

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 17 • Issue 8

THE VINE

Pruning and trimming

The Seasons of Life

A time for everything

Birthday Mango

Hold on



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TASTING THE FRUIT

A few years ago, *Activated* published a special series on what Paul in his letter to the Galatians called the fruit of the Spirit.¹ One issue was published for each of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.² It occurred to us that we hadn't explored the concept

of *fruit* itself, and this issue will be devoted to that topic.

The Bible refers to literal fruit—such as olives, grapes, and figs—many times. Along with that, the word *fruit* is often used metaphorically to describe a person's outward actions, results, and accomplishments.

During His last night of liberty with His disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus commissioned them to bring forth fruit: "You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last."³ How does a Christian bear fruit? Essentially, by growing in the likeness of Jesus—in other words, by becoming more like Jesus—and by spreading His kingdom on earth, in word and in deed.

That's quite a challenge, but Jesus doesn't leave us alone with the task. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. A branch draws strength, nourishment, protection, and energy from the vine, and as His followers, when we stay connected to Him, spiritual fruit will become manifest in our lives, in our character, and in our priorities. As we spend time with Jesus and get to know Him better, we grow in His likeness, His purpose becomes our purpose, and we are compelled to put our faith into action.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

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1. See Galatians 5:22–23.

2. These were the February–October 2013 issues, available at www.activated.org.

3. John 15:16 CEB



The Vine

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

ONE OF MY MOST PLEASANT CHILDHOOD MEMORIES is lying on the bench beneath Grandma's grape arbor on a hot summer day and munching on fresh grapes. Years later, when I was moving to a vineyard in Italy, I envisioned many comfy benches to lie on. To my shock, we arrived to what looked like barren fields. Only the tiniest stubbly heads appeared above the roots. It was explained to me that the vines were cut back to the ground each year after the harvest to increase their yield. It wasn't a pretty sight, but it was a fruitful field.

When the growing season began, I was amazed at how quickly the roots gave birth to new vines beneath the warm Tuscan sun. Their tendrils reached out quickly through the

fields, and where there had been barren earth, suddenly there was lush new growth and green grapes that would produce wonderful wine.

As I remember Tuscany, John 15 comes to mind: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."¹

I am a very poor gardener because I hate to prune my plants. I let my rose bushes grow to ungainly heights. I shoo away every tree trimmer who comes to the door wanting to trim our trees. I let my perennials grow wild. I like the runaway growth of living things and don't like to be the judge of what to cut.

But it is pretty clear in John 15 that God knows about vine

trimming. If we don't bear fruit, He cuts. When we do bear fruit, He prunes. Either way, He takes action.

There are times the rug gets ripped out from under us, and He's all we have left to stand on. The unexpected knocks us for a loop; tragedy, illness, betrayal or failure give us a sucker punch, and we feel all of those beautiful leafy branches being ripped away, until all that is left is a stubbly, chopped-up root in some seemingly barren ground.

But then, the time is right. The sun shines down. Rain falls. We realize that we have all we need in Him, and the miracle of new life and growth begins.

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

1. John 15:1-2



BY DAVID BRANDT BERG, ADAPTED

SOUL FOOD

THE WORD OF GOD IS THE MOST POWERFUL TRUTH ON EARTH.

—Words that contain the very spirit and life of God Himself.¹ The Word is the spiritual spark of God that ignites us with His life, light, and power. Reading, absorbing, and following God's Word is one of the most important things you can do to build your relationship with Him. It's what keeps you in tune with God and

helps you to keep going God's way. When you listen to God and His Word and obey His truth, you'll be happy and fruitful.²

Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life."³ His Word is the very life of God. That's what gives us spiritual life, food, nourishment, strength, and health. This is why a good wholesome balanced diet of His Word is essential if you wish to grow and stay close to Him.

Jesus Himself is called "The Word" in the Bible.⁴ Jesus is the Word, the Spirit and the life, and you need to have a dose of Him every day, a good feeding and feasting and drinking, if you're going to grow and stay healthy spiritually. Just as you have to eat in order to have physical strength, you have to feed

and drink from God's Word to have spiritual strength.

