

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 19 • Issue 6

I'M GOD'S CELEBRITY

And so are you!

Practicing Empathy

Do you build walls or
circles?

Paying it Forward

A trail of loving deeds





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION COMPELLED AND PROPELLED

I'm sure most of us would look at Mother Teresa and people like her and think we could never be like that; we could never be so saintly or make such a difference in the lives of so many. Maybe not, but the tragedy is that because so many don't think they can, they don't even try.

But Mother Teresa didn't set out to become a saint or a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. And she didn't start out ministering to multitudes of the poorest of the poor. She just saw the need nearest to her and responded.

God is in the business of using ordinary people in ordinary circumstances to show extraordinary love. It all comes down to Jesus' rule for living, which He expressed a little differently on a couple of different occasions: love God foremost and love others as much as we love ourselves,¹ and treat others the way we want to be treated.² If we try to live that way, one decision, one action, one conversation at a time, it won't change the whole world overnight, but it will change *our* worlds—our own lives and the lives we touch.

The apostle Paul, in explaining the life of service that he and other early Christians had adopted, said, "The love of Christ compels us."³ That same love can also propel us. The more we put God's love to use, the more it grows, the more it becomes a part of our reactions, and the more it is seen in our actions. This was the secret to Paul's success, and Mother Teresa's—and it can be ours.

This issue of *Activated* is dedicated to all those who daily give unselfishly of themselves for the love of Christ's sake. Though you may be unsung in the world today, God knows and sees.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. See Matthew 22:37–40.
2. See Matthew 7:12.
3. 2 Corinthians 5:14

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Though our feelings
come and go, God's love
for us does not.
—C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

A BIG BROTHER

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

ONE DAY WHEN I WAS NINE, my older brother and I went for a swim. I hadn't yet learned how to swim properly and could only do a little dog-paddling and floating on my back. My older brother was an excellent swimmer, which was why my parents had sent him along to keep an eye on me. He and I had argued that morning over something I can't even remember, so I was annoyed that my parents insisted on him being there. I was determined to do my own thing and insisted on swimming laps by myself.

I started from the pool's shallow end, and was floating along on my back for a while until it suddenly struck me that I might be nearing the end of the pool, and I worried about bumping my head on the

pool wall. Thinking that I was just centimeters away from the edge, I flipped over. In fact I'd only reached about three-fourths of the pool's length, but I already couldn't reach the bottom. I panicked and started thrashing about wildly, which only served to get more water into my nose and mouth. Choking and struggling desperately, I felt two arms around my waist lifting me above water and taking me poolside.

"Are you okay?" my brother asked. I muttered something while sputtering out pool water, feeling embarrassed and expecting him to chide me. Instead, he quietly waited until I calmed down and then brought me home.

Looking back, my older brother and I weren't particularly close. We squabbled over the smallest issues,

like who had gotten a thicker slice of toast for breakfast. But the day he rescued me in the pool showed the strength of our sibling bond. In spite of all our differences, at the moment when I most needed him, he was at my side.

My brother's love also served as an illustration of how Jesus, my spiritual Big Brother, is my ever-present help in time of trouble. Even when I turn away from Him in my pride and stubbornness, and argue with Him about His ways of working in my life, He doesn't let my haughty pretensions of independence keep Him from putting His arms around me during times of danger and stress.

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

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED



PERCEPTIONS

WHEN I FEEL A SENSE OF WEARINESS CREEP IN, because the queue of deadlines seems to be getting a little too long, I find it helpful to occasionally stop for a few minutes and allow my mind and heart to relax.

Sometimes I'll step outside onto the balcony or I'll sit in my chair near the large glass doors and give my sore eyes a break by looking out at the beauties that fill my view. From my vantage point, the scene is one of abundant trees and overgrown fields, with mountains rising in the distance. The dense clusters of trees have a deep green hue that has a soothing effect just from looking at it.

I imagine the birds must think the same thing, because everywhere around the house teems with birds of different types and sizes and colors. The bright yellow birds are my favorite. They're not only beautiful to look at, but they also have a strong, cheerful song.

