

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# **a**CTIVATED

Vol 20 • Issue 9

## **THE UMBRELLA**

A stranger's kindness

## **Your Little Light**

Ways to make a difference

## **Three Lives**

Looking for a legacy



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

### THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”

Does that seem challenging to you? It does to me. It's often really *hard* to step up and make a difference. More often than not, it will involve some discomfort, and we can expect our lives will sometimes need to deviate from the course we've planned. But history is full of men and women who stepped up, sacrificed, and played their part in making a difference—and who were changed for the better and were happier for it.

Take the apostle Paul. He probably didn't own a house or lands or livestock. He didn't have a wife or children. He had no stable income or paid vacations. He suffered almost unbelievable persecutions,<sup>1</sup> and he spent his final days in a foreign dungeon. But his letters are peppered through with words like “joy,” “rejoice,” “gladness,” and “cheer.”

The Bible says, “God planned for us to do good things and to live as he has always wanted us to live. That's why he sent Christ to make us what we are.”<sup>2</sup> Whenever we serve others in any way, we're actually serving God and fulfilling one of His purposes for us—living our destiny.

The British poet David Whyte put it like this: “When people struggle through the weeds, pull back the moss, and read the inscription on my tombstone, I don't want it to say: ‘He made his car payments.’” Neither do I. We were made for more than that. God used Paul, and He can use you and me to make a difference.

1. See 2 Corinthians 11:23–28.

2. Ephesians 2:10 CEV

For more information on *Activated*, visit our website or write to us.

Website: [activated.org](http://activated.org)

Email: [activated@activated.org](mailto:activated@activated.org)

Local contacts:

*South Africa:*

Tel: (082) 491 2583

Email: [sales@bigthought.co.za](mailto:sales@bigthought.co.za)

*India:*

Email: [activatedindia@activated.org](mailto:activatedindia@activated.org)

*Nigeria:*

Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333

Email: [activatednigeria@activated.org](mailto:activatednigeria@activated.org)

*Philippines:*

Cell: (0922) 8125326

Email: [activatedph@gmail.com](mailto:activatedph@gmail.com)

EDITOR Ronan Keane

DESIGN Gentian Suçi

© 2019 Activated. All Rights Reserved.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. Other Bible quotations are from the following sources: Contemporary English Version (CEV). Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission. New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1978, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission. English Standard Version (ESV). Copyright © 2001 by Good News Publishers. Used by permission.



# THE UMBRELLA

BY ROALD WATTERSON

THE AIR WAS HEAVY WITH IMPENDING RAIN AS I MADE MY WAY ON FOOT THROUGH CHIBA, JAPAN. As I glanced at the low gray clouds, I chided myself for not bringing an umbrella. It seemed that in a minute or two the heavens would burst open, but two minutes came and went.

I was waiting at a railroad crossing when my luck ran out. Suddenly, huge drops cascaded from the sky, and I heard the sound of umbrellas clicking open all around me. The electronic display announced that the barrier would remain down to allow three trains to cross. I would be standing in the rain for at least five minutes.

I decided I wouldn't let it faze me. After all, this wasn't the first time that I found myself caught in the rain unprepared.

Then a woman walked up and stood next to me. There was nothing

striking about her, and I wouldn't have paid much attention to her if it hadn't been for what happened next. As she stood alongside me, she quietly held her umbrella over both of us, shielding me from the rain.

I was startled out of my pretended indifference and thanked her.

She smiled but didn't say a word. I wondered what else to say. But as

we stood there waiting for the trains to pass, I realized I didn't have to say anything. She was one of those people who don't give a second thought to the acts of kindness they perform. We crossed the tracks together, then went our separate ways.

Like everyone else's, my life is filled with little opportunities to do something to help others and

show them a touch of God's love, as that woman did for me that day. And whenever I'm tempted with the thought that there's really no point in showing kindness to strangers, I find good reason in the memory

of the kind woman who shared her umbrella with me.

More importantly, I realize that each extra step, kind deed, and loving

word I say may seem small, but it can open a world of kindness for people who cross my path. You think not? Well, I'm sure that woman has long forgotten the kindness she showed a wet teenager years ago—but *I* haven't.

