels list many times when Jesus felt compassion toward the crowds or toward individuals and was moved to help them.

The Gospel of Luke tells us the story of how Jesus raised the son of the widow of Nain from the dead. “When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. ‘Don’t cry!’ he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. ‘Young man,’ he said, ‘I tell you, get up.’ Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk!” (Luke 7:13–15 NLT).

Sometimes the implications of these stories can be lost on modern readers. Luke situates this miracle by telling us that Jesus was preaching in Capernaum one day and that He was in Nain “the day after.”

Nain is nearly *50 kilometers* away from Capernaum, with an elevation difference of *400 meters*. That arduous, uphill walk takes 10 to 12 hours today—on paved roads—so you can imagine the time and effort it must have taken Jesus and His followers. But I suspect His heart was already “overflowing with compassion” as the Father was guiding Him to the widow. He didn’t “just happen” to end up in Nain on that particular day.

“What does love look like?” Saint Augustine asked. “It has eyes to see misery and want. It has ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. It has hands to help others. It has feet to hasten to the poor and needy.”

The compassionate put feet to their prayers and match kind deeds to their kind words. That’s what the Good Samaritan did. That’s what Jesus did. And that’s what we can each strive to do in our own lives as we live out our faith.

RONAN KEANE SERVED AS THE EXECUTIVE EDITOR FOR *ACTIVATED* FROM 2013–2023. ■

# THE PATH OF DISCIPLESHIP

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

“WHO SAVED US AND CALLED US TO A HOLY CALLING, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

A disciple is defined as a “follower of Jesus,” “a learner,” “one who follows in the master’s footsteps,” “someone who is aiming to be like Jesus.” Disciples seek to learn, study, and then follow and apply what their teacher tells them. We are students of Jesus—our Master. We seek to not only learn about His life on earth, the truths of God’s Word, and His nature and character, but we seek to follow His example and to live as He taught us to live, to love as He loved, and to live a life of faith.

Discipleship goes beyond simply accepting the teachings and believing them; it is essentially a choice to become active in practicing the teachings. Disciples add action to their beliefs; they are “doers of the word,

and not only hearers” (James 1:22). Discipleship is, quite literally, a commitment to pattern our lives, attitudes, and actions in accordance with the teachings and example of Jesus; in short, to be like Him. And that’s a tall order, since Jesus lived the ultimate life of love, mercy, compassion, sacrifice, truth, and integrity, of any man or woman who has ever walked the earth.

One of Jesus’ most life-changing calls was given in just two words: “Follow Me.” And when He said that, He in fact meant for us to shape our lives, thoughts, habits, and actions after His. As fallible human beings, we aren’t capable of rising to this challenge, but as we surrender to God and draw on the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be conformed to the likeness of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Discipleship is centered on love for Jesus and having a personal relationship with Him. It also hinges on faith in His Word. It requires dedication and commitment. Being



a disciple of Jesus is a challenge. Jesus made it clear that following Him would involve sacrifice, forsaking, putting His will above our own, loving others with His love, and sharing His teachings with others, even being willing to “lose our lives for His sake” (Matthew 10:39).

Walking the path of *discipleship* means going beyond *believing* in the teachings to *following* the teachings and applying them in our daily living. Disciples are key to the *spreading* of Christianity, to fulfilling the commission Jesus gave to His first disciples, those originally tasked with bringing the good news to the world of their day. As disciples today, we are tasked with bringing the gospel to the world of *our* time.

Discipleship is not an isolated, once-in-a-lifetime happening. It's a spiritual journey, a faith journey. It involves daily choices and actions to abide in Jesus, and to let Him abide in us, to be led, fed, and cleansed by His Word, to operate under the influence of the Holy Spirit and God's love, to seek Him, to yield to His will for our lives, to obey Him to the best of our ability, to testify of His love through our words and actions, to bear fruit that glorifies Him.

