

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 17 • Issue 4

DANCE ACCORDING TO THE MUSIC

Loosen up and enjoy

Changing Landscapes

When autopilot won't deliver

Shorter Strides, Faster Progress

Pacing yourself





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION FACING THE UNKNOWN—TOGETHER

Like most people, I like predictability. Change can mean stepping into the unknown and losing my comfortable routine, and that's frightening.

It also means I have to give up some control. That's scary too. Even when you prepare as well as you can, there are so many factors involved that you

just can't control them all.

"Change always comes bearing gifts," wrote Price Pritchett, but I'm sure we've all sometimes wondered if those gifts were worth it, and if it might not be better—easier—to forgo them instead of having to deal with the discomfort of change. Then again, we often don't have a choice; changes have a way of coming upon us whether we want them or not.

One thing I've experienced recently, though, is that change is so much easier to go through with God than on our own!

God knows all things, including the future. He can prepare us in ways we couldn't prepare ourselves, and He works all things together for our good.¹ He's never surprised by the bend in the road or the turn of events, and He is able to guide and equip us for what's ahead, even if we don't recognize what's happening at the time.

God is in control. Knowing that the being who created us and will fulfill His purpose for us² is on our side can be just the shot of confidence we need in order to face whatever happens. "If God is for us, who can be against us?"³

Perhaps one of the most important realizations God leads us to in times of change is His unconditional love for each of us. When change is difficult, scary, or hurts, He remains by our side. His love never wavers, and He wants only the best for us. Even though we go through innumerable changes and experiences that shape and ultimately modify our character, He remains constant, supportive, and ever dependable. He's the best friend we could have ... and that's one thing that's not going to change: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."⁴

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. See Romans 8:28.
2. See Psalm 138:8.

3. Romans 8:31
4. Hebrews 13:8

For information on *Activated* and other inspirational products, visit our website or contact one of the distributors below.

www.activated.org

Activated Ministries
P.O. Box 462805
Escondido, CA 92046–2805, USA
Toll-free: 1–877–862–3228
Email: info@actmin.org
www.activatedministries.org

Activated Africa
P.O. Box 2509, Faerie Glen
Pretoria 0043, South Africa
Tel: 0861 888 918
Email: activatedAfrica@activated.org

Activated Nigeria
P.O. Box 9009, Aggrey Road P.O.
Port Harcourt, Nigeria
Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333
Email: activatednigeria@activated.org

Activated Philippines
P.O. Box 8225, Paranaque Central P.O.
1700 Paranaque City, Philippines
Cell: (0922) 8125326
Email: activatedph@gmail.com

EDITOR Samuel Keating
DESIGN Gentian Suči

© 2015 Activated. All Rights Reserved.
Printed in Taiwan by Ji Yi Co., Ltd.
All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Used by permission. Other Bible quotations are from the following sources: New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1978, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission.



CHANGING LANDSCAPES

By JOYCE SUTTIN

I WAS DRIVING HOME TODAY AND MISSED MY TURN. I'm familiar with the neighborhood and have turned into that street thousands of times. But I was confused by the changing landscape.

An unused strip mall was being torn down, and bulldozers had been busy all week. Suddenly, the corner building was no longer there, and I went cruising past my turn. I hadn't realized how accustomed I was to turning left at that building.

I began to think about the landscape of my life and how difficult it is to respond to changes. I like to follow familiar routes. I like to know my way. I like to cruise along without having to think about it. I am thankful for new technologies that provide turn-by-turn guidance whenever I have to venture into new areas, because I don't always have a navigator in the car with me to read the map and help me spot street signs. But familiarity can also become a navigation system.

I grew up in the countryside and learned to use trees and hills as landmarks instead of streetlights and signs. I very rarely read signs unless I am in unfamiliar territory. I like to unconsciously follow the way I have traveled thousands of times by looking at the visual landscape.

There have been a few times in my life when I had sudden changes, and my spiritual landscape was completely overhauled. I struggled to find patterns and learn the ropes in my new domain. The only way to find my way was listening to God's voice, like Google Maps, "In 30 feet, turn left on Broadway..."

