

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 18 • Issue 10

THE POWER OF A SMILE

One person's
difference

Momentum

The secret to
victory

George's Story

A "sucker" no
more





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION PLANTING TREES

"The Man Who Planted Trees," by Jean Giono, is the allegorical tale of Elzéard Bouffier, a humble shepherd who single-handedly transformed a barren region of southern France by planting nuts as he watched his sheep graze on a different hillside each day. It also inspired the motto that appears on the

cover of each issue of *Activated*: "Change your life. Change your world."

In the story, that one shepherd's decades of work resulted in the entire area being reforested, which brought back the wildlife, retained the springs, and improved the soil for farming. Eventually, more people moved to the once nearly deserted region, and it became alive and prosperous.

The story tells us that Elzéard embarked on his mission after his only son and wife passed away. Many people would have retreated into their sorrow, or simply brushed off the idea as crazy, impossible, or not their responsibility. But he put his inspired idea into action and slowly but surely changed his part of the world.

He had a clear goal and a simple plan. He probably didn't set out to change his world on such a grand scale, but good things have a way of growing when we rise to the challenge. The two World Wars didn't hinder his work, nor did other seemingly insuperable difficulties and setbacks. When he realized his sheep were nibbling on the saplings, he switched to beekeeping. When the 10,000 maples he'd planted died one year, he switched to beeches the following year, with more success.

Great things are often the result of patient plodding. His task wasn't especially difficult, but he stuck with it day after day for decades, working in partnership with God, doing what he could and trusting God to do the rest.

What seemingly crazy impossible idea do you have? With God's help, it may not be as crazy or impossible as you think. Go ahead. Change your life. Change your world.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

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The role of a clown and a physician are the same: it's to elevate the possible and to relieve suffering.
—Patch Adams (b. 1945)

SHINE YOUR LIGHT!

BY ANNA PERLINI

I FIRST MET MARINA ALMOST 20 YEARS AGO at a workshop organized by a Japanese NGO for Bosnian refugee women. She was warm and friendly and was definitely adding her own very original artist's touch to the event, even though she was just helping these women make some simple greeting cards. A few years later, she accompanied two busloads of the same refugee women to Italy as part of an exchange program. That's when I got to know her humorous side! She was always livening up the atmosphere with jokes, songs, and her full contagious laugh.

Then I heard she was having some marriage problems, and as her life entered a tumultuous stage, she started visiting more often for

comfort, prayer, and spiritual solace. Tears would often stream down her face and her once-sunny personality gave way to gloom and despair. On top of this, she began a battle with breast cancer.

We eventually noticed that she would disappear each year for a while around Carnival (a momentous event in our town). Once, my husband met her at a parade, dressed as a clown and with a big smile on her face. The next time she visited, he told her: "Wait a minute. You were a great clown, and not only were you making others happy, but you were the happiest I've seen you in a while! You have a gift from God! Why not come with us to do clown therapy? I guarantee this would change your life!"

She accepted the challenge and her life radically changed! She

started participating in our clown therapy events and training young volunteers; and she began her own events business for birthday parties and other parties. She's appeared on local TV and newspapers, and people everywhere in town know and love her. Sometimes she gets sick, or even just tired, and understandably so, but never for long. In her own words: "Just a few days at home are enough for me to start getting sad and introverted. I need to put on my clown costume, get out of the house, get that sunshine out, and go and make someone happy. That's the best cure for my own problems."

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

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



A SAD PART OF MY DAY is when I listen to the news. Almost everything is about people facing terrible situations. Both Christians and non-Christians face very painful suffering in one form or another in many parts of the world.

Much of the news is about some tragic circumstance somewhere. It ranges from financial crises to terrorism and wars and conflicts to drug-related violence to homelessness to persecution of Christians to devastation due to climate change to leftover land mines to lack of water in

1. See John 6:9–13.
2. See 1 Corinthians 1:26–28.
3. Luke 21:4 CEV

various places to horrible repressive governments.

Thinking about all that's wrong can leave us feeling depressed if we stop there and we don't take these situations to God in prayer. But He also uses this in my personal life as I look to Him for hope in a broken world.

Being reminded of the terrible straits that so many people are in always helps to divert my attention from what I consider my own problems and difficulties. Repeatedly being made aware of the suffering and trauma that so many people experience on a daily basis helps me remember the relative insignificance of my own difficulties and struggles and to be acutely aware of how blessed I am to be largely untouched

by so many extremely sad and difficult things.

