

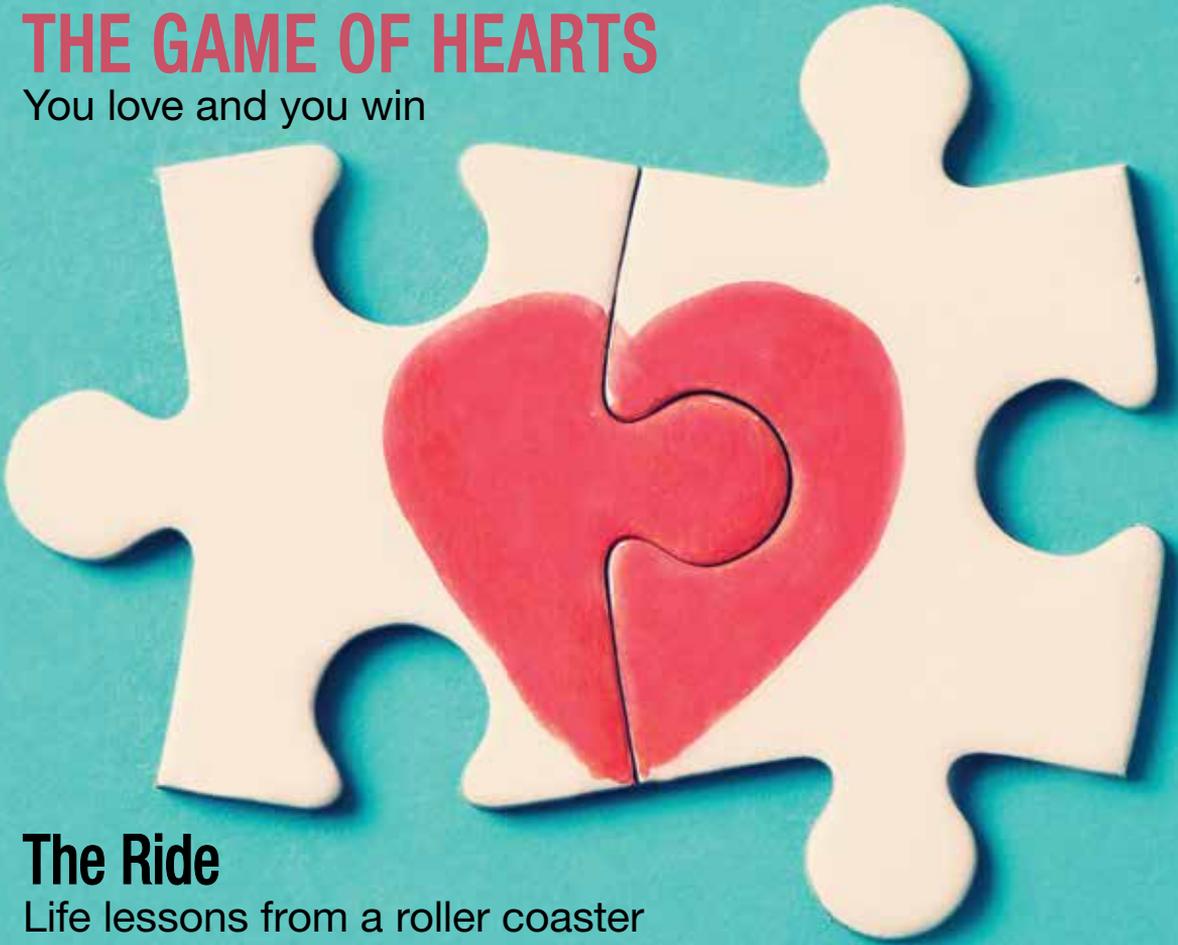
CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# activated

Vol 21 • Issue 2

## THE GAME OF HEARTS

You love and you win



### The Ride

Life lessons from a roller coaster

### God Isn't an Elephant

A clean slate

# ACTIVATED

VOL 21, ISSUE 2

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THE SPICE OF LIFE

You've probably heard the statement many times, "If you don't like the weather in *Whereverville*, just wait a few minutes and it will change." Having lived on several continents, I've heard something similar many times. There are places that enjoy a fairly constant climate year-round, but it seems like most places on earth experience a variety of weather conditions—even, as the saying illustrates, several in one day—and to me, that diversity shows an aspect of God's personality.

