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LIVING WITH THE ROSE

The secret of a closer
relationship with Jesus

INTIMATE DETAILS OF MY LIFE

Jesus tells it like it was

14 MAJOR POINTS OF THE ENDTIME

What to expect—from here
to eternity

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Activated Ministries

P.O. Box 462805
Escondido, CA 92046-2805
USA
info@activatedministries.org
(1-877) 862-3228 (toll-free)

Activated Europe

Bramingham Pk. Business Ctr.
Enterprise Way
Luton, Beds. LU3 4BU
England
activatedEurope@activated.org
(07801) 442-317

Activated Africa

P.O. Box 2150
Westville 3630
South Africa
activatedAfrica@activated.org
083 55 68 213

Activated India

P.O. Box 5215
G.P.O.
Bangalore - 560 001
India
activatedIndia@activated.org

EDITOR

Keith Phillips

DESIGN

Giselle LeFavre

COVER PHOTO

Elizabeth K

ILLUSTRATIONS

Etienne Morel

PRODUCTION

Francisco Lopez

VOL 4, ISSUE 4

April 2003

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www.auroraproduction.com

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personally speaking



I was 21 when I read the Gospels for the first time. Someone had suggested I read the book of John first, but I knew so little about the Bible at the time that I didn't understand the Gospels were four separate accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. So I started at what seemed the only logical place, at the beginning of the New Testament, with the book of Matthew.

By the time I got to the book of John, I was fascinated with Jesus. He had the perfect answer to every question and always knew exactly what to do. But more than that, He seemed to understand *me* and know exactly what I needed. His words were powerful and alive. *He* was alive! His words reached across nearly 2000 years and touched me in a way I had never experienced before. When I finally came to John 15:15—"I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you"—I felt He was speaking directly to me. Jesus called *me* His friend! I got so excited I couldn't sit still. I wanted to tell the whole world—and still do!

I had prayed to receive Him as my Savior a few months before, but nothing changed until I began reading His words with an open, receptive heart. His words were powerful and alive and, best of all, personal. And it got better. Some time later, I discovered that Jesus still speaks as openly and directly with His followers today as He did with His first disciples. It is our hope that this issue of *Activated* will help you make that direct, personal connection with Jesus, or strengthen the relationship you already have with Him.

Keith Phillips

For the *Activated* Family

A FATHER'S AGONIZING DECISION

AT THE BEGINNING OF A CHURCH SERVICE, the pastor briefly introduced his guest speaker. An elderly man stepped up to the pulpit and told this story:

"A father, his son, and a friend of his son were sailing off the Pacific Coast," he began, "when a fast-approaching storm blocked any attempt to get back to shore. The waves were so high that even though the father was an experienced sailor, he could not keep the boat upright. The three were swept into the ocean."

To which boy would he throw the other end of the rescue line?



The old man hesitated for a moment, making eye contact with two young men in the crowd who were beginning to look somewhat interested in his story.

"The father made it back to the overturned boat and grabbed the only remaining rescue line," he continued. "Then he had to make the most excruciating decision of his life: To which boy would he throw the other end of the rescue line? He only had seconds to make the decision."

"The father knew that his son had received Jesus as his Savior, and he also knew that his son's friend had not. The agony of his decision

could not be matched by the torrent of waves. The father yelled out, 'I love you, son!' Then he threw the line to his son's friend. By the time he pulled the other boy back to the capsized boat, his son had disappeared beneath the raging swells. His body was never recovered."

By this time, the two young men were decidedly attentive, sitting up straight and waiting anxiously for the next words to come out of the old man's mouth.

"The father," he continued, "knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus, and he could not bear the thought of his son's friend stepping into an eternity without Jesus. Therefore, he sacrificed his son."

Pausing for just a moment, the old man then finished with this thought: "How great is the love of God, that He should do the same for us."

Silence filled the room as the old man stepped down from the pulpit and went back to his seat.

Within minutes after the service ended, the two young men were at the old man's side. "That was a nice story," one of the boys said, "but I don't think it was very realistic to say that a father would give up his son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian."

"Well, you've got a point there," the old man replied, glancing down at his worn Bible. A big smile broadened his face as he looked up at the boys and said, "It doesn't seem possible, does it? But that story gives me a glimpse of what it must have been like for God to give His Son for me. You see, I was the son's friend."

Intimate

details

of my life

Excerpts of
a message
from Jesus

FAITHFUL SCRIBES RECORDED SOME OF MY WORDS and parts of My life story, but because you are My friend, I want to tell you more about My life.¹

So much happened during My time on earth. I had trials and tests, happy times and sad times. I faced battles and had lessons to learn, just like you do. I learned to obey My Father through the things I experienced. Because I was in human flesh, I had to learn how to yield and obey and follow My Father's will, the same way you do. Your life is full of choices and decisions, and so was Mine. I had to *choose* to do the right thing, just like you do.

