

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

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Vol 19 • Issue 7

THE PERFECT LIFE

Make an impression

Breaking Point

Can you take the pressure?

A Compass for Life's Journey

Finding answers in God's Word





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

NOURISH AND FLOURISH

It's human nature to form quick opinions based on the things we see and hear, without taking the time to dig deeper. "Do you look at things according to the outward appearance?"¹ the apostle Paul cautioned the Christians in Corinth 2,000 years ago.

Jesus also had advice on the topic: "Stop judging by mere appearances,"² He pleaded. But if we're honest, most of us would probably admit to doing just that, at least some of the time. Here's a passage that got me thinking about how I see others:

"It takes love, hope, faith, and understanding to nourish the possibilities in another and to believe that there is more to a person than meets the eye. You may think you know a person well enough to know that he is beyond changing, but what if the tables were turned? Would you consider how people view and treat you to be a fair representation of who you really are and how you would want to be treated?"³

We all thrive on hearing appreciation from those around us. We gain confidence when we know that someone values our thoughts. We could all do more to help those around us flourish. It doesn't cost much to show confidence in people. We may be pleasantly surprised what happens to someone when they're at the receiving end of a little faith.

If we want to see the world and those around us change, let's start by believing that others are more than they appear to be. Let's try to draw out the good in those around us, appreciate individuals for who they are, and acknowledge their gifts and talents. When we highlight the good in them, that good can flourish even more. After all, that's what God does with us: "God our Father ... will encourage you and help you always."⁴

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. 2 Corinthians 10:7
2. John 7:24 NIV
3. Author unknown
4. 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 CEV.

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THE ENCOURAGEMENT EXPERIMENT

BY IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ

AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES, we've all had someone say a few words of encouragement that radically changed our day or the course of events, just because of the extra inspiration and change of perspective those words brought. Maybe we were at the end of our rope, and someone's encouragement opened a whole new horizon of possibilities. Or maybe we'd simply had a long and tiring day, and a few cheerful words renewed our inspiration and energy.

One day my husband did an experiment that has since served as a reminder to me to be generous in passing encouragement on to others.

We were on a bike ride, following a mountain trail, and as usual we'd brought our dog Iris with us. She loves to hike in the mountains and is also a very fast runner.

As we were laboriously pedaling up the hill, she was literally running circles around us, bursting with speed and energy. On the downhill, however, she had a hard time keeping up. We were just a little faster than she, and although at first she made an effort to run alongside us, she soon got discouraged and stopped trying.

At that point the logical solution was to slow down and let her catch up with us. But before doing that, my husband said, "Let's see what encouragement can do." And continuing downhill he called out to Iris, "C'mon, doggie, you can do it! You're such a fast dog, you can keep up with us! Run!"

Instantly, Iris seemed to be filled with renewed energy and speed, and she caught up with us, happy to be by our side once again. But as the words of encouragement ceased, she started losing that extra momentum

and slowed down yet again. A new shower of encouragement propelled her forward once more.

Eventually, we did slow down to make it easier for her, but the experiment will forever remain in my memory as an example of the power of positive words and the difference they can make. It reminds me to try to give the gift of encouragement to those around me. It's a simple act that can give people the boost they need to reach their full potential.

Is there a coworker or a family member with whom you are at a standstill in your relationship? Try the power of encouragement and appreciation, and you'll see your relationship blossom with renewed energy and freshness.

IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ IS A FULL-TIME VOLUNTEER FOR PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE¹ IN CROATIA AND ITALY. ■

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



THE THORN FACTOR

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

I DON'T THINK THAT GOD INTENDED ANY RELATIONSHIPS TO BE PERFECT. I think of it as the “thorn” factor that He allows into the equation—that element that we shrink from, but that He knows we need. You may wonder, *Why would we need differences of opinion, sensitivities, misunderstandings, jealousies, resentments, comparing, sacrificing, arguments, emotional upsets, fears, heartbreaks, and adversity? Those things don't sound like they would build a very strong relationship.*

This reminds me of the adage, “It's your attitude toward adversity that counts.” If we didn't experience the trials of life, we would have a hard time learning to exercise the qualities that make us better people—patience, understanding, and forgiveness.