When God had finished creating the earth, Genesis tells us that He looked at His work—at the ten types of clouds and the four types of snow crystals, at the five types of sand dunes and the dozens of species of pine trees, at the cocoa beans and the vanilla pods—and declared that "it was very good."<sup>1</sup> In other words, God likes variety.

And so do we! While *Activated* issues have usually followed a themed format, there are some articles that just don't fit nicely into a theme. There are also articles that could fit into a theme, but that theme isn't on the schedule for a while. The solution was obvious—although it hadn't yet been put into practice.

Welcome to *Activated's* first potpourri issue with articles on a variety of interesting topics. Did you ever wonder which animal is (*not*) a good illustration of God's character? Who would have thought that the defining event in a eunuch's life was not the barbaric operation he underwent as a child? And what would *you* do if you found 31 cents on the street?

The answers to these questions, and more, are included in the following pages. We hope that you enjoy reading them as much as we enjoyed compiling them.

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1. Genesis 1:31

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# Playing ketchup

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

I RECENTLY SAW A KETCHUP AD FOR A FAMOUS BRAND THAT SHOWED KETCHUP POURING OUT OF A BOTTLE VERY SLOWLY, accompanied by the song “At Last.” It reminded me of being a child and waiting for ketchup to pour out on my hamburger agonizingly slowly.

Some brands are watered down and pouring isn’t a problem anymore—except for the lack of flavor. Some brands now come in plastic squeeze bottles for impatient folks like me or in small plastic packs that you tear open and squeeze out. But I’m talking about the narrow-necked glass bottles which gave you no alternative except to wait.

I remember getting so impatient for my ketchup. I’d try shaking the bottle. Then I’d pound on the bottom. Sometimes, I even resorted to pushing a knife up into the bottle to get my ketchup. But most often, I’d just have to wait until the ketchup

gradually began to pour out in its own time.

I overslept the other morning and woke up feeling like I had to pound on that proverbial ketchup bottle. I kept pushing for things to hurry up, so I wouldn’t be late for an appointment. I even tried shortcuts and raced through yellow traffic lights just to get through. I felt like I was literally playing catch-up.

Then I realized that life is like that ketchup bottle. Things move in their own time and, in our impatience, we can shake and pound, but events will pour out as they’re meant to. Some of the best things in life are slow—slow songs, slow sunsets, slow kisses, and even slow ketchup.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [HTTPS://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM/](https://joy4dailydevotionals.blogspot.com/). ■



Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

—Romans 12:12 NIV

I waited patiently for the Lord to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry.

—Psalm 40:1 NLT

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.

—Lamentations 3:25–26

Something completed is better than something just begun; patience is better than too much pride.

—Ecclesiastes 7:8 CEV

Be patient like those farmers and don’t give up. The Lord will soon be here!

—James 5:8 CEV



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

# LOOKING FOR INSPIRATION

**INSPIRATION INFUSES YOU WITH RENEWED ZEST FOR LIFE.**

It influences, moves, or guides you to action. But we all have times when we hit the inspiration skids; when we not only lack inspiration but might even doubt that we'll ever feel inspired again.

Maybe you're facing a big challenge at your workplace. Perhaps one of your children is going through a rough patch and you're overcome with worry. If you've had some unexpected expenses and your finances are tapped out, that can bring a lot of anxiety. Or maybe you've become estranged from a close friend or loved one and you feel guilt and sadness. Or maybe nothing "bad" has happened, but you just feel flat.

When you feel like you've lost inspiration or hope or like the wind has gone out of your sails and you



don't know how you're going to get it back, there are some things that can help. God created many things that can boost our sense of well-being and reignite our inspiration flame.

Whether you're trying to make it through a tough spot or seeking a creative boost for a project, these sources of inspiration can serve as recharging stations to your spirit.

🕒 **Reading God's Word** is paramount. The Bible is a direct source of divine inspiration. Jeremiah said of God's Word: "Your words became

to me a joy and the delight of my heart."<sup>1</sup> Communing with God should be your first priority when your inspiration has run dry. This results in the wonderful "joy of the Lord" referred to in the Bible,<sup>2</sup> the inspiration that does not fade.