Remember there's no such thing as a small act of kindness. Every act creates a ripple with no logical end.  
—Scott Adams (b. 1957)

ROALD WATTERSON IS AN EDITOR AND CONTENT DEVELOPER. ■

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

# GOD'S LOVE FOR HUMANKIND

**GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE HAS NO BOUNDS**, is unchanging and without limitations. It is given freely, no matter what. Each of us has sinned, and sin brings separation from God. Nevertheless, God loves us. It doesn't mean He loves all that we do, but He loves us. In fact, He loves humanity so much that He made it possible for the breach caused by our sins and wrongdoing to be bridged through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrates

his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."<sup>1</sup>

God loves us not because of who *we* are but because of who *He* is. In fact, He doesn't just love you and me and other Christians who appreciate the great sacrifice He made in giving His only Son to die for us, but He loves every single person in the whole world equally and unconditionally. Even if someone has never heard of God, even if someone says they hate Him, He still loves that person unconditionally. God's love is unfathomable. It is perfect.

Every person is precious to God, regardless of age, race, nationality, physical appearance, economic status, religious belief, political affiliation, or sexual orientation. We may not like every person's beliefs,

lifestyle, or choices. We may not agree with their political or other opinions. They may live without regard to God's moral standards; they may live lives of grave sin—but no matter what their state, God loves them.

Jesus said that the two most important commandments are to love God and to love others,<sup>2</sup> and we are told to let our light shine, so that others may see our good works and glorify God.<sup>3</sup> This call to action shows that God intends for us to

1. Romans 5:6,8 NIV
2. See Matthew 22:37–40.
3. See Matthew 5:16.
4. See <http://www.turnbacktogod.com/story-unconditional-love>.
5. 1 John 3:16 NLT
6. James 1:27 NLT
7. *Our Daily Bread*, February 6. From a sermon by Dennis Davidson, Authentic Faith Works, October 26, 2009
8. *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 126





The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the little boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. He hesitated only for a moment before taking a deep breath and saying, “Yes, I’ll do it to save her.”

As the transfusion progressed, he lay in bed next to his sister and smiled, as all did, seeing the color returning to her cheeks. Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, “Will I start to die right away?”

The little boy had misunderstood the doctor; he thought he was going to have to give his sister *all* of his blood in order to save her.<sup>4</sup>

What a tender and beautiful example of love! The Bible says, “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.”<sup>5</sup>

The apostle James wrote that the true practice of faith consists of both outward and inward action. Outward toward others in practical ways, and inward through devotion to God. He said: “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means

caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.”<sup>6</sup>

In his book *Well Done*, Dave Thomas said, “Roll-up-your-shirt-sleeves Christians see Christianity as faith and action. They still make the time to talk with God through prayer, [they] study Scripture with devotion, [they are] super-active in their church and take their ministry to others to spread the Good Word.”<sup>7</sup>

As Rick Warren said in *The Purpose Driven Life*, “In heaven God won’t say, ‘Tell me about your career, your bank account, and your hobbies.’ Instead he will review how you treated others, particularly those in need.”<sup>8</sup>

Jesus set the example of the “roll-up-your-shirt-sleeves” concept. He constantly showed love to others. He felt compassion for those in need and was moved to loving action. He was merciful. He showed kindness. He fed the hungry and healed the afflicted. He fought against evil and unrighteousness.

Let’s do what we can to be tangible examples of God’s love for humanity, by sharing Him and His love with those in need—spiritually, through introducing them to Jesus, and practically, through ministering to their other needs.

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

interact with others in a manner that reflects Him, to treat others with love, compassion, and mercy, as He does. This often requires some sacrifice. But when you think about Jesus’ sacrifice for us, there really is no comparison.

The story has been told of a little girl named Liz who was suffering from a rare and serious disease. Her only chance of recovery appeared to be a blood transfusion from her five-year-old brother, who had survived the same disease and developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness.



BY TINA KAPP

# TO GIVE OR

MAHATMA GANDHI ONCE SAID, “The world provides enough for every man’s need but not for every man’s greed.” It’s easy to say things like, “The rich should really give to the poor and solve world hunger!” However, when the giving strikes closer to home, it can be tougher than we think.