1. Ephesians 6:13 TLB

Misunderstandings, disagreements, hurts—even wrongs—force us to respond to them. We can choose to stretch, to become better, to reach out to God for more of His love, to forgive, to make a conscious decision to learn what we can from the situation.

It's how we face the circumstances that come into our life and what we do with them that counts. Will we learn from our difficulties and become better or will we become hardened? Will we become humbler or prouder? Will we become creative in solving problems or will we sink under them in despair? Will we do whatever is necessary to become what we should be in order to handle the difficulties, or will we become accusatory and critical? Will we become more committed, or will we be tempted to quit when the going gets difficult?

Even when we do our best and we grow and learn and mature, there

are always more challenges ahead, because that's the way God intended for life to be. We overcome one difficulty and then we go on to another one. But each victory is a step forward. Each victory is fulfilling. Each victory takes us farther along the road of progress.

But what about when we feel we can't overcome something and it seems that we're doomed to permanent frustration in some area? If we've done what we can, God's Word promises that we will eventually be victorious: “Use every piece of God's armor to resist the enemy whenever he attacks, and when it is all over, you will still be standing up.”¹

God may know that these rocky paths are actually more beneficial to us in some way than a smooth road would be. As we communicate with Him, He will motivate us to do better in the areas we need to, encourage us for the good we are doing, and help us find strength and grace to meet each challenge.

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



AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Bitter for Sweet

THE SOUND OF MOTHER'S EGGBEATER DREW ME TO THE KITCHEN. There I found her at work, and began to watch. This was my chance to find out what she put into that chocolate cake of hers that made it so good. There was baking chocolate, of course. I reached for a crumb that had fallen off the bar and put it on my tongue to dissolve. It was bitter! I surveyed the other things on the table. There was a cupful of sour milk. Yuck! Surely Mother wasn't going to put that in the cake! But she did, along with some of that awful baking soda she had given me the last time I had a stomachache. What kind of cake could she possibly make out of such things? Mother smiled and told me to wait and see.

She served the cake that evening after dinner. It looked as good as usual, but I was going to be careful.

I tasted a little crumb, then a larger crumb, and finally a whole bite. It couldn't have been better! I forgot all about the bitter chocolate, sour milk and baking soda, and asked for another piece.

Life is not all sweetness. There is much that is bitter, and we often cannot believe that anything good could come from it. Certainly all things are not good, but God's Word promises that "all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God and are fitting into his plans."¹ ■

The greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it. Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests.—*Epictetus (c. 55–135)*

Tough times never last, but tough people do.—*Robert H. Schuller (1926–2015)*

Man is fond of counting his troubles but he does not count his joys. If he counted them up, as he ought to, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for it.—*Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881)*

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.—*Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968)*

In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.—*Albert Camus (1913–1960)*

Out of difficulties grow miracles.—*Jean de La Bruyère (1645–1696)*

The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.—*Chinese Proverb*

1. Romans 8:28 TLB



The Principle of Priority states (a) you must know the difference between what is urgent and what is important, and (b) you must do what's important first.—Steven Pressfield (b. 1943)

Start with the Frog!

By IRIS RICHARD

I'M SOMEONE WHO TENDS TO GO BY INSPIRATION, and I've long been bothered by my scattered approach to setting goals, so I was searching for an effective way to make it through my to-do list. It seems so easy to pick out the things I prefer doing or feel inspired to tackle first, but unfortunately, this strategy often leads to procrastination, especially since those "favorites" often aren't the most important or priority tasks. Since the important stuff doesn't just disappear, I find myself cramming in order to fit everything in.

Something definitely had to change, and one morning during my daily devotions, I specifically prayed that God would help me get a handle on my poor prioritizing skills.

A few days later when browsing through stalls at a flea market, a thin book caught my eye. The odd title, *You Can't Send a Duck to Eagle School*, peeked out from among a pile of dusty secondhand books crammed into a cardboard box. I pulled it out and cracked it open to a quote from Mark Twain: "Eat a live frog every morning, and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."

The accompanying article explained the basic idea of tackling the most daunting task first, likening those tasks to eating a frog before getting to more appealing to-dos. There were many other useful anecdotes on getting things done, but this picture stuck with me, and I realized it could be the answer to my prayer for a strategy.