Discovering how God wants you to live your discipleship, how He wants you to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth is part of your personal spiritual journey (Matthew 5:13–15). You are a unique individual and God has plans for you that are unique to you and your circumstances, your talents, and your abilities. What He asks is that you commit these to Him and use them to glorify Him and to make the world a better place, to be part of the answer to the Lord's prayer, “Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2), by doing what He asks you to do to



You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

—Jesus, Matthew 5:14–16

NIV

follow Him and be a part of the world-changing force He has called His followers to be.

So what does discipleship mean in the context of today's world? A disciple is someone who follows hard after God, following His will as expressed in the Bible and seeking His specific will for their life, their career, their family, and their personal pursuits. It means living your life according to His teachings.

As Billy Graham once said, “This invitation to discipleship is the most thrilling cause we could ever imagine. Think of it: The God of the universe invites us to become His partners in reclaiming the world for Him! We can each have a part, using the unique gifts and opportunities God has given us.”

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



# MAKING A MASTERPIECE

BY MARIA FONTAINE

**“FOR WE ARE GOD’S MASTERPIECE.** He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

When the life of a follower of Jesus is lived as Jesus intended it to be, it becomes a thing of beauty. Being a Christian and having a relationship with God should be something that permeates our daily experiences, is integrated into our decisions, and enlightens our perceptions of ourselves, others, and this life.

Like a beautiful painting, a Christian’s greatest glory is often made up of countless little things. The tiny globs of color in the painting that appear to be so insignificant when viewed up close become breathtakingly beautiful when seen in their totality. In the same way, the countless expressions of God’s love shared with others in the course of a Christian’s life may at times appear to be insignificant in themselves, yet God sees them in the context of a life that glorifies Him.

As our lives become more centered around God, He gives us more strength in our weakness and more grace in times of struggle, loss, or suffering. As our dependence on Him grows, He enhances the joy of His Spirit that overcomes our sorrow.

The more we are determined to strengthen our walk with Jesus, and the more we desire a deeper spiritual

connection with Him, the more He will be able to manifest His Spirit through us. Paul commended some early Christians by saying: “They even did more than we had hoped, for their first action was to give themselves to the Lord and to us, just as God wanted them to do” (2 Corinthians 8:5 NLT).

When your faith plays an integral part in your values, goals, and decisions, the love that prompted God to create the universe can stir your heart to see the need around you. It will move you to action. If God demonstrates His love for us in the beauty of a tiny flower, as well as in the immeasurable greatness of His coming to live and die for us, that teaches us that there is also great variety in the ways that our lives can show His love and truth to this world.

God wants to fill our lives with His Spirit. We are His handiwork. As we allow Him to blend the hues of His love and mercy and develop the beauty of form that He intended for us, we become His masterpiece that will speak to the hearts of others.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■



# A LIVING SACRIFICE

BY MARIE ALVERO

“DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him” (Romans 12:1 NLT).

I believe that God has given us power and agency to make changes and choices for our lives, but I also sometimes feel how easy it is to get distracted with “self-help” ideologies. Designing our “best lives” and making five-year plans, for example, are positive actions, but we need to find a way to reconcile that with “giving our bodies as a living sacrifice.”

That’s a really interesting Bible verse, because it’s not just talking about our thoughts or our beliefs being presented to God, but our bodies too. That means what we are physically doing with our lives should be to His glory. The King James version of this verse calls that our “reasonable” service—so, not super amazing, not award-winning, but just your “starter package” Christianity being lived out.

When you look at following Jesus in that context, it gets real. It’s not just an ideology, but something you spend your time on, something you give yourself to. “Sacrifice” doesn’t imply that life is going to be dreary or tough, without any fun or ambition or dreams. That’s not it. True fulfillment can only be found in staying close to God and following His plan.

Our souls receive personality from God. They are designed to be filled by Him. The danger for us all comes when we crowd them full of our own petty ambitions and our shortsighted ideas of fulfillment and leave no room for the work that must be done in us.

—William Kirk Kilpatrick

Sacrifice alone, bare and unrelieved, is ghastly, unnatural, and dead; but self-sacrifice, illuminated by love, is warmth and life; it is the death of Christ, the life of God, and the blessedness and only proper life of man.