As long as I focus on the distant beauties, it's nearly impossible to feel anything but inspiration. Unfortunately, like life, all isn't perfect when I focus in closer. Heavy black and gray cables slash through the beautiful scene just feet from the balcony like ugly strikethrough lines across a framed picture. They try to capture my attention as if attempting to mar the beauty of this perfect gift. Across the little street below, a small house is topped with a large satellite dish, and an old, unused concrete light pole stands askew in the middle of the scene with its upper section missing and spikes of rusty rebar shooting out of its top at all angles. It seems



to serve no purpose other than to interfere with nature's color and design.

I was trying to relax during one of these pause times, but instead found myself looking a bit too much at the drawbacks of this otherwise beautiful scene when God began to chide me in His special way through a little skit, with His creatures as the main performers. As I watched, a bit put off by the less-than-inspiring additions to the setting before me, my favorite yellow bird landed on the wires just a few feet from the edge of the balcony and began to sing me his choice little tune.

All of a sudden, those wires lost their ugliness, because it struck me that if it hadn't been for them, this little angelic encourager

wouldn't have been there singing to me. As I began to relax, a pair of radiantly red birds perched themselves on the satellite dish. They looked so comfortable and peaceful, and they stayed there for a long time, giving me a chance to enjoy their little interactions with each other. They seemed to be communicating so enthusiastically that I could almost imagine them discussing the events of the day. My focus and enjoyment in observing them seemed to make the ugliness of the antenna melt away as it became a stage for this cheerful interlude.

Then the crowning event unfolded as dark clouds began to quickly roll in. I expected the little show was

Jesus' love is *perfect*. There are a lot of things that are nice, beautiful, and wonderful, but nothing is perfect like His love. We live in an imperfect world, with imperfect humans, in imperfect conditions, but His love makes it possible for us to weather everything that comes our way.

Jesus' love is *free*. That's a good thing, too, because we all sin and make mistakes. If we had to earn Jesus' love, none of us would have it.

Jesus' love is *everlasting*. It can't be stolen or forfeited. It doesn't get old with the times or go out of style. It is traditional and historic, but also modern and current. It is always. He has loved us from the very beginning of time, and He will love us throughout eternity.

—*Maria Fontaine*

over, but I was about to see that it had just begun. As the rain began to pour down, an entire chorus line of swallows and sparrows accompanied by my yellow encourager and several red birds began gathering all along the black wires. They were chattering happily in the rain, letting it wash off the dust and dirt of life, as they playfully hopped and cheeped like a bunch of little children playing in a sprinkler.

The downpour only lasted a few minutes. As the sun began to peek out again from behind the black clouds, I looked on my special view in a way that I hadn't before. It struck me that so much about what we face in life, especially in the short term and up close in hectic times, can look so ugly and seem to be ruining our view of the hopes and dreams of the more distant future. But so much can change if we let God show us how those seemingly ugly things that get so in-our-face at the moment can at times be the avenues for the blessings and beauty and awe that He wants to bring into our life. If we could only remember that they are just the stage being built, on which He can give His most precious treasures of joy and hope and the reminder that there is beauty in everything He sets before us.

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

THE FORGIVENESS CHAIN

BY ANNA PERLINI



I'VE ALWAYS BEEN IMPRESSED BY PEOPLE WHO CAN FORGIVE. When I was a kid, it was that friend at school who didn't get back at others when they made fun of his awkward ways and pimply face. Later on, I had to learn to forgive when my boyfriend left me for no apparent reason and without explanation. Then followed marriage, which offered endless opportunities to forgive and be forgiven. Working as part of a team has also been a good platform to practice forgiveness.

The truth is, I'm quite easygoing and generally prefer to live and let live rather than get into confrontations and feel resentful. But could I

forgive someone who killed one of my loved ones? Or if I was unjustly detained in jail for years? Or if war had destroyed my house and my city, and I had to flee and become a refugee—and then be looked upon suspiciously by most people?

I don't know.

It's good to know that mankind has seen such forgiving people, who can stand as beacons of hope. From Jesus to countless missionaries and activists, to the Amish parents who forgave and helped the family of the man who killed their kids,¹ to the more recent example of Father Boules George following the two bombings in Tanta and Alexandria, Egypt, that left 44 Christians dead and more than 100 wounded on Palm Sunday 2017. His sermon expressed forgiveness for those who killed the victims and a call for believers to pray for them to see the light and experience God's unconditional love.²

It never ceases to amaze me how alongside such cruel people who commit such heinous crimes, there are individuals who are capable of forgiveness that seems to defy logic. Hate begets hate, but love begets love, and God's love has the power to initiate a cycle of love, instead of death.