I see how very rich in spirit and blessings I am, how abundantly supplied for. My feet walk in pleasant paths, my eyes behold peaceful meadows, my ears hear beautiful music. I don't hear the bombs of war. I don't drink polluted water. I don't live in a cardboard shack. I don't hear words of cruelty from harsh taskmasters. I'm not imprisoned in a filthy cell.

I live in peace. Most people I encounter smile and say kind words. I have the freedom to openly talk about my faith. I can enjoy my loved ones. I have fun and friendship and fellowship. I have a warm bed. I can go out without fear.

I'm truly rich in so many ways that are so easy to take for granted!

START WITH YOURSELF

Author unknown

When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world.

As I grew older and wiser, I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change only my country. But it, too, seemed immovable.

As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me, but alas, they would have none of it. And now as I lie on my deathbed, I suddenly realized: If I had only changed *myself* first, then by example I would have changed my family. From their inspiration and encouragement, I would then have been able to better my country and, who knows, I may have even changed the world. ■

Listening to the news helps me to pray for those who are suffering around the world. It also helps me to be much more positive and thankful for the “lightness” of my burdens, which are nothing compared with those of so many others.

We who are Christians may still have to struggle and face deep sorrow and suffering. Sometimes we may not feel very wealthy. However, in terms of spiritual provision, freedom, and answers to many of the questions of life, we are richly blessed.

As a result, we have the responsibility to share what we have with those the Lord leads us to, and to pray for those who are suffering and have incurred great loss.

When faced with the suffering and desperate needs of so many in the world today, you may not feel you have much to offer. But in spite of difficulties, deficiencies, inferiorities, disabilities, afflictions, or impediments, we all can do our part. Like the boy who gave his lunch to Jesus because he thought it would help others.¹ And it did—in a far greater way than he could have ever imagined! What Jesus accomplished through the boy’s offering that day probably affected his and others’ lives forever.

Don’t underestimate the small things you can do: the smile that can cheer someone’s heart, the little word that can be an encouragement, the tract that can convey Jesus’ love, the little offering to God’s work, or

the contribution to the poor. He uses some of the smallest things and weakest people as tools to have great impact on the lives of others.²

God had great commendation for the widow who, though she gave so little, comparatively gave more than the rich men because she gave all she had. He said, “Everyone else gave what they didn’t need. But she is very poor and gave everything she had.”³ He sees your heart and He knows what your sacrifices cost you, and it is great in His eyes.

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

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

BY IRIS RICHARD

I WAS READING THE FAMILIAR STORY of the Good Samaritan¹ from a well-illustrated cartoon Bible to a group of eight- to nine-year-old Sunday school students. It ended with the question Jesus asked: “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”²

One boy with a head full of red hair and a freckled face asked, “How do I find a neighbor that needs my help?”

This question got me thinking! True, it isn’t every day that we come across a beaten person lying on the street, if ever, or not often that we witness someone being robbed or mistreated, and my physical neighbor rarely needs something from me that I know of.

Exploring the thought further, I pictured one of my routine days, which went something like this:

Half an hour of early morning reflection and prayer, followed by some exercise and a quick breakfast. Getting out the door on time to beat the rush-hour traffic is often a scramble. Even if I’m on time for appointments, most everyone in our African city isn’t, often leaving me running late for my next appointment, which forces me to join the circle of latecomers. In turn it leaves me disgruntled, with little compassion to stop and place a coin in the hand of the bedraggled elderly beggar woman at the street corner or the man in the wheelchair with

stumps instead of legs sitting by the road with his hand outstretched.

I’d rushed by. *Were those my neighbors?*

I’d moved from one event to the next with little time to answer an SMS from a friend who needed a few minutes of my time. A listening ear might have meant the world to him. *Was he my neighbor?*

I’d glanced over an email from an old acquaintance who explained how his life had taken a downward turn and that he needed someone to talk to. *This has to wait until later*, I’d decided, as I turned to pressing business emails. *Could he have been my neighbor?*

When I’d reached my car in the parking lot later that day, the man parked next to me was frantically turning over his engine, trying to get his car started, but to no avail. It seemed he was in need of a jumper cable. Yikes, that had to be coming from some Good Samaritan, but not me. My jumper cable was deeply buried in the trunk of my car, under some supplies which I needed to deliver to one of our projects on my way home. *Surely he isn’t my neighbor*, I’d thought as I jumped behind the wheel with a sorry look. In any case, I was on my way to an aid project and was running late.