I know that's hard for you to grasp because you think, "You're God's Son, part of God Himself, so of course *You* could make it!" But flesh is flesh, and all those who are in the flesh are men and women of like passions. As I've told you before, I was tempted in all the ways you are. I had to pass My tests, just like you. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to be your intercessor today, the One who understands you and knows exactly what you go through.²

I confronted a lot of tough situations, and there were plenty of obstacles I had to overcome. One of My biggest lessons was learning not to lean on My own fleshly abilities, but to lean on God, My Father. I had become a man so I could feel like you feel, hurt like you hurt, laugh like you laugh, and experience life as you do.³ I became flesh—only to discover that one of the most important things I would have to learn as a man of flesh was to lean on the spirit.⁴

Every time I was faced with a

needy situation, I had to make a decision. I had to choose whether I would try to solve the problem on My own or acknowledge that I needed help from Heaven, ask My Father, and get My power from on high.⁵

Just as your life is made up of constant choices, so was Mine. I had to make choices every day, and all of My choices involved whether I was going to get explicit directions from My Father in Heaven, or try to solve the problems in My own fleshly strength and wisdom.

I learned that I had something far superior to fleshly wisdom. I had a connection with Heaven, and because I kept that connection strong and heard from Heaven rather than leaning on My fleshly wisdom, I succeeded.

The plan My Father gave Me was simple. If I was going to be successful, if I was going to have the strength and stamina and faith and wisdom to accomplish My mission, I would have to take time with Him every day. I would have to get away from not only the crowds, but also My closest friends in order to have time alone with My Father. This is why I got up early and went out to pray before the busy day began, or went out to the hills—so I could have this time to look to Heaven and get My direction for the day.

This is how I was able to have the strength to carry out My ministry; this is how I was able to work miracles; this is how I was able to wisely answer those who asked Me questions—because I got My directions from My Father. My flesh was just like everyone else's, but My wisdom far surpassed any wisdom, power, or strength on earth, because

My flesh was just like everyone else's, but My wisdom far surpassed any wisdom, power, or strength on earth, because I listened to Heaven.

¹ John 20:30–31; 15:15.

² Hebrews 4:15; 5:8.

³ Hebrews 2:10.

⁴ John 6:63.

⁵ John 5:30; 8:28.

I listened to Heaven. Heaven was in Me, and the proof was in the results.

Another great test I had to pass was the test of pride. The temptation to yield to the pride of life is the great test of all mankind, and I was not exempt. Even though I was born the son of a lowly carpenter, even though I didn't have much to be proud of in the way of worldly riches or education, as I grew and became strong in spirit,⁶ Satan tempted Me with pride in other ways.

Just as I was about to launch out into My public ministry, the Devil tempted Me with riches, power, and glory when he offered Me the kingdoms of the world.⁷ But what you don't know is that when the Devil saw that that didn't work, as I ventured out in My work among the public, he was always on the lookout for ways he could tempt Me with pride.

Had I yielded to pride, I easily could have taken the credit to Myself for the mighty things My Father did for Me. The only way I was able to resist this temptation was to look constantly to My Father in Heaven and call on Him for help. When I did this, He gave Me a plan—the humility plan. He said that whenever I was tempted with pride, the way to combat it was to openly give Him all the credit and glory.⁸

This is why I regularly reminded My disciples and those around Me that I couldn't do anything Myself and that I knew nothing except what the Father showed Me. I was the living Word to the people;⁹ I couldn't merely *preach* humility and love, I had to *be* humble and *give* love.

As My Father worked great miracles by My hand and the news

spread abroad, crowds followed Me everywhere I went.¹⁰ This could have easily gone to My head. I found I had to always point to My Father and give Him all the honor and glory. As I told people then, if I had honored Myself, it would have meant nothing. It was My Father who honored Me.¹¹

When I was taken prisoner in the Garden of Gethsemane and later stood before Pontius Pilate, part of Me wanted to call down the legions of Heaven and show My power. But My Father knew a better way, the humble way, and so I replied, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight.”¹² Through humility, by standing back and letting My Father work in the way He knew best, the victory came and all glory was given to Him.

I worked many obvious, visible miracles, but these were not as great as the miracles I worked in the hearts of men. Walking on the water, raising the dead, turning water into wine, multiplying a little food to feed multitudes, healing bodies, and calming the angry sea were all supernatural manifestations of My power. But the miracle of changing a hardened heart was a far greater wonder and proof of My divinity.¹³

Modern science appears to also work wonders, but only I can change a heart. As King Solomon asked, “Who can bear a broken spirit?”¹⁴ Only My miracle-working power can touch and heal a wounded spirit. I worked many miracles in the hearts and spirits of men, women, and children when I walked on earth, and I still do today. These truly are My favorite miracles. □

⁶ Luke 2:52; John 7:15. ⁷ Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13. ⁸ John 5:19. ⁹ John 1:14. ¹⁰ Matthew 4:23–25.