I believe the process often starts with small steps of forgiveness, starting within a family or a circle of friends and coworkers. This can seem unimportant compared to the big problems the world faces, the wars, the fights politicians carry on, etc. But it actually starts right here, with us. It starts with our personal lives and the choices we make each day.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,³ A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■

1. See <https://lancasterpa.com/amish/amish-forgiveness/>.
2. See <http://scoopempire.com/father-boules-george-sends-incredibly-humane-message-to-terrorists/>.
3. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>



Though your sins have burned you black, I will make you clean and sparkling again. Though you feel charred and ruined, I can give you a new life.—Isaiah 1:18, paraphrased

THE BURNT SAUCEPAN

BY EVELYN SICHROVSKY

NOT EVEN THE DARK CLOUDS AND GUSTS OF THE ICY WIND OUTSIDE seemed as bleak and cold as my heart. As I pulled a saucepan from the cupboard, measured water and dried beans into it, and turned on the stove, my mind wandered, retracing the events of the previous weeks and months.

Two hours later, a sudden whiff carried down the hall caught my attention: smoke! I ran to the kitchen. Black clouds billowed, and the saucepan lid was rattling under the pressure. I quickly turned off the stove, grabbed the saucepan, put it in the sink, and turned on the faucet. Water sizzled as I lifted the lid.

The entire pan had been burnt coal black, and there was nothing left of the dried beans but a smoldering

melted lump. Even the lid had been charred. I'd burnt many pots before, but never so badly. *It's ruined!* I thought. *There's no hope in trying to scrub it.*

Standing there surrounded by the smoke and steam, I couldn't help seeing a resemblance to my life at the time: a burnt, blackened mess. *It's ruined! There's no hope in trying to fix it.*

As I sank into bed that night, my thoughts reached out to Jesus. *I love you*, Jesus whispered back, *and I always will, no matter what you have or haven't done. Together, we can always start anew.*

My burnt saucepan became an inspiration, giving me courage when the feelings of condemnation threatened to recapture me. I spent hours

scrubbing it with scouring powder, and the coal black slowly gave way to gray, then tan, then finally its original silver. As the specks of silver expanded, my faith to persevere on the climb toward inner healing was bolstered. At last, I held a sparkling silver saucepan, cleansed of every spot of black.

I learned that when God forgives He not only forgets, but He also heals. His undying love gives us courage to get up from where we've fallen, faith to let go of our past, and hope to walk forward into the future.

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WHAT HAGAR TAUGHT ME

BY ROALD WATTERSON

I HAD A BASIC KNOWLEDGE OF WHO HAGAR WAS through the various illustrated Bibles I had read as a child. But this year, after deciding to read through the Bible cover to cover, I came away from her story with new perspectives on God's individual love for each of us.

Hagar was an Egyptian servant to Sarah, Abraham's wife.¹ She first appears as somewhat of a secondary character in the story of Abraham and the covenants God makes with him. God had promised Abraham offspring as countless as the stars, but Sarah—still not pregnant, and growing impatient at the lack of fulfillment of God's promise—asks Abraham to take on her servant Hagar as a concubine.

Abraham agrees, and Hagar soon finds herself expecting a child. This

is where things begin to get dicey. Jewish and Muslim traditions say that Hagar was the daughter of a pharaoh and had been given to Abraham as a gift during one of his sojourns in Egypt. Whether this is factual or not is hard to determine. Regardless of status, I began to imagine how isolated this Egyptian girl must have felt amidst a people and culture completely different from her own. So when she finds herself pregnant, perhaps she begins to feel that things are looking up for her. Perhaps she hopes that here is a way to define herself amidst a strange people. Perhaps she begins to gloat. Whatever the case, the Bible tells us that she "began to despise her mistress."²

Sarah complains to Abraham, and Abraham tells Sarah that Hagar is her business, and that Sarah can do as she sees fit. Whatever Sarah decided to do caused pregnant Hagar to run away into the desert, where we next

find her sitting by a spring, slaking her thirst.

