

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 22 • Issue 11

THANKS FOR EVERYTHING

A wonderful life

Be Still

How to get God's best

Positively Grateful

The gratitude attitude



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION THE KING AND THE PHILOSOPHER

Cineas was an ancient Greek politician and a friend of King Pyrrhus of Epirus, considered one of the greatest generals in antiquity. After spending decades securing his own possessions, it was inevitable that the king would turn his attention toward the new powers of Rome and Carthage, to the west of Greece.

The story goes that Cineas tried to dissuade Pyrrhus from sailing to Italy and urged him to be satisfied with the possessions he already had. “Should the gods permit us to overcome them,” Cineas asked, “how will we profit from our victory?”

“After we have conquered the Romans, no city in all of Italy will be able to resist us.”

“And once we have Italy, what next?”

“Sicily is a wealthy island and should be easy to take,” said Pyrrhus.

“Will that put an end to the war?”

“Of course not. Carthage would then be within reach,” said Pyrrhus.
“After we have taken both Rome and Carthage, who in the world would dare oppose us?”

“And then what shall we do?”

“Then, my dear Cineas, we will relax, eat and drink, and have pleasant conversation.”

Cineas delivered the point he was leading to: “What is to stop us from doing that right now, without causing further hardship to others or to ourselves?”

Pyrrhus and Cineas ended up sailing to Italy, and unfortunately for them, despite several successes—which gave rise to the term “Pyrrhic victory,” for a victory that inflicts such a devastating toll on the victor that it is tantamount to defeat and damages long-term progress—they never did gain that final peace the king referred to.

It's easy to miss the chance to appreciate and enjoy our current blessings and to instead get so busy pursuing earthly goals that we lose sight of the kingdom of God¹ and the things that will truly bring peace and contentment. May the story of King Pyrrhus serve as a life lesson to us all about investing in the things that truly matter.

1. See Romans 14:17.

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BY AMY JOY MIZRANY

HOW I REPLACED STRESS WITH PEACE

I HAD A SOLO AND FIVE OR SIX ENSEMBLE/QUARTET PIECES TO PRACTICE, a music exam coming up, and a speech (partly in the local Xhosa dialect) to prepare for. And not only that, but I hadn't received the speech's text from the organizers, or the music for which I was supposed to write a harmony!

I don't like being stressed, and I don't normally get that stressed, but this time was different. I kept thinking about what I had to do, mentally rearranging it over and over. This actually led to more stress and worry, as the pieces of the alarmingly intricate puzzle would float out of place in my head as soon as I got them in order.

I could barely do anything without some trigger popping up out of nowhere to remind me of all the things I wasn't getting to. When playing soccer, I'd remember long

to-do lists as I paced back and forth on my goal line, goalkeeper gloves crossed in frustration. I couldn't enjoy time spent with my family, or studying, because I was so focused on all those things.

It got to the point where I felt like informing everyone who was counting on me that I just couldn't do it all. And I would have been right. I *couldn't* do it all. But where was Jesus in all this stress? Where had I included Him? When had I sought Him out and asked Him for peace and strength? I hadn't.

With a repentant heart, I asked Jesus to calm my worries and smooth the way. I asked Him to give me peace of mind and a clear path to follow. And He did.

When the day came, everything fell into place. My solo went well, as did the other pieces I played in. Some of them were less than perfect, but the

crowd was kind and we were happy. The elusive speech only ended up in my hands half an hour before I had to deliver it, but I managed. I may have mispronounced some words, but not many, and I laughed at my mistakes along with the audience. In the end, my mom and sister worked on the musical harmony together, and it turned out wonderfully.

Jesus can take away any stress that we feel, if we remember to seek Him out and cling to Him in our hour of need. He is more than willing to push all our stressful thoughts away and replace them with His peace of mind. We just have to ask.