God can guide us through changing landscapes and bring us home, no matter how much things have changed. All we have to do is turn to Him and ask for His help, and He can give us a step-by-step plan to get us through. Changes force us to get out of our ruts, pay attention to where we're going, and carefully read the signs.

Right now the demolition process down the street looks like a big mess, but somebody knows what they are doing. Somebody has a plan, and eventually, I will be thankful for something new and better in our neighborhood. The only way to have improvements is to have change. In the meantime, I need to be a little more conscientious driving home and remember where to turn. No more relying on "automatic pilot."

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. ■

STARTING OVER

BY CHERYL MADISON

MY HUSBAND AND I MOVED TO CANADA A FEW YEARS AGO AFTER 30 YEARS ABROAD. During those years, I had lived, worked, and traveled throughout the Americas without ever returning to the place of my birth for any length of time.

The repatriation process was a bit of a culture shock, though I quickly came to love living in a country that embraces diversity and welcomes immigrants from around the world, creating a racial and ethnic mixture that exudes tolerance and teaches patience for the many people trying to find their way, learn a new language, and adapt to a new culture. It brought home the realization that our planet is full of people rebuilding their lives, searching for new homes, learning new languages and trades, and starting over from scratch. A

phenomenon that has increased in modern times, yet God created humankind with the versatility to start over.

While receiving some medical tests, I struck up a conversation with the radiologist, a pleasant, kind woman with a patient demeanor, who shared her story with me. She was born and studied medicine in the Soviet Union. After the fall of communism, she immigrated to Israel, where she discovered that she would have to repeat most of her medical training if she wished to practice in Israel. Feeling called to be a pediatrician, she repeated eight laborious years of medical training and once again took up the practice. Life did not turn out as planned for her and her family in Israel, so they immigrated again to Canada. Once again, she discovered that she would have to endure some eight years of

medical training if she wished to practice. At that point, she gave up her medical practice and became a radiologist, as she felt that now that she had children of her own, it wasn't possible to repeat the training.

As she shared her life story, she did so with cheerfulness and without complaint. She had assessed her options, redirected her plans, and started over from scratch. I am sure her cheerfulness and patience were hard-earned, and I expressed my appreciation to her, which brought a smile to her face.

Certainly, starting over during mid-life is not an enviable position. But many people today face this reality. It seems that there are few careers that come with a "guaranteed for life" sticker, and in today's world, versatility and adaptability are paramount. Thankfully, those are qualities that God's Word has always advised Christians to hone, as the following Bible passage brought home to me:

1. Ecclesiastes 3:1–7,11,14 NIV
2. Hebrews 11:10 NLT
3. 1 Peter 1:3–4,6–7 NLT
4. Hebrews 12:1–2 NLT



"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak. [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ... God does it so that men will revere him."¹

The Bible is filled with stories of people who changed careers, homelands, or direction as God guided them, whether through His direct word or through circumstances. Starting over is, in fact, so common in the Bible that it's difficult to think of many of its main characters who *didn't* have to start over, beginning with Abraham to Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Esther, Ruth, Daniel, Jesus' disciples, Paul, and on the list goes.