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby."⁵ When you're spiritually weak, it's often because you haven't really feasted on, been filled up with, and been strengthened by the good, wholesome, nourishing, encouraging and feeding truth of God's Word. You can't get so busy with other things that you neglect your inspiration, the spiritual food and nourishment that you need from the Word. There are times when I would have really gotten discouraged if I had not drunk deeply of God's Word.

If you sincerely seek God as you read His Word, He will speak to you through it. And the more dearly you begin to love His Word and the

1. See John 4:24.

2. See John 15:11; 13:17.

3. John 6:63

4. See Revelation 19:13; John 1:1,14.

5. 1 Peter 2:2

6. Psalm 119:130 NLT

7. Jeremiah 15:16 CEB

8. Job 23:12 NIV

9. Luke 10:42 NLT



more you study it and feed from it, the more you will grow spiritually and the more you will find that God can speak to you clearly and directly through His written Word.

When the Holy Spirit quickens a passage of the Bible or verse to you, applying it to your own personal situation, it brings the Word to life. The Lord will bring His Word to life and speak to you personally, giving you direction for your problems and answers to your prayers, as you read His Word. When He helps you apply it to a situation, it suddenly becomes alive. The Bible isn't mere words anymore, or words that just run through your head, but it reaches your heart and you really get the point. "The teaching of your word gives light, so even the simple can understand."⁶

The prophet Jeremiah said, "When your words turned up, I feasted on them; and they became my joy, the delight of my heart."⁷ Job said, "I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread."⁸

Jesus said, "There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."⁹ What is the "one thing" that Mary chose? She sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His words. Resting in the Lord and sitting at His feet and hearing from Him and His Word is so necessary. God's Word is just that important.

DAVID BRANDT BERG (1919–1994) WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■



Spiritual food is necessary for spiritual survival.—*Dallin H. Oaks (b. 1932)*



God's presence is everywhere around us. God is able to penetrate and intertwine himself within the fibers of the human self in such a way that those who are enveloped in His loving companionship will never be alone.—*Dallas Willard (1935–2013)*



We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.—*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955)*



There are many means by which Christians are spiritually nurtured and fed, and God is not limited to any specific method to touch your heart, to reveal something to you, to increase your faith, or to uplift and inspire you. God wants to communicate with His children. The important thing is that we allow Him to speak to our hearts through the spiritual instruction we read, and to guide us in our relationship with Him and our spiritual lives.—*Maria Fontaine, current co-director of the Family International* ■



The Power of a Peach

By ELSA SICHROVSKY

WHEN I WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD, my family and I watched a BBC documentary featuring a group of British WW2 veterans who had fought in North Africa. Throughout the film, the veterans related their wartime experiences, most of which were accounts of withstanding hunger, terror, and deprivation on the path to victory. Although these stories were moving, the most unforgettable one for me was a different sort of tale. It was related by a frail, white-haired gentleman who smiled warmly and said that his most unforgettable experience was when he was gifted a peach!

He explained that his division had been captured by the Italian army, and he and his fellow soldiers brought to Italy. Their captors paraded them through the streets and did their best to publicly humiliate them. Passersby joined in, taunting them, spitting at them, and venting their anger and resentment.

Suddenly, from among the jeering crowd, “a young girl stepped out, stuffed a peach into my hand, and then darted away before I could thank her,” the veteran recounted. “It was the most delicious peach I had ever eaten.”

The veteran was well into his seventies, but his eyes sparkled as he told the tale of this Italian girl who had

shown him kindness during a time of deep hatred and enmity between the two warring countries. In his hour of shame and despair, this nameless girl defied social pressure to reach out with a simple, sincere gift of compassion. She looked beyond his status as a soldier of an enemy country and saw him as a hurting human being in need of kindness. He remembered that peach through the tough years that followed as the war slowly drew to an end, and later whenever he needed strength to hold on to hope, to leave the hurt and pain of the war behind, and to start a new life.