AMY JOY MIZRANY WAS BORN AND LIVES IN SOUTH AFRICA AND IS A FULL-TIME MISSIONARY WITH HELPING HAND AND A MEMBER OF TFI. IN HER SPARE TIME, SHE PLAYS THE VIOLIN. ■



BY PETER AMSTERDAM

MORE LIKE JESUS: joy

CHRISTIAN JOY IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED TO FAITH, hope, and gratefulness. It's about taking a long-range view of life that is based on faith in God, trust in what He has told us through Scripture, and the knowledge that our earthly life is only the beginning phase of our eternal relationship with Him.

Our joy is based in our faith in what Scripture has taught us: that God is our Creator; that though humanity is alienated from Him due to our sins, He has made a way for us to be reconciled with Him through the sacrificial death of Jesus and the forgiveness of our sins; that through this reconciliation, we enter a relationship with Him in which His Spirit dwells

within us, and this relationship will last for eternity.

Our faith in God and deep trust in His promises of salvation, reconciliation, and ultimately eternity with God help us have peace of mind and a confident outlook. Our beliefs generate hope, an expectation of good things to come, and cause us to live in joy.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.¹

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1. 1 Peter 1:3–5 ESV
 2. 1 Peter 1:8 ESV
 3. Romans 5:3 ESV
 4. 2 Corinthians 8:2 NLT
 5. 2 Corinthians 6:10 CEV
 6. John 15:10–11 ESV
 7. Psalm 33:21
 8. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 CEV
 9. Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2012), 129–30

Gratitude is related to joy. When we're grateful for what God has done for us; when we're focused on His goodness, love, and care, and are content with His blessings, then we have reason for joy. Being thankful for God's love, blessings, presence, and promises helps us live in joy, with a positive attitude toward life.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.²

Because joy is a response to who God is and the blessings we have in Him, and not to our circumstances, joy can flourish even during times of pain and suffering.

We rejoice in our sufferings.³

They are being tested by many troubles, and they are very poor. But they are also filled with abundant joy, which has overflowed in rich generosity.⁴

We are always happy, even in times of suffering.⁵

It's not easy to rejoice in our sorrows. In fact, generally speaking, it's not natural to be joyful and constantly rejoicing. Many of us want to cultivate a joyful spirit, but it's not something we can do through our own power. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and to cultivate it, we

must raise our sails so that the breath of the Spirit will move us in the direction of joy.

One way to raise our sails is by reading, absorbing, and living the teachings of Scripture. Speaking to His disciples right before His crucifixion, Jesus said:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.⁶

As we read the Bible, God's Spirit uses Scripture to speak to our heart to comfort and guide us, thereby giving us faith and hope, which are stepping stones to joy. We do what we can by abiding in God's Word, and the Spirit moves within us to give us joy.

We cultivate joy by putting our trust in God. Being trustworthy is part of who God is; it's part of His character. All throughout Scripture, we're exhorted to put our trust in Him. Trusting Him means putting our confidence in Him, knowing that He loves us and has our best interests at heart.

Our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name.⁷

Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do.⁸

Regardless of whether our circumstances are pleasant or unpleasant, we are to be thankful. This doesn't mean that we need to be thankful *for* difficult circumstances, but rather that we give thanks *in the midst* of every circumstance, good or bad. Scripture teaches us to thank the Lord that He is working in our present circumstance for our good, knowing that He will not give us burdens which are too much for us to bear and His grace is sufficient to enable us to bear it. As we thank and praise Him, we experience the joy that is our heritage in Christ.⁹

As we've seen, Christian joy is connected to and is a result of our belief system. We believe in God as our Creator and Father. We believe in His Word, which tells us about Him, and we use it to guide us in making good decisions. We have an ongoing two-way relationship with Him, which will continue for eternity. Author Michael Zigarelli wrote about what it means to have this joy:

From a biblical point of view, we can define joy as "having a daily spirit of rejoicing through all circumstances." It's more than inner



contentment, more than gladness, more than overall satisfaction with life.¹⁰

Zigarelli found that those who reported that they were “often” or “always” joyful also exhibited more of other Christlike characteristics than those who were “rarely” or “only sometimes” joyful. He explained that

the “virtues most affected by consistent joy are kindness and patience.”¹¹

While things of a spiritual nature are very difficult to quantify or measure, and a survey of course relies on interpretation, I found that Zigarelli’s survey provided helpful guidance by pointing out how practicing particular virtues seems to help one grow in Christlikeness. He found that many Christians, while strong in their God-centeredness and gratitude, reported below-average joy in their lives; and according to his survey, these folks tended to struggle with kindness and patience. He

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10. Michael A. Zigarelli, *Cultivating Christian Character* (Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Publications, 2005), 49
11. Zigarelli, *Cultivating Christian Character*, 50

pointed out that when an otherwise godly person does not experience consistent joy in his or her life, the tendency is to be abrupt with others, to have little tolerance for life’s irritations, and to be less generous.

Growing in joy calls for regularly thinking about and meditating on God’s goodness and love for us. Joy is an outgrowth of our reading, believing, and acting on God’s Word; of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us; and of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Christian joy is living life within the conscious framework of God’s love and care for us, facing the ups and downs of our lives with deep faith that He is always there, comforting and caring for us; and being glad, rejoicing that we are always under His loving care.

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

JOY IN THE MOMENT

By JOYCE SUTTIN

I SAT QUIETLY, listening to the birds, drinking a cup of tea, feeling the rays of sunshine on my face and I felt perfect peace. I wasn't letting my mind run over things that had happened. I wasn't making mental lists and thinking about what I was going to do. I wasn't feeling remorseful. I wasn't worried. I wasn't even trying hard to shut down my mind. I just soaked in the moment and enjoyed the feeling of God's presence. It made me think about how much time I spend in the past and the future, and how rarely I'm fully engaged in the present moment.

Being caught up in those thoughts has filled my life with remorse and worry and kept me from appreciating what's happening around me. On the other hand, when I focus on the present, I notice the wonderful aroma of my peppermint tea and the damp grass under my chair. I hear the praiseful songs of birds singing

after the rain. I feel calm and at peace and in love with life.

Too often I spend my relaxation time dividing my energy, playing solitaire on my phone as I watch a movie or listen to a podcast, or tuning in to the radio while driving. I have a lot of little interests that eat at my time and cause me to miss the beauty all around me. I also miss the calmness that comes from allowing things to unfold in my life and taking things as they come.

It occurred to me that I've spent too much of my prayer time as if I were grocery shopping: I have needs. I write them on a list. I go before God and recite my list, then I fill my basket and run back home. I have determined today to make a conscious effort to spend uninterrupted time daily to find joy in His presence.

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



He satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness.

—*Psalm 107:9*

This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

—*Psalm 118:24*

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

—*Philippians 4:6 ESV*

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

—*Colossians 3:17 ESV*



POSITIVELY GRATEFUL

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

I RECENTLY STUMBLED UPON A FASCINATING BOOK IN A USED BOOK STORE. The premise of *The Secret Life of Water*, by Masaru Emoto, is that water reflects the positive or negative force that it comes in contact with. The author exposed distilled water to various influences with speech, music, photographs, and writing. He then froze the water and photographed the crystals. The photographs suggest that positive influences such as prayers, uplifting music, and positive speech caused the water to form beautiful crystals, while

1. Psalm 22:1 NLT
2. Psalm 22:24,26–27 NLT
3. <http://elixirmime.com>

negative influences caused the water to not crystallize at all or form ugly patterns.

Far-fetched? Perhaps, but his ideas can at least cause us to question what kind of energy vibes we generate to others.

Having lived in 14 countries over a 45-year period, I often get asked which country I like the best. The truth is, it's usually whatever country I'm living in at that moment. Each country has its own blessings and challenges, and I found that it was necessary to appreciate the good things each had to offer in order to more fully enjoy the experience that life was throwing my way at that point in time.