🕒 **Friendship**, good company, and camaraderie are central to a happy life. We all need the support of others, and most of life's best experiences are shared with those we love. And when we're feeling low or facing hard times, friends are

1. Jeremiah 15:16 ESV

2. Nehemiah 8:10

3. Philippians 4:8 ESV

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.—*Isaiah 40:31 NIV*

even *more* important. If you find yourself living far away from your friends and it's not easy to have face-to-face time together, pick up the phone or have a Skype call to keep in touch. True friends not only provide support, they also inspire us to be our best selves. Friends encourage us to keep going. They remind us that the best is yet to come, and that if we hang in there, we'll pull through, as we have so many times before.

• **Nature** is a magnificent source of inspiration. God's creation is a constant and amazing proof of His power and design. Not only is nature, in its many forms, breathtakingly beautiful, it also showcases God's power and love for humankind. The majesty of creation is an ever-present reminder that the God who made everything is more than capable of caring for every burden, fear, worry, and prayer that we entrust to Him.

• **Seek out good news** to lift your spirit. "Whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."<sup>3</sup> You can pay more attention to the good news

in your life by pausing in the morning or evening to think about and note them in a gratitude journal.

• **Appreciate the arts** through such things as music, painting, sculpture, literature, dance, photography. There are countless beautiful expressions of human creative skill, and when we take time to appreciate these things, we can be inspired and uplifted.

• **Enjoy life's simple gifts.** It doesn't always take something significant or amazing to boost your mood. One small thing enjoyed fully at just the right time can have a big effect. There are countless small blessings that we receive daily from God and others that can bring us a lot of joy and a sense of well-being if we are mindful of them.

• **Exercise.** Science has proved that exercise is good for both your body *and* your emotional and mental health. It's a mood-booster. So when your inspiration is lagging, get your body moving.

• **Try something new!** New scenery and new activity bring new inspiration, so when you can, do new things, explore new places. Break

out of your routines. Consider a new hobby. New environments can bring new insights. God made each of us to be creative in some way, and activating your creative processes can both be enjoyable and open a pathway to new inspiration.

• **Make time for silence.** God made us to need quiet. We need white space in our lives. You can gain a sense of purpose and joy from times of quiet, thought, reflection, prayer, and communion with God. Sometimes we need to think, meditate, and pray about our lives, where we're headed, and what our goals are.

At different times in your life, different things can help to boost your inspiration, to rekindle the flame, so to speak. So while you may have your "go-to" inspiration primers, don't get stuck in a rut. Try new things! Let's keep ourselves open to the many beautiful ways in which we can be renewed.

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



BY TINA KAPP

# GOD ISN'T AN ELEPHANT

I'M A BIG FAN OF MIKE DONEHEY, the lead singer of Tenth Avenue North, and host to their video journal on YouTube. He often shares how he receives inspiration for songs he has written, or funny stories that help him better understand God and His ways. One of my favorites is where he talks about how “God is

1. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-mNFhHafjM>.
2. Isaiah 43:25 NIV
3. Psalm 103:8–12 NIV
4. See Matthew 18:21–22.

not an elephant.”<sup>1</sup> He knows this, he says, because he met him—not God; an elephant.

When he was five years old, he went to the zoo and saw an elephant for the first time. The elephant put out his trunk, and little Mike thought it was a gesture of friendship. But nope, the elephant then sneezed all over little Mike’s foot. Needless to say, he wasn’t too fond of elephants after that.

He also figured that God couldn’t be an elephant. It was only when he got older that he realized how

true that was. Not just because of the obvious reason elephants are animals and God is, well, God. And as the old saying goes, “An elephant never forgets”—whereas God, in His love for us, chooses to forget our sins when we are sorry and repent. God even describes Himself as the one who erases transgressions and “remembers your sins no more.”<sup>2</sup>

It’s hard to imagine that God would purposely forget something, especially if we try to put ourselves in His place by imagining ourselves doing the same for those who have

## THOUGHTS ON KINDNESS

His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is (His) faithfulness.—*Lamentations* 3:22–23 NIV

I would go to the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit. It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary.—*Charles Spurgeon* (1834–1892)

The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.—*William James* (1842–1910)

Kind words do not cost much ... yet they accomplish much.—*Blaise Pascal* (1623–1662)

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.—*Leo Buscaglia* (1924–1998)

wronged us. We may say we've forgiven someone, but sometimes "We bury the hatchet but leave the handle sticking out."

The saying "burying the hatchet" comes from a Native American tradition where chiefs of tribes would bury a hatchet—or a tomahawk—signaling an act of peace. If you were to leave the handle sticking out so you could go back and get it if you needed to, that would be like forgiving, but not completely.