Here is the part of the story that I love: God sends an angel to find this runaway girl and talk her into returning to Abraham's camp. This was a girl who by then probably felt worthless, unwanted, and unloved; a girl with an ego and faults and failings; a girl who was Egyptian, and who perhaps still held on to her previous traditions and pagan gods; a girl who had despised her mistress; a girl who would doubtless go on to screw up more times in the future.

But here in the desert—in the midst of her despair—God appears to Hagar, because underneath the layers of circumstance and choice and faults and failing beat the heart of a creation God had breathed life into. And that's what God sees and is out to rescue when He sends an angel to find this girl whose existence began in His imagination and whose life story He had recorded in His book.

That one encounter with an angel in that desert place is enough to

1. Read the story in Genesis 16.
2. Genesis 16:4 NIV
3. Genesis 16:13 NIV





encourage Hagar to return home. But before doing so, she gives a name to this God who searched her out and spoke to her. She called Him “the God who sees me.”³

You know those days when you’re not looking or feeling your best? Mine are generally marked by bad hair, a ratty sweater that’s as comfortable as it is ugly, mismatched clothing, and an intense desire to not be seen by anyone. Sometimes my spiritual lacks also make me feel like taking cover, such as when I have questions about how much I love God, or attitudes that need tossing, or prayers I’m neglecting to pray, or things I’m not getting around to. These are things that make me feel quite unworthy of being seen by God.

But it’s the times when you feel most unworthy of love, and yet God does something for you and says you are still worthy, that change you. And that’s what God did for Hagar that day. He showed her that He cared for her, He was watching out for her, and He had a plan for her life. That’s the power of being seen by God. It

was that power that gave Hagar inner strength to turn around and return to a situation that she’d felt was intolerable just days before.

There’s so much I like about this story, but here are three main points:

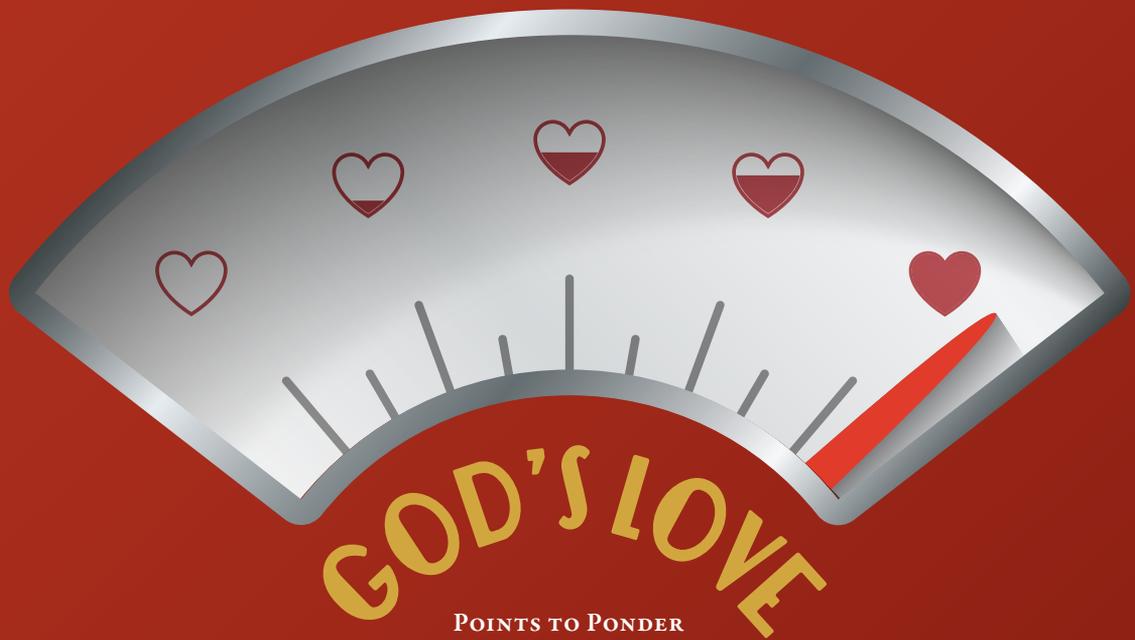
First, there are no secondary characters to God. Perhaps biblical narrative has compressed Hagar’s story into one or two chapters, and addresses her role as a supporting

one to the central story of Abraham and Sarah. But God had a book with her name on it, in which *she* was the star—the story of her life. And that is true for everyone who feels like a secondary character in someone else’s story.