She probably thought little of her deed; it was “only” a peach, after all. She probably never dreamed that he would cherish her benevolence for the rest of his life, and that the story would be featured in a documentary that has probably inspired others to pass this story on, as I’m doing.

The apostle James described this ripple effect when he wrote, “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”¹ May we make peace by sharing “peaches” of love and mercy, even when it is risky or unconventional, for the “fruit of righteousness” that will be sown—the weary souls strengthened, the sad hearts gladdened, the lonely ones loved—is well worth the cost.

ELSA SICHROVSKY IS A FREELANCE WRITER. SHE LIVES WITH HER FAMILY IN TAIWAN. ■

1. James 3:18



Like the Flowers

BY NEERAJ KHOSLA

I WAS SITTING IN A FRIEND'S LIVING ROOM when I noticed some crimson red flowers in a vase on the coffee table. I was almost spellbound by their loveliness, and as I gazed at this beautiful creation, I seemed to hear God's voice telling me, *I want you to be like those flowers.*

As I reflected on these words later and on how simply seeing an artistic assortment of flowers can lift our spirits and inspire us, I remembered Jesus' words, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."¹

If the lilies don't strive, why do I? I guess it happens when I get my eyes off of God and stop reflecting His light and glory. I start trying to do things in my own strength and haste and end up inadvertently going in the wrong direction. Things stop working out the way I hope.

1. Matthew 6:28–29

A flower shines by reflecting God's glory. It gently sways with the breeze, smiling at passersby and showing them the love God gave it. A flower is not idle; it is constantly working to take in the light of the sun and transform it into something it can use.

Keeping in touch with God through prayer is essential if we are to grow and blossom like the lilies of the field. And of course, many flowers blossom into fruit! So to be fruitful, we should take the time to absorb God's sunshine and allow God's Spirit to pollinate us and others. As Timothy Keller wrote in *Every Good Endeavor*, "The way to serve God at work is to work with a grateful, joyful, gospel-changed heart through all the ups and downs—to dance with the wind, and to smile through the rain, and to die to self that others may live."

NEERAJ KHOSLA IS AN EDUCATOR, TEACHER, AND TRAINER IN INDIA. ■



Prayer in action is love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time. ... We are all God's children so it is important to share His gifts. Do not worry about why problems exist in the world—just respond to people's needs. ... We feel what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean, but that ocean would be less without that drop.

—Mother Teresa (1910–1997)





BY JESSIE RICHARDS

AVOCADO

I ABSOLUTELY LOVE AVOCADO! Along with being delightfully delicious, it is a versatile fruit. Not to mention that it's outstandingly healthy—one of the best sources of natural oils and many vitamins.

In Chile, where I spent many of my growing-up years, avocados—called “palta” there—are abundant and are included in many local dishes, including a variety of salads, sandwiches, and even hot dogs. It always impressed me how adding a few slices of avocado to a salad, or a layer of guacamole to a burger or sandwich, could totally transform it—essentially turning “normal food” into something glorious. That’s how I feel about it anyway. Avocado is one of the staples of my

diet, and I find that it pairs well with almost everything. It’s even great on its own as a snack or small meal—slice in half, sprinkle on some salt and pepper, a squeeze of lemon, and perfection.

I think that the accomplishment of the avocado, as it were, insofar as its transforming power, is in a way representative of what active kindness and compassion add to our lives. There are a lot of things that we do in the course of our work or caring for our family or just being concerned citizens, that are good things, nice things, caring things, necessary things, but also things that become somewhat the “default.”

You know how when you see a sign all the time, it starts to feel like

wallpaper and you don’t really see it anymore? Sometimes, the things we do for those around us become like that. We aren’t particularly mindful when we do them, and the recipients aren’t particularly grateful for what we do. Or, sometimes it’s the things others do for us that fail to be properly noticed and acknowledged. Either way, when we go the extra mile and add a little “avocado” in the form of, say, a few words of welcome or appreciation, it makes a big difference.