I know I'm certainly guilty of leaving the handle sticking out. I'll forgive a friend, but then if we argue or I'm upset at them, I'll bring up that thing they did in the past. Obviously, that's not true forgiveness, and thankfully, that's not how God is toward us.

No matter how much we deserve retribution, He sees past that and looks at our heart and our desire to

do better. He sent us His only son, Jesus, who died on the cross, taking on the sins of the world. Through this great act of love, we are forgiven. He wipes our slates completely clean.

In Psalm 103 (one of my favorites), David writes: "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."<sup>3</sup>

An elderly woman was celebrating her 50th anniversary, and a younger woman asked her how she'd made her marriage work so well for so long. She answered that at the beginning of her married

life, she decided to make a list of ten mistakes that she would always forgive her husband for. The young lady was curious and asked if she could see that list. "Well, I never did get around to writing it down," she said, "but anytime he would do something that would make me boiling mad, I'd take a deep breath and tell myself, *Lucky for him, that was one of the ten!*"

I think that's what Jesus meant when He said we should forgive others "seventy times seven" times.<sup>4</sup> True forgiveness doesn't keep count. Unlike the elephant, God forgives and forgets.

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. ■



BY DANIEL BENJAMIN

# THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

—A RETELLING OF ACTS 8:26–40

I COULD NEVER FORGET THE DAY OF THE OPERATION, when I was only seven. That was when I became a royal eunuch, destined to serve in the palace of the kings and queens of Ethiopia. I would never have my own family, never be looked at as “normal”—and I would always have to abide by special rules, and would not be allowed to do the things that normal people do.

Over the years, I learned how to serve in the royal household. I was taught calculation, writing, and geography, which awoke in me a fascination for other people and territories. I found out that eunuchs had served the pharaohs in Egypt, the emperors in China, and the rajas in India. If you were looking for eunuchs, you had only to look for the seat of power. They would never be far away.

When Queen Candace needed someone to oversee her foreign trade, I was chosen, given my knowledge of other cultures. I was happy to serve in this capacity, but I wanted a family to belong to. I thought, *There must be a place where I can be at home, where I will be accepted just as I am.*

When affairs of state took me to Jerusalem, I stayed longer than

1. See Deuteronomy 23:1.

2. Isaiah 56:4–5 NLT

strictly necessary because I was interested in the Jewish religion. I found out all I could, and even managed to obtain a copy of their scriptures. I was keen to visit the temple but was stopped at the entrance.

“Why can’t I go in?” I asked the temple guard. “Don’t you know I am a member of a royal household on an important diplomatic mission?”

“Eunuchs aren’t allowed!” he responded sharply.

“Says who?” I challenged him.

“Says our Law,” he replied.<sup>1</sup>

I was struck by the injustice of my situation. The operation that had rendered me a eunuch hadn’t been my choice, yet I was rejected. Certainly this wasn’t a religious community that I could be a part of.

Yet I was still intrigued by the God of Israel. So in the chariot, on the long way home, I continued reading the scrolls, wondering what they meant. It was on the desert road out of Jerusalem that I noticed a bearded Jewish man by the roadside.

I was reading out loud, and he must have realized that my scroll contained the teachings of Isaiah, a Jewish prophet. He asked me, “Do you understand what you are reading?” I had the chariot stop, and we looked at each other with curiosity.

I replied earnestly. “How can I, unless someone helps me understand? I will give you a ride if you can explain this to me.”

I read the passage: “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, like a sheep before his shearers is dumb. He did not open his mouth. Justice was denied him. He has been cut off from the land of the living. Who is going to declare his posterity?”

This reminded me of my own fate in life—no posterity, also cut off.

“Tell me, who is the prophet talking about? Himself? Or someone else?”

Philip proceeded to explain how the predictions from the scrolls had come true, about how he had met Jesus of Nazareth and followed Him. How Jesus had given His life for all people by allowing Himself to be crucified, only weeks earlier, and how on the third day He had risen from the dead.

I was amazed, but hesitant, as I could not forget the condemning words I had read earlier. Then Philip showed me something else within the same scroll: “This is what the Lord says: I will bless those eunuchs who ... choose to do what pleases me and commit their lives to me. I will give them—within the walls of my house—a memorial and a name far greater than sons and daughters could give.”<sup>2</sup>

I was filled with joy! Finally, a community where I would be accepted, where I would be loved, just as I was!