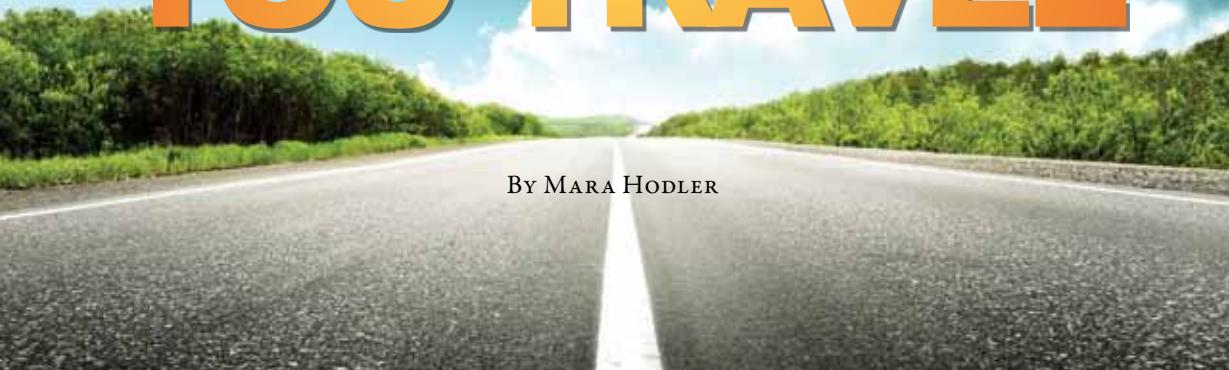
Living in an area of the world where so many people are first-generation immigrants has brought home to me the fact that starting over is a fact of life that many people are facing in today's world, as the dynamics around them shift and populations migrate and travel the globe in search of better opportunities and a better life. They choose to be strangers and pilgrims to provide a better life for their families and children, and step out with incredible courage to do so, often with few resources and having to leave behind their families, careers, and credentials. They still conceive of a future that is better, and that makes it worth the risk and the challenges.

As Christians, we are "confidently looking forward to a city with eternal

foundations; a city designed and built by God,"² so that "now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance ... beyond the reach of change and decay. ... There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine."³

Starting over still looms large, and at times the challenges seem overwhelming. But taking a look around and seeing the courage of other people who have crossed land and sea in search of better circumstances in this world has served as a confidence-booster that God never puts us in a position where we can't grow and expand and "run with endurance the race He has set before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, our champion who initiates and perfects our faith."⁴

CHERYL MADISON IS A PUBLIC RELATIONS CONSULTANT IN CANADA. ■



THE ROAD YOU TRAVEL

BY MARA HODLER

ABOUT 13 YEARS AGO, MY HUSBAND, Sam, and I had to make a trip from Calgary, Alberta, to Winnipeg, Manitoba, in Canada. We loaded up our old truck for the move and headed off. We had planned for this move pretty well. Everything was neatly packed and sorted. We had mapped our route and estimated our time. We had made a budget for gas, food, hotels, and all that. It was our first long trip with a baby, so we had made sure we had everything we needed for the journey. Our intention was most definitely to end up in Winnipeg.

On the morning of our departure, we got up early and hit the road on time. Only one problem: We didn't head east as we were supposed to. We got on the highway and out of habit began heading west. Eventually, the signs for Banff—in the opposite

direction of where we were trying to go—alerted us that we might not be going the right way. As soon as we recognized our mistake, we took the first U-turn and began heading in the right direction. We arrived in Winnipeg only slightly delayed.

The point isn't just that Sam and I are directionally challenged, but that it's the road you're on, not your intentions, that determines where you end up. We had absolutely no intention of going to Banff and every intention of going to Winnipeg; but regardless, we would have ended up in Banff if we'd stayed on our first route.

But at the end of the day, actions are going to top intentions every single time. Our lives are the sum total of our actions, not our intentions, dreams, or wishes. The lesson is a simple one: pay less attention to intentions. Instead, look at the road you are on.

If you want to make it to a different place, get on a different road. Make the link between your choices and the results in your life. Evaluate and adjust your course accordingly. It's something we all have to do. God has given us the ability to choose, to navigate, and to determine the roads we travel.

Most of us don't get lost or get on the wrong road on purpose. Rather, we don't recognize the choices we make every day as choices that get us closer to our destination or take us farther from it. Once that connection is made, it's easier to adjust the course we're on to one that will take us to where we want to be.

MARA HODLER IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO THE FAR EAST AND EAST AFRICA. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN TEXAS WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN AND RUNS A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS. ■

Making Peace with Jo

BY ANNA PERLINI



ONE OF MY FAVORITE BOOKS WHEN I WAS GROWING UP WAS *LITTLE WOMEN*, by Louisa May Alcott. The novel follows the lives of four sisters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March—detailing their passage from childhood to womanhood. There were analogies with my family since I also had sisters, and the youngest one, born premature, reminded me a lot of frail and sweet Beth. It took no time for me to identify with Jo and her strong, emotional personality, her boyish ways, her love for literature, her initial rejection of the idea of marriage, and so on. She was my secret role model.

