

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

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THE PROBLEM TRUCK

A question of
perspective



Never Ever Quit!

When persevering does
the trick

The Snowball Effect

A chain reaction of good



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE QUEST FOR SUCCESS

We may not all have the same definition of success, but who doesn't want to be successful? And rightly so. The desire for comfort and security and the yearning for meaning and fulfillment in life are inborn and universal. Why then do so many people seem to settle for less? Why don't they pursue their goals more actively? There are several reasons, but I think this excerpt from an article I came across exposes one of the most common:

"Both success and failure involve future consequences, namely inevitable rewards or unavoidable regrets. If this is true, why don't more people take time to ponder the future? The answer is simple: They are so caught up in the current moment that it doesn't seem to matter. The problems and the rewards of today are so absorbing to some human beings that they never pause long enough to think about tomorrow."¹

If that sounds like you, this issue could help get you started on a new future-focused and more successful path. Here are a few highlights:

Never Ever Quit (pp. 4–6) offers advice on getting through the "kill years" of any project or endeavor; and The Path of Most Persistence (p. 7) puts some skin on that.

Worth Forty Thousand (pp. 8–9) explores the value of motivators, while Working Well with Others (p. 10) breaks down the secrets to taking on new responsibilities and avoiding misunderstandings in the workplace.

Finally, The Snowball Effect (p. 15) invites you to not be discouraged when the results aren't what you hoped for. There are different kinds of success.

So dust off those goals, get God's promises and power behind you, and gear up for an exciting, successful future.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Jim Rohn, *The Five Major Pieces to the Life Puzzle* (Southlake, Tx: Jim Rohn International, 1991)

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STRESS RELIEF

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

STRESS RELIEF HAS BECOME A MULTIFACETED, multi-billion-dollar industry. Armies of experts have emerged, dispensing advice of every sort. Some say the key is better time management—reduce stress by doing a better job of juggling everything we need to do. Others say the key is patience—be ambitious, but focus on less daunting short- and mid-range goals. Others tell us to reexamine our priorities from the quality-of-life angle and major on the things that count most. Still others take a more spiritual approach: Relieve stress through yoga, meditation, or other disciplines. Who are we to believe?

1. Philippians 4:7

It reminds me of the story of the five blind men who were asked to describe an elephant. They each felt a different part of the animal before giving their answer. One grabbed ahold of the tail. “The elephant is like a rope,” he said. The next grabbed a leg. “No,” he said, “the elephant is like a tree.” The third man felt the elephant’s side. “No, the elephant is like a wall.” The fourth felt the trunk and said, “No, the elephant is like a serpent.” The last man felt an ear and said, “No, the elephant is like a leaf.” They were all right, but none of them was completely right or the only one who was right.

When it comes to our lives, God alone has the whole picture. He knows exactly what each of us needs

to manage the stress and challenges we will inevitably face in life. And that’s not all. He also wants to be personally involved on a daily basis to show us what we can do to make that happen.

He will do that for you and heap His love on for good measure, as you turn to Him, tell Him what you need, and thank Him for His help. “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus.”¹

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED*’S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

NEVER EVER QUIT!



LIFE IS HARD SOMETIMES.

When you've worked as hard as you possibly could and yet you failed to make the grade, your dreams remain out of reach, and you feel you just can't do it anymore, you can feel like giving up.

All of us have probably felt that way at some time or another. Maybe you've been in that situation recently. In fact, maybe you feel that way right now.

When you're getting pounded and slammed again and again, how do you get through it?

I know how. You do too.

You keep going, no matter what! As Winston Churchill said: "If you're going through hell, keep going."

Okay, that might be oversimplifying a complex issue, but really, in order to accomplish anything

significant, you have to keep fighting day after day, no matter what roadblocks you run into. In the face of disappointment or even failure, that's the time to try again, work harder, study more, and pray desperately.

All great accomplishments take a lot of work and time. When progress is slow and our plans or dreams aren't coming together as quickly as we'd hoped, it's easy to wonder if something's wrong. More often, however, I believe that when we hit a brick wall we're simply going through the normal paces required for progress and success. That's just the road to accomplishment.