Just then I noticed that we were passing an oasis with a small lake. Quickly, I turned to my new teacher: “What would prevent me from getting baptized, right here and now?” I was eager for the cleaning ritual of baptism.

Philip responded, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.”

After Philip had prayed over me and baptized me, I felt renewed! Changed! I wanted to thank him, but suddenly he was nowhere in sight. Where did he go?

I didn’t know what had happened to Philip, but I knew what had happened to me. The journey of my life took a new direction. I was no longer alone. At last I had a place where I belonged—the family of God.

DANIEL BENJAMIN ACCEPTED JESUS AT THE AGE OF 16 IN EUROPE AND HAS TRIED TO FOLLOW IN CHRIST’S FOOTSTEPS EVER SINCE, IN CHINA, HONG KONG, KOREA AND SINGAPORE. HE CURRENTLY LIVES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, WHERE HE PREACHES IN SMALL LOCAL CHURCHES AND LEADS A CELL GROUP OF YOUNG BELIEVERS. ■

BY CHRIS MIZRANY

# WHEN JESUS SHOWED UP

IT NEVER CEASES TO AMAZE ME HOW JESUS SHOWS UP IN THE DARK AND DIFFICULT PLACES OF OUR LIVES. One such example is told in Luke 8.

Jesus, already being thronged by crowds of people eager to hear His words, is begged by Jairus, a cleric and a man of some importance, to come to his home and heal his dying daughter.

Jesus agrees and begins making his way to Jairus' home. As He walks through the busy, crowded streets, a woman who has been sick for 12 long years catches hold of His clothing for a moment, and the Bible says she was healed immediately.

Just then, messengers arrive from Jairus' house, saying, "It's too late, your daughter has died. Don't bother Jesus any longer." But Jesus says, "Don't fear; only believe and she will be made well," so they continue to the house.

When they arrive in the midst of great mourning, Jesus leaves the scoffers outside, taking only the girl's parents and a handpicked few inside, and calls the child to arise. And arise she does, a 12-year-old girl no longer snatched away by death, but restored to life.

There's a beautiful message in this passage for each of us—that wherever we are and whatever our situation, there is healing and restoration available. The woman who had suffered for 12 agonizing years must have wished for death; instead, Christ gave her a new lease on life in a moment, along with forgiveness and peace. The 12-year-old girl whose life suddenly ended before it had hardly begun was granted a continuation, along with full healing.

Jesus still turns to us in the midst of our confusion and says, "Touch Me, and be restored." Crowds of thoughts, voices of doubt, or years of pain and struggles cannot keep us from being recognized by Him; all it takes is a moment of reaching out and believing.

We might feel like our whole life—our plans, dreams, family, or health—has died abruptly, and we'll never rise again. But our Lord knows that we're only sleeping. He holds our hands when we can't lift ourselves, gently calling us to arise and continue on.

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



You can let Jesus into your home and life, like Jairus did, by simply praying:

*Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all the wrong things I've done. I open the door of my heart to You and invite You to come in and stay with me always. Help me learn to know You better through reading Your Word in the Bible, so that I can show Your love to those I meet.*



BY DINA ELLENS

# THE RAIN ALSO BRINGS BLESSINGS

I WAS SITTING IN A WHEELCHAIR IN THE LOBBY OF THE HOSPITAL, waiting for the taxi to come. My shoulder was still swollen from the operation, and my entire arm was mottled with black and blue marks.

To top it off, it was raining, adding to my dark mood. *Great! Rain!* I thought. *Just what I need!*

Then my eyes turned to the plexiglass roof of the lobby entrance where raindrops were falling and collecting into little pools before running off the roof. The words *the rains cover it with blessings* popped into my mind, and in an instant, that Bible verse reframed my situation.

Those who put their strength in [God] are truly happy [...] As they pass through the Baca Valley, they make it a spring of water. Yes, the early rain covers it with blessings. They go from strength to strength.—*Psalm 84:5–7 CEB*

Yes, I had slipped and fallen. Yes, I had broken seven bones in my upper arm. Yes, I now had a metal

plate in my arm and two months of physiotherapy in front of me.

I'm going through the Baca Valley! It's my time of testing.

The Bible's Baca Valley was a literal place. It was a narrow, dry valley that the Jews had to travel through to get to Jerusalem to worship in their temple. The Hebrew word "baca" means "weeping," and "the Baca Valley" has come to mean a difficult and sorrowful time.