—Frederick W. Robertson (1816–1853)

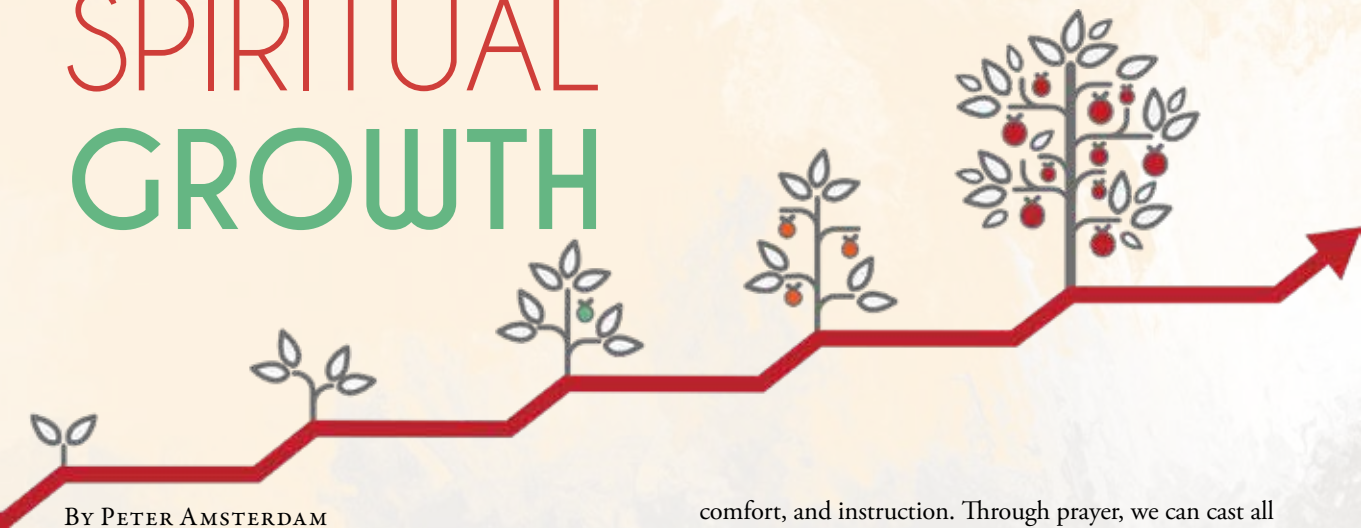
The Christian faith is meant to be lived moment by moment. It isn’t some broad, general outline—it’s a long walk with a real Person. Details count: passing thoughts, small sacrifices, a few encouraging words, little acts of kindness, brief victories over nagging sins.

—Joni Eareckson Tada

While we all have hopes, dreams, and expectations for our lives, we need to ask ourselves what God needs from us. What does a “living sacrifice” look like in our personal lives and walk with Him?

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. ■

# SPIRITUAL GROWTH



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

**IF YOU WANT TO BE PHYSICALLY FIT**, you have to eat right, exercise, and put some time and effort into building good physical habits. Similarly, if you want spiritual growth—if you want to be spiritually fit—it will require investing in a spiritual regimen. Here are five foundational principles for spiritual growth.

**Devotional input.** Making time daily for godly input and spiritual nourishment is paramount to a vibrant spiritual life. The Bible says that “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). The Bible is the Word of God. Just as we need to eat physical food every day for sustenance, we need daily spiritual nourishment. Another source is devotional, faith-building material (or media) authored by godly men and women. The inspired writings of other Christians can serve to strengthen your faith, open your understanding of the Scriptures, and help you to practically apply God’s Word to your life.

**Develop an active prayer life.** Prayer is a key component of our spiritual life; it’s how we communicate with God, our Creator. We can speak with Him, praise and worship Him, and tell Him our concerns, troubles, needs, and ask Him for His help, intervention, and strength. Prayer is asking for the will of God to be done, and through prayer, we listen to His voice and seek His guidance, encouragement,

comfort, and instruction. Through prayer, we can cast all of our earthly cares upon His strong shoulders.