In *Little Women*'s Italian edition, the novel is divided into two books, the first one covering the four sisters' childhoods and teen years. When I read the sequel a few years later, I was utterly disappointed and almost disgusted. Whatever had happened to my Jo? She ended up actually getting married and having children! No way! I tossed the book aside, and that marked the end of my "relationship" with Jo.

Of course, years passed, and I also married and had children. Now I even have grandchildren! When

I last visited my parents, I happened to find that old dusty book in a box in the attic, and the old feelings of enticement and disappointment combined resurfaced, but I brought it down and reread it for the first time in decades. By the time I got to the last page, I had made peace with Jo and no longer felt betrayed by her choices. I could see that despite the adjustments she had to make to her plans, she had remained true to herself and her ideals, her heart more alive than ever as the years went by.

That made me ponder on the realization that growing up is not just inevitable, it's good. Like someone said, "Getting old is not so bad if you think of the alternative." Each season of life has unique beauty and originality, challenges and rewards. It's definitely possible to grow up without losing your core values and your dreams, in spite of what life might throw at you. Even though you might momentarily lose sight of them, they are there, well kept and ready to come out anytime you are ready. ■

1. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>



BY ROSANE PEREIRA

DANCE ACCORDING TO THE MUSIC

WE CAN LEARN A LOT ABOUT COPING WITH CHANGE FROM THE CLASSIC MUSICAL

*FIDDLER ON THE ROOF.*¹ The story takes place at the beginning of the 20th century and features a Jewish family suffering from poverty and religious persecution in the south of Russia. The father, Tevye, complains about having five daughters and no sons, not the ideal distribution on a farm. To make matters worse, his three older daughters picked husbands he didn't approve of, one of them an Orthodox goy. Throughout the story, whenever there is trouble or change in the air, a man playing a fiddle on a roof appears to him in a vision.

At the end, the family—and the entire Jewish community—is forced to leave their small town, during winter, with each family going to be with relatives in distant parts of the world. Tevye is forced to sell his old horse because of a bad hoof and has to push the wagon containing his few belongings down the road himself, followed by his wife and two younger daughters. Then the fiddler appears again, playing his instruments cheerfully. At first, Tevye rejects the vision and almost curses it, but after a few

moments, he lights up and begins to walk with renewed gusto to the rhythm of the fiddler's song.

The lessons of this movie transcend time and place. Changes do get easier when we submit to them, instead of resisting. Our lives are full of obstacles and even persecutions. We face challenges and changes in relationships, careers, home life, health, looks, physical appearance, stamina, and so on.

Getting married and having children can bring the biggest upheavals in lifestyle. With a husband or wife, we have to think about their feelings and emotions, their likes and dislikes, care for them, get hurt and forgive again and again. When children come, we have to let go of personal pursuits, with diapers, lack of sleep, worry, and considerably less freedom left for ourselves.

But as the old Brazilian saying goes, "We must dance according to the music." Romans 8:18 says: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us." And Jesus said: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."²

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. Music by Jerry Bock, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick.

2. John 16:33

ALL OVER AGAIN?

By VICTORIA OLIVETTA

FOR THE LAST 12 YEARS, I worked as a freelance contractor for a project that I was passionate about. Due to some recent changes, though, this project shut down. I feel the emptiness, like a hole in my stomach, and I've been trying to figure out what's next.

To tell you the truth, I don't know yet.

But I do know a few things ...

Almost four years ago, the former administrator of my building retired, leaving the job vacant. The residents hired an outside administrator, but after a short period of time, we were unsatisfied with him and the way he operated. As we couldn't find anyone to replace him, I volunteered to fill in on a temporary basis—and I've

been on the job since then. I even studied for and passed a property administration course. Starting a new challenging part-time career at the age of 52 was a little scary, and sometimes I still ask myself what I'm doing ... but I also love it.