I once had a watch that I thought was seriously cool. It was a boy’s watch, but I didn’t mind; it had all the dials and gadgets you could want. My younger brother was crazy about my watch and asked if he could have it. I told him I couldn’t possibly part with such amazingsness and left it at that. Shortly after, my treasured watch met with an accident and

broke. That’s when I realized how silly it was that I’d missed the opportunity to give it to my little brother, who was so much more important to me than that watch ever could be. It might not have lasted him forever either, but at least he would have enjoyed it for a while. And more than the watch, the meaning behind my giving him something special would have stuck with him so much longer.

I try to remember that incident whenever I’m tempted to be selfish with my things or start to prize them too highly. It’s great to have nice things and groovy gadgets. These days, the “must-have” gadgets are endless—from smartphones, iPads, laptops, and gaming equipment down to 3D home TVs! If you have some of these nice things and enjoy

them and they help you with your work or studies and are also a fun source of entertainment, technology can be great. But it’s good to step back sometimes and imagine what it would be like if one day all those things instantly disappeared. After your initial withdrawal symptoms, you’d realize that life goes on without an abundance of material things. What matters most are our loved ones—our friends and family members. Sometimes we can forget this truth, and that’s when we tend to act selfishly.

The act of giving not only helps those we give to, but us as well. Luke 6:38 says, “Give, and it will be given to you.” Sometimes what you get back will be something tangible, but more often than not, what you



# NOT TO GIVE

receive in return is the satisfaction that you did something good. Have you ever given someone something they really needed or wanted and watched their face light up? It's an amazing feeling!

An old American movie from the 1930s called *The Man Who Played God* is about a wealthy concert pianist who lost his hearing in a bomb explosion. He finally got through his depression when he learned how to read lips. He'd watch people in Central Park (New York City), where they'd talk about their problems and troubles, and he'd do what he could to solve their problems anonymously. I think it would be amazing to do something like that, to know what other people need and be able to secretly give it to them.

Then again, that's when the crunch comes. It's easy for me to think that if I had a million dollars, I'd love to give it away to good causes, or to ponder all the great things I'd do for my family with money like that; but when it comes to giving away a small portion of my free time or doing a favor that costs me in the here and now, that's where the true essence of giving really kicks in.

I have a very personal description of what having a truly giving heart means. It means not *only* doing visible works to help the poor or disadvantaged, but also being there for others to lend a helping hand. It's giving sacrificially and not asking for or expecting favors in return. It's not having a personal agenda. The love and kindness of people with giving

hearts are obvious in their actions, and their lives are examples of cheerful and selfless giving.

I'd love to be remembered as someone like that! Sure, we all have bouts of selfishness, and human nature tends to take the path of least resistance, but being generous is something to strive for. Sometimes giving can be as simple as a sincere compliment, a hug, or a word of appreciation. It can also be giving your favorite gizmo to your little brother or sister when it would mean the world to them.

TINA KAPP IS A DANCER, PRESENTER, AND FREELANCE WRITER IN SOUTH AFRICA. SHE RUNS AN ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY THAT HELPS RAISE FUNDS FOR CHARITY AND MISSIONARY PROJECTS. ■

**I LOVE BIOGRAPHIES.** Historical movies, books, and even web posts are a great way to get a bird's-eye view of a life. Through their commendable or detestable examples, we have the benefit of seeing how a life develops and how it ends—either in fame, shame, or maybe obscurity. Sometimes the plot goes places that no fiction writer would dare go.

One such example is Lilius Trotter (1853–1928). When I saw a recent documentary of her life entitled *Many Beautiful Things*, I was touched by her dedication and commitment to stay true to her convictions. She turned down fame and success as a renowned artist to live a life of relative obscurity, spending 40 years in Algeria helping women learn a skill that would enable them to have a better life. She didn't bury her creative talents, because her art blossomed while she was in Algeria, but she wasn't doing it for her own glory or the way that some of the art experts of her day wanted her to. Lilius created art because she loved observing nature and people, and she wanted to share that passion with others.