As we embark on a new adventure expecting quick results, if that doesn't happen—or more likely, *when* that doesn't happen—we can become disappointed and disillusioned, and even tempted to quit. Whereas if we realize that the path toward our goals isn't likely to be an easy road, then we'll face the challenges with

enthusiasm, and we won't be caught off guard or derailed when things are much more confusing, taxing, and time-consuming than we anticipated.

Former White House Press Secretary Tony Snow, who was in the midst of fighting cancer at the time, explained the challenges of life as follows: "God relishes surprise. We want lives of simple, predictable ease—smooth, even trails as far as the eye can see—but God likes to go off-road. He places us in predicaments

1. Jeff Quandt as quoted in Irving Wallace, *The Book of Lists* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980)



that seem to defy our endurance and comprehension—and yet don't. By His love and grace, we persevere. The challenges that make our stomachs churn invariably strengthen our faith and grant measures of wisdom and joy we would not experience otherwise."

There are many different approaches to facing setbacks and disappointments. I don't think there's one perfect formula for overcoming difficulties. There's no set list of

other challenges that accompany the dry spells in our lives. I often find inspiration from true stories about people who have accomplished great things in the face of hardship or handicap. Sports provide some great examples along these lines because they're such *public* examples and there's a clear means of *measuring* their accomplishments. For example:

During a football game between the Chicago Bears and the New York Giants, one of the announcers

"must do's" if you're looking to muster up courage and strength to endure fear, stress, heartache, frustration, or any of the

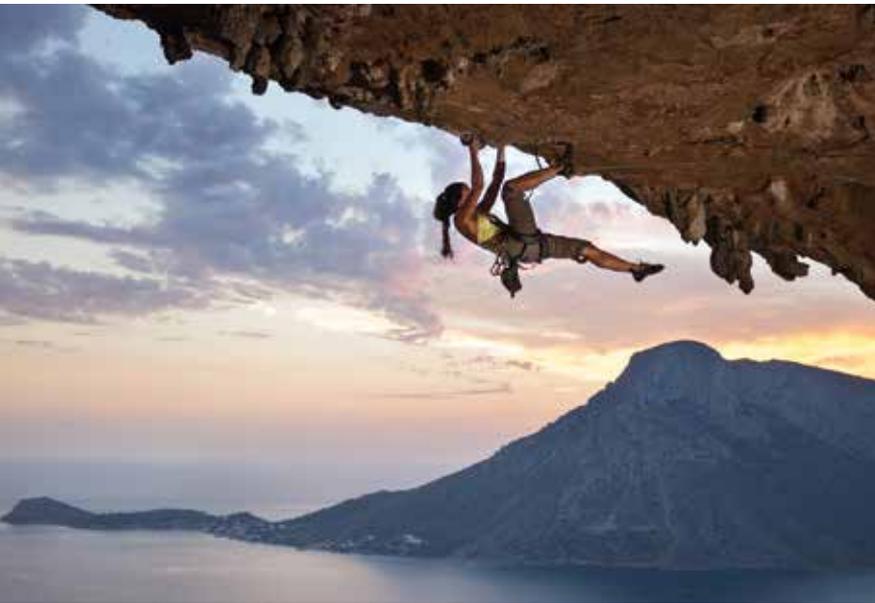
observed that Walter Payton, the Bears' running back, had accumulated over nine miles in career rushing yardage. The other announcer remarked, "Yeah, and that's with somebody knocking him down every 4.6 yards!" Walter Payton, the most successful running back ever, knows that everyone—even the very best—gets knocked down. The key to success is to get up and run again just as hard.¹

Sports isn't the only arena that requires vision and persistence. You can find great examples in all walks of life, including business. Here's a fairly well-known story:

Automobile genius Henry Ford once came up with a revolutionary plan for a new kind of engine, which we know today as the V-8. Ford was eager to get his great new idea into production. He had some men draw up the plans, and presented them to the engineers. As the engineers studied the drawings, one by one they came to the same conclusion. Their visionary boss just didn't know much about the fundamental principles of engineering. He'd have to be told gently—his dream was impossible.