Since I've had a severe back problem from the age of ten, daily exercise and stretching has been a must to help me function through the day, but over the years, it's become a chore that I sometimes dread. Getting this routine off my to-dos was definitely going to be my first "frog" of the day.

Identifying this and other "frogs" felt strange in the beginning, but this simple tactic has improved my work habits and helped keep procrastination at bay. Even on days when I don't have time to write a to-do list, I still remember to search out a "frog" or two that need my attention first.

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



BREAKING POINT

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

WHAT AMAZED ME THE FIRST TIME I saw an oil refinery up close was the intricate maze of pipes. Besides the complexity of it, one wonders how it can all be maintained safely and still be financially viable.

Proper pressure must be kept in every pipe to ensure that the oil flows at just the right rate—not too fast lest it burst the pipes, and not too slow. The designers were clearly ingenious, and it takes an army of experts to maintain and monitor it all.

Our lives are sometimes like that maze of pipes. Besides our jobs and the endless chores that make up everyday living, we have obligations to our families and friends, responsibilities to our communities, and appeals to help a world full of needy causes. We also have spiritual commitments to live our faith—to maintain our

relationship with God through prayer, reading His Word, and having fellowship with other believers. Sometimes the pressure seems too much to bear. How do we keep from bursting apart at the seams?

A certain amount of pressure is good for us, and helps us not to slip into a state of physical, mental, and spiritual lethargy. On the other hand, too much is our undoing. That's why we need a pressure valve, a way out. Jesus offers us just that.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens,” Jesus tells us, “and I will give you rest.” Speaking in terms that His followers of 2,000 years ago could understand, He likened the press of daily responsibilities and problems to the load of a beast of burden: “Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy

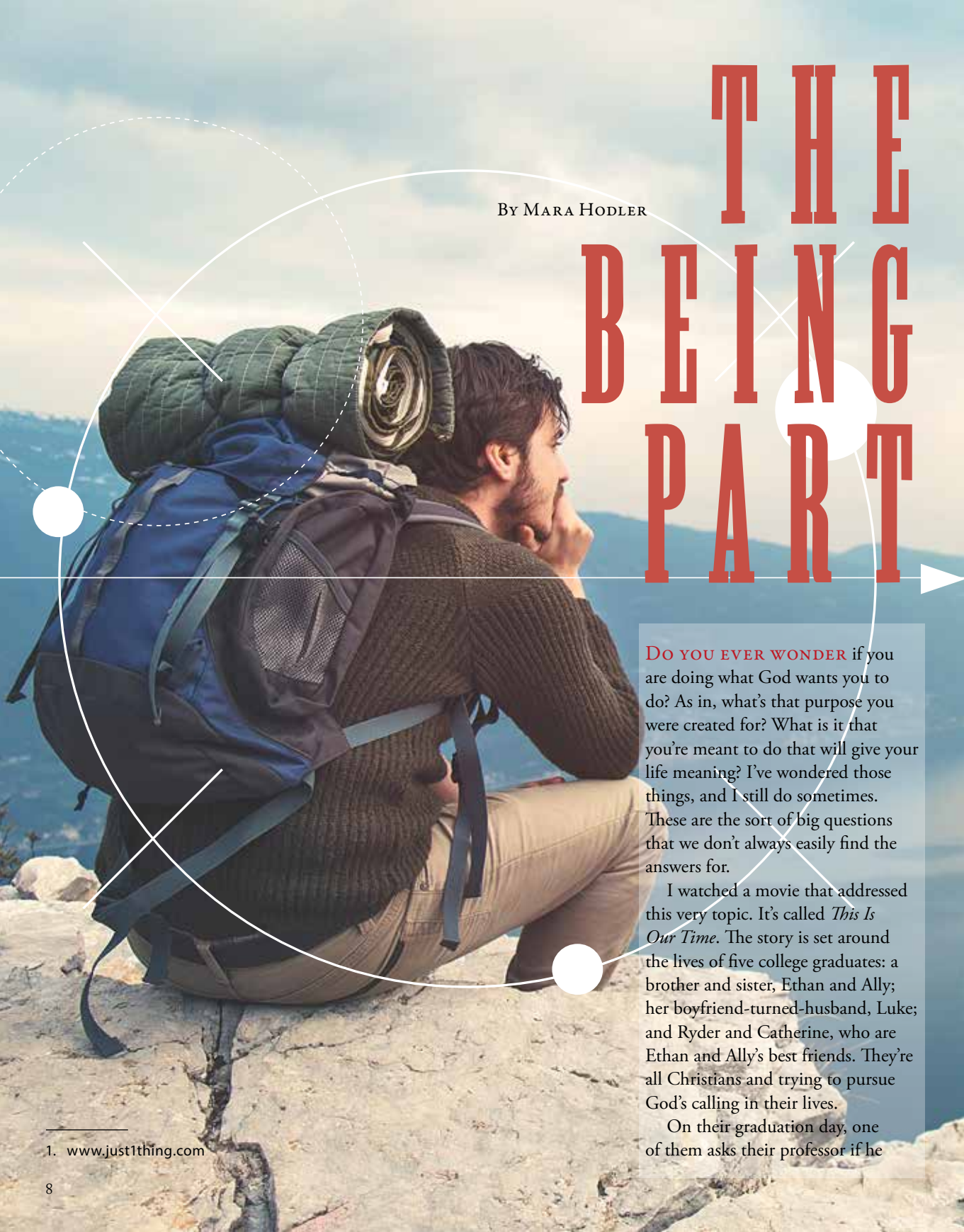
to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”¹ If we find our yoke too heavy, perhaps we have fashioned one for ourselves that is heavier than the one God wants us to bear.