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

# THREE LIVES

Her diaries are full of illustrations and notes of what she learned from people and nature: “The daisies have been reading me a faith lesson,” and “The milky looking glacier torrent spoke with God's voice.” Lilius' writings show that she was enthralled with the adventure of living, learning, and adapting to a new culture and language. She loved what she was doing. Her final statement was, “I was more alive and had more joy and more creativity and richness than if I had stayed in London.”

God had called her to do something hard in leaving her comfort zone, but she reveled in the adventure of it all. Her impact isn't only measured in her art, but also in the ripple effects on the women's lives she touched. Sometimes it seemed that she was just pouring water onto the dry sand without seeing any fruit. But in the desert, there are underground rivers of water. Trees tap into this resource by growing their roots deep. Lilius was like that tree, with faith that ran deep.

Lilius' art remained mostly buried in the basements of private collections and museums until art historians recently brought her life to light. But if success is counted



1. Matthew 6:19–21 NLT
2. <http://elixirmime.com>

in lives changed and improved circumstances for others, Liliias Trotter was eminently successful, and the impact she had is still being felt today.

In stark contrast was another docudrama I saw called *Narcos*, about the life of Pablo Escobar (1949–1993), the Colombian cocaine baron and narco-terrorist. Although he was the wealthiest criminal in history, with an estimated worth of 55 billion dollars (in today's value), he was a pauper spiritually. Like Jesus said, "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."<sup>1</sup>

The futility of Pablo Escobar's riches can be vividly seen in the fact that 10% of all his cash was eaten by rodents and written off as spoilage. When he was hiding from law enforcement, he burned stacks of bills just to keep warm, and in the end, his wealth was turned over to the Colombian government.

Besides the futility of his wealth, consider the death and destruction that Escobar left in his wake. Thousands died in the mayhem, and during his reign as "King of Coke," Colombia was dubbed the murder capital of the world. The negative impact of those lives lost and ruined is incalculable.

But even here, there is a ray of hope. Pablo's son, Juan Pablo Escobar Henao, has tried to reach out to the victims of his father's rage through a documentary film, as well as personally. He has apologized on behalf of his father to the Colombian people and any who have suffered from the sins of his father. Instead of throwing fuel on the fire and seeking revenge, Pablo's son seeks to follow God's admonitions to seek reconciliation through forgiveness from those we have wronged and to forgive those who have wronged us.

Three very different life stories and three legacies. How will we play our role, and what legacy will we leave?

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST<sup>2</sup> IN GERMANY. ■





BY MARA HODLER

# HOW CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

WHenever I log in to Facebook or load a news website—or when I glance at the newsrack at the checkout—it seems there are always some really ugly things going on, and I find myself oscillating between anger and despair.

As I scroll through my social media feeds, there are comments like, “This is so sad!” or “I hate that this is happening!” While I agree with those statements, I can’t help but feel that they’re a bit useless. How does saying that we dislike catastrophic issues help the people whose lives are being turned upside down because of them?

But what can I do? Do I pack up a large first-aid kit and head off to a war zone? Do I open my home to homeless families? Do I put up a video on YouTube exposing the nastiness of bullying? How can I actually make a difference?

I think this is sort of a universal question that mankind has been asking for millennia now: *What are we supposed to do about all the horrible stuff that happens in the world?*

- 
1. Matthew 25:40 CEV
  2. [www.just1thing.com](http://www.just1thing.com)

One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.  
—*John F. Kennedy (1917–1963)*

If you cannot feed a hundred people, feed one.—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in our hands to make a difference.—*Nelson Mandela (1918–2013)*

I just wish people would realize that anything is possible if you try. Dreams are made if people try.—*Terry Fox (1958–1981)*

It's amazing what God can do with what seems so small; like you and I!  
—*John M. Sheehan*

Some people take the approach of not knowing and not caring. They don't follow the news; they block out all the problems and loop the "Everything is Awesome" song track through their head all day long.

Others figure that it's a dog-eat-dog world out there, and it's okay to trample on someone else, because if you don't, they may trample on you.

There are also people who just conclude, in despair, that it's all a waste of time. This life is misery. Why try to help anyone? It won't make any difference.