Recently, I traveled home by bus after a few days’ visit in a nearby city. I’m an experienced traveler, and handle long trips pretty well, but naturally I always prefer when



We are constituted so that simple acts of kindness, such as giving to charity or expressing gratitude, have a positive effect on our long-term moods. The key to the happy life, it seems, is the good life: a life with sustained relationships, challenging work, and connections to community.—Paul Bloom (b. 1963), professor of psychology and cognitive science at Yale University



80/20

In 1906, Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto noted that 80% of Italy's land was owned by 20% of the people, then that 80% of the peas in his garden came from 20% of his pea plants. The Pareto Principle—that in general 80% of consequences stem from 20% of causes—has been observed and studied in sales and marketing, management, technology, economics, and other fields.

I end up with a free seat next to me rather than another person. I had settled into my seat, and the bus seemed nearly full, but nobody was beside me yet ... but, sure enough, a young man soon approached and asked if he could sit beside me. I said “Yes, please do,” and he smiled and replied, “Never in my life has someone replied with a ‘please do.’ That’s refreshing.” I try to make a point to be kind to strangers—strangers have been kind to me many a time—and it made me happy to have made a memory like that for someone.

He settled in to the seat, we started chatting, and had a pleasant conversation for a while before we both sank back into our devices and

earbuds to relax. There was a “warm and fuzzy” feeling in the air—so much better than that prickly feeling when you and your fellow passengers inevitably bump elbows on the tiny seat rest between the tiny seats. We didn’t have any of that. The journey was smooth and creamy, like avocado.

You’ve probably heard of the “Pareto Principle.” Also known as the 80/20 principle. The concept is that about 80% of one’s effectiveness is derived from about 20% of one’s efforts. I was thinking about that in relation to guess what—avocados. I feel, and this is purely personal opinion, that while they’re usually about 20% or less of the content of a meal, they are easily worth 80% of

the delicious. Bringing the thread back around to mindful and active kindness, I think it’s fair to say that when doing a “routine” helpful deed, if you add a few words and a personal touch, then that 20% of the effort is easily going to end up as 80% of what the other person remembers about the exchange.

JESSIE RICHARDS HAD A ROLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF *ACTIVATED* FROM 2001 TO 2012, AND HAS WRITTEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES AS AN *ACTIVATED* STAFF WRITER. SHE HAS ALSO WRITTEN AND EDITED MATERIAL FOR OTHER CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS AND WEBSITES. ■



BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

FRUITY LESSONS

I WAS RECENTLY FASCINATED to read how scientists learned how to make more effective waterproof products such as raincoats and airplane parts by studying the ridges on butterfly wings. It struck me that I also could learn something from nature, and I began researching fruit trees.

I found that each kind of fruit tree has its own requirements for soil, moisture, sunlight, and pollinator. It showed me that each project has to be studied on its own merits to find out what works in each situation. It behooves us to learn the lay of the land and study the situation in the area where we are embarking on our project. That's why new companies pay big bucks to consultants who can help them determine what will work in the area they are expanding into.

It takes patience to get a harvest—two to five years from seedling to fruit—and it takes about the same

amount of time to establish a new business. While the young fruit tree is growing, it needs protection from dangers such as harmful insect pests, climate extremes, drought, flooding, and too much or too little sunshine. The start of anything is the hardest. In the early stages of any endeavor, particular care and attention need to be given. But we can take heart, as things do get easier as the “tree” grows and gets established.

Now on to the sexy subject of pollination—plant reproduction. This is all about leaving a legacy for the next generation—lunch for the next bunch. Most farmers bring in bees to do the job of spreading the pollen, but there are other insects and birds that do the job as well. We, like the flower blossom, have to open to new opportunities. When the flower is just opening its bud, it has no assurance that it will ever be pollinated, but it is ready when the chance comes. In spring, the fruit tree puts forth its blossoms, inspiring picnics, poetry and song.