Last year, I was faced with an amazing opportunity to work in the nutrition field. So again I studied and worked really hard on my second new career. Now I get to help people out not only with their wellness and fitness, but also spiritually—praying for them, encouraging them, and putting myself in their shoes so I can understand them better.

Over the last months, I've been working both jobs along with some freelancing, and I've learned so much

about good organization, managing my time, and asking God for guidance even for simple issues.

I never imagined I'd end up doing all this, but I felt it was God engineering it behind the scenes, and I just had to go along. So now when I feel this emptiness in my stomach, I remind myself of all the opportunities God has given me and how He has always opened better, more suitable doors for me when other doors closed.

I don't know if I'll accomplish all my goals, but I relax, because I know who is with me while I accomplish His.

VICTORIA OLIVETTA IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ARGENTINA. ■





SHORTER STRIDES, FASTER PROGRESS

BY JESSIE RICHARDS

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, I started running for exercise, and I've tried to be consistent with it. I quickly built up to longer distances and durations than when I started, but then I hit a plateau and stayed there for a year or more. I found it difficult to increase my endurance beyond a certain point, and I found it particularly difficult to increase my speed.

Then I went for a run with a friend who has been running for years and is in excellent shape, and I asked him to critique my running.

"If you take shorter strides than you're taking now and let your feet

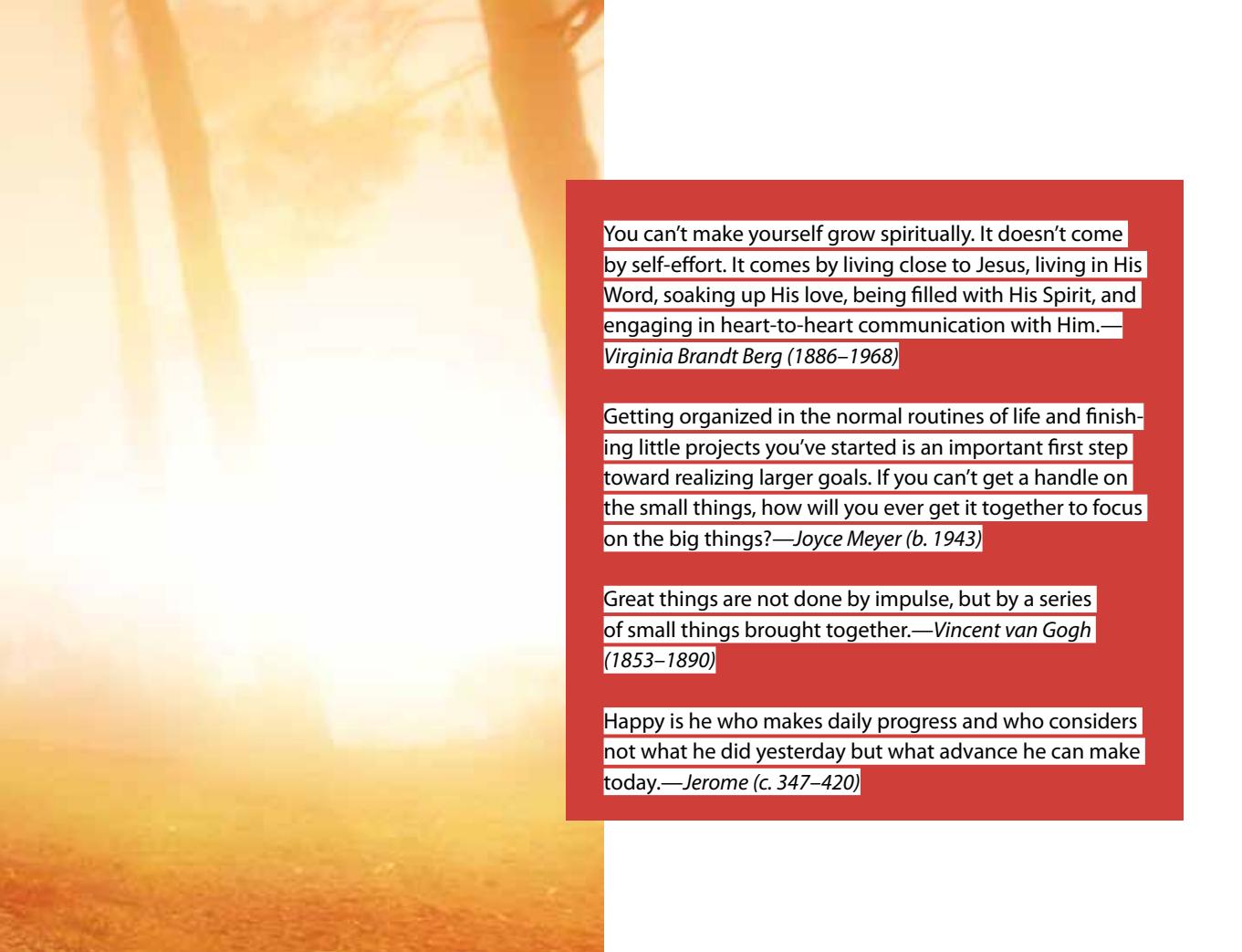
move more quickly," he advised, "you'll last longer and your running speed will pick up."