One useful survival skill I picked up while living in the Middle East was being thankful for all that happens



to me. It is common for people of this region to consistently thank God for what is happening to them at that moment—whether it is an obvious blessing or a blessing in disguise, as illustrated in this story:

The famous storyteller Juha relates how one day despite the difficulties of his donkey dying, an extended drought, and rising prices at the market, he determined to thank God no matter what. The test soon came, as he was hoeing in his garden and a thorn came up through his shoe. After hopping around on one foot as he cried out in pain, he remembered. *Thank You, God, that my old shoes were ruined, and not my new ones.*

As he continued hoeing his garden, a sandstorm arose and knocked him flat. After it subsided, he thought, *I thank God sandstorms are so rare!*

Before resuming his hoeing, he put down his money purse, which contained the coins he had been saving to buy a new donkey. A thief who was passing by stole the purse, and despite a fervent chase, Juha was not able to catch him. Panting heavily, he asked himself, *What can I be grateful for now?* He had no answer, and so went back to hoeing.

Soon a sailor approached and said, “I used to be your student until I joined a ship crew. When we were in dire danger with huge waves threatening to sink our ship, I remembered that you taught us to give thanks in any situation. I did, and I am truly thankful that my life was spared. I now want to give you a gift as a small token of my gratitude.”

Opening the gift, Juha found that it contained the exact number of coins that had been stolen. *I lose money and gain it back the same day! How marvelous! God is good!*

I had the opportunity to apply this principle in my own life when I was hospitalized for ten days with a life-threatening illness. It was a very positive, special

time with lots of moments for reflection. It was as if I was lifted up by the arms of God and brought to a quiet garden to meditate on my life.

I am usually work-oriented, so to slow down and concentrate on surviving was a new experience for me, and certainly gave me a new perspective on the blessing of health. I made a resolution that when I got better, I'd try to give my body some cooperation by living a healthier lifestyle. Tottering with one toe over the chasm between life and death made me realize what really matters—loving God and others. This was nothing I didn't already know, but there's a big difference between knowing something and making it a big part of your life.

I've tried to pass this gratitude attitude on to my children and grandchildren by playing a little dinner game called “roses and thorns.” Each person relates something good that happened to them that day—a rose—and a difficult, unpleasant, or challenging experience—a thorn. I found that this game sparked table conversation much more than merely asking, “How was your day?” and getting a one-word answer of “okay” or “fine.”

Being grateful doesn't mean that we just ignore our troubles. King David cried out to God, asking: “My God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help?”¹ But then David goes on to end the same psalm on a positive note: “He has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy. He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help. The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will praise him. Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy. The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to him.”²

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST³ IN GERMANY. ■



THANKS FOR EVERYTHING

BY STEVE HEARTS

PAUL SAYS IN ROMANS 8:28, “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.” In Proverbs we read that “A person’s steps are directed by the Lord.”¹ Nonetheless, during moments when life gets complicated and confusing, I wonder what might have happened if things had turned out just a little different, and I wish I could go back and do them over.

It was during just such a moment that I listened to one of my favorite movies, *Mr. Destiny*. The story takes place on the day Larry Burrows turns 35. Twenty years earlier, Larry struck out in the last at-bat during his high school baseball championship game and has regretted it ever since. So on this, his 35th birthday, which seems to be forgotten by everyone except his best friend, and is made worse

when he gets laid off, he finds himself reflecting on that baseball game and wishing he’d been able to win it.

As he’s making his way home, his car quits on him. He calls a tow truck and heads into a nearby bar to wait. The bartender, Mike, is friendly and sympathetic. What’s more, he knows everything about Larry, including his regret from twenty years ago. Mike makes Larry a drink he calls “The Spilt Milk,” which takes him back in time so he can live his life as it would have been had he won the game. He finds his life totally altered in every aspect. Most disconcerting of all, he is married to someone else, as is his wife, Ellen. He tries to “fix” things, but in doing so, he ends up jeopardizing both his job and his life.