I've given this a lot of thought of late, as it's something I have to make peace with. I don't want to live in fear, ignorance, and depression regarding the world and where it's headed.

So in my seeking, I looked to the life of Jesus. In ancient Palestine where He lived, there were plenty of problems, many of them the same problems we face today—poverty, sickness, suffering, oppression, cruelty, and indifference.

Jesus responded by helping those around Him each and every day. He healed, encouraged, blessed, and made whole. In turn those blessed, healed people went out and spread the joy, the good news, and the blessing. And those they blessed and encouraged probably turned around and did the same for someone else. And this ripple effect of Jesus' life continues today.

Even if you can't change everything, then at least do something. Be kind. Be a light. Be a bright spot in a dark world. Keep caring.

Treat each person you interact with every day as an opportunity to share something beautiful. Talk to the cashier, smile at the other parents picking up their kids from school, thank the teacher, the policeman, the mailman, or the server. Be gracious with the homeless lady on the street corner.

And go a step further by being generous as well. Imagine how different a place the world would be if each person was like that.

Neither you nor I may be able to make a difference to the whole world, but we can make a *huge* difference in the little bit of world that surrounds us. When we're kind to someone, and they turn around and are kind to the next person, the ripples of those actions can reach around the world!

So my conclusion is that while there may be problems in the world that I cannot do much about, there's usually someone or something right in front of me that needs my help. There, I can make a difference, and I will try my best to keep being someone who cares.

When I can help in a big way, I will help in a big way. When I can help in a small way, I will help in a small way. And regardless of how I help, I will remember Jesus' words: "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me."<sup>1</sup>

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST1THING,<sup>2</sup> A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

A photograph of a dog, likely a sheepdog, standing on a rocky outcrop. The dog has a mix of brown, black, and white fur. In the background, there are blue mountains under a cloudy sky. The text 'BE LIKE TIP' is overlaid on the left side of the image in large, red, block letters.

# BE LIKE TIP

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

IN HIS BOOK DESCRIBING YEARS OF VETERINARY WORK IN THE HARSH YORKSHIRE DALES OF ENGLAND, James Herriot tells the story of Tip, a sheepdog at a local farm. He first encountered Tip one freezing morning, when he walked up to the farmhouse door, looking for the owner. Suddenly, from under a pile of snow at the foot of the door, Tip emerged, cheery and full of excitement. James was shocked, and later asked the farmer why the old dog was left outside.

“He’s not left there,” explained the farmer. “We’ve tried all sorts of things to get him to stay in the barn with the other dogs, but he wants to sleep outside our door.”

What dedication, loyalty, integrity, and faithfulness Tip had! Old and ragged though he might be, he remained true, preferring to stay in

the cold by his master’s door than sleep in the comfort of a distant barn.

The Bible commends those who “keep their promises even when it hurts.”<sup>1</sup> As Christians, we’re called to fulfill our promises, both to others and to God. Part of that is doing what we know is right, even if it’s hard. And to be willing to give up a few comforts for the sake of our physical and spiritual goals.

James Herriot describes how, as he left the farm that cold morning, he looked back at faithful Tip, standing right by his master’s side. Whatever the circumstances, Tip’s joy was to serve his master. May we all have equal joy in our daily living—for whether it is mundane or exciting, through it we can serve and glorify our Master.

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

“Stand still”—keep the posture of an upright man, ready for action, expecting further orders, cheerfully and patiently awaiting the directing voice; and it will not be long before God shall say to you, as distinctly as Moses said it to the people of Israel, “Go forward.”  
—Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)

◆  
Never forget that you are one of a kind. Never forget that if there weren’t any need for you in all your uniqueness to be on this earth, you wouldn’t be here in the first place. And never forget, no matter how overwhelming life’s challenges and problems seem to be, that one person can make a difference in the world. In fact, it is always because of one person that all the changes that matter in the world come about. So be that one person.

—Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983)

1. Psalm 15:4 NLT



BY ANNA PERLINI

# WEDNESDAY MEETINGS

YOU WOULDN'T THINK HE WAS SPEAKING TO A GATHERING OF ELDERLY PEOPLE, some in wheelchairs, some unable to talk, others afflicted by dementia or Alzheimer's.