Second, God is aware of the ugliest, lowest moments of your life, yet He still believes in you. Wherever you’re at right now, whatever your spiritual or physical state, God sees you and believes in you.

Third, I love that God went and found Hagar when she ran away. There are so many times in my life when I’ve run away from situations. Perhaps not physically, but I’ve emotionally hightailed it, or closed myself off when feeling overwhelmed. I know I’ve done this to God as well. But God sees just where I’m at, emotionally and physically—geographically, too—and there’s nothing that can separate me from His love.

ROALD WATTERSON IS AN EDITOR AND CONTENT DEVELOPER. ■



THE LORD YOUR GOD is living among you. ... He will take delight in you with gladness. ... He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.
—*Zephaniah 3:17 NLT*



Though we are incomplete, God loves us completely. Though we are imperfect, He loves us perfectly. Though we may feel lost and without compass, God's love encompasses us completely. ... He loves every one of us, even those who are flawed, rejected, awkward, sorrowful, or broken.—*Dieter F. Uchtdorf (b. 1940)*



The maker of the stars would rather die for you than live without you. And that is a fact. So if you need to brag, brag about that.
—*Max Lucado (b. 1955)*

God's unfailing love for us is an objective fact affirmed over and over in the Scriptures. It is true whether we believe it or not. Our doubts do not destroy God's love, nor does our faith create it. It originates in the very nature of God, who is love, and it flows to us through our union with His beloved Son.

—*Jerry Bridges (1929–2016)*



God is love. He didn't need us. But he wanted us. And that is the most amazing thing.—*Rick Warren (b. 1954)*



I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell

can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.
—*Romans 8:38–39 NLT*



Your Heavenly Father loves you—each of you. That love never changes. It is not influenced by your appearance, by your possessions, or by the amount of money you have in your bank account. It is not changed by your talents and abilities. It is simply there. It is there for you when you are sad or happy, discouraged or hopeful. God's love is there for you whether or not you feel you deserve love. It is simply always there.
—*Thomas S. Monson (b. 1927)* ■



God carries your picture in His wallet.—Tony Campolo (b. 1935)

I'M GOD'S CELEBRITY

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

MY DAUGHTER KRISTEN IS A CELEBRITY. Has been since birth. My wife and I follow her every move and document her moods, faces, and actions. We talk about her a lot and share stories about her funny habits or latest tastes. We give her our support and care, and do our best to protect her from harm. She has all our attention, even in the middle of the night, and we get up eager to see what she'll do in the new day. Her laugh always makes us smile, and her tears spur us to remedy situations. To us, she's the best.

However, Kristen has her moments—mealtime and bedtime

struggles, and the occasional touching of forbidden objects, for example. We teach her to speak her requests clearly instead of just yelling, reward her for progress made, and sometimes penalize her for wrongdoing. She's not perfect by any means, but she's ours, and we adore her.

And you know what? I'm God's celebrity. Flawed as I am, I bring joy to His Father's heart. He follows my every move and loves to see what I'll do next. He sends me encouraging messages through His Word, and protects me when I go out into the big world. He is righteous, and teaches me through my choices and ensuing consequences.¹ By His sacrifice, He's given me undying love, and He is available to hear my requests at any time, anywhere.² The rewards He offers are priceless and

eternal, and believe it or not, I'm His favored child. And so are you.³

In a world filled with ways to stay “close” to those we care about or have an interest in, it's comforting to know that God needs no social network, no magazine columns, no status check to understand us. He knew us before we were even conceived, and will keep us close to Him forever. We're special to Him, and He has a plan for us. As my daughter warms my heart every time she calls “Papa!” so is our Father's heart touched when we call out to Him.⁴ No matter whether you *feel* valued or not, to Him, you're the best!