Mercifully, before the worst could occur, he finds himself in the bar with Mike again. His life is back to normal, and he has a new appreciation for his blessings. He gets home

to a surprise birthday party organized by Ellen. His boss unexpectedly stops by and offers him a better position. Most importantly, Larry is free of regrets and determined to live life to the full without focusing on the might-have-beens.

This movie is a good reminder that life is no bed of roses for anyone. We all have problems, and we’ve all done things we wish we could either do over again or undo altogether. We all experience pain, disappointment, and even failure. But we shouldn’t let these things stop us from counting our blessings, appreciating what we have, and moving forward with today. As Mike says to Larry, “This is your life, Larry. Learn to enjoy what you’ve got.”

STEVE HEARTS HAS BEEN BLIND SINCE BIRTH. HE IS A WRITER, MUSICIAN, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN NORTH AMERICA. ■

1. Proverbs 20:24 NIV

MOMENTS

BY JESSIE RICHARDS

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Life isn't a matter of milestones, but of moments.—Rose Kennedy (1890–1995)



I'VE KEPT A JOURNAL OF SOME KIND SINCE MY PRETEEN YEARS. At the beginning of this year, I decided that I would not only record things of obvious significance when they occurred, but I would write at least a line or two *every single day*, whether or not anything apparently noteworthy took place. I'm happy to say I'm well on track to finish strong.

Something interesting about this type of journal is that in reviewing the year so far, as I did recently, I am reminded not only of “key” happenings, but my memory is jogged about “everyday” incidents and moments which in some cases turned out to be significant.

Without further ado, here are a few of my journal entries about moments this year—focusing mostly on the everyday type.

MOMENT #1



One of the two toilets in the house has been broken for several days, and this evening the plumber finally came by. But he made a mistake reconnecting the pipes, and now my shower doesn't have hot water! He's coming back tomorrow to turn it back on. It is annoying, but it also makes me aware of how smoothly my life regularly runs, and I feel grateful for things I usually take for granted—flushing toilets and running hot water.



MOMENT #2

My doctor had recommended I have an early mammogram because of (non-painful) cysts. Just to make

sure. So I did. I hadn't expected to be so worried in that in-between time until I got the clean bill of health. I feel like I breathe so much freer now.

MOMENT #3



Spent the day with a friend from way back whom I hadn't seen in a couple of years. It's wonderful how, having been apart so long, we were on the same page again within a few minutes.

MOMENT #4



Had a lovely run on the beach. Perfect weather. Time to think, to be grateful, to commune with my own heart and with God. At one point, I was listening to the hymn “How Great Thou Art” while running right through a flock of seagulls filling the space above and all around me. Literally. Awesome.

MOMENT #5



Found out that my aunt has colon cancer. She's a nurse, a nonsmoker, a vegetarian, and only in her 50s. It really can happen to anyone, anytime. Makes me realize how precious life and family are.

JESSIE RICHARDS HAD A ROLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF *ACTIVATED* FROM 2001 TO 2012, AND HAS WRITTEN A NUMBER OF ARTICLES AS AN *ACTIVATED* STAFF WRITER. SHE HAS ALSO WRITTEN AND EDITED MATERIAL FOR OTHER CHRISTIAN PUBLICATIONS AND WEBSITES. ■

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

BE STILL

I NEEDED TO URGENTLY GET IN TOUCH WITH A WOMAN WHOSE ADDRESS I DIDN'T HAVE, and every part of my being seemed to throb with anxiety. I felt as though I would fly to pieces if I didn't get some word to her. As I prayed about what to do next, suddenly a paraphrase of Scripture came to me. *Just be still. Get quiet and know that I am God.*

When I sat down, quieted my spirit, and asked God to do something to avert disaster, He spoke to my heart. *Just write a note and take it to the apartment where she lived before. Maybe she will have some reason to go back there or someone who knows where she moved will find your note and tell her to contact you.*

So I wrote the note and went over to the apartment to deliver it. Just as I arrived, note in hand, up drove the very person I had wanted to reach but couldn't!