What God is saying is that all those who experience sorrow—and who doesn't?—can find strength through faith. Through keeping our eyes on Him and our hearts fixed on His Word, the Baca Valley becomes a different place. Instead of being a hard, dry valley of weeping and

sorrow, He can make it a place of growth and abundance.

Life takes us through times of hardship and sufferings, but with faith in Jesus, these hard times can become steppingstones where we can "go from strength to strength." We can face these difficulties knowing that the final outcome is bringing us closer to God.

As sojourners in this world, we can find our strength in God, which will enable us to persevere through sorrows and setbacks. The Baca Valley can turn into a spring of blessing through God's grace empowering us.

The honk of the taxi startled me from my reverie. "On my way!" I yelled as I rolled my wheelchair towards the taxi stand with a smile.

"I'm going to make it through this!"

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. ■



BY ANNA PERLINI

**HOW ABOUT PLAYING A GAME WHERE YOU COMPETE ONLY WITH YOURSELF AND GET TO DO SOME GOOD IN THE PROCESS?** How about the “Game of Hearts”?

Last year, my daughter discovered her breast cancer had returned, and I found my mind becoming mired in depressive and hopeless thoughts night after night. It was a long, cold winter. I no longer found joy or comfort in the things I had loved, like winter’s blanket of white snow. I started hating that snow and the freezing air. How I yearned for some warm rays of sunshine to break through that gloom!

And some sunshine came, in an unexpected way.

I was chatting with a friend and casually mentioned that while on a train I got into talking to somebody, and “how good it felt to focus on someone else.” “That sounds great!” he said. “Let’s make it a game.” So we began writing each other stories of people we’d met and connected with or somehow helped. Besides doing some good, it helped me keep my sanity during a very difficult time in my life, forcing me to look for opportunities and stories

1. Learn more about the Game of Hearts and watch it in action here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ew2lu-VEVKc>.
2. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>

I could share with my friend. Since then, we’ve expanded to playing this game with a group of volunteers on the streets of downtown Rijeka and using it as part of our youth summer camp.<sup>1</sup>

Here’s a summary of how to play:

- Do small acts of love to anyone, but preferably strangers—people you happen to meet on your way to school, or work, or on a walk somewhere.
- These acts of kindness may or may not involve speaking.
- It can be played anywhere, at any time of day, alone or with another player.
- There aren’t any secret tactics. In fact, it’s best to share your secrets and experiences, even though the idea isn’t to brag about your good deeds.

The goal of this game is to increase awareness of the universal need for love, and to realize that it never runs out; we can give and pass it on to others, and often it gets returned right on the spot. It also demonstrates the importance of little things, what an influence we can have on others without necessarily having to do anything unusual or great.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,<sup>2</sup> A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■



BY NEVE SPICER

# GODLY FREE PLAY

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

—Proverbs 22:6 NIV

**JESUS HAS A SPECIAL PLACE IN HIS HEART FOR CHILDREN,** and, as Christians, we are called to follow in His footsteps and try to raise our children with the knowledge of God and His son. Jesus showed us to lead by example and use kindness and understanding to teach children and remind them of God's ways. This requires that we have patience, a close relationship with God, and a personal commitment to His ways.

Learning prayers, parables, and Bible verses are all part of early Christian education. There are also ways that we as parents can introduce godly principles with the goal of helping these to take up permanent residence in our child's mind and heart. Bible study requires a fair bit of concentration and focus, and while children may enthusiastically

participate, young children seem to learn more readily and joyfully through free play; that is, play that is unstructured, without too many rules<sup>1</sup> or expectations.

How do we bring God and godly principles into our children's free play? Here are some ideas that may work for your family. Once you see how easy it is to introduce your children to the truth presented in the Bible, you'll be able to come up with many more ideas.

- Let your children write, direct, and star in a biblical play. One idea might be the parable of the loaves and fishes. Or how about Moses' flight from Egypt? Be sure to include a dress-up element.
- On an outdoor trek, have a family discussion on how the plants, animals, and minerals you see are part of God's marvelous creation.
- For a biblical puppet show, choose puppets that are intentionally

ambiguous, without obvious facial expressions. This enables children to perform an infinite number of plays using the same few puppets. You'll be amazed at how their creativity is enhanced and their imagination activated when their play isn't limited by obvious and explicit characters or toys.