After reflecting on this day, I realized that each day brings along a neighbor or two, and how easy it is to brush them aside and go on with “important” business. I also contemplated the many times I had benefited from a friendly Good Samaritan who’d decided that I *was* a

1. See Luke 10:25–37.
2. Luke 10:36–37 NIV
3. Read the full story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37.



“

Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

—Jesus, *Matthew 25:40 NIV*

”

neighbor and reached out with a helping hand when I was in a tight spot. So I decided to pay more attention to the little deeds of kindness and the small niceties I could extend to the neighbors who might come along the path of my busy days.

The very next day, I was tested on this decision when a friend called, asking if I could babysit her toddler for an hour while she went for a dental appointment. I'd planned to take that Saturday off, but remembering my resolution, I said yes, trusting that I could spare an hour and still have enough time left for relaxation afterward. I also dropped a note to my sad acquaintance and pressed a coin into the hand of the old lady at the corner. Thankfully, nobody needed my jumper cable that day.

There were other neighbors throughout the coming weeks, and there will always be plenty more in the future. Even a smile can go a long way, as well as a helping hand lent, a coin spared, a bag carried, an encouraging SMS sent, a meal shared, a moment of undivided attention given, or that overdue phone call made.

It's surprising to see the countless little attitudes and deeds that can improve the world around us, if we pay attention and remember the Good Samaritan and ask God regularly, "Who is my neighbor?"³

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

GEORGE'S STORY

BY HANNAH BOOK

“THIS HUMANITARIAN WORK YOU DO—is there some religious motivation? If it’s religious, I’m an atheist.” The old bum tugging at my arm looked more like a beast than a man. His shriveled body bore all the marks of extreme alcoholism, but his eyes were alert and pled with mine.

“I was once an atheist, too,” I told him.

The large public market in Buenos Aires where this took place is home to many *stevedores* and others who don’t have anywhere else to live. During the day, hundreds of street people comb through the garbage and vie for refuse from the produce stalls. It’s a pretty rough place. In the years I’ve been going there for supplies for our volunteer work, I’ve gotten to know quite a few of the vendors and many of the regulars. This one wanted to talk. He said his name was Sucker.

For a street drunk, he turned out to be surprisingly well spoken and educated. Standing there in the market, for the next half hour the man told me his life story—all 64 years of it—including how his

police-chief father had been assassinated by organized crime before his eyes, and how he had then “gone loco” and been uncontrollably violent ever since. By the time he finished, tears were streaming down his face.

What could I say? I prayed silently for the right words. “Do you want to be delivered?” I asked.

“Delivered from what?”

“From your bitterness and fear.”

“No one can take that away!”

Sucker protested.

“I know Someone who can,” I told him, “and I have a gift for you.”

He caught on immediately that I was talking about Jesus. “Do you know how hard it is for an atheist to receive that gift?” he groaned.

“I was an atheist too, remember. That’s why I know this will work for you.”

Sucker had no answer for that.

“Do you want to receive Jesus?” I asked outright.

For a long moment he stood perfectly still, staring at me. Then suddenly he exhaled and his arms fell open, as if to receive the gift I was offering. “Yes, I do,” he said.

So I prayed with Sucker to receive Jesus as his Savior, and for Jesus to deliver him from the bitterness and fear that had driven him to become an alcoholic.

When I opened my eyes, he looked like a different man!

Before we parted, he said, “Thank you for bringing me this peace—and by the way, my name is George.”

Two weeks later, back at the market, I didn’t even recognize George! He was clean-shaven and well groomed. He was also eager to pray with me and happy to receive that month’s *Conéctate* (the Spanish edition of *Activated*).

The following week, he told us that he’d read the literature over and over. He’d also sat and talked to Jesus for a couple of hours, and concluded by telling Him he needed to find work. Because of his violent and argumentative behavior, George had been fired from job after job.

“Barely one minute later, a boy walked up to me and said his father was offering me a job at his stall—the same man who swore one month ago that I would never work for



him again!” George was so excited at how quickly his prayer had been answered!

On that visit, he asked us to pray that God would help him stop drinking completely.