Ford said, "Produce it anyway." They replied, "But it's impossible." "Go ahead," Ford commanded, "and stay on the job until you succeed, no matter how much time is required."

For six months, they struggled with drawing after drawing, design after design. Nothing. Another six months. Nothing. At the end of the year, Ford checked with his engineers



and they once again told him that what he wanted was impossible. Ford told them to keep going. They did. And they discovered how to build a V-8 engine.²

Sometimes I set goals, but then whatever I'm working toward ends up taking so much longer than I planned or expected. Often things don't happen according to our timetable, but maybe God has a different timetable, in accordance with His overarching plan. If we have faith and determination, then we won't just quit and make excuses when something doesn't work out as we had hoped. As Helen Keller reportedly said: "A bend in the road is not the end of the road... unless you fail to make the turn."

Life can't always be balanced. Sometimes you'll find that you're doing double or triple time; there's

2. Napoleon Hill, *Think and Grow Rich* (Meriden, CT: The Ralston Society, 1937)

work, the children, studying, managing the house, caring for a sick or disabled loved one or child, and on and on it goes. Those really tough times are what a friend of mine calls "the kill years." That's when you're way busier than you want to be, you're getting very little sleep and exercise, you have almost no free time, and you're absolutely exhausted. And on top of that, you often don't see the progress or success you had hoped for.

Yep, those are the "kill years." It's hard. And yet you just have to push through. You just have to keep going.

Whether you're studying, starting a business, pursuing a new career, learning a new skill, or whatever you're busy doing, it's almost *guaranteed* that you'll face challenges—a lot of them! Often it takes a long time before you see fruit, and you might face difficulties or opposition along the way. Take this example from the diary of the great evangelist and founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley:

- Sunday, A.M., May 5 Preached in St. Anne's. Was asked not to come back anymore.
- Sunday, P.M., May 5 Preached in St. John's. Deacons said "Get out and stay out."
- Sunday, A.M., May 12 Preached in St. Jude's. Can't go back there, either.
- Sunday, A.M., May 19 Preached in St. Somebody Else's. Deacons called special meeting and said I couldn't return.
- Sunday, P.M., May 19 Preached on street. Kicked off street.
- Sunday, A.M., May 26 Preached in meadow. Chased out of meadow as bull was turned loose during service.
- Sunday, A.M., June 2 Preached out at the edge of town. Kicked off the highway.
- Sunday, P.M., June 2 Afternoon, preached in a pasture. Ten thousand people came out to hear me.

There are many true stories that illustrate the magic that happens when you refuse to surrender in the face of difficulty. Each of those stories is a testimony to the power of perseverance.

The takeaway for our lives is this: When we don't quit, anything is possible.

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



POINTS TO PONDER

The path of most persistence

ALL THE PERFORMANCES OF HUMAN ART, at which we look with praise or wonder, are instances of the resistless force of perseverance: it is by this that the quarry becomes a pyramid, and that distant countries are united with canals. If a man was to compare the effect of a single stroke of the pickaxe, or of one impression of the spade, with the general design and last result, he would be overwhelmed by the sense of their disproportion; yet those petty operations, incessantly continued, in time surmount the greatest difficulties, and mountains are levelled, and oceans bounded, by the slender force of human beings.
—*Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)*

We must persevere in prayer that He may not permit our hearts to faint. Prayer and perseverance are necessary in our daily conflicts. The best remedy to the weariness is diligence in prayer.
—*John Calvin (1509–1564)*

Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish.
—*John Quincy Adams (1767–1848)*

Courage is not having the strength to go on; it is going on when you don't have the strength.
—*Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919)*

Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.
—*Galatians 6:9 ESV*

Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.
—*Pelé (b. 1940)*

Never stop fighting until you arrive at your destined place—that is, the unique you. Have an aim in life, continuously acquire knowledge, work hard, and have perseverance.
—*A. P. J. Abdul Kalam (1931–2015)*

When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.
—*Helen Keller (1880–1968)*