That hadn't occurred to me before. I hadn't been trying to move in any particular manner, but just let my body take me where and how it would. When I started paying attention and focusing on taking smaller steps, I found that I didn't really have to try to move more quickly; it just happened. The change wasn't dramatic, but enough for me to tell I was making progress.

Now my running has definitely improved. My breathing is less labored, my energy level stays higher,

and my speed is increasing. This morning I ran the same distance on the track where I made my discovery, and did so in considerably less time, even without consciously trying. Best of all, I didn't feel like I was straining, struggling, and short of breath. I felt relaxed and enjoyed it from start to finish. In fact, I felt that I could have just as easily kept running.

While praying one morning shortly after my discovery, it occurred to me that I should test the same principle in other areas of my life, particularly my work. I like to think of myself as a "get things done" person, but I have to admit



You can't make yourself grow spiritually. It doesn't come by self-effort. It comes by living close to Jesus, living in His Word, soaking up His love, being filled with His Spirit, and engaging in heart-to-heart communication with Him.—

Virginia Brandt Berg (1886–1968)

Getting organized in the normal routines of life and finishing little projects you've started is an important first step toward realizing larger goals. If you can't get a handle on the small things, how will you ever get it together to focus on the big things?—*Joyce Meyer (b. 1943)*

Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together.—*Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890)*

Happy is he who makes daily progress and who considers not what he did yesterday but what advance he can make today.—*Jerome (c. 347–420)*

that I have a problem with procrastinating. It's not that I'm lazy. I'm happy to work hard and put in the hours, and I relish few things more than completing a project. Yet I find myself habitually avoiding the initial dig into large or long-term jobs, often putting them off until I have to cram to meet a deadline.

Recently I figured out why I do that: I've always assumed that I needed to make progress on big projects in big strides. But Jesus helped me see that by applying my running principle to my work, with smaller steps I could maximize efficiency, move more quickly, cover the same

distance in less time and with less effort, and not be so exhausted at the end.

I no longer wait until I can clear a seven-day block on my calendar before starting a seven-day project. If I have an hour or two today, I can use that time and make a start—a small stride. Then I can work on it a bit tomorrow—another small stride—and a bit more the next day and the next. Working that way, I find myself getting to the end of what initially seemed like a daunting project, even without having devoted huge blocks of time. And I don't feel like I've run a marathon. The job

got done because I picked away at it little by little. And as it's happening, I can breathe! I'm not desperately playing catch-up. I'm not struggling to get in the mileage. I'm learning that sometimes the best and most lasting improvement is made not in one dramatic move, but bit by bit and step by step. Shorter strides make for faster progress.

JESSIE RICHARDS HAD A ROLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF *ACTIVATED* FROM 2001 TO 2012 AND HAS WRITTEN AND EDITED MATERIAL FOR OTHER CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS AND WEBSITES. ■

EMBRACING CHANCE

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

WHEN YOU'RE EXPERIENCING A LOT OF MOVEMENT OR A LOT OF CHANGE, it can give rise to uncertainty, concern, even some fear, worry, or discouragement, wondering how you are going to make it and what the future holds.