I found out there are two kinds of fruit trees—those that are self-pollinating (like apricots), and those that need an outside pollinator (like apples). But even among

1. See Psalm 1:3.
2. See Galatians 5:22–23.
3. <http://elixirmime.com>



the self-pollinating kind, a sweeter and healthier fruit can often be obtained through pollination from another source. This could be applied in the sense of getting help from others to make our project more fruitful. Those who try to do everything themselves are soon worn out and frustrated from the effort. It takes a team to make most endeavors effective.

Fruit growers pay particular attention to this part of the growing process by planting compatible trees next to ones they want to pollinate. Many growers plant crabapple trees nearby as their pollen is accepted by most apple trees. The crabapple is itself too bitter to eat, but it renders the other trees in the neighborhood sweet. The application could be that good ideas and fruitful results often come from unexpected sources or people—sometimes the opposite from what you would expect. Be ready for surprises!

My elderly Japanese neighbor asked me and a few friends to help him with his apricot trees. They were budding and small fruits were appearing. “When you see three buds coming out of a branch,” he instructed, “pluck two and throw them away.” At the time, it seemed like a

Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.
Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

—Psalm 1 NIV

waste, but the result was one large fruit instead of three small ones. That concept stuck with me. You can diversify too much. There’s a lot to say for concentrating on your main goal.

To be really fruitful, we need to be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth his fruit in his season.¹ We need to get our spiritual nourishment from the source. If we were a mobile phone battery, it would mean plugging into the power supply to get recharged. If we were a grapevine, it would mean putting our roots down into the fertile earth. As people, we need to draw strength and spiritual sustenance from our source—our Creator. We do this through taking time reading and meditating on His Word and through prayer. We then begin to bear the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control,² which make us truly effective in our endeavors.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST³ IN GERMANY. ■



THE

SEASONS

OF

LIFE

BY MARA HODLER



“THERE IS A TIME FOR EVERYTHING, and a season for every activity under the heavens.”¹

This is a big life lesson. It is really good news ... and not such great news at the same time. Regardless of how you may feel at the moment, what season of life you are currently living through, you can probably expect a change at some point, because, as we know, seasons come and go.

When King Solomon wrote the preceding scripture, he gave a lot of examples of the seasons and ways our lives can change:

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 from embracing

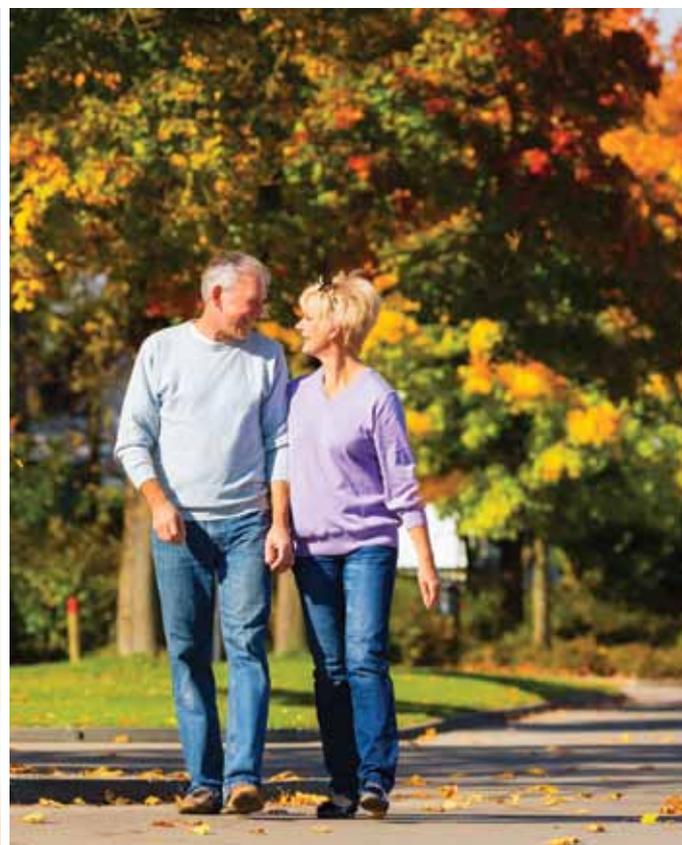
1. Ecclesiastes 3:1 NIV
2. Ecclesiastes 3:2–8 NIV
3. Ecclesiastes 3:11 NIV