Don't ever give up. Don't ever give in. Don't ever stop trying. Don't ever sell out. And if you find yourself succumbing to one of the above for a brief moment, pick yourself up, brush yourself off, whisper a prayer, and start where you left off. But never, ever, ever give up.
—*Richelle E. Goodrich, Eena, The Tempter's Snare (2014)*

Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it to glory.
—*William Barclay (1907–1978)*

Though today may not fulfill
All your hopes, have patience still;
For perchance tomorrow's sun
Sees your happier days begun.
—*Unknown* ■

BY TINA KAPP

WORTH FORTY THOUSAND

THERE ARE TWO OPPOSITE ATTITUDES IN LIFE. Some people's motivational attitude inspires them to work harder and be better. They also have a knack for inspiring others to be the same. Not so the people that I'll call "demotivators": they have the opposite effect. You may end up feeling inept and negative about yourself when around them, and perhaps their "lectures" and "helpful" advice intimidate rather than inspire.

1. Nehemiah 4:10 NIV
2. Nehemiah 4:11 NIV
3. Nehemiah 4:12 NIV
4. Nehemiah 4:14 NIV
5. See Nehemiah 6:15.
6. www.just1thing.com

Some people say that all motivation comes from within, but I think many people can look back to a time they succeeded at something and can pinpoint a person who played a role or was a key influence in making that success happen. Sometimes having someone to back you up and motivate you can make a huge difference. The Duke of Wellington remarked that he considered Napoleon's presence in the field equal to forty thousand men.

Dr. Alan Loy McGinnis, author of *Bringing Out the Best in People*, once gave a lecture to an executive club in Toronto. An elderly, well-dressed gentleman came up to him afterwards and introduced himself. He was 74 years old and had just

retired from a lifetime of making lead pencils. Dr. McGinnis thought it must have been a terribly boring way to make a living and asked him if he was glad to finally be getting out of that business.

"Oh no," he replied. "In fact, I'm going to miss it like crazy. And you know what I'm going to miss most? The friends I've made in this business. Some of my suppliers and customers have been my best friends for 40 years. Several of our upper-level managers are guys I hired right out of college. I've had a lot of satisfaction helping them succeed."

As they talked, Dr. McGinnis learned that this man had built his business into a multimillion-dollar company and had recently sold it



Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

for a big profit. One of the keys to his success was his inherent belief in people. He had learned how to find the good in everyone he worked with and helped them build their success. In the process of helping others succeed, he benefited as well!

The Bible tells us the story of Nehemiah, who was an excellent motivator. He was the cupbearer for a foreign king, an honorable but dangerous job protecting him against poison. His heart, however, was to help his own people. So God set it up so that he would be in the palace at the right time to have a chat with the king, who then gave him permission to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls that had crumbled due to foreign occupations.

Nehemiah inspired people to help him and get the work started, but the Israelites had a lot of enemies who didn't want the walls rebuilt and constantly threatened them.

People got discouraged, saying, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."¹ Their enemies were also taunting them, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."² The people who lived near the construction site kept warning, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."³

So Nehemiah set up guards to protect the builders and he gave them a pep talk, saying, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."⁴

Part of what made him effective as a leader is that he didn't sit on the side barking orders; he built and guarded right alongside his men. Their fears were his fears. Their concerns were his concerns. Their triumphs were his triumphs. Thanks in part to Nehemiah's dedication and inspiration, the wall was rebuilt in only 52 days.⁵

One of my favorite examples is in Dale Carnegie's famous *How to*

Win Friends and Influence People. A store's employee was always mixing up price tags, which resulted in customers complaining and added headaches for the manager. No matter how many warnings or reminders or even confrontations, she didn't do any better. The manager finally tried one last solution. He called her into his office and told her he was promoting her to "supervisor of price tag posting" for the entire store, and that she was now in charge of keeping all the items properly tagged. The title and responsibility paid off, and she took pride in getting it right.

