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Vol 17 • Issue 9

ROCKS TO ROADS

Surviving the avalanche

Paperclip Faith

Trade up!

Peaks And Valleys

The inside scoop



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BOULDERS AND BURDENS

In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was known as a master trickster and the most cunning of men. Eventually, the gods were so displeased with his craftiness and deceitfulness that they condemned him in the afterlife to push a huge boulder up a steep hill. The boulder was enchanted so that

Sisyphus has never been able to complete the task: whenever he nears the top, the boulder always rolls back down, over and over again, endlessly, for all eternity.

That's just a story, of course, but it's an impression we can relate to. Doesn't it sometimes feel like you are pushing a boulder up a hill, only to have it roll back down? Maybe it even rolls right over you on its way.

Fortunately, unlike Sisyphus, we have a way out of the discouraging cycle of expending a lot of effort with hardly any results to show, or getting stuck repeatedly in a difficult or unhealthy situation. The solution is found in God's Word: "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken."¹ "God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."²

The first verse instructs us to let God bear the weight of our burdens instead of letting them wear us down and out. It's a relief to know that we can depend on Him, but that doesn't mean God is going to magically solve all our problems. He often wants us to grow and learn through the things that come our way; that's where the second verse comes in.

Faith is what unlocks God's ability both to help us with our burdens now and bring us to victory in the future. We know that we will reach the top of the hill and be able to move on. Nothing like poor Sisyphus, after all.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Psalm 55:22 NIV
2. James 1:12 NLT

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MY JOURNALS

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

I WAS DOING SOME ORGANIZATION AND DEEP CLEANING OF MY BELONGINGS. This is the longest I have ever lived in the same house, and I've accumulated a lot of things. In the course of this, I came across a box filled with my old journals.

Let me explain. These weren't journals detailing events of my life. I made them to write down prayer requests and answers to prayer, Bible verses I was claiming, and most importantly, personal instruction I had received from Jesus during my times of meditation that gave me direction and helped me make choices. I hadn't opened the journals in years and had in fact almost tossed them out many times. They were all different sizes and shapes, and most were barely legible, since I am not known for my neat handwriting.

They were also reminders of some very challenging periods of my life, when a lot of things seemed to be going wrong. When I thought back on those times, I was very grateful to have made it through and I didn't even really want to wade through all those old trials and emotions.

But as I picked up the journals and began to read them, two things hit me over and over. Number one: God has always loved me and looked out for me, even when I was going through the darkest times in my life. And number two: He has always answered my prayers.

As I read through the journals, the difficulties of the past melted away, and all I saw revealed was God's loving care in my life, guiding me through very hard paths and decisions, and helping me keep my eyes on Him. Bible verses came alive, and I saw that even if I

didn't understand it at the time, God was answering my prayers and helping me through. Most of all, I realized that the faith I have today is based on all the lessons I learned during the most difficult times in my life.

If you're going through confusing or challenging times, I recommend writing down your thoughts. Write down your prayers. Write down the Bible verses you want to claim. Write down the words God gives you in your times of private prayer and keep them. You may not see your way through right now, but if you hold on to Him and trust His love and promises, He will see you through, and eventually you will understand and be grateful that you can look back at all He has done.

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

ROCKS TO ROADS



BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE TO LOOK AT WHAT'S AHEAD WITH SOME TREPIDATION. Maybe as you look back you see the struggles, uncertainty, and perhaps even setbacks that have shaken your life. Sorrows and disappointments that were pretty overwhelming may still weigh on your heart. That can make the future seem intimidating.

Here's the good news! In spite of all those things that can turn our lives upside down without warning, we have God's never-failing promises that He will be right there at our side to guide and empower us, and to bring His peace, comfort, and faith to fill our hearts.

He's there to help us carry on through the storms and struggles of life. He is with us to guide us to the hope and light of a new day with Him. He can even use the difficulties we encounter to strengthen us and help us move forward.

Here's the picture: Volleys of rocks are incessantly pelting you, raining

down on you. It feels like you've been hit by an avalanche. These rocks are the troubles and setbacks and discouraging events, the sufferings and sorrows that are a part of this life.

I think we've all faced those painful and potentially debilitating volleys of "rocks" of condemnation, depression, sorrow, or fear. The good news is, we don't have to let them cripple our future. How they affect our lives has so much to do with our attitude toward them. These "rocks" we're being hit with may be the result of distorted perceptions, misunderstandings, or wrong imaginings. Or they may be based on reality. But either way, we have a Savior who can help us dispel what isn't real, bring a greater good from the genuine difficulties, and help us through the challenges, so that we can grow wiser, stronger, and more like Him.

When we focus on the facts of God's promises and His love for us and our loved ones, these "projectiles" that threaten destruction will

instead fall, crushed on the ground at our feet, where the rains of His love can turn them into a solid path to help us on our way.

Have you ever seen crushed limestone? It looks like dusty gravel, but when it is spread over a dirt road, something amazing happens. The rains don't wash it away. Instead, the limestone reacts to the water by becoming a very hard surface, similar to cement, that turns the rut-prone dirt into a road that is highly resistant to water and erosion.