A large part of an engineer's job is to know exactly how much stress the structure he is designing—for example, a bridge, elevator, or boat—can take. That's why signs are posted in elevators or boats informing how many people they can safely hold. Beyond that limit, the bridge could collapse, the boat could sink, or the elevator cables could snap.

We have to know our limits too, and not push ourselves beyond them. When things begin to get too much, we can let Jesus regulate the pressure. He knows how much is good for each of us and how much we can take.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST² IN GERMANY. ■

1. Matthew 11:28–30 NLT
2. <http://elixirmime.com>

A man with a large backpack is sitting on a rocky ledge, looking out over a mountain range. The backpack is blue and black, and the man is wearing a brown sweater and khaki pants. The background shows a vast landscape with mountains and a cloudy sky. The title 'THE BEING PART' is written in large, red, serif letters on the right side of the image. The author's name 'BY MARA HODLER' is written in smaller, black, sans-serif letters above the title. There are decorative white lines and circles overlaid on the image.

BY MARA HODLER

THE BEING PART

DO YOU EVER WONDER if you are doing what God wants you to do? As in, what's that purpose you were created for? What is it that you're meant to do that will give your life meaning? I've wondered those things, and I still do sometimes. These are the sort of big questions that we don't always easily find the answers for.

I watched a movie that addressed this very topic. It's called *This Is Our Time*. The story is set around the lives of five college graduates: a brother and sister, Ethan and Ally; her boyfriend-turned-husband, Luke; and Ryder and Catherine, who are Ethan and Ally's best friends. They're all Christians and trying to pursue God's calling in their lives.

On their graduation day, one of them asks their professor if he

has any last words for them before they go out into the world. He says, “Always remember that God has a purpose for each one of you.”

Luke and Ally accept an invitation to work with a mission that serves leper colonies in India. Ryder moves into IT work and believes that God wants him to make a difference online. Catherine starts working her way up the corporate ladder and believes God’s calling for her is to be faithful in the workplace.

The only one left is Ethan. He always thought God wanted him to be a writer, but he doesn’t get into the college he wanted to attend and ends up working in his dad’s café. He struggles to find purpose and feels like he’s been left behind while everyone moves on to fulfill their destinies. He keeps asking for and seeking “God’s calling,” but it seems like he gets no direction or answer. His professor frequents his dad’s café, and one day he asks the young man what he’s doing with his life. Ethan says he’s trying to figure out what God wants him to do but still has no idea.

It’s the professor’s reply to him that really impressed me: “The question is not ‘What does God want me to do?’ but ‘Who is God asking me to be?’ When you become who God wants you to be, His will is all around you.”

Without getting into spoilers, suffice it to say that an unexpected event changes everyone’s lives, and

Ethan, who has finally started to focus on being who God wants him to be, is thrust into the spotlight. All of a sudden, his life has direction and God’s purpose becomes clear.