“The strangest thing happened the other day,” he said. “I was drinking with my buddies when I felt Jesus nudge me on the shoulder and tell me to put down my wine—and I did! I just got up and walked away. I *never* would have done that before! Then, about 20 minutes later, the men I’d been drinking with started a big fight, and a policeman came to break it up. This policeman knew he could always find me in the middle of a good fight, so when he saw me

sitting nearby, not in the melee, he asked, ‘Don’t you belong in there?’ When I told him no, he just stared at me and asked, ‘What’s *happened* to you?’ Jesus is changing me. I can feel it, and others can see it. Now I want to pray that I can stop drinking completely.”

When George said he didn’t think he could survive another cold, damp winter on the street, we prayed for him to find a place to stay at a rent he could afford. The next time I saw George, he told me that a large

citrus company had offered him a supervisory job, complete with living quarters.

Better news still, he said he felt he could once more face his wife and grown twin daughters. “With all the miracles Jesus has done for me, I’m sure He can help me make amends. Now, no matter what the problem, I feel that Jesus is saying, ‘Trust Me!’”

HANNAH BOOK IS A PART-TIME VOLUNTEER WITH THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ARGENTINA. ■

If you’d like to get to know the One who can change your world, simply pray:
Dear Jesus, I accept Your love and forgiveness. Please come into my life and help me grow in understanding and in following You.

LIGHT UP YOUR CORNER

BY EVELYN SICHROVSKY



I STIRRED AT THE NOW-FAMILIAR SOUND of a baby crying plaintively. Behind the partitioning curtain, I could hear his mother's despondent, weary voice trying to soothe him. I was fifteen, and I was in the children's ward of the hospital after having undergone a tonsillectomy the day before. Contrary to expectations, there had been some complications, and now the pain in my throat and ears made it impossible for me to sleep deeply. I pressed the ice pack more tightly to my throat and face while I watched this exhausted, careworn mother pacing the narrow aisle as she rocked her tiny, weeping son.

His pitiful cries were somewhat muffled by the bandage above his mouth. The day before, I had overheard his mother discussing with a nurse how her son had been born without an upper lip. At only four months old, this was already his third surgery. He would need to undergo at least three more surgeries before his first birthday, with each surgery building upon the previous one to gradually form an upper lip.

My mind went back to visiting hours the evening before, when his father had come. He appeared to be a construction worker and had obviously come

straight from work. I watched as he lovingly cradled his son and fed him by pouring a little milk into his mouth and then very gently shaking his head to help him swallow it. Without an upper lip, his son couldn't nurse or drink from a bottle like other babies.

I was brought back to the present as a nurse came in for her rounds. I reached for the fresh ice pack she offered and watched her bend over the baby to change his bandage. Later, as his cries subsided and he drifted into a restless sleep, she turned to go. But then she paused. "It must be very difficult," she said softly, touching his mother's arm. "Oh yes," came the reply, in a voice full of pain. Looking away, her voice

1. "Jesus Bids Us Shine," by Susan B. Warner (1868)

2. See John 14:20.



You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house.—*Jesus, Matthew 5:14–15 NLT*

We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won't need to tell anybody it does. Lighthouses don't fire cannons to call attention to their shining—they just shine.—*Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899)*

Better to illuminate than merely to shine, to deliver to others contemplated truths than merely to contemplate.—*Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

broke as she went on. “I often ask myself why ... why I brought him into the world like this!”

As the nurse's footsteps faded down the hall, the mother's words echoed in my ears. I thought about how much God must want her to know that He loves, cares, and never condemns; that He is near and understands. I couldn't shake the longing to tell her. But what could I say? How could I say anything at all? My voice had been temporarily reduced to a raspy whisper, and speaking would be very painful. But as I turned the idea over in my mind, a little chorus I'd learned as a child suddenly returned to me:

 Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light,
Like a little candle burning in the night;
In this world of darkness, we must shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine.¹

This is my corner now, I thought, looking around the dimly lit room. Still unsure of what I would say and how I'd say it, I put down my ice pack and slipped out of bed. Soon we were talking. My voice was scratchy, my words were simple and a bit clumsy, and my face flushed with my usual shyness. But as we conversed, the pain and despair in her eyes gradually gave way to peace and faith. When we prayed together, I realized with awe that God had used me, His little candle, to bring His light to a hurting heart.