**Keep your heart right with God.** This doesn’t mean you have to be perfect. Jesus understands our flaws and human weaknesses, as He experienced life as a human. When He gave His life for the forgiveness of our sins and our redemption, He knew very well that we’d never get everything right, no matter how hard we tried. We can enter into that wonderful place of peace and forgiveness by regularly confessing our faults, mistakes, and sins to Him. We can find peace in His forgiveness as we humble ourselves, acknowledge our faults, and run to His outstretched arms.

**Follow God (His Word, voice, and guidance).** Another foundational point for spiritual growth is *doing* what God’s Word says to do. We are called to obey what God asks of all Christians, as well as His personal guidance and instruction to us as individuals.

**Participate in a community of believers.** When we spend time with other Christians—worshipping, reading God’s Word, singing and praying together—we come away stronger. We are refreshed, our vision is clarified, and we are better prepared for what God will bring into our lives.

To cultivate a thriving spiritual life, put these five foundational points into practice. You’ll be happy with the results. ■



FEEDING READING

# THE PARABLES OF JESUS



**WHEN JESUS SPOKE TO THE MULTITUDES**, He often explained deep truths by means of parables—stories about common events, circumstances, and things that His listeners could easily relate to. Times have changed, but the timeless truths contained in the parables of Jesus are just as relevant today and just as feeding to our souls as they were to those who first heard them 2,000 years ago!

## The Parable of the Sower: The seed of God's Word

Matthew 13:3–23

Key Verse • Matthew 13:23 NLT: 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!

## The Good Samaritan: "Who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:25–37

Key Verses • Luke 10:36–37 NLT: "Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?" Jesus asked. The man replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said, "Yes, now go and do the same."

## The Prodigal Son: God's everlasting love

Luke 15:11–32

Key Verses • Luke 15:18–20 NLT: I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven

and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son." ... And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

## The Two Houses: What is your foundation?

Matthew 7:24–27

Key Verses • Matthew 7:24–25: Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

## The Unmerciful Servant: A lesson in forgiveness

Matthew 18:23–35

Key Verses • Matthew 18:32–33 NIV: Then the master ... said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?"

## The Rich Fool: Be generous—Don't hoard material goods

Luke 12:16–21

Key Verses • Luke 12:20–21 NIV: But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God. ■



# MAKING GODLY DECISIONS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

**ONE OF THE TRAITS OF HUMANKIND**, as beings created in the image of God, is free will, which includes both the ability to make decisions and the responsibility for the outcomes of our decisions. Learning to make decisions that will glorify God and fulfill His will for our lives can be very challenging. It can test and grow our faith, as we seek His will and wait on Him for answers and guidance.

Decision-making for Christians is meant to be a relational process, involving ourselves and God, as we bring all our anxieties to Him, knowing that He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). He has told us to “come and let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18), demonstrating His desire to carry on a conversation with us. He wants to be present and to participate in the conversation as we make decisions. He has promised that His Spirit within us will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

Throughout our lives, we are faced with decisions that affect our future, whether they relate to what career to

pursue, who to marry, how to raise our children, where to live, or how to commit to our faith and participate in God’s work. One of the most important steps for finding God’s will and making good decisions is acknowledging Him and committing our ways to Him. The Bible tells us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Proverbs 3:5–6 NKJV).

Learning to make decisions that will honor God and align with His will and commands is often accompanied by times of soul searching, prayer, and testing. Sometimes it can be difficult to distinguish what God’s will is in a situation or what decision will produce the best outcomes. At such times, we can wish that a lightning bolt would light up the sky or that we’d be knocked to the ground like the apostle Paul to give us a precise, infallible sign (Acts 9:3–4). And yet, so often, the voice of God is so quiet that if we don’t calm our spirit and open our minds and listen, it can be missed.

## ALWAYS WITH YOU

The Bible lets us know that we can expect to go through some difficult times while we're on this earth (John 16:33). The good news is that it also promises that we won't have to go through them alone. God promises to always be there for us. "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (Psalm 23:4 NIV). "I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:8 NLT).

God wants to hear about our burdens and for us to give Him all our cares, so that He can bring hope to our heart, peace to our soul, and strength to our life (1 Peter 5:7). Of course, God is not *only* interested in our struggles; He cares about *everything we experience throughout our lives*, from our smallest victories to our greatest fears and everything in between.