Trusting in God doesn't guarantee that the changes will be easy to go through, or that the hardship or

difficult emotions will pass quickly, but it does mean that you are allowing Him to act in your life and circumstances and are putting yourself in the position where He can bring you to a new and fruitful future.

Transitioning into new situations can be a part of God's plan for getting each of us where He wants us to be, ready for what He has in store for us. As hard as it may be to accept, if He is asking you to make a change, or if someone else is making a change that affects you, it may be His way of telling you that He has something new, something better in some way for you. Your changing circumstances will bring new challenges and potential for personal growth. The new situation you find yourself in may help create a vacuum for future possibilities which would not have been available otherwise.

The new situation or state of affairs creates an opening for Him to work in your life in new ways. You may not see immediate positive effects from the new course your life or work is taking; in fact, it may not seem positive at all at the



time. But when change thrusts you onto a new path, it can lead to new experience, growth, and fruitfulness which would be unattainable on the well-worn path of your past.



Embracing change puts you in a position to respond to future opportunities—opportunities that become possible because you have faith to let go and move in the way God shows you. It takes faith to change. You have to fight against fear and uncertainty. It can be very intense. But it's worth the fight in order to discover what God has ahead for you. Remember that, while we are walking by faith, *He* is walking by sight! So put your hand in His and let Him guide you, step by step, into your future.

1. See Philippians 1:6.
2. Isaiah 30:21 NIV



Even if it seems that things are moving slowly and might not look so promising right now, God always has a plan in what He's bringing about in each of our lives. As you move into new situations, it's very likely that you'll start seeing the world around you through new eyes, from different perspectives; that you'll have a better understanding of your past, your present, and even what the future might hold for you.

During times of great change, it's comforting to know that you are being watched over and cared for by our Great Shepherd. I like to look at the future like a mystery unfolding, as a parcel of surprises that are unwrapped, one by one, at each stage of the journey, as you learn more about yourself and your potential and God's plan for your life.

I believe that one day we will each be able to look back with happiness when we see that the small and faltering steps we've taken in our life journey have been transformed into a confident and steady stride. This comes with experience, and, of course, by leaning on Jesus. It comes from a praiseful, positive outlook that assures us that what God has begun, He will continue to perform.¹

It's my opinion that we and Jesus together can handle anything that

comes our way and face every challenge with faith, grace, and optimism. Not only can our lives be transformed through the changes God brings our way, but also what may now be partially dormant qualities and characteristics within us can come to life and blossom. We're each a work in progress, and what might appear to be of little worth to us today may well be a highly valued treasure tomorrow. There is a purpose in what each of us is going through today, significance in every opportunity, and a reason for each change and new step we're embarking on.

If you're experiencing some trepidation or concern due to changes you're in the midst of, or if you can identify with some of the things that I've talked about in this article, be encouraged. Embrace the changes God brings into your life, knowing that He is with you. If you want to please Him, He will guide you and answer your prayers.

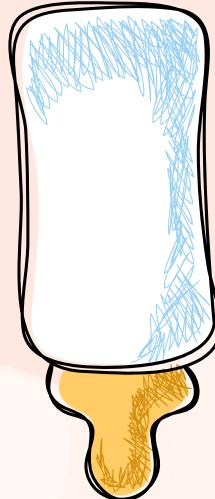
You can rest in the assurance that "Your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it,'"² and that voice will not fail you. That's not optimism; that's His promise!

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



BOTTOMS UP!

BY JENNIFER McGINLEY



I RECENTLY BECAME THE MOTHER OF TWO.

There are so many new emotions, joys, and lessons that come along with welcoming an additional child into the family. The newest challenge I face is getting ready to go back to work and preparing our three-month-old baby girl for this transition. My first daughter (now almost four years old) never took to feeding from a bottle, and my second seems to be no different. Time after time, I face the same disappointment and feel terribly wasteful as I dump out the unfinished milk.