He finally understands that God couldn’t get him to do what He wanted him to do until he was the man God was calling him to be. Becoming that man involved struggle, disappointment, sacrifice, surrender, and hard choices, but when Ethan finally understands that his part was being the man God wanted him to be, he finds peace and contentment. And then he finds his calling, or at least his next step.

Life can be a series of cycles. Sometimes your purpose is clearly defined, and other times it might feel like you’re benched, sitting on the sidelines, watching and waiting for your opportunity. In a professional sports team, even those sitting on the bench are good players. They’re expected to train just as hard as the A team, even if they spend the better part of the season sitting on the bench.

If you reach a point where you aren’t sure of what God wants you to do (and we all face times like that), just focus on *who God wants you to be*. The rest will come.

If I ever got the chance to chat with Moses, I would ask him about his time in the wilderness—those 40 years between his escape from Egypt after he killed the slave driver and

before he received God’s call from the burning bush.

Imagine, Moses had been groomed to be a pharaoh, or at least a prince. He was highly educated, probably a skilled warrior, and accustomed to a lavish lifestyle. Becoming a shepherd probably didn’t feel like, *Yes! I’ve found my life’s calling!* He may have sometimes gotten inklings of what God wanted him to do, glimpses into the future, but he received no definite call or guidance in that direction. Talk about being benched for the season. Try being benched for four decades!

Then one day, out of the blue, bam! The call! And life was never the same again. Of course, most of us might not have a calling of the magnitude that Moses did. But the great thing is that we don’t really have any pressure to figure out something outstanding or awe-inspiring to do with our lives. That’s up to God. What we need to concern ourselves with is being who God wants us to be.

God has a perfect and amazing plan for your life. Be patient if it seems to take time. God is as happy with you when you are “being” what He needs you to be as when you are “doing” what He wants you to do. To Him, it’s often the same.

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,¹ A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

NAVIGATING THE LOWS

BY ROALD WATTERSON

IT'S WELL KNOWN THAT IN FICTION, plots along the lines of “Matilda is happy, beautiful, successful, and will live happily-ever-after-forever-and-ever” don't make the most captivating stories or become bestsellers. Even picture books for children need to involve some kind of tension—an obstacle that the child needs to work through in order to achieve his or her happy ending. Whether it's a little boy handling his first day of school, or a little girl learning to share her toys, the story isn't captivating if it starts off perfect. Whereas books that go something like, “Man is falsely accused of a crime he did not commit, is imprisoned for countless years before he finally escapes with the intention of confronting his accusers and clearing his name” pique our interest. We want to know what happens next. We want to find out if things turn out right. We begin to want things for the characters

because we're able to relate to the difficulties they're experiencing.