It's wonderful what a little encouragement can do for someone, and it's even better when you're the one doing the motivating. As Anne Frank said, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

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ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

WORKING WELL WITH OTHERS

Q: I WAS RECENTLY PROMOTED TO A MANAGERIAL POSITION THAT I'D HAD MY SIGHTS ON FOR A LONG TIME, but now I'm not sure I'm cut out for this job. It seems that everything I say or do results in a misunderstanding between my fellow managers and me. Any advice?

A: Misunderstandings are unpleasant under any circumstances, but especially so in the workplace, which is often already stressful. Add the pressure of learning a new leadership role, and it's no wonder you're discouraged. But don't give up! Learning new responsibilities and building good working relationships both take time, so be patient. In the meantime, here are a few tips and reminders that may help.

1. ONE THING AT A TIME. Give the business at hand and those you are talking with your undivided attention.

2. LISTEN. Hear your colleagues out before expressing your own thoughts

and opinions, and never interrupt. This will not only help you benefit from their experience, but it is a way of showing respect, which wins respect.

3. ASK FOR MORE INFORMATION OR A CLARIFICATION, IF NECESSARY. A lot of communication problems stem from people being too proud to say they need more background information or don't understand the point someone else is trying to make.

4. THINK THINGS THROUGH. Know what you want to get across before you start to speak. This will help you be clearer, more specific, and more direct in your presentation, and therefore less likely to be misunderstood.

5. DON'T OVERCOMMUNICATE. As John Kotter, a professor at the Harvard Business School and author of the international bestseller *Leading Change*, put it, "Good communication does not mean that you have to speak in perfectly formed sentences and paragraphs. It isn't about slickness. Simple and clear go a long way."

6. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR LIMITATIONS. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know."

7. WATCH YOUR UNSPOKEN COMMUNICATIONS. Nearly everything you do communicates something to others. Punctuality communicates. Attentiveness communicates. Body language communicates. Your facial expression communicates. Your tone of voice communicates. Even silence communicates. Positive signals open lines of communication; negative signals hinder.

8. BE SYMPATHETIC. To understand others, try to put yourself in their position. Why do they think or act the way they do? Be careful not to misread others' body language. If you're not sure about something, ask.

9. STRIVE FOR UNITY. It's easier to work with people than it is to work when at odds with them. Avoid conflicts and personality clashes by looking for common ground and admirable qualities in those you work with.

10. BE POSITIVE. Build team spirit by dwelling on jobs well done and progress being made toward your united goals. Focus on problems from the angle of "how can we fix this" rather than "who's to blame." ■



THE PROBLEM TRUCK

BY LI LIAN

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN STUCK BEHIND A TRUCK IN THE MIDDLE OF RUSH-HOUR TRAFFIC? The sight of a dirty truck, loaded down with an assortment of rusty metal objects and black, oil-laced fumes pouring out the exhaust pipe, is fairly common across Africa. To be caught behind one in a traffic jam is no one's idea of pleasure.

I happened to overhear two drivers discussing this very situation. The first driver asserted that whenever he found himself caught behind one, he would make every attempt to get out of the predicament, even riskily weaving through packed traffic lanes to get away.

But the second driver had a very different outlook. He said that whenever he happened to find himself behind one of those trucks,

he would roll up his windows and stay put behind the mammoth in front of him. Experience, he said, taught him that when the light at the intersection hit green and the chorus of horns and jostling of vehicles erupted, the massive truck would sound out its loud, penetrating horn and forge its way through the traffic, its size and speed charting a path through the confusion. All the second driver had to do was stick close behind it and follow.

I realize that I often view problems in my life like that awful truck in front of me, blocking my view and polluting my atmosphere. I'm in the middle of a traffic jam of daily problems, and now this monster shows up to add to the confusion. But I'm learning to appreciate the perspective of the second driver.

While each of us knows that being stuck with a problem is annoying,

and sometimes downright frustrating, it may be that very difficulty which will end up charting a new path for you and helping propel you faster down the road of life.

That's what Romans 5:3 says: "We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient."¹

And, by the way, the road of life is never jammed forever. God always opens an opportunity to overtake that problem truck in our lives, once it has served its purpose in helping us through the traffic battles of life!