Once Jesus comes into our lives, His presence is always with us (Hebrews 13:5).

How do we play our part in the decision-making process, doing everything in our power to make right decisions, to hush our spirits to hear God's voice, and to determine the best option in the decisions we make? God's Word tells us, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him" (James 1:5).

God created us in His image, as rational beings, capable of freewill decisions and of choosing to place Him at the center of our lives. This is one of the ways by which we love God with all our minds: by making conscious decisions to love God, and by seeking to glorify Him in our decisions and ways. This positions us to discern the will of God, as Paul explained in Romans: "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

As you take that first step, God will often either confirm it or new factors will emerge that will shed

new light on the situation. You may need to make adjustments, as you discover that the coordinates of your original decision, while pointing you in the right general direction, need to be fine-tuned as you zero in on your final destination. Decision-making is often a process involving many choices, and each one lays the foundation for the next ones.

God usually wants us to do the work of wholeheartedly seeking His will, investigating, analyzing, assessing, and using every means at our disposal to make wise and godly decisions. He rarely seems to do things for us that we are capable of doing. I have found that I make the best decisions when I work in conjunction with Him through analyzing the possibilities and the options, and seeking His guidance through prayer.

As we place God at the center of our lives, acknowledging Him in all our ways, we can trust that He will guide us and help us to make wise decisions. ■

# THE SCHOOL OF LIFE

BY MARIA FONTAINE

LIFE IS OFTEN LIKENED TO GOING TO SCHOOL, and that's a good analogy. God allows all sorts of things to happen in our lives to test us, to see how we'll react to them, to teach us lessons, and to help us grow spiritually. His desire through all this, of course, is that we'll apply ourselves, take the lessons to heart, learn from them, and live up to our full potential. In short, life's tests are designed by Him to help us become the people He knows we can be.

One of the things that God uses to bring us along is our human weaknesses. Everyone has their share of those. Among other things, our weaknesses and failings teach us humility, patience, and other virtues. They teach us the power of prayer, which helps us to live closer to God and become more dependent on Him, and they help us to better understand others, thereby putting us in a better position to help encourage them through their problems and tests.

We are meant to learn from our weaknesses and shortcomings, as well as from our mistakes and poor decisions. The first step is to acknowledge the problem, and the next step is to determine to do something about it to overcome that weakness with God's help. God wants to help you overcome your weaknesses, and He will if you ask Him to.

So the next time you find yourself struggling with some personal weakness, take it as a challenge. Choose to learn from it, and you'll soon find yourself excelling in the school of life. ■



## CULTIVATING CHARACTER

God created us “in His own image” (Genesis 1:26), but He's not done yet. It's an ongoing process. We all share some basic aspects of His nature from birth—we are eternal, spiritual beings with the capacity to reason, love, and distinguish right from wrong—but developing godly character is a lifelong process. It's also a big part of why we're here. What should we strive to be like? The following Bible passage provides some insight:

“The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23 NLT).

The Sermon on the Mount also serves as a guide, as Jesus highlights as blessed those who are merciful, meek, and peacemakers, and those who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:3–9). The Bible's “love chapter” highlights the supremacy of love: “Love is patient and kind... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

# THE MAKING OF A VIOLIN

BY AMY MIZRANY

**ONE MORNING**, I walked into my music teacher's classroom to start my violin lesson and noticed two violins on the desk. My eye was immediately drawn to the first one, which looked new. A brand-new violin is something to behold, with gorgeous curves, a glossy, unscratched surface that shines in the light, and an engagingly twisting scroll fitted with squeaky tuning pegs.

Next to this beautiful violin freshly out of the hands of some expert violin maker was another violin. Its curves were still gorgeous, but in some places the outline was disturbed by a crack or scuff in the wood; its surface was dull and scratched; its scroll still twirled, but the pegs were surrounded by chips, and the neck was worn where years of hands had held it.

*Yuck!* one might think. *That's about as messed up as a violin can get without falling apart!* But as my teacher told me, while new violins *look* perfect, it's the old violins that *sound* beautiful. They've been bumped, clanged, dropped, forgotten. And they sound all the sweeter because of it.