- Don't mind the mess! Children thrive in outdoor play, and even the sand and mud can provide an introduction to the beauty of God's creation. What's more, sensory play nurtures their development.

I believe children will quickly and gladly learn the lessons of the Bible through active free play. By making their faith a joy rather than a chore, we play a part in bringing our children to the knowledge and love of Christ.

NEVE SPICER IS A BLOGGER AND MOTHER OF THREE WHO BLOGS AT HER WEBSITE WETHEPARENTS.<sup>2</sup> ■

1. See <https://wetheparents.org/importance-of-free-play>  
2. <https://wetheparents.org/>

BY FRANK STEELE

# 31 CENTS



*Wow, that's a lot of money,* I thought.

Well, relatively speaking.

I walk through my neighborhood for errands and exercise, and I'll often spot coins on the sidewalk or street, which I pick up. The coins are usually pennies, but I'm not one to turn down money, even if it's pennies. Occasionally I'll find a nickel or a dime. But today, while taking a route I'd never been on before, I'd come across quite a few coins—31 cents in all. It felt like I'd hit the jackpot.

The next day I did my weekly shopping early, which was unusual for me. Standing in the checkout line, unloading my cart, I noticed a man behind me in line. All he had in his cart was a carton of eggs.

After I paid and was bagging my groceries, the man gave the cashier a handful of change for his eggs. She patiently counted it out, and I heard her say, "I'm afraid you're 31 cents short."

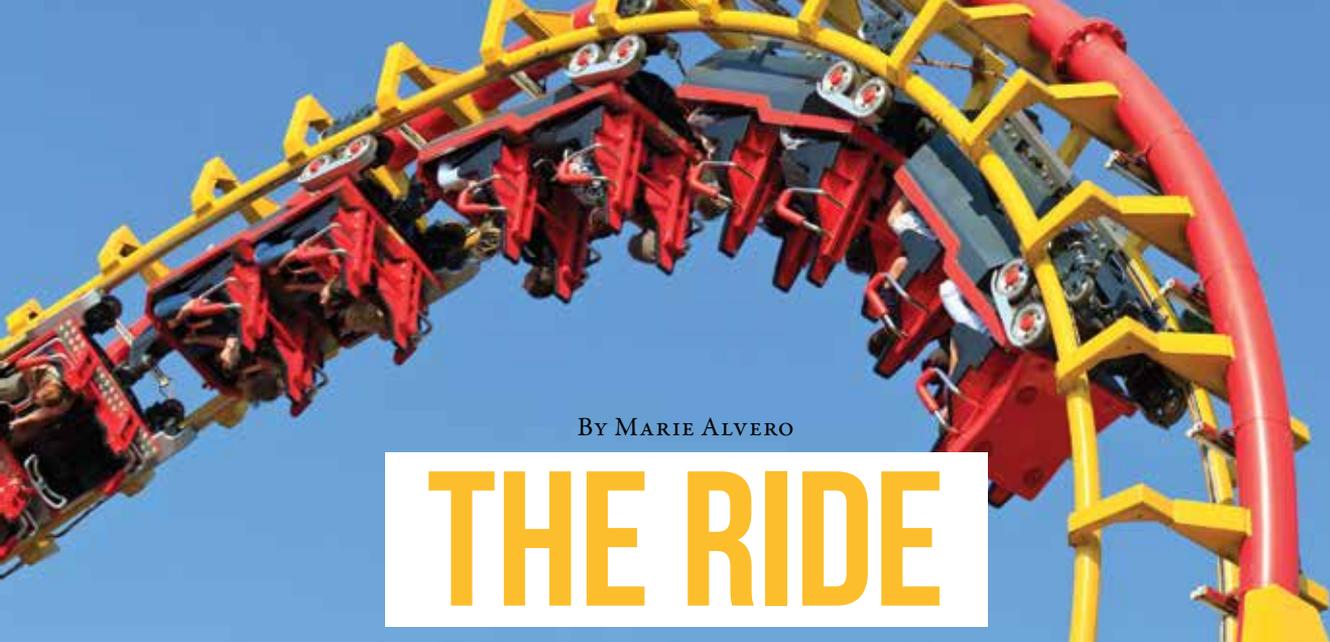
As it turns out, I just happened to have those 31 cents! I dug in my pocket, gave the cashier the balance needed, and the man had his eggs. He gave me a shy smile and nod as he left, and I said a few parting words to him. And as I walked home, I thought about God's foresight and wonderful ways.