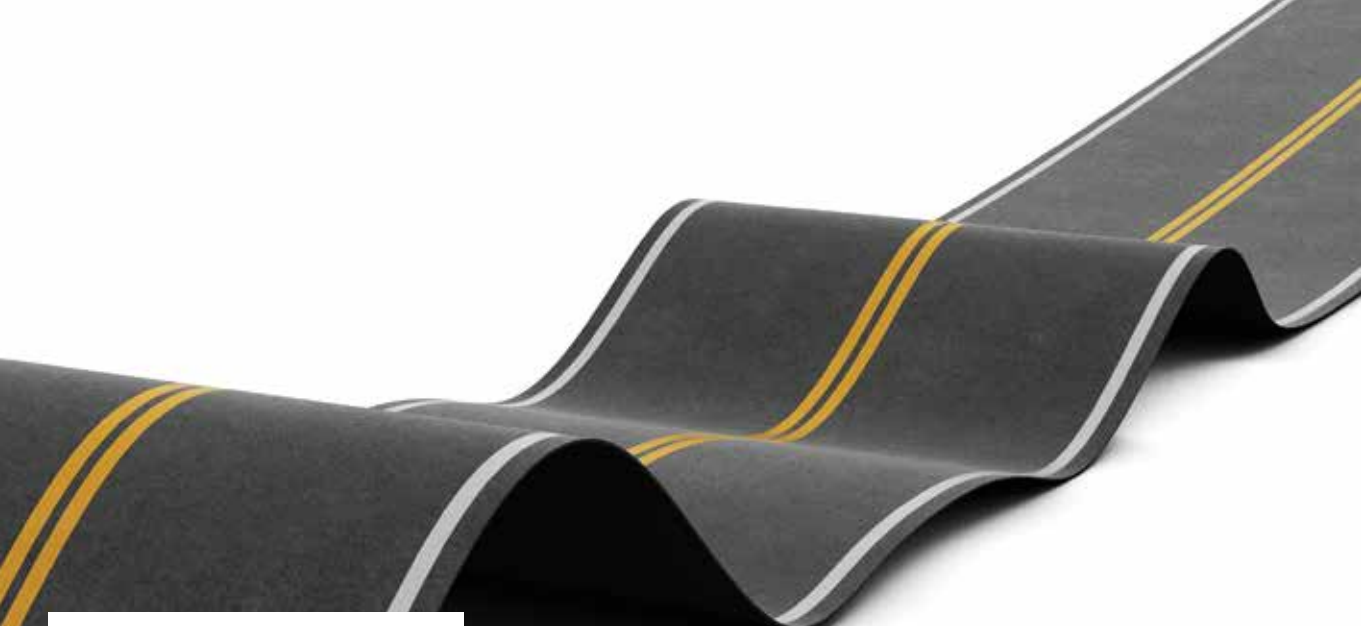
But in real life, not too many people care for the lows. We wish we could skip them or we could put life on fast forward to get to the good parts, the happily-ever-afters, and the scenes where one gets to ride off into the sunset or stand over a slain Goliath with sword thrust high in the sky as an orchestra plays in the background. But it's the highs and lows that the hero or heroine went through *before* that ending scene that give meaning to the story. If that weren't the case, movies would last ten minutes instead of ninety.

Real-life lows come in all shapes and sizes. It could be depression over a situation in one's life that doesn't seem to have hope of getting better, or impatience toward situations or people that aren't meeting one's expectations, or perhaps tragedy has struck—and times when we once enjoyed life seem to be either a distant memory or a foggy future hope.

King David told God in Psalm 139:16, “Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.”¹ There must be something within the lows that God has ordained to strengthen us and

1. NLT

2. Psalm 40:1–3 NIV



that will bring increased value to our lives.

Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years, which I'm betting were some of the lowest in his life. But he never gave up hope for his country and his cause. He learned, he studied, and when his moment arrived, he was ready. The Nelson Mandela who went into prison wasn't the same Mandela who was freed over two and a half decades later. Those 27 years in prison mattered; they made him into the man he became who was able to lead a reconciled South Africa.

I think that's why the lows in life are important: they get us thinking about what truly matters in life. They also cause us to consider what more God wants for and from us. They can bring insight, direction, wisdom, and valuable lessons our way if we are open to it.

Everyone knows about David slaying Goliath, but the part that not everyone remembers as clearly was how David was initially left behind to tend sheep while his older brothers went off to war. David probably

felt frustrated and possibly even angry—hadn't he single-handedly dispatched lions and bears that had tried to attack the family's flock?

But it's during this time, as David watches his brothers leave for the front lines while he passes time watching his father's sheep, that he recognizes within himself a desire to fight. So when he's asked to take food to his brothers, and when the opportunity presents itself, he grabs ahold of it, because he sees the potential fulfillment of the passion God has placed in his heart.

A friend and his wife were looking for the right house to move into a short while ago, and while there were a few prospects, none of them were ideal or worked out as they'd hoped. They were discouraged, but at the same time, I realized in talking with them that with each house they saw and evaluated, they gained a better

understanding of what they were looking for in a home and neighborhood. The hunting and waiting process was worth something—when the right house came along, they were better equipped to recognize it.

I'm not sure I'll ever come to enjoy a "low" in life, but by remembering to look for meaning when they show up, I'm coming to terms with the fact that they're often the walkway that God uses to bring me to a different point in life.

The following Psalm is a comfort to me during such times: "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."²

Life continues beyond the lows, and as you brave through them, God can give you a new song to sing.