That's like the transformation God can bring about in our life. When we refuse to let our troubles defeat us and choose to bring them to Him, He can show us how to turn them into determination and greater faith.

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

FAITH DOES IT AGAIN!

BY IRIS RICHARD

WHEN I LOOK BACK AT THE CROSSROADS IN MY LIFE—times when things seemed to have taken a wrong turn or my plans and goals were dealt a severe blow—I realize that my faith played a major role and helped me to weather the adverse circumstances and challenges.

Since I've worked as a missionary for over 30 years, mostly doing community and volunteer service in foreign lands, faith has naturally been a driving force in my work and private life. I learned to trust that whatever the problem, there was light at the end of the tunnel and a ray of hope.

When my second baby was born two months premature with underdeveloped lungs and a weak heartbeat,

I was devastated. Doctors doubted his chances for a normal healthy life, and he was placed in an incubator for a month. The fear of losing my baby almost choked me, but as I clung to faith, he and I both made it through the long wait before his release from the hospital with the necessary weight gain and a clean bill of health.¹

When after 13 years of mission service in Southeast Asia, our assignment unexpectedly ended and our family, including three small children, was faced with starting all over again in a new land, faith gave us the courage and strength to wholeheartedly plunge into the unknown.²

The loss of a child to leukemia after a two-year stretch of chemotherapy in 2003 brought me to the brink of despair. Faith accompanied me on the road of suffering and loss until I could arrive at a better place.³

Feeling powerless to help a loved one's long struggle with drug

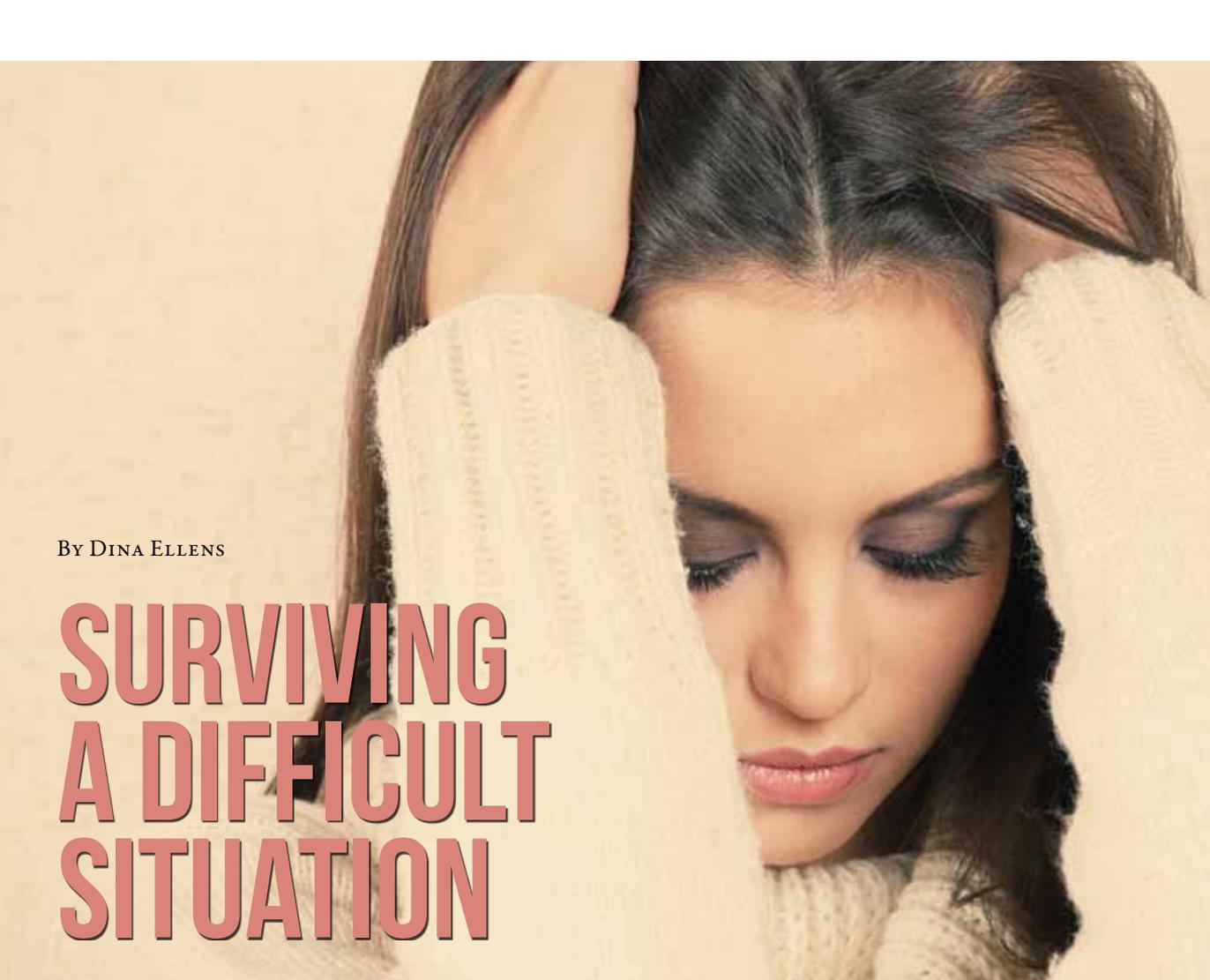
addiction, and witnessing the resulting problems in his marriage and professional life, was heartbreaking. Faith gave me hope when all seemed hopeless and strength to believe the battle could be won.⁴