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1. TLB



BY ROALD WATTERSON

THE GOLDEN TRAIT

I'VE BEEN WATCHING THE TV SERIES *THE X FACTOR*, in which singers across the United States participate in a talent show contest where the winner will be awarded a multimillion-dollar recording contract. For those unfamiliar with the show, in each episode the judges choose who will move on to the next level in the competition, based on talent, of course! But there's another trait that they're also looking for. They want someone reliable.

Judging from the remarks that the judges make to the contestants, it seems that recording companies don't want to invest millions of dollars in someone who may be momentarily fantastic and seemingly hugely talented, but is unreliable when it comes to giving stellar performances to sell-out crowds. Show business is tough, and performers who stand out from the crowd are those who consistently deliver excellent performances.

Of course, performing artists aren't the only ones who need to be reliable.

Coach John Wooden—considered one of the greatest basketball coaches of all time—talks about some of his basketball players who had reliability and what that meant to him. In his book, *Coach Wooden's Pyramid of Success*, he wrote, "Curtis Rowe was one of my most

1. John Wooden and Jay Carty, *Coach Wooden's Pyramid of Success, Building Blocks for a Better Life*. Regal, 2005), 114–115
2. 1 Kings 18:1–2 NIV

consistent players. Although he wasn't usually spectacular, he consistently played at a very high level and made it look easy. I could have almost penciled in his stat line before the game began."

Coach Wooden goes on: "Two of my best players during the mid-1950s stood out for different reasons. Morrie Taft was spectacular and explosive. But I never knew how he was going to play from night to night. On the other hand, I knew what Dick 'Skeets' Banton would deliver each game. Morrie [Taft] might get five rebounds, but they were memorable. Dick [Banton] would get eight or nine, but no one gave them much notice. Most people would say [Morrie] Taft was a better player than [Dick] Banton, because [Morrie] Taft had more natural ability and was so dazzling. But I'm not so sure that [Dick Banton] wasn't the more valuable player, because of his reliability."¹

I've found the same to be true in my line of work. There are times when I need to find artists to illustrate articles or stories, and I consider several things when picking an artist for an assignment, such as art style, and, of course, the level of talent and ability. But the real selling point for me, which might seem rather lackluster, is the artist's ability to meet deadlines.

Having watched a few episodes of *The X Factor*, and having read that excerpt from Coach Wooden's book, I began to notice this trait in certain Bible characters. Of the 50 Old Testament miracles listed in the concordance at the back of my Bible, close to a third are by the hand of Elijah. And as I was reading episodes of Elijah's story in the Old Testament I was struck by the immediacy and reliability of Elijah's obedience to God. God gives Elijah a command, and Elijah obeys.

Merriam-Webster gives this definition for reliable: "1. Suitable or fit to be relied on: dependable; 2. Giving the same result on successive trials." That second definition sounds a lot like what God found in His servant Elijah. Look at the following scenario: "The word of the Lord came to Elijah: 'Go and present yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the land.' So Elijah went."² And that's just one of the many verses that reflect the kind of relationship that God and Elijah shared. Perhaps it was because God found Elijah to be reliable that He continued to call on him.

Coach Wooden describes the characteristics of a reliable person in this way: "When we are reliable, others know that they can depend on us. They know that we will make the effort to do our best, whatever the situation might be. They know we won't run, cower, or become paralyzed by fear. They have learned to count on our consistency and trustworthiness. We'll still be there making the effort to do our best long after the weaker ones have faded." Do you have people like this in your life?—Those you can count on and who you know will be there to help you when life seems grim?

Reliable people are treasured wherever they are found. How can you practice this trait in your own life? You may love that you can count on a certain best friend to always show up when you need help, but can that person count on you in the same way? We may love that God is so reliable and utterly trustworthy, but can God also count on us to show up when He calls? These are worthwhile questions to consider.

ROALD WATTERSON IS AN EDITOR AND CONTENT DEVELOPER. ■

You can start growing with God today by praying this little prayer:

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for the wrong things I've done. Come into my heart and life and stay with me always. Help me to find true success that comes from getting to know You better and loving You and others. Amen.