ROALD WATTERSON IS AN EDITOR AND CONTENT DEVELOPER. ■



THE PERFECT LIFE

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

I LOVE PHOTOGRAPHY. When I got my first camera—a cheap point and shoot—I thrilled to the new world of possibilities. I took it everywhere and captured a lot of memories, till the day it fell against a hillside rock and failed me forever after.

Then I upgraded to a bridge camera with more options and a much greater built-in zoom. This was my pride and joy for years, though eventually my skills outgrew it as well. I wanted something that took the photo as soon as I pressed the button.

Eventually, I got a DSLR. It was good quality, fast, and presented a huge learning curve. Just what I wanted. No more missed moments. Or so I thought.

As I learned more, I became ultra-concerned about getting perfectly in-focus photos. I kept searching for ways to *always* get sharp photos. I'd frantically change settings hoping for a better result, often taking my eyes off the events unfolding in

front of me. I'd be frustrated even if I captured what I wanted but the result was anything less than perfectly sharp.

Then one day I read an article by an eminent photographer. He said something profound: "Photography is about feelings, not technical perfection. It's about showing the emotion you felt at a scene to your viewers, not just showing your skill at controlling the camera."

Suddenly I understood that it's really not about the settings, the sharpness, or even my skill. It's about telling the story. Amateurs want their images to be perfect. Professionals want their images to be poignant, to make an impression.

In our lives, we strive to get our hair, bodies, phone, car, job, food, relationships (and the list goes on) in perfect shape. In the process, we often overlook the joy of life itself. We should use our skills to improve our and others' lives. But we don't have to become so focused on overcoming

life's imperfections that we don't savor the moments all around us.

Life is a massive collage of innumerable moments every day. Does it matter if every moment is perfect? Does it matter if *any* moment is perfect? Not really. They're all a part of the big picture, and it wouldn't be complete without even one. So don't hurry through life, purging moments from attention or memory because they're "lacking" in some way.

Let's take time to stop when "we don't have time." Let's take deep breaths when we're stressed. Let's live lovingly even when we're treated badly. Let's create a life that others will look at and be encouraged by. We can't always impress those around us, but we *can* leave an impression. We can be poignant.

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



BY ANNA PERLINI

BIRTHDAY MESSENGER

ON MY BIRTHDAY, I often experience mixed feelings—on the one hand, I wish I could escape to a lonely island; on the other hand, the extra attention does feel good. Either way, I’ll say with Todd Stocker: “A happy birthday is measured not in the amount of gifts one gets, but in the amount one is loved.”

Paolo, a dear friend and colleague of mine for the last 18 years, has made it a point and a personal goal to remember people’s birthdays either through a phone call or an SMS. He keeps a list and updates it as he meets new people.

Businesspeople, politicians, housewives, students, lonely elderly people, rich or poor, famous or obscure, everyone’s heart is the same, and everyone has a need for genuine

love. I’ve been able to witness it personally by observing people’s reactions to these birthday wishes.

Two years ago, a lonely widow burst into tears when she received that phone call wishing her a happy birthday, and she has brought up that call on many occasions since. To her it represented a turning point in the difficult process of inner healing after her husband passed away and she had to live all alone in a remote area. She said she felt so much love and concern in that unexpected phone call that it brought her heart back to life again.

I’ll admit it’s not as simple as it seems, as some mornings you wake up wanting to just think about yourself and don’t feel like making the effort to cheer up someone else on their birthday. I say this because Paolo’s example influenced me, and

some time ago I also embraced the “birthday tradition,” even though my list is still much smaller than his.

Sometimes I don’t feel like making that phone call, but the reaction usually more than repays my effort, and I discover once again that it doesn’t take much to bring a little cheer to someone’s life. A few times, I realized that my simple words really made someone’s day and that I was possibly the only person who remembered. Or I found out they had just experienced some difficult time in their lives, a loss or a sickness. And when I hung up, all I could say was: “Thank God I made that phone call!” Truly, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”¹

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

1. Acts 20:35

A COMPASS FOR LIFE'S JOURNEY

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED



THE BIBLE COVERS GOD'S REVELATION ABOUT HIMSELF, His love for humanity, the means of salvation, and the relationship He wishes to have with humankind. It also contains instruction on how to live in a manner that is pleasing to Him, which is the foundation for a happy, fulfilling, and productive life in harmony with God and others.