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
A time to love and a time to hate
A time for war and a time for peace.²

One of the most beautiful promises in the Bible is given in the same chapter: “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”³

I like the part that says “no one can fathom.” When I was a teenager, I had so many plans and ideas of what I wanted my life to look like. Most of the ideas I had were good, or at least okay. I wasn’t (only) dreaming of being a celebrity or millionaire. I also wanted to be able to rush to anywhere in the world that needed help. I wanted to help orphans and wipe out poverty. If and when I had kids, I wanted to raise them in an African village where we all worked together to help a community thrive. That’s what I wanted. It really sounded like a good dream; it still does sometimes.

But God had a plan for me that I did not fathom.



I'm still watching that plan develop, but I've learned enough to know that God's design is so much more far-reaching than anything I could fathom. I've learned that God is present in both times of sowing and times of reaping. And something else I've come to realize is that both seasons are repeating.

A farmer plants his crops every spring and harvests them every fall. Each year. He doesn't get upset that he's planting again another year. He doesn't scream out in frustration, *I just did this last year! Why again?* In the fall when it's time to gather in the crops, he doesn't tell himself, *Yay! I'll never have to do that again!* The farmer knows the cycle will repeat every year, and he's okay with that.

In that way, we should all make peace with the seasons in our lives. There is a time to laugh, and a time to cry, a time to sow, and a time to reap, a time to give, and a time to receive. It's all gonna happen.

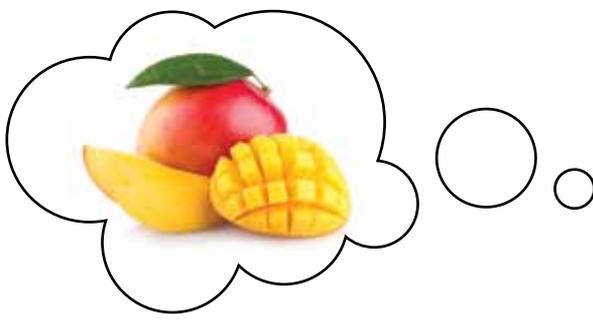
In Texas, where I live, the weather is crazy. One day you're in shorts. The next day you're pulling out your winter gear because there's a cold front coming through. On the blistering hot days, of which today is one, it's hard to remember that it also gets cold around here—even freezing cold.

It's the same with the seasons of life. When the sad times come, it's hard to remember that there's also a lot of happiness. When things disappoint, it's easy to forget about all the things that have worked out smoothly.

To God, one season isn't more precious than another. He can use each season in our lives to bring about His design. Sometimes I think that God is smiling on me when things are going great, and that a trial or misfortune means I have fallen out of His favor. But experience has taught me that this is not so. A great artist will use lovely, bright colors—reds, yellows, purples, and blues—to convey inspiration, but not without the contrasts of black, the muted grays, and the blurred whites.

We need to trust the Artist. His work speaks for itself, and time and again, He has proven that He does indeed make everything beautiful in His time. Each of our lives is no exception to the high and low seasons. And neither is it an exception to the promise that it will be beautiful in His time.

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. ■



BIRTHDAY MANGO

BY ANNA PERLINI

MY SON JONATHAN WAS BORN IN A SMALL INDIAN VILLAGE, during the time my husband and I were serving there as volunteers. Like many Indian kids, he grew up eating rice, dahl, chapatis, and the incredible, colorful variety of tropical fruit available at every street corner.