SUCCESS AND SUCCEEDING

BY MARIE ALVERO



I HAVE A HARD TIME DEFINING SUCCESS, specifically when it comes to my work. It seems like any enterprise that gets 40+ hours of my life each week should be setting me up for tangible success. There should be promotion, challenge, and a sense of pride and accomplishment. But what if there isn't? What if you feel pretty much invisible at work; no one is recognizing you, let alone promoting you? Does that mean you're not succeeding? If success isn't measured by achievements, then how is it measured?

These are questions I've wrestled with regarding my career for the past few years, and here are a few questions I've been using to gauge my success:

1. Psalm 75:6-7

1) Am I showing up? This might sound silly, but the first requirement to success in just about any arena is simply to show up, to be present, to do the work. Daily I am astounded by how many people defeat themselves by not showing up.

2) Am I learning and growing, improving my knowledge and skills?

3) Am I consistently doing good work? Anyone can show off and dazzle when seeking attention and rewards, but the work you do day in and day out speaks to your character.

4) Am I cheering on others and supporting them? Am I doing my best to help my team succeed?

Each day I strive to be able to answer these questions in the positive. I feel that if I can do that, I am giving myself the very best chance at

true success, whether or not it comes with recognition or promotion.

Let me share a great scripture on the subject: "Exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another."¹

That's not to say I have no ambition for growth or greater opportunity, but I'm learning to focus on the part I can control, my attitude and my performance, and trust God for the rest. I would hate to cheat myself out of the growth God wants for me because I'm putting an inflated value on tangible success.

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. ■

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT

BY IRIS RICHARD

FRED WAS 19 WHEN OUR PATHS CROSSED—a troubled ambitious youth in search of purpose. After leaving home as a teenager, he'd tried many different ways to make a living and had unfortunately made some wrong choices along the way; but there was much potential for change, and Fred was blessed with numerous talents and the willingness to learn.

At the time, I was heading a Christian Leadership Training and Counseling ministry, and Fred joined the program. Through the following year of ups and downs in his life, he kept up with his weekly classes and completed the course with excellence. Then he got a job, and for some years we lost touch.

Then there was Jackie. She was 30 and had recently experienced tragedy when her newborn baby passed away. We met on a train and got into a conversation. She too joined our training

program and showed great interest. Receiving faith-building input also helped her recover from the pain of losing her baby, and when a new setback struck her life, the spiritual fortitude she had gained provided Jackie with the strength needed.

There were others who came and went, from all backgrounds and ages. Many left the course better able to navigate the challenges of life; others took what they had gained a step further and applied at least some of the lessons. But sadly, most received little benefit and didn't show lasting change in their lives and actions.

The parable Jesus told of the sower describes a similar scenario: A farmer went out to plant seeds: some fell by the wayside and were trampled on, some fell on rocks with too little soil to grow, others were eaten by birds, but some fell on good soil, and these grew strong and brought forth abundant fruit.¹

The times when I get to see this play out are the sweetest. After a few years without any news, Fred got back in touch and described how he'd used his training as a springboard to become successful in the medical field. When I heard from Jackie again, I found out she had become a therapist specializing in counseling people with HIV.

The lesson for our team, and perhaps for anyone who gets tempted with discouragement over lower-than-expected output for the amount of effort put into a task, can be learned from the sower above, who didn't expect 100% of his seeds would yield fruit, but knew that the seeds which fell on good ground would provide all he needed.