Over the 21 years (and counting) that I have been working on the African continent, with all its insecurity and poverty, my faith has been a shield. It's given me courage and endurance to hang on during times when things don't make sense or when energy and resolve wear thin.⁵

Again and again, faith in God has made adverse circumstances manageable, happiness tangible, disappointments bearable, loss endurable, and given me the assurance that the sun will always shine again.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■

1. See Hebrews 11:1,6.
2. See Mark 9:23.
3. See Romans 8:18.
4. See 1 John 5:4.
5. See Romans 4:20–21.



BY DINA ELLENS

SURVIVING A DIFFICULT SITUATION

THOSE FIRST FEW MINUTES WHILE THE NEWS SANK IN WERE DEVASTATING. I felt like my whole world was caving in. Somehow I managed to stumble shakily out of my boss' office. His words kept reverberating in my head: "Due to the current situation, we're having to cut back. So we wanted to ask if you wouldn't mind accepting a cutback on your work hours for now."

Perhaps you've faced that kind of situation, too. Whether you had full-time employment to support a family or, as in my case, a part-time job

that was helping to supplement my income, either way, it's difficult news to swallow. What do you do? How do you pick up the pieces and go on? Here's what worked in my case.



1 Reminding myself constantly to stay positive. There was nothing I could do about my boss' decision, but I could decide how I was going to react to it. Each time I was tempted to start getting discouraged or depressed, I would yank myself back to positive ground. It wasn't easy, but I forced myself to keep at it.

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1. Jeremiah 29:11 ESV
 2. Romans 8:28,31 ESV
 3. Psalm 31:21 NIV
 4. Matthew 6:34 NIV
 5. John 16:33 NIV



2 Remembering that no matter what the circumstances, God was on my side. He loves me and His love hadn't changed. My outward circumstances had changed, but I still had the same solid ground of God's steadfast love to stand on.

I kept that in the forefront of my mind by reading the Bible and letting God speak to me through it. These were some Bible verses that helped me: "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."¹ "We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"² "Blessed be the Lord, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city."³

3 Listening to uplifting Christian songs, such as "You Lift Us Up" by Paul Baloche and "Come to Me" by Jenn Johnson. These songs and others are available on YouTube and helped fill my mind with good thoughts.



4 Having sincere friends who listened sympathetically, heard me out, and prayed for me. Having those friends helped me appreciate the fact that I had someone to go to in times like this. Some walls and distance had grown up between us due to my being so busy. These all came down as I humbled myself and showed myself emotionally needy. As a result, we got closer through this experience.



5 Taking things one day at a time, as Jesus said: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."⁴ Instead of trying to figure out the whole future and where I was going from here, I tried to set myself one or two goals to accomplish each day. As I took care of those, I felt encouraged, knowing that I was taking care of some "to-dos" that I'd put off for a long time.



6 Counting my blessings more often and learning to see more clearly all the many ways that I was blessed. Even very little things I'd taken for granted lifted my heart and lightened my step.



7 Last, but most important, keeping my connection with Jesus strong. He said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."⁵ I figured the more time I spent with Him, the more of an overcomer I'd become.

Day by day, as I put these tips into action, things got better. Even though my circumstances didn't change, what did happen is that I got a better outlook on my situation because of being more positive and praiseful.

During the hours of work I still had, I continued to do the best I could, putting my whole heart into it. Sometimes it meant doing things I'd never done before—like going to the wholesalers' area in town and hunting for décor items. And then figuring out how to fashion the woven rattan baskets, pumpkins, and artificial maple leaves into an attractive autumn décor.

After about a month, I was given my full hours at work again. As you can imagine, I was very happy and relieved. But although my situation changed for the better, the tips I just shared are staying with me. If my circumstances change again—and I'm sure they will—I now have something solid to fall back on for those dark hours when my world seems to cave in.

DINA ELLENS LIVES IN WEST JAVA, INDONESIA, WHERE SHE IS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK. ■



PAPERCLIP FAITH

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

DID YOU EVER HEAR ABOUT THE YOUNG MAN NAMED KYLE MACDONALD who traded a paperclip for one item after the other until he was able to get his own house? Surprisingly, it only took him 14 trades to achieve his goal one year after he started. His journey was: clip to pen, to doorknob, to stove, to generator, to keg of beer, to snowmobile, to trip to Yahk, to panel truck, to recording contract, to one-year rent of an apartment in Phoenix, to an afternoon with Alice Cooper, to a motorized snow globe, to a speaking role in a movie, to a house in Kipling, Sk., Canada.