His hands gesticulating in the air, his voice passionately describing some deep concept, then the blackboard and the chalk: "Who can tell me what peace means? You, Alberto, yes, tell me and I'll write it down. Wonderful! Come on, everyone, we'll send this to the local newspaper!"

Ferruccio had already been working for years in this home for the elderly when I first met him. He was in charge of recreational activities, but basically he was a motivator, especially for anyone who had a chance to see him in action.

Passion, empathy, encouragement, care, and respect till the end—these are some of the values he embodied till the day he retired, just a few months ago. I learned so much from his example, the way he spoke. No matter how in a hurry he was, he always stopped to answer anyone

calling him from a distant wheelchair or stooped down to wipe spilled food. He placed enormous value on the individual.

Every Wednesday, he would gather a group of senior citizens together and discuss current events. Then the group would write letters to local politicians and officials or the children at the village school or a group of Bosnian refugees. Like magic, he was able to pull words from the most seemingly uninterested old man and steal a smile from the woman in a wheelchair who had suffered a stroke and couldn't talk anymore but had so much to say, all trapped inside.

During what became known as "Wednesday Meetings," much was said, discussed, proposed. The participants wrote a book dedicated to the town, and even the local press often reported on their discussion topics.

I learned the importance of creating an environment for

elderly people to open up. They need someone to take a few moments and truly engage. They need eye contact. They need a smile. They need someone who remembers their name and who shows genuine interest.

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

When it's over, I want to say:  
all my life  
I was a bride married to amazement.  
I was the bridegroom, taking the  
world into my arms.

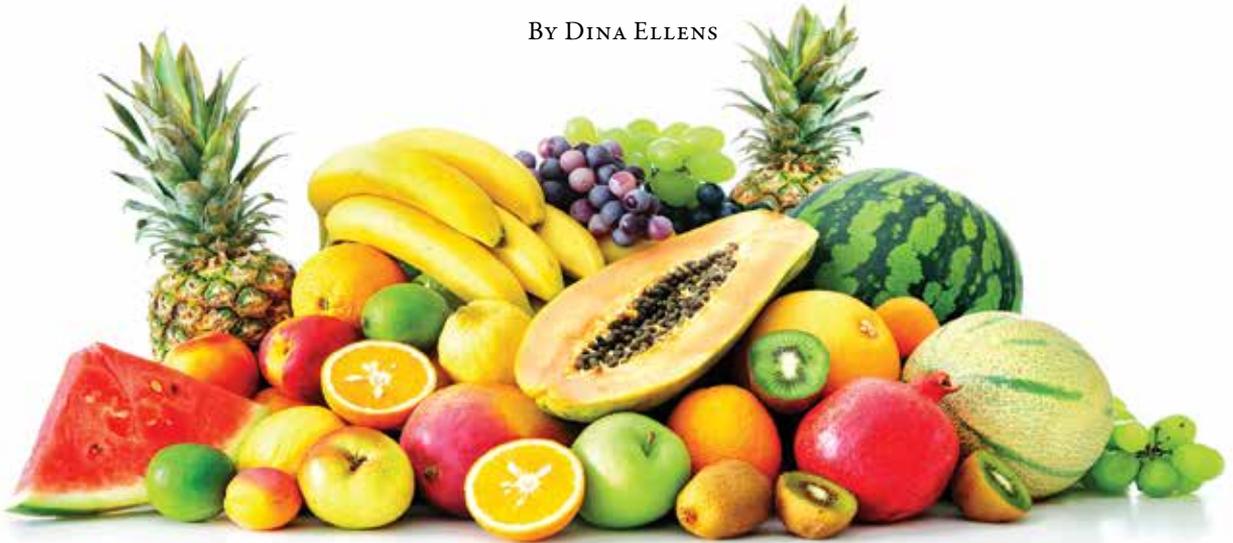
When it is over, I don't want to  
wonder  
if I have made of my life something  
particular, and real.  
I don't want to find myself sighing  
and frightened,  
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply  
having visited this world.  
—Mary Oliver (1935–2019)

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

# A FRUITFUL REFLECTION

BY DINA ELLENS



**MY TEN-YEAR-OLD GRAND-DAUGHTER AND I HAD A LOT OF FUN THE OTHER DAY**, talking about fruit. We had just read the verses in Revelation 22 about the tree of life that bears 12 different kinds of fruit: “The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.”<sup>1</sup>

We tried to imagine what fruits those would be—of course, all our favorites would have to be there!