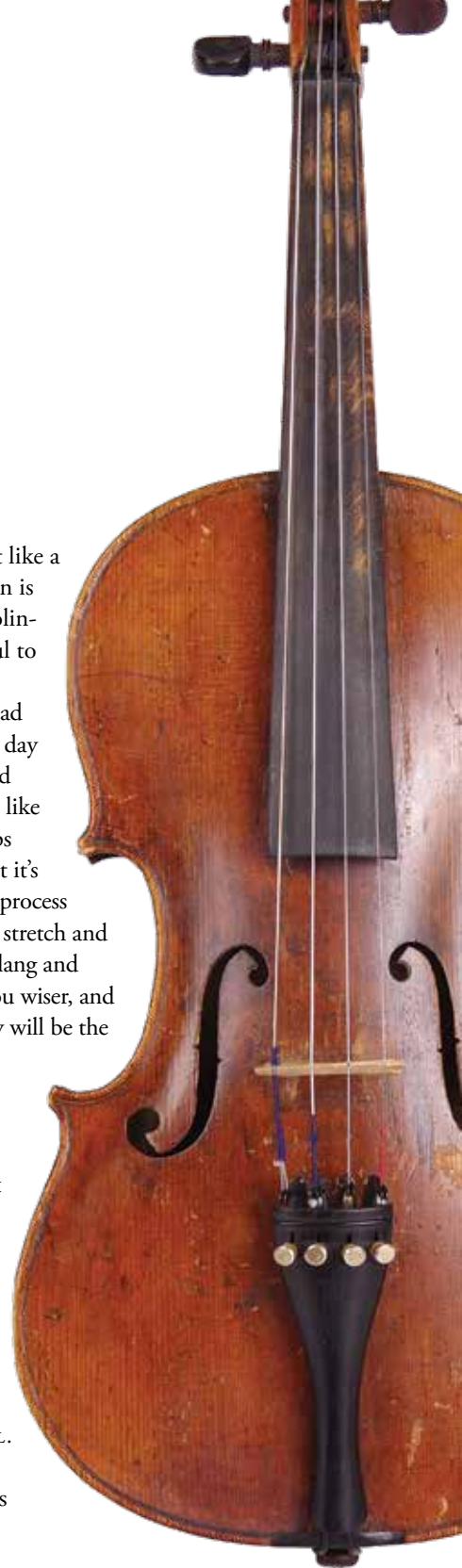
A violin needs time to find its tone, to fully grow into its voice. To reach its full potential, a violin must be played for hours on end. It must be tuned and re-tuned. Its strings will snap, its bridge might slip, its pegs might come undone. But it's all part of the process.

Sometimes I feel like I'm being endlessly bumped, clanged, dropped, and forgotten. Sometimes it feels like I'm scuffed up, chipped, and beginning to crack. There are days when my nerves snap, just like a string on my violin, and I most assuredly don't feel beautiful. But from the seemingly never-ending succession of days, from each slip and bang, I learn. While I may not be able to compare to the flawless and beautiful, I grow and

mature. And just like a century-old violin is beautiful to a violinist, I am beautiful to Jesus.

So don't feel bad if you have a bad day or you slip up and fall. You may feel like you're full of chips and scratches, but it's just a part of the process that helps you to stretch and improve. Every clang and dent will leave you wiser, and your life's melody will be the sweeter for it.

AMY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■





ONE OF THE MOST ENCOURAGING AND COMFORTING THINGS THAT A CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO CONSTANTLY REMEMBER—particularly when going through times of trouble, trials, and tribulations—is that our heavenly Father loves us and is in sovereign control of our lives. Even if we don't always understand exactly why we're going through such trials, God has promised in His Word that "all things work together for good to those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28 NKJV).

He will never permit anything to happen to you, His child, that He will not somehow work together for your good. Of course, you may be tempted to feel like a lot of things have happened that don't look very good to you. But with time, you finally found out sooner or later that somehow or another they did work together for good.—Or you will yet discover that, whether in this life or in the next!