Kyle said, “I embarked on an adventure and that paperclip symbolically held it together, and it was really easy to remember.” Jesus often used such object lessons when

1. <http://elixirmime.com>

He told us that the kingdom of God was like a pearl, door, seed, bread, water, treasure, fruitful tree, vine, just to mention a few. In the same way as Kyle used the paperclip as a point of focus for his idea, I thought we could use his story by applying some of its concepts to our life of faith.

Kyle was inspired by a childhood bartering game called “Bigger and Better.” He wondered if it would be possible to take the idea of this game and bring it to life. Instead of playing with game pieces, he would trade real objects until he owned a house. Lots of the greatest discoveries and innovations in history were about making connections, applying one idea to another. Often, this involves connecting the imaginary with the real—first you have to conceive the idea before you can begin to reach for it.

What kept Kyle going throughout that year of trading from paperclip to

house? One was the fun factor. Kyle said he was jazzed on his journey to get what he wanted; he loved every minute of it. Enjoying what we do, seeing it as a step to a greater end, helps greatly in seeing our vision come to fruition.

Kyle looked down on his desk and saw one red paperclip and thought he’d start his adventure with that. We have to begin with the little that we have before we can get to where we want to be. Kyle asked himself, *What is one red paperclip worth?* We should ask the same questions: *What is the potential of this idea? What can it lead to? What steps can I take to get closer to that goal?*

Jesus encouraged us to have crazy faith when He said that if we have even just a little faith—even as small as a seed—we can move mountains of obstacles. Moses had the same thing happen to him when God told him to take a better look at what was in his hand, which was just a wooden rod

that he used to part the Red Sea and free his people from slavery.

The red paperclip story is a lot about putting ideas into action. It is easy to just blow off an idea when we get it, dismissing it as insignificant, but once we take the time and find out it is what we should do, we should not give up while we are

granting people their wishes. He was giving something to others that they could benefit from. He was connecting people who no longer needed something with someone who did.

In our dealings with others, we should look deeper than outward

which is what he had set out to do. If we're not satisfied with second-best, we're giving God the opportunity to actually deliver on what He has promised. Kyle's story is a good example of seeing the possibilities that others would miss. It makes me wonder what opportunities I've missed because of my lack of faith or vision, what waters I could have walked on, what mountains I could have moved, what rivers I could have crossed if I'd had more faith. Certainly, hearing stories like Kyle's gives us a precedent and example that the seemingly impossible is within our grasp.

Having faith for an idea that comes to fruition inspires others. Kyle remarked, "There are people all over the world that are saying that they have paperclips clipped to the top of their computer, or on their desk or on their shirt, and it proves that anything is possible, and I think to a certain degree it's true." MacDonald said the journey had turned out to be more exciting than the goal. "This is not the end. This may be the end of this segment of the story, but this story will go on," he said. He is now inspiring others as a motivational speaker and has spoken to over 50,000 people on four continents.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST¹ IN GERMANY. ■

struggling to develop it. It is essential to stick to the plan till the end.

When we get an inspiration, it may be God speaking to us to get us going in the direction He wants us to go. Just as Kyle recognized his "Aha!" moment as a worthwhile idea, so can we. When inspiration strikes, we need to capture the lightning in a bottle for future use.

Kyle soon found that he was doing more than just trading objects; he was

appearances to find out what the person really needs. Achieving what you set out to do is more than acquiring wealth and objects; it is more about developing warm relationships with the people you meet along the way.

Near the end of his trading, Kyle got a year's rent of a house. Some people said he could stop then as he had a house, but he wasn't fully satisfied because it wasn't his own house,



The Sign

BY SHARON GALAMBOS

I MUST CONFESS THAT I HAVE NEVER BEEN ONE WHO COULD EASILY BELIEVE IN MIRACULOUS FORMS OF HEALING. In fact, I prided myself a bit on being “rational,” “logical,” of which skepticism was an integral part. Perhaps it was also because of feeling that what happens to us is just part of the big game plan—our destiny. I think that I too, like the Jews demanded of Jesus, “required a sign.”

Health is something which is easy to take for granted, as long as we’re feeling fine. It’s not until something happens to us that we hit that reality check button, seemingly for the first time, no matter how many times we’ve had to hit that same button in the past.

At one point in my career, while working as a teacher in a volunteer mission community, I had the fun experience of sharing living quarters in an attic with another missionary volunteer from England. It was great, except for the fact that we couldn’t straighten up in our quarters; we had to crouch and stoop to get around. I didn’t mind too much, since we mostly used the space for sleeping.