1. Revelation 22:1–2 ESV
2. See Genesis 2:9.

We laughed, thinking how amazing the tree of life must be—growing coconuts, apples, peaches, mangoes, and papayas on the same branches!

*It’s so wonderful, I thought, how God gives us glimpses of heaven to look forward to.*

“Are there any other Bible verses about the tree of life?” Emily asked.

Inspired by her question, we did a Bible search and found quite a few verses about the tree of life. Not only is it mentioned in Revelation, the last book of the Bible, it’s also mentioned in Genesis, the first. In Genesis, the tree of life is in the Garden of Eden, along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible contains many encouraging verses about heaven. There’s really

a lot to look forward to! Heavenly rewards may mean something different to each of us—to Emily, it means getting to eat her favorite fruit whenever she wants—but God has promised those special rewards to every person who knows Jesus as the Savior!

Although we face tough times in our Christian life—after all, God has called us to be fighters and conquerors—He’s also given us many encouraging promises about the rewards and blessings that await us.

DINA ELLENS TAUGHT SCHOOL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FOR OVER 25 YEARS. ALTHOUGH RETIRED, SHE REMAINS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK, AS WELL AS PURSUING HER INTEREST IN WRITING. ■



# YOUR LITTLE LIGHT

BY MARIE ALVERO

If you haven't yet received Jesus, you can do so now by praying the following:

*Jesus, please forgive me for all my sins. I believe that You gave Your life for me. I open the door of my heart and ask You to please come in and give me Your gift of eternal life with You in heaven. Amen.*

I LOVE READING INVIGORATING STORIES OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE STARTED NGOs, founded orphanages, adopted foster kids, created fair-trade organizations, or pulled off some other world-changing feat. But as inspiring as these people are, most of us aren't called to that kind of mission. We're in one place, woven through a family and a community, living pretty low-key lives. Let me share with you three things that have helped my family learn to love and serve our community in the midst of our ordinary everyday lives.

## 1) SAY YES TO SERVING

This could be in your church or your kids' school, or for your neighbor, or anywhere there is a need that you can fill. And you can be sure that there *is* a need that you can fill. We learned that when we started

servicing in our church. We started by giving an hour or so of our time, but as we saw more needs that we could fill, we said yes. This servicing enables us to give back to our community, and we're blessed by the friendships this builds and strengthens.