Many years have passed, but I often think back on that experience. Each of us has a little corner—a family, a workplace, a school, a neighborhood. It's so easy to feel small and to doubt that we can make a difference. But little is much if God is in it. And God is indeed in each of us.² We are His candles, each set in a corner of this dark world to shine uniquely for Him. I pray that I will be faithful to light up my corner, whenever and however I can.

EVELYN SICHROVSKY IS A CONTENT CREATOR FOR CHILDREN'S ENGLISH EDUCATIONAL BOOKS AND MATERIALS. SHE LIVES IN SOUTHERN TAIWAN. ■

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

THE POWER OF A SMILE

MOTHER TERESA (1910–1997) ON SMILING

Every time you smile at someone, it is an action of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.

Peace begins with a smile.

Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love.

We shall never know all the good that a simple smile can do.



SMILES ARE POWERFUL. You've probably met a few gifted people, like I have, who radiate warmth and friendliness all the time. They smile so much that just being around them charges your spiritual battery. Babies are experts in this as well. Without saying a word, they lighten your day with their smiles.

These days, many companies train their employees to smile at customers, even when they're talking to them on the phone. Of course, the professional smile can at times seem insincere. As a matter of fact, extensive research has been done on the nature of smiling to determine which smiles appear genuine. These findings are useful in selecting juries or determining the honesty of someone that needs to be trusted.

That said, even though we know that these professional smiles are sometimes insincere, we still miss them when they're not there, as anyone knows who has felt the negative effects of a scowl from a grumbling cashier.

I recently read an article about a man named Hans Bergen who lived in the tiny town of Ida, Holland, whose face was disfigured. He lived a lonely life, rejected socially by everyone in his community and spurned by his own relatives.

Everyone he met seemed to ignore or mock him, except for one young girl named Anna Martin, who gave him a kind smile, the one and only time she met him. When this man died, he left a considerable amount of money to her in his will in appreciation for the kindness that she showed him. "She was the only one who smiled at me," he wrote.

A friend of mine experienced a similar story. Helga was volunteering in Thailand when she met an elderly farmer resting on the beach on his vacation. She gave him a friendly smile and struck up a conversation. Over the course of the next 20 years, they continued to write each other once a month or so, but they never met again. Then one day, Helga received a letter from this man's lawyer, saying that he had left her a large inheritance in gratitude for the kindness and concern that she'd shown him in her communication.

Never underestimate the value of a smile. It costs nothing, and we all have an infinite stock to give away.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST¹ IN GERMANY. ■

1. <http://elixirmime.com>

THE JOY OF SERVING

BY UDAY PAUL



FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, I've volunteered in a project teaching underprivileged youngsters. I was brought up in a typical Indian upper-middle-class family, and for most of my life, I've lived in an affluent neighborhood of the city where I was raised and have enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. So it was bit of a culture shock to set foot in the slums and experience life on a totally different level.

In India, there's a great contrast between affluent people who are well-educated and have good manners, and the lower classes. It's a challenge to teach them good communication skills, etiquette, and values, but it's also given me a lot of fulfillment and satisfaction and helped me understand the mindsets and heartcries of the people I once looked down upon. I can see that they're eager to improve

their lives by their eagerness to learn. I also see by their quick progress that they have as much potential as children from families who can afford to attend the best schools.

The Bible tells us that good works done in the service of those who need it can be a witness to the world and glorify God.¹ Jesus put a lot of emphasis on meeting people's needs. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, welcomed and comforted the oppressed, the marginalized, and those on the fringes of society. He saw great potential in everyone. He looked at people with weaknesses and told them that they were "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."² Everyone, whether rich or poor, is created in God's image and is very precious to Him.

Volunteering to serve, whether in an educational project for the

underprivileged or in a neighborhood clean-up program, is a great way to minister to our communities. It gives us a chance to get to know people right where they are, understand their problems and burdens, and build close relationships. When others see that it is Jesus' love that motivates us to serve in this manner, it opens the door for a deeper witness for Him.

Jesus said that He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.³ By ministering to the needs of others, we reflect the love of Jesus, who ministered to the whole person, physical and spiritual, and we glorify God.