Isn't it wonderful how God is able to work things out? I learned then that, as God's Word says, "in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."¹ In this mad rush that modern living has become, we have an even greater need for this divine stillness to bathe our souls in quietness. It is only when our minds and spirits are quiet and serene that we can come to know God. "Be still and know that I am God."²

Many people have the mistaken idea that the stillness this verse speaks of is a sort of controlled tension, a practiced poise, and that they can compress anxiety in some way. They may be able to do that sometimes, but if they do, it's only a surface calm; inwardly they are a boiling cauldron. That isn't the kind of stillness we are talking about! The stillness of God isn't mere passivity. It's a genuine stillness of spirit that brings about the greatest



clarity of thought, and it is in that stillness that we come to know God's will and plan.

I know from experience that divine stillness often comes through trials and testings. How can that be? Trials and tests subdue the soul, and suffering humbles the spirit. Are you going through a difficult time right now? Then get quiet and be still before the Lord, and He will show you how to get sweetness out of that difficulty. He will teach you wonderful lessons from it, but you've got to get quiet. It is in that sweet, still devotion that He is able to speak to your heart.

What shall the believer do in times of darkness? The first thing to do is to do *nothing*, to stand still. That goes against human nature, but that's the wise thing to do.

1. Isaiah 30:15 KJV

2. Psalm 46:10

3. Philippians 4:6-7



There's a saying, "When you're rattled, don't rush." In other words, when you aren't sure you know what to do next, don't rush blindly into anything, hoping for the best.

There have been times when I have run into a spiritual fog and I have wanted to do something so badly in my own strength. I've felt that I had to unsnarl the tangled wires or find the solution to a problem. I had to *do* something. My human energy felt like it had to rush out and take care of the problem. But I have learned that while sometimes human energy may help a little, it is far better to anchor my boat and let it swing upon its moorings for a while and simply trust God!

Be still and see what God will do. Put your hand into the hand of God, and let Him lead you out into

the bright sunshine of His love. Be still. Let Him do the work for you. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving"—by getting still before God—"let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."³

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS AN AMERICAN EVANGELIST AND AUTHOR. READ MORE ABOUT HER LIFE AND WORK AT [HTTP://VIRGINIABRANDTBURG.ORG](http://VIRGINIABRANDTBURG.ORG). ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

Be happy with what you have and are, be generous with both, and you won't have to hunt for happiness.
—William E. Gladstone (1809–1898)

I am determined to be cheerful and happy in whatever situation I may find myself. For I have learned that the greater part of our misery or unhappiness is determined not by our circumstance but by our disposition.—Martha Washington (1731–1802)



Heavenly happiness here and now and for all eternity is just a short prayer away. If you haven't yet received Jesus as your Savior, you can right now by sincerely praying the following:

Dear Jesus, I want to know You. Thank You for dying for me. Please forgive me for the wrongs I have done. I open the door of my heart and I ask You to come in. Give me Your gift of eternal life, and fill me with Your love and Spirit. Amen.



BY CHANDRA REES

ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART FONDER

SEVERAL MONTHS AFTER OUR THIRD CHILD WAS BORN, I found myself struggling to pull out of a “post-birth slump.” My daily routine was blurring into a continuum of chores and deadlines that I felt weren’t leading me anywhere, not to mention a newborn in constant demand of my care. My mind felt constantly tired, and my heart was heavy. I couldn’t identify what was making me feel down.

In contrast, my husband had struck a motivated phase. He was up early studying and working, always looking for ways to fill up the moments in his day as best he could. Because I didn’t share the same motivation in my own life, I found myself growing somewhat distant toward him. I suppose, in a way, I was jealous about the stride he had hit, and I was angry with myself for not bouncing back from

this slump as quickly as I would have liked.