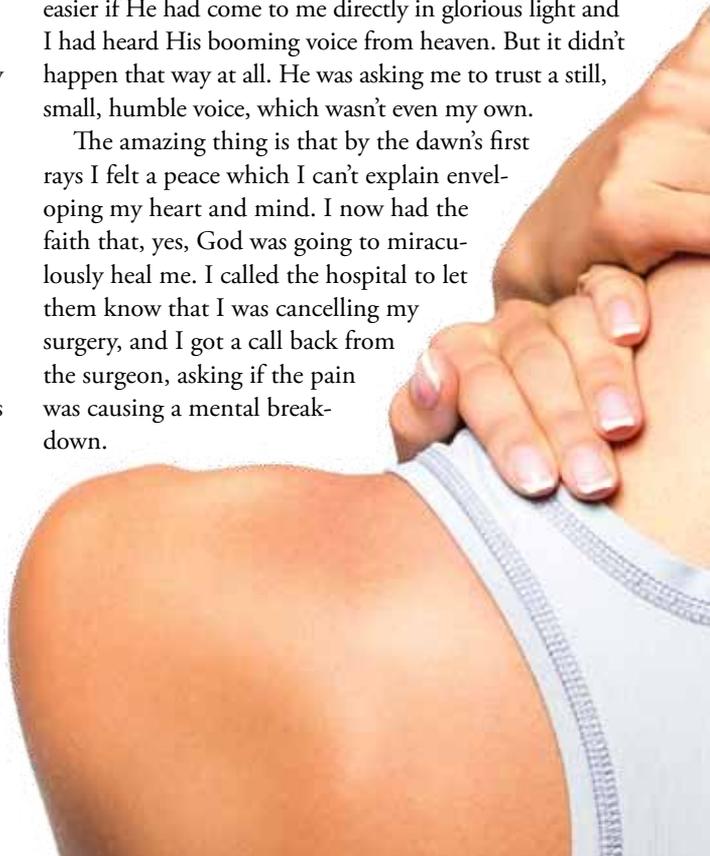
However, over time I began to notice pain and stiffness in my neck, like when one sleeps in a wrong position. That happens to everyone once in a while, but this was a pain that didn’t go away. Rather, it kept intensifying to the point of becoming unbearable. X-rays showed nothing, but I knew there was something really wrong.

A friend suggested that I go to a chiropractic doctor, and he sent me to get a CAT scan. I still remember sitting face to face with him as he tried to gently explain that I had a herniated disc between two vertebrae of my neck, through which were passing some nerves. An

abrupt movement could cause a severing of those nerves, leaving me paralyzed. One option was surgery to correct the damage and fit a bone patch from my hip onto my neck, immobilizing it and leaving me unable to turn my neck, with the further downside that surgery wasn’t a 100% bet for permanent success. The other option remained excruciating pain and potential paralysis at any moment. I chose the surgery, which the head of the neurosurgery hospital himself agreed to perform.

Everything was ready and taking its logical course. The night before the surgery, my friends and colleagues gathered to pray for me. During the prayer, someone received a message from God that He would heal me completely without the surgery. Whoa, that definitely did not fall into the “logical course” pattern! Needless to say, I spent a sleepless night, wrestling with God about it. It would have been easier if He had come to me directly in glorious light and I had heard His booming voice from heaven. But it didn’t happen that way at all. He was asking me to trust a still, small, humble voice, which wasn’t even my own.

The amazing thing is that by the dawn’s first rays I felt a peace which I can’t explain enveloping my heart and mind. I now had the faith that, yes, God was going to miraculously heal me. I called the hospital to let them know that I was cancelling my surgery, and I got a call back from the surgeon, asking if the pain was causing a mental breakdown.



He was absolutely sure that I had gone off my rocker, especially when I could only answer: “God said that He’s going to heal me.”

The next challenge I had to face was the pain. Up to this point I had been going for painkiller injections every six hours. This time I heard God’s voice myself, in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone, mentioning that if I had the faith to trust Him for the healing, I should also have the faith to trust Him for the pain. I didn’t go for my next injection.

I was not instantly healed and delivered from pain. Somehow, though, I was miraculously given the grace and the strength to endure the next few months. I do know that gradually the pain did subside and little by little I was able to move my head and even turn it to both sides. The healing process continued until I was leading a normal life again. Wait a minute! Normal? What if the condition was still present, just to a lesser extent, and if I jolted my neck, the nerves would snap? Those little doubts began to plague me, and I found myself being extra cautious in my movements.

Logic kicked in: another CAT scan should provide information either way. Lo and behold, the second CAT scan showed absolutely nothing, like there had never been any problem at all! Was that first CAT scan really me? I was in ecstasy!