I'm very much a creature of habit; I do certain things at certain times and have certain places I walk. But I'd broken my routine in walking a new route, where 31 cents was waiting for me. Next, I went shopping at an unusual time, but it

was God's perfect time for me to be able to help the man behind me with just the amount of money he needed. The Lord's foresight and behind-the-scenes planning of the smallest details of our lives is just amazing!

I would have paid the few extra cents for the man's eggs whether I'd found that change or not. I'm sure God knew that, but it was as if He were saying, *Here, I'm paying you back in advance for what you will give for the eggs anyway.* In this case, it was only 31 cents, a seemingly insignificant amount, but God knows what His children will go through, He loves them and cares for them, and He supplies for the needy and rewards the giver.

FRANK STEELE IS AN EDITOR IN THE DALLAS AREA OF THE USA. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

# THE RIDE

**A FEW MONTHS AGO**, on a muggy Saturday, our family made the much-anticipated trip to a big theme park. Our teenagers, undaunted by hot sun and crowds, were looking forward to a day adventuring on roller coasters and other adrenaline-surging rides, so as soon as we entered the park, we headed straight for the biggest, loopest roller coaster of all.

After waiting in line for a good half hour, we were all strapped and harnessed into the ride and past the point of no return. The roller coaster picked up speed as it climbed 171 feet high, then it plunged, looping forwards and backwards, at speeds of up to 60 mph (100 km/h). This wasn't fun for me. I tried to suppress my panic and visions of death, as the rest of my family shrieked with excitement. Two very scary minutes later, we coasted into the loading dock. I can't tell you how happy I was to get out of that harness!

Even though I'm not a fan of roller coasters, I can't help but notice how life can sometimes feel like a twisting and turning ride. So much

can change so quickly, and we control so little of the experience. Here are a few things my life ride has taught me:

## **I'M NOT IN CONTROL**

There are twists and plunges I don't anticipate, and soaring heights I can't foresee. I cannot force an outcome or determine the choices of others. I can only control my own attitude and actions.

## **OPEN YOUR EYES**

I closed my eyes for pretty much the entire roller coaster experience. Of course, that didn't actually help me be less scared. Sometimes, in life, we can squeeze our eyes shut, refusing to see the adventure, because of fear, stubbornness, or maybe even laziness. We need to open our eyes.

## **EMBRACE THE CHAOS**

Life doesn't always feel like a roller coaster ride. Sometimes it's more like one of those kiddy train rides—predictable, safe, and easy. I love routine, I love predictable. But in looking back, it's clear that the chaos, the being thrown into the unexpected, was often what produced the richest

parts of my life's adventure. Always leave room for discovery.

## **TRUST THE RIDE**

Roller coasters aren't designed haphazardly by someone with a sketch pad and a hammer. There's extreme precision and skill involved in every phase. Rigorous equations and scenarios and tests are run to prove that the ride is safe, strict training is provided to every operator, and detailed maintenance is logged. The ride is safe, even when it doesn't feel like it. And when it comes to the loops, plunges, twists, and climbs of my life, God has proved to me over and over that He is good. He is trustworthy. He is faithful. When we trust in Him, we are safe.

I think I just gave you four good reasons to go ride a roller coaster!—And also to enjoy the ride of your life!

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. ■



# MASTERPIECE OF LOVE

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Have you ever wondered why the sky is blue and why that specific color gives you a feeling of peace when you look at it? Have you ever wondered why the scent of a pine forest or the grass after rain brings calm and refreshing to your spirit? Is there some magical reason why the simple sound of a bird singing makes you feel happy inside? While there are scientific reasons that your body responds to a certain stimulus, the simple truth is that I created these things to have such pleasant effects on you because I love you. I created you to respond to certain colors, sights, sounds, and fragrances, and I placed all those things throughout creation that I knew you would enjoy.

When you look up into the night sky, if all you saw was darkness, it might be a bit dismal and foreboding. The shine of the stars I placed in the heavens can remind you that even in the dark times, I am still there for you. In life, you have your dark times when it seems like all around you is black and there's no way out, and if you're only looking down, this is all you will see. But when you look up, you will see My hand in your times of darkness as well, and My touches of love that will shine as stars to guide you.

Let My love fill your life, and let others see My light and love shine through you today.