UDAY PAUL LIVES IN BANGALORE, INDIA, AND TEACHES ENGLISH AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT COURSES. ■

1. See Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12.

2. Matthew 5:13,14

3. See Matthew 20:28.



Success is like a snowball. It takes momentum to build, and the more you roll it in the right direction, the bigger it gets.—Steve Ferrante

BY ROBERT STINE

MOMENTUM

WHEN SUFFERING A BIG LOSS or being overwhelmed by life's obstacles, changes, and problems, it can almost seem impossible or hopeless to win—but this is when putting up a fight and giving it your best effort can result in a major, “impossible,” come-from-behind victory that changes history.

I never saw this point so clearly made as at Super Bowl LI on February 5 between the New England Patriots and the Atlanta Falcons.¹ The Patriots were behind 28–3 during the third quarter, and no team had ever come back from more than ten points behind to win a Super Bowl, so it seemed like *mission impossible* with only one quarter to go. During the first half, the Falcons scored 28 points and it didn't seem like they could do much wrong. It sure looked like it was going to be a complete disaster and a rout.

Then a few things happened that were momentum changers. The Falcons had the ball, and could have chosen to kick a field goal which would have extended their lead even further, but they ran a pass play instead.

Their quarterback was tackled, putting them out of kicking range, and they had to punt the ball back to the other team.

From that point on, nothing could stop the Patriots, and they went 90 yards (82 m) to score, and then score again, and again, before tying the score in the last minute and finally winning in the first overtime in Super Bowl history.

There was a very specific point in the game when viewers could see the change taking place. The Falcons were very good, but once the Patriots came into their own, there was nothing the Falcons could do to stop them.

Life is like this. Sometimes we're losing the battle of the mind, of initiative. We get discouraged. Nothing seems to go right, and we're tempted to give up, but if we look at these losses as learning opportunities and go on the offensive, doing what we know is right, things can change and victories can come. Sometimes, a simple prayer is all it takes to switch the momentum back to our side.

1. In the United States, the Super Bowl is the annual championship game of the National Football League (NFL).

ROBERT STINE IS A CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR AND MISSIONARY IN JAPAN. ■



LOOKING OUTWARDS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

LIFE CAN BE SO INCREDIBLY BUSY, and that can hinder our spiritual lives. It can be a struggle to find the time to commune with God, to spend time in His presence and in His Word. It's as if there is a strong gravitational force that keeps us tethered to the burdens of daily life, making it increasingly difficult to stop and enter His presence, where we could find the spiritual strength and stamina to gracefully handle the burdens of life.

This in turn can affect our conviction to share our faith with others. When we're too busy, when the anxieties of life and concern about our own needs weigh heavily upon us and we're not allowing God to carry those, it becomes too easy to forget that there are others around who have many of the same and often

much heavier burdens than we do. And yet, unlike us as believers, they don't know God.

No matter what our situation, we have God helping us through it. But so many don't know about Him, and consequently don't have the reassurance of His presence, the inner peace that He loves them, and the faith that they will live with Him forever. And there are some who may *never* know, unless we tell them.

Let's pray that we don't become secluded in our blessings, looking inward, being overly concerned about ourselves and our own needs. Rather, let's ask God to help us be sensitive to the fact that the people He brings us in touch with are made in His image and likeness, and that He loves and died for each one of them.

Dear God, fill me with Your Spirit, compassion, and love, so I can speak as You would. Better yet, I ask that You will speak to people through me. May Your gentle words of love, Your understanding, care, concern, and truth flow through me as Your channel, from Your heart to theirs.

Enlighten the darkest corners of their hearts with Your light and love. Bring them rest in place of struggle, peace in place of worry, happiness in place of grief. Replace their anxiety with comfort, their fears with faith. And when it's Your will, use me to help make this happen.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Make someone's day

Have you ever had a bad day just because you crossed paths with someone who was in a foul mood? Maybe it was someone on the bus or another customer in a store—someone who you normally wouldn't have even noticed—but that one grumpy or inconsiderate person cast a pall on your whole day.

On the other hand, have you ever had a day that went great and realized later that it all started when you met someone who was especially nice to you? Maybe it was the way she smiled at you, or the way he picked up and handed you something you had dropped, or held a door open for you—only a little gesture, but one that had a positive impact on your day.

Everyone has influence. Moment by moment your attitude and level of happiness are reflected in the little things you say and do, and those are bound to affect others. What kind of impact do you usually have?

Think of the things people have done that made your day, and make a point of doing those same things for others. Not only will you brighten someone else's day, but you will also find that you are happier and see life more positively.