As the precious nourishment disappears down the drain, I wish she could somehow understand that what I'm doing is for her own good. I wish she could understand that this milk is just as good as the usual serving; it's just in different packaging. It's not as warm, cozy, soft, and comforting, but it is perfectly suited to her future needs. I wish she could understand that I'm not trying to upset her or withhold what she wants to hurt her or

because I don't understand her hungry and frustrated cries. I do it because I love her and want her to be able to cope with the changes that are about to come and ease her into this next stage in our lives.

As the start date of my new job looms closer, I'm starting to feel the stress. Standing over the sink one evening, I found myself thinking about the last six months and how much has changed for our family. Over a year ago, my husband and I opened a very successful business with two of our closest friends. We had put off having our second child to devote our full attention to this endeavor. Our work and those we worked with brought a lot of joy into our lives. It was a dream come true, and we had great hopes for the future. That said, after the business took off, we were looking forward to a slightly slower-paced year to focus more on our family.

But just before entering our second year, there was a disagreement with one of our business partners on a matter of principle. Rather suddenly, three of us ended up losing our entire investment in the business and more. It was a heartbreakingly loss on so many levels.

I heaved a sigh as I came back to the present and swallowed the lump in my throat. *Why did this have to happen? Why do I have to now be in a position where I must leave my little one so soon? Why did this person hurt us so deeply?* Each year presents brand-new ways of testing our endurance, and this one takes the cake. When will we be able to take a breather?

My mind at that moment was definitely not focused on spiritual things, but just then, a thought struck me, like an understanding that had suddenly been injected in the midst of my troubled train of thought. What I'm going through with my baby could be compared to what God must do in our lives at times. He only wants good things for us, but sometimes the things He allows to come into our lives don't seem good to us at all. What's being shoved in our face is awkward, unfamiliar, and uncomfortable. We can't see much beyond the big obnoxious thing, and we feel separated from the warmth and closeness that we have grown accustomed to.

Just like my baby, my soul was crying out, not seeing how any good could come out of this situation.



Thankfully, I have a heavenly Father who is all-knowing and all-powerful, who will never give up on me even in my moments of weakness. He gently whispers as He wipes away the tears, "I will not withhold what you need. I know it seems difficult and you are distressed, but, My dear child, I know what you need for your next stage in life. I want to equip you with the skills that you need, and if you trust Me and take what I'm offering, you will soon see that you will be filled and satisfied just as before. But you will now be wiser and better able to embrace the future and what I have in store for you."

How it must hurt our Father when we don't trust Him and we let His precious offerings slip away, when we meet His best efforts to help us with resistance and loud protests. How many of His gifts have I let pass me by, or just nibbled at and not fully partaken of? All that goodness could be mine if I would only trust, yield to His wishes, resolve to embrace change, and put in just a bit more effort and see where it takes me.

Meditating on this a bit more, I could think of countless times throughout my life when I had met with heartbreak, injustice, and faced challenges that seemed daunting. With time, I saw that each one was just a stepping stone. It led to new places, people, and experiences, which in turn brought me joy, fulfillment, and new skills that equipped me for other opportunities that later came my way. Without these past traumas and dramas I know I would not have the faith and trust that I now have to face this latest life-changing event.

Okay, Father, warm up that bottle. I trust You.
Bottoms up!

JENNIFER McGINLEY IS AN ARTIST AND TEACHER CURRENTLY LIVING WITH HER FAMILY IN ALBANIA. ■

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

THE SECRET TO DAILY PROGRESS

The best way to ensure that you're making progress is to make an effort each day to take a step forward. Take a step in the right direction in some area you're working on. Refuse to vegetate or settle down. Stay stirred up by launching out into some new venture. Try something new, learn something new, do something new.

Every day can be filled with newness and challenges if you are faithfully attending to your spiritual life. If you find yourself getting bored or stagnant or feeling as if you're in a rut, then it's time to break out. Look around you: Is there someone you haven't talked to in a long time? Is there something new I'd like to show you in My Word? There's always something you can do to step up and grow.