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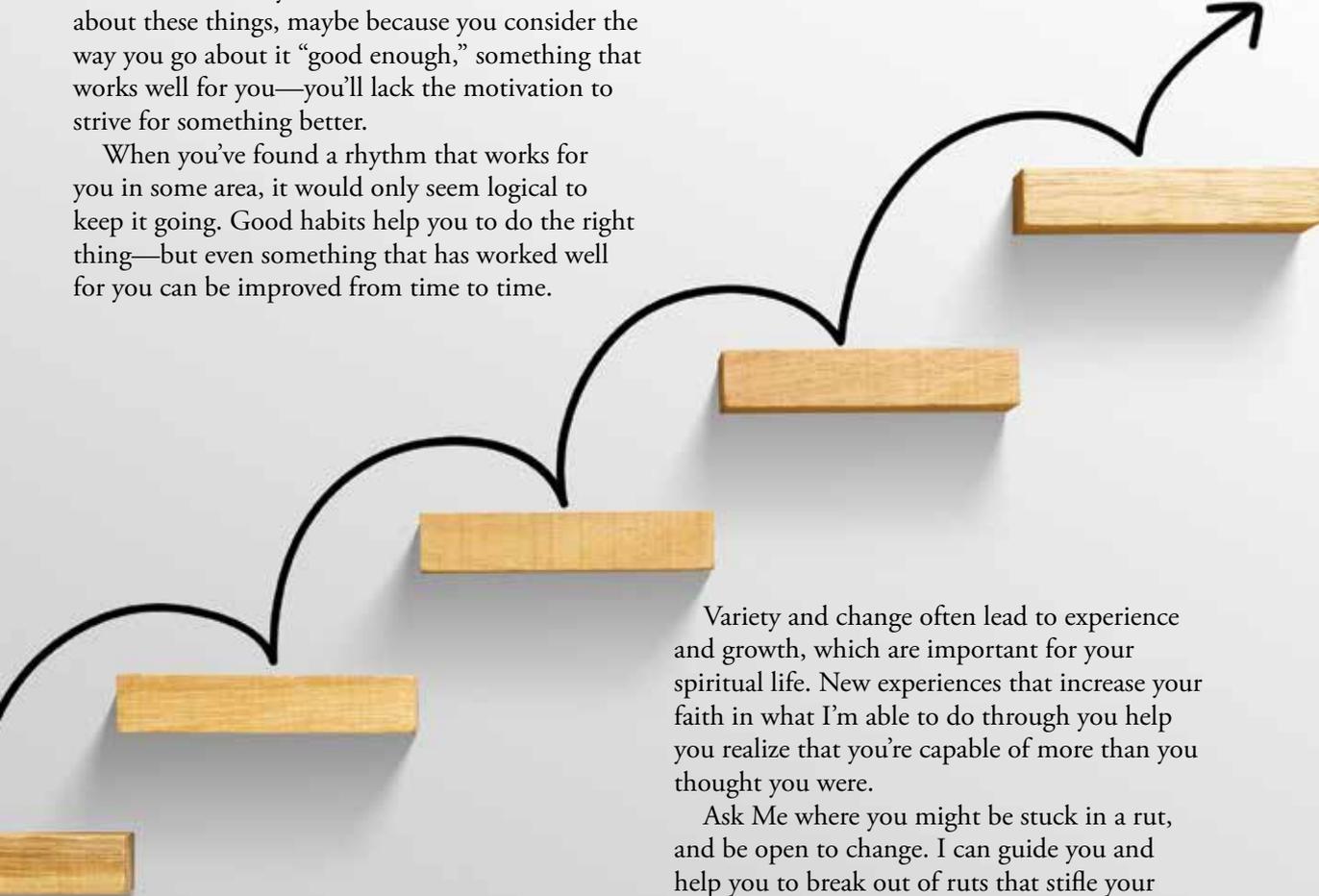
1. See Luke 8.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

MAKE YOUR GOOD BETTER AND YOUR BETTER BEST

I'm in the business of helping you take the good things in your life and improve them, making them even better. But if you never take the time to think about these things, maybe because you consider the way you go about it "good enough," something that works well for you—you'll lack the motivation to strive for something better.

When you've found a rhythm that works for you in some area, it would only seem logical to keep it going. Good habits help you to do the right thing—but even something that has worked well for you can be improved from time to time.



Variety and change often lead to experience and growth, which are important for your spiritual life. New experiences that increase your faith in what I'm able to do through you help you realize that you're capable of more than you thought you were.

Ask Me where you might be stuck in a rut, and be open to change. I can guide you and help you to break out of ruts that stifle your growth. I am the best rut-breaker of all time. Call on Me to help you break any chains that hold you back, and I will help set you free.