I finally mustered the courage to express to my husband the emotional decline I was experiencing, resolving that at least it would help him to understand why I didn’t seem to have life by the horns. He listened patiently and simply stated that though he’d been wondering, he had wanted to allow me time to come to grips with whatever it was that I was facing. While I didn’t experience an immediate rebound, I felt relieved to have expressed what I was going through, if for nothing else than because I’d been able to put into words what it was that I was facing.

Later that week, a business trip took my husband out of town for several days. It was the first time he’d been away from home since our third child was born. I was amazed by the rebound of spirit that I experienced

in those few days, and how true the saying “absence makes the heart fonder” seemed to ring for me. Rather than the growing distance I’d been feeling between us, I felt a renewed love and admiration for him. It was as though I clearly saw exactly where he fit into my world—as husband, father to our children, and friend.

I hope I can carry my appreciation for the blessing of my life—my husband, my children, the love and happiness that brightens my world—throughout my days, even on those days when things seem gray and dismal. Remembering and appreciating the love that fills my world adds buoyancy to my spirit. It reminds me of how blessed I truly am.

CHANDRA REES IS A FREELANCE CHILDREN’S AUTHOR AND MOTHER OF FIVE IN THE USA. ■

TWO SECRETS

BY MARIE ALVERO

EVERYONE HAS AN IDEA OF WHAT PEACE AND CONTENTMENT LOOK LIKE TO THEM. I think of green rolling hills and a cottage in the woods with a beautiful garden. I think of spending evenings on the front porch swing watching the sun set, sharing a conversation with friends and family. I think of a healthy balance in our savings account. In my “happy world,” my kids are all leading productive, satisfying lives and will grow up to start happy, healthy families, and all my loved ones are flourishing. That sounds peaceful. That sounds like a good life, and I just know I would be the very model of contentment!

In reality, the world’s a mess, my kids occasionally struggle, my husband and I are out of sync sometimes, money isn’t always abundant, we’re often tired, there are

things we don’t enjoy but need to do, and things we’d love to do but rarely get to. And while I do have a front porch, I don’t get to spend many evenings swinging peacefully on it.

But I’ve been rereading the Gospels recently, and it’s interesting to observe Jesus’ approach to life. There’s much to learn from His example, but two things that pertain to this topic jump out at me:

- He knew His Father well enough to trust Him.
- He retreated from the noise and hubbub regularly.

I’m convinced that when I am experiencing anxiety, frustration, discontentment, overwhelm, or stress, the answer will be found under one of these two things. That doesn’t mean there isn’t anything practical to learn, change, or do, but it will likely be rooted in one of these things. It’s simple, but not easy. Fortunately, life provides daily opportunities to practice and get better.

Here are some examples of Jesus retreating:

[Despite Jesus’ plea that His miracles be kept secret,] the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”¹

“Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea.”²

“When Jesus heard [that John the Baptist had been beheaded], He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself.”³

And here is an example of Jesus’ trust in God, spoken at the most difficult time in His life:

“Father, if it’s your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will but your will must be done.”⁴

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1. Luke 5:15–16 NIV. See also Mark 1:45.

2. Mark 3:7

3. Matthew 14:13

4. Luke 22:42 CEB





FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

I AM HERE FOR YOU

Turn to Me in your loneliness. I love you dearly, and I am here for you anytime, all the time. I am your constant companion, your best friend.

When you feel like no one cares and there is no love to be found, that is the time to retreat into My presence and find peace. When you are discouraged and feel like a mess, look into My face and see Me smile at you, for I love you just the way you are. When you feel worried or frustrated, run to Me. I will be your perfect companion. When you feel that no one can possibly understand the difficulties you are experiencing, that is the time to come to Me. I *always* understand. Set your affections on Me, and I will fill your every need.

In those special times when you draw close to Me, your love for Me and awareness of My presence in your life will grow stronger, and your relationship with Me will grow deeper than any earthly love or relationship could ever be. From this oneness with Me will grow your greatest and most lasting peace, fulfillment, and contentment.