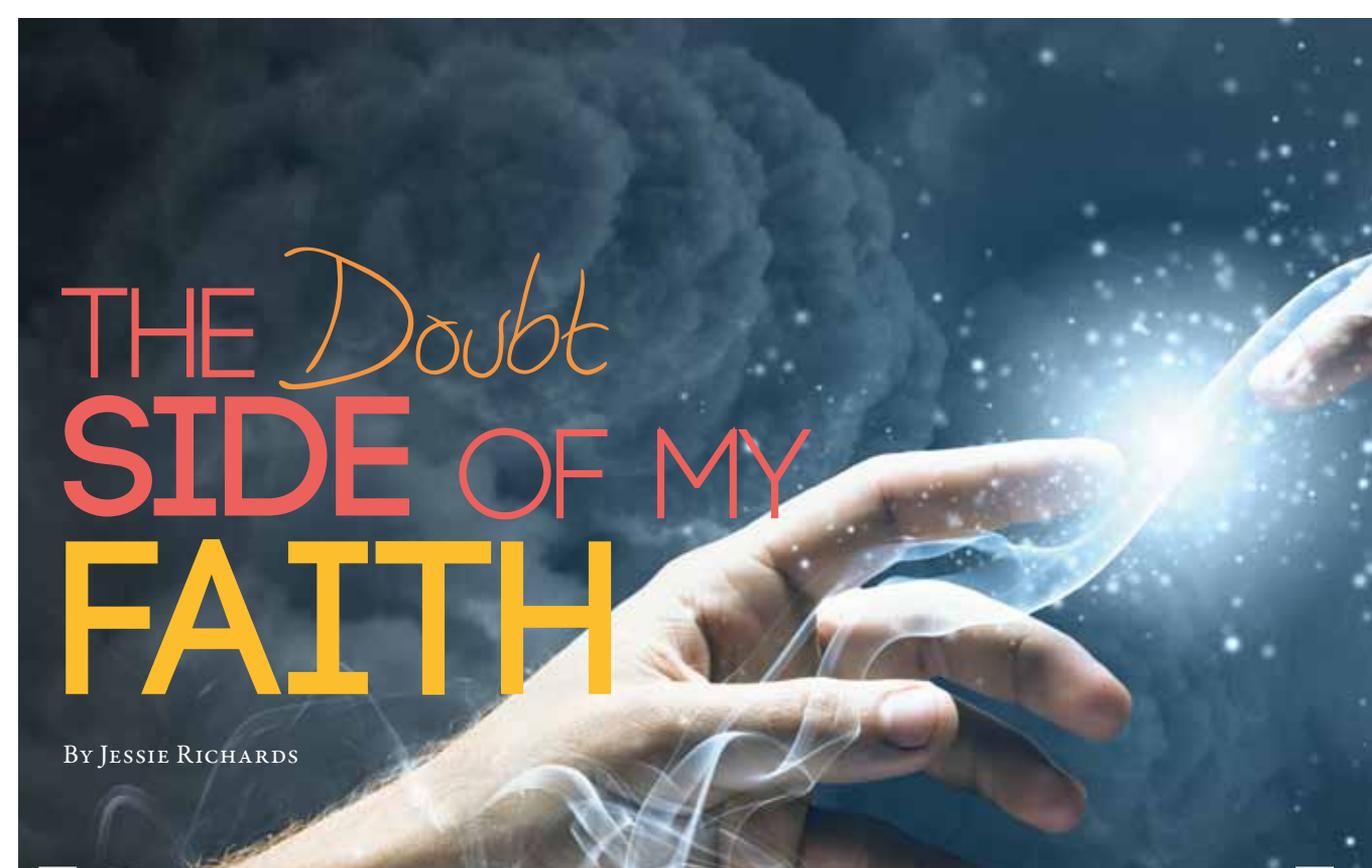
The first person I wanted to show the scan to was the surgeon. I showed up at his office and placed the scan in front of him. With a playful smile, I asked, “What do you have to say about this?”

He studied it for a long time, then looked at me and replied, “You know I’m an atheist. From that point of view, my answer would be that this is a phenomenon that could possibly happen, though extremely rarely, perhaps once in a million times. However, from what my eyes are seeing, I have to concur that this is a miracle.”

As for the final outcome, I have not had the surgery in the many years since, and every day when I move my head or stretch, I smile as I realize once again that I am my own sign—a sign that God can do miracles.

SHARON GALAMBOS IS A MISSIONARY, TEACHER, AND AUTHOR OF RESILIENCE STORIES FOR CHILDREN. SHE WORKS WITH CHILDREN WHO SUFFER FROM TRAUMA. ■



A hand is shown holding a glowing, translucent blue orb that emits a bright light. The background is a dark, starry night sky with soft, wispy clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and ethereal.

THE Doubt SIDE OF MY FAITH

BY JESSIE RICHARDS

I GREW UP THINKING THAT “FAITH” AND “DOUBT” WERE OPPOSITES. Faith was good. Doubt was bad. With that mindset even questions could be dangerous, as I figured they could lead to doubt. For an intellectually curious person, that is a difficult thing to deal with, and I struggled with it for most of my rememberable life. The questions I used to resist ranged from wondering whether God really cared that much about X or Y specific rule mentioned in the Bible, sometimes vaguely or heavily interpreted, to that large and ever-present question: Does God exist?

At one point, I had what seemed to me a revelation, and which I have since learned to be something many people of faith agree on: Doubt is not the enemy of faith, but can in fact make it stronger. Answers need questions as much as questions need answers.

The way I see it, when you are a person of faith and you question your faith, one of two things happens: either you lose said faith—in which case it was probably not real or strong enough to begin with—or, you find that despite the inner struggles, despite the sadness, despite the

unexplainable or unanswerable, your faith remains. The latter is what happened to me when I let myself explore my doubts.