God's Word includes practical instruction and principles which serve as the compass of our life and help us face our daily challenges. It conveys principles which guide us in our interaction with others and our decision-making, helping us to know the difference between right and wrong. It sets the tone for our moral standard, our ethics, our attitudes about life, love, the world, the environment, and relationships. Though the Bible doesn't specifically deal with every possible situation that a person may face, it reveals the principles needed to navigate the complexities of life in a manner that is pleasing to God.

These spiritual principles are meant to serve as a compass throughout the journey that is our life. They help us to face each challenge with the confidence that we can make good and wise decisions, that we can develop proper attitudes about life and others. They show us how to respond when we face obstacles or conflict. They help us to know what direction to take at every crossroad.

Being connected to God—the source of life—and being aware of the truth of His presence, the words of guidance He has given to mankind, the marvel of being connected to Him and communicating with Him, gives us the ability to live our lives in alignment with Him.

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

Reading the Bible will help you get to know [God's] Word, but it's when you put it down and live your life that you get to know the Author.
—Steve Maraboli (b. 1975)

You can get to know the Author by simply inviting Him into your life:

Dear Jesus, please come into my heart and fill me with Your light and love. Help me get to know You better through Your Word and learn to live Your loving principles. Amen.

A photograph of a student in a classroom, wearing a dark blue sweater, sitting at a desk and writing in a notebook with a silver pen. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and classroom furniture. The text 'BY MARIE ALVERO' is centered below the image, and the title 'GROWTH IS ADDICTIVE' is overlaid in large, orange, 3D-style letters with a yellow brushstroke effect behind it.

BY MARIE ALVERO

GROWTH IS ADDICTIVE

I'M SURE PARENTS THE WORLD OVER share my dread of wrestling with children's homework and preparing for tests. Calming my teenagers' anxiety before a test or trying to get them to eat breakfast before a benchmark exam are parenting moments I'll be more than happy to be done with.

After many struggling sessions, I've realized that more than prepping them, I need to change our approach to testing. The issue is in our view of scoring and failure. If my kid brings home a 60% score on a test, I'll try to say something like "That means you understand 60% of the material. What do you think you need to learn next?" We now use the scoring more as a "you are here" marking on a map, not as a determination of success or failure. We try to make growth the goal.

Focusing on growth puts a new spin on making mistakes, asking questions, reworking a problem, and even failure. Growth is exciting and rewarding, and always pursuable and attainable. Even if they haven't fully mastered the material, they can learn one more thing. And progress becomes a lifelong pursuit. I don't want fear of failure to hold them back. I would rather have them try, fail, see where their weaknesses are, strengthen those weaknesses, and try again.

This has led me to find out a lot about myself. I realized that I'd hit my ceiling of growth because I wasn't venturing out of my comfort zone. I was terrified of failure, speaking up only when I was 100% sure I was 100% correct, only attempting things I knew I was proficient in, and generally holding back.

Recognizing that in myself was uncomfortable. When it comes to growth there's no such thing as simply maintaining; you're either going forwards or backwards. And who wants to go backwards? Who wants to be less wise, less healthy, and poorer today than you were yesterday?

Since I've made the choice to grow, I've found endless opportunities—harder workouts, uncomfortable conversations, new recipes, "scariest" investments, applying for promotions at work, signing up for training courses. Oh, and backing into the driveway! Each step of growth has made me want to keep going.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

YOU CAN CHANGE

You can change your life, because I can change anybody who comes to Me, seeking to fulfill My will for their life. It doesn't matter what you've been like or how long you've been a certain way. If I made the world and everything in it, don't you see that it's a small thing for Me to transform a single life into something better to fulfill My purpose and plan?

It all begins with a spark of faith. I can speak to your heart and put that spark there—a spark of faith that tells you that I can and want to help you. But for Me to continue to work in your life and bring the desired change to fruition, you must have a believing and yielded heart. Come to Me, read My Word, and be willing to do the things I ask of you. Then I will be able to help you change as you desire. Even then, it won't happen overnight. Certain aspects of this change can happen in an instant, the moment you believe and ask Me and yield. Others will take time. But as you continue to look to Me and do your part, you will see change. That I can promise!

If you can believe, all things are possible with Me.¹

1. See Matthew 19:26; Mark 9:23.