Although he wasn't yet five when we moved back to Europe, it took him a while to get adjusted to the new environment and particularly the new foods. At first, he looked very suspiciously at and dissected every bit of pasta on his plate. He had always been a slow eater, but he surely took his time to embrace Italian cuisine! Eventually, his memories of India and Indian food did fade. In those days, globalization hadn't quite kicked in yet, and the only produce available in Italian supermarkets was seasonal Italian produce.

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

However, passing by a newly opened delicacies store one day, I spotted a *mango*! It was quite expensive, but Jonathan's 11th birthday was just around the corner, and I thought it would be such a great treat for him to get to savor one of his favorite early childhood fruits.

I bought and packaged the mango, and invited my preteen son for a walk. Then we stopped on a bench and I solemnly presented my gift, telling him it would bring back memories from the past. Jonathan slowly opened the package and held the colorful mango in his hands for what seemed like a long time. No reaction.

"Mom, I really can't remember. Sorry."

I felt a bit disappointed. "Well, you should still try it. I promise you, you loved them when you were small." With the same suspicious look he'd given his first Italian dishes years before, Jonathan took a small

bite. Then another one, then more. Still, no reaction. Then ... the seed appeared, and Jonathan's eyes lit up.

"Mom, now I remember! I do! I remember how fun it was sucking on the seed!" And along with that memory, many more started rushing through this thinker of a boy. We talked and talked, reminiscing on other events and memories from the past.

From this episode with my son, I remember thinking how important it is to hold on just a bit longer when things don't seem to click or make sense. As a mother, it was another confirmation that whatever we sow in our children's youngest years will never be forgotten. It might seem like it is at times ... but wait till they get to the seed!

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,¹ A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■



A Meaningful LIFE

BY MAG RAYNE

MY GRANDMOTHER WASN'T A CAREER WOMAN. In fact, she only held a job for six years in her entire life. When she got married, she and my grandfather couldn't afford for both of them to be away studying for five years, so although she'd hoped to attend college, she remained at home with her husband's relatives, who unfortunately treated her quite harshly. She endured the separation and the unkind relatives patiently, with no complaint in her letters throughout the entire time.

My grandfather went on to have a successful career as a lawyer and judge, while Granny remained at home, taking care of children—first her own twins, then nieces, and finally grandchildren. I spent every summer, and a few school years as well, at my grandparents' home.

Now 93, Granny is still a source of wisdom, a pillar to lean on when one needs calm in this fast world, and a reminder of what is really important in life. She has been one of the greatest role models in my life, and though mostly confined to her apartment these days, she continues to live through me and each of the others whom her life has greatly influenced.

At times, I wonder if it is possible or worth all the effort to be an influence for good in this cruel world. Then I remember my granny's poise, joy, inner peace, and contentment and I decide to do my best. If I can bring her good teaching and example to life inside me, I can be a force for good as well.

MAG RAYNE RUNS A VOLUNTEER ASSOCIATION IN CROATIA. ■

I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.—*Jesus, John 15:5,8 CEB*

I pray that you will then be filled with the fruit of righteousness, which comes from Jesus Christ, in order to give glory and praise to God.
—*Philippians 1:11 CEB*

Knowing Jesus and filling your life with His Spirit is the best way to make each experience more meaningful and more fruitful. Ask Him to be with you from today to eternity:
Dear Jesus, please come into my life and help me to be a reflection of You and Your care and love to all I meet. Amen. ■



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Healthy Spiritual Life

What are the manifestations of a good, consistent walk with Me? It's not the amount of time spent in communion with Me—a “step a, step b, step c” system for our time together—that determines our closeness. To know if your relationship with Me is where it should be, you have to judge by the fruit, because a true, close walk with Me is reflected in the daily interactions that you have with others, the way you handle situations, what your priorities are, and the decisions you make.

When you spend quality time with Me, you can rest at peace that you are doing what you can, and you know that I will do the rest, according to My will. Despite any lacks or areas that you could do better in, you trust that I will carry you the rest of the way. You learn to recognize the areas where you need to improve, but you also recognize My ability to compensate for your lacks.