CHRIS MIZRANY IS A WEB DESIGNER, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. ■

1. See Proverbs 3:11–12.
2. See Luke 12:29–31; Matthew 7:11.
3. See 2 Corinthians 6:18.
4. See Galatians 4:5–7.

A close-up, profile view of a woman with long, dark hair looking out of a window. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with the sun low on the horizon outside the window. The woman's expression is thoughtful and serene.

Paying It Forward

BY MICHELE ROYS

I'VE RECENTLY BEEN READING ABOUT THE "PAY IT FORWARD MOVEMENT."¹ What stood out the most to me is how simple the philosophy is. Yet it's still often difficult to be altruistic and do something for someone just because someone has helped you, or because you want the cycle to continue.

So many times in my personal life I've been stuck and in need of help, and someone helped me out. When I was 19 years old and leaving India after a two-year stint as a volunteer, I was crushed. I loved the work I did with the underprivileged children, the deaf, and the relief work I had been involved in. Packing my suitcase wasn't easy either. I'd accumulated a lot of things during my stay, and there were airline restrictions in how much I could carry, so I downsized my belongings to fit into one big suitcase, a smaller carrying bag, and my guitar.

I arrived at the New Delhi airport three hours early with a heavy heart; I was sad to be leaving, sad to be saying goodbye to the things and people I had grown fond of.

I'd called ahead of time and learned that I was entitled to bring up to 32 kilos, and that my guitar would count as additional carry-on baggage. Well,

1. See <http://www.payitforwardfoundation.org/about>.

when I arrived at the check-in desk, the lady said that for *that* particular flight I could only take 23 kilos and that my guitar could *not* be considered carry-on baggage. She said my small carry-on bag was also too heavy.

I was stuck. I couldn't afford to pay the overweight, and I couldn't believe that they were now telling me something different from when I'd first contacted the office.

I asked to talk to the overseer. As I waited, I noticed that he seemed very upset about something; he was talking intensely to three different people, and I just knew I'd arrived at a bad time. I prayed desperately for God to do something, as I didn't know what else I could do. My friends who had driven me to the airport had already left, and I didn't know how to get rid of my clothes and/or my guitar, if I needed to.

The overseer very briskly asked me what I wanted. I tried to explain my predicament as precisely as I could, and asked if he could waive the fee for overweight, as I couldn't afford to pay it. He refused to allow for an exception and told me that if I didn't pay, my options were either to miss my flight or throw my "extra" stuff in the trash so that I could make the flight.

You can imagine how I felt. Devastated. Indignant. Frustrated. Wondering why this was happening

to me. It wasn't my fault that the airline office had given me the wrong information. I felt that it would be a simple thing for the overseer to just say "yes," especially after hearing that I was a volunteer who'd given two years to help the people of his country.

That's when someone asked me what was wrong. I explained the whole story, from the reason I'd been living in India to my current predicament. I also explained that I'd asked the supervisor for help, but that he didn't seem to be in the mood for helping.

This gentleman, I discovered, worked with another airline and knew the supervisor. He went to ask him if he would allow me on with the overweight baggage. The supervisor said he had bigger problems to take care of.

This man appeared to be deep in thought and then said to me, "I'm going to cover the fee for your overweight. I'm also taking this flight, and it would be a shame for you to miss it, after all you've done for my people!"

I was shocked, relieved, and very thankful.

During our long flight, I sat next to this man, and he explained that when he was younger, about my age, he'd found himself in a similar situation. Someone had come by

and asked him if he needed help. He'd explained his dilemma, and the gentleman had paid his train fare and asked him to pay it forward.

He said that when he saw me pace back and forth at the airport, he felt bad for me, as he had three daughters. One of them was on her way to the UK that day, and he pictured how she would have felt if she was the one stuck and in need of help, and that was why he decided to help me.

He felt good that he had, because not only had he been personally helped when he was younger, and felt that it was his turn to pay it forward, but also because he knew it was the right thing to do. He said he knew that God is always watching, and if his daughters were ever in a tight situation, he knew God would work something out for them too.

This man paid it forward, saved my day, and made a real impact in my life. Since then, I've always done my best to help and give to people. I know it's the right thing to do, but it's also because someone did it for me. We give from our heart and pass on to others the kindness that has been shown us.