I often find myself frustrated at the need many of us often have to make things “either/or” and to put everything in a box, from ethnicities to religions to God Himself. We feel the need for a conclusive answer. Right or wrong. Black or white. Faith or reason. Science or God. I think there are very few things in life that are so simple. I also think the whole point of God and faith is that it is something beyond our “boxes” and something we cannot be conclusive about.

In the end, what we are left with is a choice of faith. I choose to have faith, to believe that there is a God, and that being connected to His Higher Power makes me a better human being. Wanting to be the best person I am capable of being is in itself enough reason for faith. My faith may not be “traditional,” and sometimes I miss that sense of simplistic confidence that I used to have. In its place, however, I have instead gained awareness, humility, and openness that I hope will never go away. I’m hungry



To seek truth requires one to ask the right questions. Those void of truth never ask about anything because their ego and arrogance prevent them from doing so. Therefore, they will always remain ignorant. Those on the right path to Truth are extremely heart-driven and childlike in their quest, always asking questions, always wanting to understand and know everything—and are not afraid to admit they don't know something. However, every truth seeker does need to break-down their ego first to see Truth. If the mind is in the way, the heart won't see anything.—*Suzy Kassem (b. 1975)*

to learn, because I know that there is so much I do not know.

It follows that if there is a God, and if the Bible is His Word, then the two things that He has said matter most are: Love God and love your neighbor. Those are things that I should do, can do, and will do. Following the primary commandments and being loving and kind, tolerant and forgiving toward one another—as fellow human beings, made in God's image, each of intrinsic and immeasurable worth—is of much greater significance to me than trying to figure out what opinions and preferences God might have regarding specific things about my lifestyle and personal choices, or those of my loved ones, or of humanity in general.

Over breakfast one morning, I was reading Hebrews 11, “the faith chapter,” and came to verse 6: “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

I used to see that verse as saying that “if you doubt, you displease God.” Now I read it quite differently.

There are only two things it says I need to do in order to have faith and please God: 1) Believe that He is, and 2) believe that He rewards those who “diligently seek Him.” I believe that He is, and I have diligently sought Him—the questions and doubts were a necessary part of that “diligent seeking.” I have found peace in knowing that I'll never have all the answers, and that's okay. That's a part of faith. Greatest of all, He rewards me with His presence. I know there's no way of explaining that to someone who doesn't have faith, but I know that I know Him, and that knowing Him is pure joy.

While I can't say that my faith is stronger than before I started on my journey of doubt, I can say this: I have thrown every doubt at my faith, and my faith is still here.

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. ■



THOUGHTS TO PONDER

ASKING QUESTIONS

FAITH IS A REASONING TRUST, a trust which reckons thoughtfully and confidently upon the trustworthiness of God.—*John Stott (b. 1921)*

Doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith.—*Paul Tillich (1886–1965)*

Doubts are the ants in the pants of faith. They keep it awake and moving.—*Frederick Buechner (b. 1926)*

The relationship between commitment and doubt is by no means an antagonistic one. Commitment is healthiest when it is not without doubt, but in spite of doubt.—*Rollo May (1909–1994)*

The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. You must leave room for the Lord, not for our certainties; we must be humble.—*Pope Francis (b. 1936)*

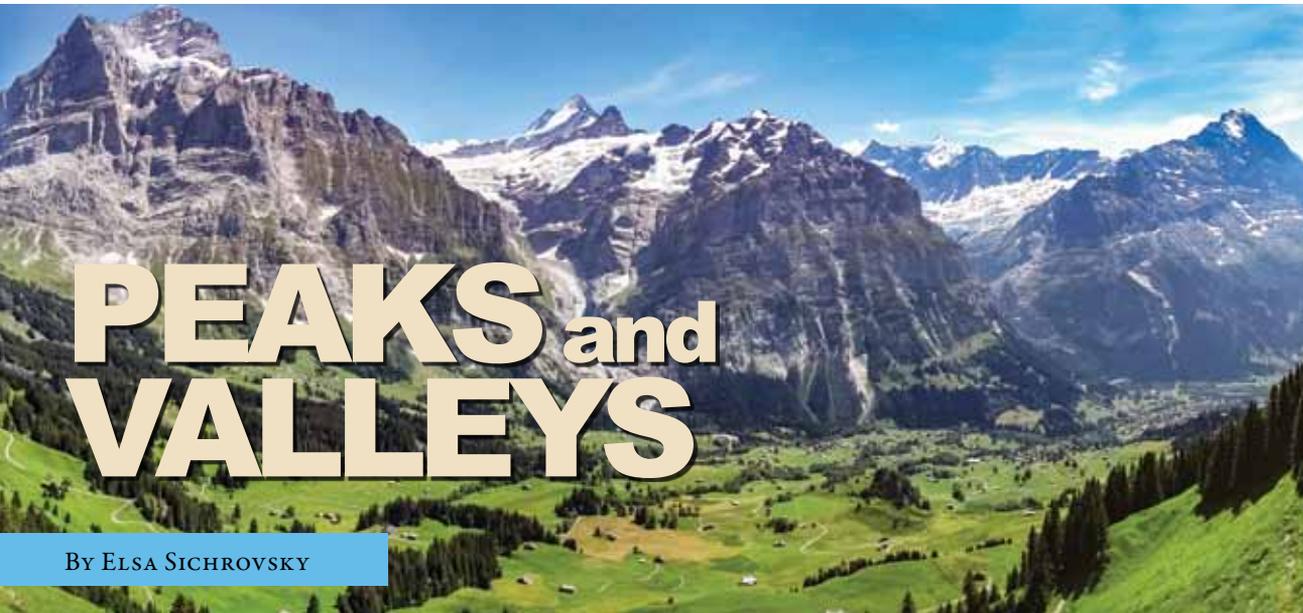
Sometimes doubting is not a lack of faith, but an expression of it. Sometimes to doubt is to merely insist that God be taken seriously not frivolously, to insist that our faith is placed in and upheld by something other than seeming conjuring tricks.—*Mark Buchanan (b. 1960)*