The following true story illustrates this principle:

One chilly winter morning, a fishing fleet launched out from a small harbor on the east coast of Newfoundland. In the afternoon there arose a great storm. When night settled, not a single vessel of all the

fleet had found its way back into port. All night long, wives, mothers, children, and sweethearts paced up and down the windswept beach, wringing their hands and calling on God to save their lost loved ones. To add to the horror of the situation, one of their cottages caught fire. Since the men were away, it was impossible to put out the blaze and save it.

When morning broke, to the joy of all, the entire fleet had returned safely to harbor in the bay. But there was one face which was a picture of despair—the wife of the man whose home had been destroyed in the fire. Meeting her husband as he landed, she cried, "We are ruined! Our home and everything in it were destroyed by fire!" But the man exclaimed to her surprise, "Thank God for that fire! It was the light of our burning cottage that safely guided the whole fleet into port."

Whatever God does or allows in the lives of His children who love Him, He always does so in love. Look to Jesus in your times of trouble, and trust in the promise in His Word that whatever you're going through, He will truly work together for good. "For every one of God's promises is 'Yes' in Christ, and through him we also say 'Amen' to the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 1:20 CSB). ■

PRAYER FOR THE DAY


# OUR FATHER

**DEAR FATHER,** You saved us through Your Son's sacrificial death and adopted us into Your family, so that now we have You—the one above all others, the Creator of all things—as our Father. As we come to know You and Your love, power, and holiness, we want to give You the reverence You so heartily deserve.


You are God, holy, present, and righteous, and You deserve our praise and worship. May we add our voices to those in heaven who never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come” (Revelation 4:8). And may we echo the words of those in the Bible who cast their crowns before Your throne, saying, “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 4:10–11).

May You reign in our lives and throughout all the world and may we be faithful to share the joyous news of salvation with others. Teach us to live according to the principles of Your kingdom; help us to be conscious of them in our choices and decisions, so that we may reflect You and Your ways.

Work in the lives of all those who believe in You, so that as many as possible will come to know You and live in a manner that reflects life in Your kingdom. For Yours is the kingdom, the power, and glory forever and ever. Amen. ■



When I think about how to sum up who God is in a single phrase, “unconditional love” comes to mind. Of course, God is many things and cannot be confined to one phrase or term, but as we know from 1 John 4:8, *God is love*. That is His very nature. The nature of God's love, its unconditionality and universality, is truly a wonderful thing. Too often, the love we see in society is predicated on the value that the other person provides, and when that value ceases or is no longer needed, the love fades with it. Not so with God's love. He delights in our company and wants to befriend us. God's deep and abiding love motivates His continual call to each human being He has created, inviting them into relationship with Him.—Peter Amsterdam



YOU CAN  
RELY  
FROM JESUS WITH LOVE  
ON ME

You can find safety and serenity even in the midst of turmoil, when the proverbial winds of fear blow about you and the currents of worry threaten to sweep you away. That's because I am the author of true peace. You can rely on Me in the middle of any storm, any disaster, any tragedy, or any disease that threatens to harm you or those you love.

I am concerned about every detail of your life. I am here for you even in the midst of difficulty. I want to give you faith and strength, comfort and reassurance. I also wish to help you be a calming influence on others.

Wonderful and supernatural peace, as well as protection, can be found by calling out to Me. You could pray something like this: "Jesus, I need peace of mind and heart. I need calm and trust in spite of what's happening around me. I need stability. Please keep and protect me and those I care about. Please enter my heart, my

spirit, and my life and fill me with calm, trust, and peace."

If you ask Me, I will give you peace of heart and mind. My love will surround, keep, and care for you in natural and supernatural ways.

I will not only keep you through this present situation, but I will also help you to safely navigate the entire journey of life and all the experiences and tests and personal growth ahead of you while you're on earth. I will take you by the hand and lead you in the ways of truth. I will answer your questions and provide help with your problems.

My love will ensure that you have a blessed passage through life—through all of its ups and downs and twists and turns—until you eventually join Me to live forever in My heavenly realm of eternal peace and love and happiness.

I'm always here for you,  
Jesus