MICHELE ROYS IS A SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR AND MOTHER OF TWO RESIDING IN IRELAND. ■



BY JOYCE SUTTIN

PRACTICING EMPATHY

I WAS WATCHING AN INTERVIEW LAST SUNDAY, and the guest was asked, “What’s the greatest need in the world today?” Without hesitation, he responded, “Empathy. The world needs more empathy.”

I probably would have responded, without thinking, that the world needs more love. But I liked his answer. It was much more specific to say that the world needs more empathy.

Empathy is putting yourself in someone else’s shoes. Empathy is giving someone the benefit of the doubt. Empathy is realizing that everyone has their story. Empathy helps us to listen more and advise less. Empathy helps us to strive for understanding and eschew judgment.

Then I remembered another friend I had gotten to know named Judy. When I first saw her in my neighborhood, I tried to be friendly. She barely responded or spoke to me. After months of trying to interact

with her, she finally talked with me and explained that she had severe back problems, and walking was so painful she could hardly speak. After her surgery and recovery, we have come to be good friends. She taught me not to make judgments about people. They are often going through things we could not even imagine. Judy taught me a good lesson about empathy.

In today’s world, in which people are quick to comment and judge situations that are flashed across their computers, we need more empathy. When it is common to condemn, bully, and badmouth people we do not take time to understand, we need more empathy. When we allow fear to build walls between us, we need more empathy. If we want to allow Jesus to have more control in our lives and in our thoughts, we need more empathy.

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

Rejoice with those who rejoice,
weep with those who weep.
—Romans 12:15 ESV



Remember those in prison as if
you were together with them
in prison, and those who are
mistreated as if you yourselves
were suffering.
—Hebrews 13:3 NIV



Resolve to be tender with the
young, compassionate with
the aged, sympathetic with
the striving, and tolerant of the
weak and the wrong. Sometime
in life you will have been all of
these.
—Lloyd Shearer (1916–2001)



Whenever you are about to find
fault with someone, ask yourself
the following question: What fault
of mine most nearly resembles the
one I am about to criticize?
—Marcus Aurelius (121–180)



BY MARIE ALVERO

LOVED *and* VALUED

WHEN ASKED WHICH WAS THE GREATEST OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind [and] love your neighbor as yourself. The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."¹

He obviously knew that in learning to love, we would learn what it means to be holy. I think He also knew that this was probably the hardest commandment to live up to. We could have coped better with a list of rules—at least then, we'd all know who was hacking it and who wasn't. Who was worthy and who wasn't. Now we're stuck with the impossible task of loving those around us, even if they seem unworthy.

But for the longest time, that wasn't my take on His commandments. I somehow equated love with worthiness. God loved me because I was worthy of His love, and I loved others who were worthy of my love.

Then one day, my heart finally asked the question: *What have I done that has made me worthy of God's love? Nothing. Have I magically kept my sins and shortcomings within a "loveable" scoring? Nope.* I came to the realization that He doesn't love me because I'm worthy, but I'm worthy because He loves me. Honestly, it took a while for that to sink into my brain. It was extremely liberating to realize that I wasn't on a quest to score as many "love" points as I could. It was also deeply humbling to realize I was

fully and completely loved, without deserving it at all.

How countercultural is that! In a world that equates value with achievements, scorings, and numbers, the only reason I'm valuable to God is because He loves me. That's when I finally understood what John meant when he said that we love God because He first loved us.² When we understand the depth of God's love for us, and the extent to which we are unworthy of it, how can we not love Him!

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1. Matthew 22:37–40 NLT
2. See 1 John 4:19.
3. Psalm 136:1 NLT

God's love is "faithful" and "endures forever."³ And it's there for you if you want it. All you have to do is ask:
Dear Jesus, please come into my life, forgive me for the wrong things I've done, and help me love You and others. Amen.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

I Care

I know you, I see you, and I care about you. I care about each of your heartbreaks. I care about how you feel. I care about what you think. I care about the difficulties and hardships that you face. I care about your children. I care about your afflictions. I care about your struggles with finances. I care about your housing situation and your material needs. I care about your children's needs and the repairs that are coming due. I care about your spiritual struggles.

I receive you with open arms. The love you send Me through your prayers and your love for others is precious in My sight. It shines before Me as gold. Your love comes before My face as a sweet-smelling vapor that cools and refreshes. My precious child, I love you dearly!