## 2) LET GO OF PERFECTION

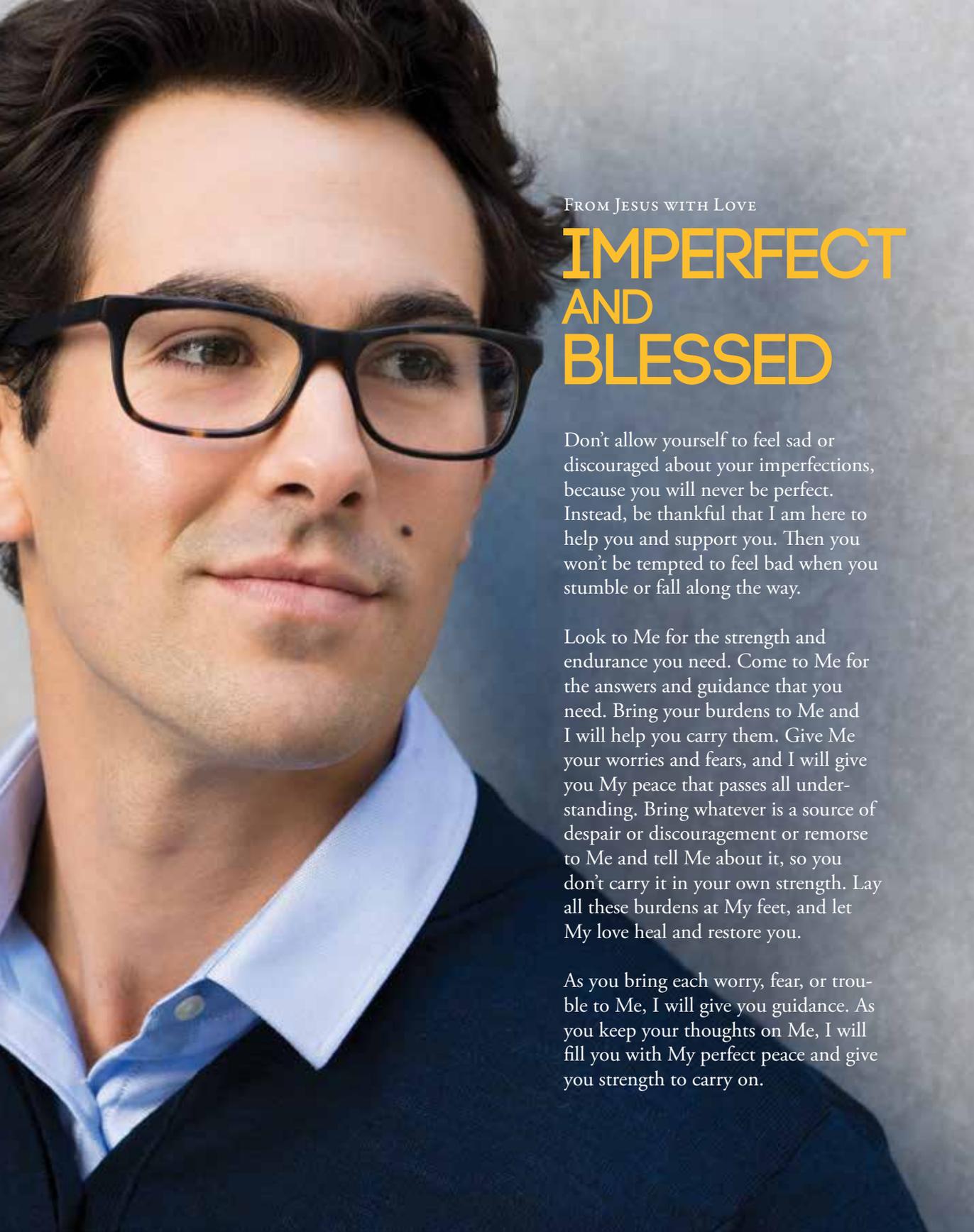
Do you love to entertain, but only when you've had the time to clean your house, plan a gourmet meal, and cut fresh flowers for the table? I've learned that availability is the first step in hospitality. Welcoming people into your home is so often the start of and the fuel for a friendship. I will open the door to my house for you no matter what it looks like, and I will share whatever I have in my kitchen with you. I've become quite comfortable sharing my imperfection, and have found that this makes it easier for others to respond in kind.

## 3) CHOOSE RELATIONSHIP OVER CONVENIENCE

Like everyone else, sometimes I want to be done with people. There's almost nothing I like more than my bed and a good TV show, with no one to bug me. But later today, I'm going to go to the kitchen and bake some cookies, because my husband invited people over to watch a football game. And in the years ahead, I know we'll remember getting together with our loved ones with far more fondness than I will recall the TV shows I watched in my PJs.

Your light might not be huge, but it will shine bright as you open your life to those around you and serve them with warmth and joy. Just like Jesus did.

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

# IMPERFECT AND BLESSED

Don't allow yourself to feel sad or discouraged about your imperfections, because you will never be perfect. Instead, be thankful that I am here to help you and support you. Then you won't be tempted to feel bad when you stumble or fall along the way.

Look to Me for the strength and endurance you need. Come to Me for the answers and guidance that you need. Bring your burdens to Me and I will help you carry them. Give Me your worries and fears, and I will give you My peace that passes all understanding. Bring whatever is a source of despair or discouragement or remorse to Me and tell Me about it, so you don't carry it in your own strength. Lay all these burdens at My feet, and let My love heal and restore you.

As you bring each worry, fear, or trouble to Me, I will give you guidance. As you keep your thoughts on Me, I will fill you with My perfect peace and give you strength to carry on.