I think there is no suffering greater than what is caused by the doubts of those who want to believe. I know what torment this is, but I can only see it, in myself anyway, as the process by which faith is deepened. A faith that just accepts is a child's faith and all right for children, but eventually you have to grow religiously as every other way. ... If you feel you can't believe, you must at least do this: keep an open mind. Keep it open toward faith, keep wanting it, keep asking for it, and leave the rest to God.—*Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964)*

For many people in our world, the opposite of faith is doubt. The goal, then, within this understanding, is to eliminate doubt. But faith and doubt aren't opposites. Doubt is often a sign that your faith has a pulse, that it's alive and well and exploring and searching. Faith and doubt ... are, it turns out, excellent dance partners.—*Rob Bell (b. 1970)*

You can't stand effectively on "blind" faith. You must have a "knowing" faith, and that comes from believing wholeheartedly what the Word promises. You know God has spoken it and declared it to be so, and you know you can depend on that.—*Gloria Copeland (b. 1942)*

For many of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it.—*John Ortberg (b. 1957)* ■



PEAKS and VALLEYS

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

I RECENTLY READ C. S. LEWIS' NOVEL *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*, which chronicles a fictional correspondence between a senior devil named Screwtape and a junior devil named Wormwood. These letters include fascinating insight into Satan's strategies for sabotaging my spiritual growth, relationship with God, and interactions with others. One of the letters explores the ups and downs of the human experience, what I call the "peaks and valleys."

In this letter, the devils are discussing the period of "dryness and dullness" that Wormwood's charge is experiencing. Screwtape warns that God intends to use this time to strengthen the young man's faith and advises Wormwood to ensure that the young man does not become aware of the normalcy of valleys but instead becomes convinced that his languid, depressed feelings are a permanent condition. As I read, I

1. 2 Corinthians 5:7 NIV

reflected on my personal peak-and-valley cycle and what I have learned from my valleys.

I have certainly enjoyed "peaks" in my life: periods of success in my work, progress in my studies, friendships, health, joyful communion with Jesus, and inspiring Bible reading. But I have also experienced "valleys," such as the one I struggled through just recently. It started with a major setback in my work, followed by problems in my studies, conflicts and strained communication with loved ones, and finally a bout of illness. I found myself at an all-time low, with no inspiration to read my Bible or even pray.

My valley seemed to stretch on endlessly, swallowing me in its dark emptiness and blanketing me in despair. I felt as if God had packed His bags and disappeared. I pled for Him to be near, to pull me through my troubles, and to let me feel His presence, but He seemed distant and silent. *What is happening? What have I done wrong?* I wondered desperately.

I tried to use willpower and effort to re-create the excitement and spiritual high I had enjoyed during my peaks, but this only left me exhausted and more discouraged. It finally dawned on me that faith cannot be measured by feelings, for as Paul says, "We live by faith, not by sight."¹ Focusing on my changeable and often negative emotions only plunged me deeper into my doubts and made my trials more difficult to bear.

Reading *The Screwtape Letters* confirmed what I had discovered in my valley. My struggles were not indications that I had failed God or that He had abandoned me. Rather, they are painful yet normal parts of human experience in a fallen world. It felt as if I would remain in my misery forever, but I found that all valleys end in God's time, and I emerged with renewed faith in His grace and love.

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



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

A PLACE OF REFUGE

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.”¹

When the storms blow about you and you are tossed and buffeted and carried to and fro with the winds of tribulation, adversity, and difficulty, come into My place of refuge until these calamities have passed. Rest your head upon My shoulder and see how I will care for you.

This is the refuge that I have promised you—the solace in My love, the peace that flows from My heart to yours, that fills you and envelops you and transports your spirit to the heavenly realm, where you see things with new eyes. You experience new thoughts and new understanding that you never had before.

In those quiet moments when we commune together, I can change your perspective. I can give you new ideas and new thoughts. I can plant little seeds in your heart and mind, which over time and with careful watering of My Word can grow into strong trees that bear much fruit.

1. Proverbs 18:10 NIV