¹¹ John 8:54. ¹² Matthew 26:53; John 18:36. ¹³ Colossians 1:12–13; Ezekiel 36:26. ¹⁴ Proverbs 18:14.



ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Q: If God is love, as the Bible says, how can He send so many innocent people to Hell who never even had a chance to accept Jesus—all the millions upon millions who were born into different cultures and religions, as well as people from Christian cultures who never heard the true salvation message?

***God does
not play
favorites
when it
comes to
salvation***

A: MANY CHRISTIANS BELIEVE AND TEACH that anyone who doesn't receive Jesus in this life is forever damned to Hell—that there is no second chance in the afterlife. That belief is nearly always based on a single verse: "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

But there are many *more* verses that clearly show that God is a God of love, a God of understanding, a God who knows and cares deeply for each of His creations. He not only sent Jesus to die for us, but every day He works in our hearts to bring us closer to Him. Would a God who has gone to such lengths to love us into Heaven let go of His precious ones so easily?

The Bible tells us God's mercy is "from everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 103:17). He is "not willing that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). And God gave His son Jesus to the world "that *all* through Him might believe" (John 1:7). "The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Peter 3:15).

God does not play favorites when it comes to salvation, giving only those brought up in a certain culture or religion the opportunity to receive Him. His plan was that everyone should hear His message of salvation and have an opportunity to receive Jesus while they are alive. But those who don't, because of circumstances or the failure of Christians to tell them, will have a chance in the next life.

One biblical example of salvation in the afterlife occurred after Jesus' death on the cross, when He went to the heart of the earth and preached for three days to the spirits in prison (Matthew 12:40; 1 Peter 4:6). Why would He have preached to them if there had been no chance of them believing in Him and thereby being saved?

God is fair. He will give everybody sufficient opportunity, a fair and loving chance—dead or alive, now or then—to hear the Gospel, believe, and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. □

The Bible not only tells us about yesterday, it also tells us about tomorrow. It is full of thousands of detailed prophecies that describe specific people, places, times, situations, and events. Many of these prophecies are about the final period of man's kingdoms on earth, a period known as the Endtime—the time in which we are now living.

14 major points of the endtime

1. Signs of the times

The Bible gives us numerous “signs of the times,” signs and signals that we are to watch for so we can know exactly *how* close we are to Jesus’ return. These signs include drastic upsurges in the number and severity of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes (Matthew 24:7); the Gospel being preached in all the world (Matthew 24:14); dramatic increases in international travel and scientific knowledge (Daniel 12:4); a great “falling away” from the true God as “evil men and seducers grow worse and worse” and deceive many (2 Thessalonians 2:3; 2 Timothy 3:13 KJV); unprecedented selfishness and lack of natural affection (Matthew 24:12; 2 Timothy 3:1–4). All this results in “distress of nations,” with “men’s hearts failing them from fear” (Luke 21:25–26)—signs that are all obviously being fulfilled today more than ever before.

2. Rise of the Antichrist

One of the most important signs of the Endtime is the rise of a totally godless anti-Christ world government led by a demonic dictator who will actually be fully possessed by Satan himself, the world leader known as the Antichrist. In desperation, the world will turn to this political superman, hoping that he will be able to solve pressing problems, cure economic ills, unite international politics, end religious squabbles, and defuse the nuclear time bomb (Daniel 8:23–25; 11:21,24; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

3. Signing of the covenant

The Antichrist will sign a seven-year covenant, or agreement, by which he will bring a measure of world peace by reconciling the world’s major religions (Daniel 9:27a). Through this cov-

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JOSEPH CANDEL
FROM THE WRITINGS
OF DAVID BRANDT
BERG >>

enant he will also somehow settle the current crisis in the Middle East by working out a compromise between the Arabs and the Jews, enabling the Jews to rebuild their Temple and resume their religious animal sacrifices (Daniel 8:11; 9: 27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:4).

During the first half of the Antichrist's seven-year reign, people are going to think that he is wonderful because he will have brought some peace, restored the world's economy, redistributed the wealth, helped the poor, solved the Middle East crisis, and promised religious liberty (Daniel 11:21–24,39).

4. Breaking of the covenant

But suddenly, halfway through his seven-year reign, the Antichrist will break the covenant (Daniel 9:27b), invade Israel from the north (Daniel 11:28–31), abolish all traditional religious worship (Revelation 13: 7–8), declare that he himself is God (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and demand that all the world worship him and his “image,” which could be some kind of computerized robot.

The Tribulation will be like the last days of the children of Israel in Egypt, before Moses led them out.

The false prophet—the Antichrist's chief aide, who deceives the world—will make this image to the Antichrist (Revelation 13:11–14) and place it at the site of the rebuilt Jewish Temple (Daniel 11:31). This

image, which the prophet Daniel referred to as the “abomination of desolation,” will “speak” and somehow have power to cause those who refuse to worship it to be killed (Revelation 13:14–15). Jesus said that when we see this abomination of desolation standing at the Temple, we will know that the last three and a half years of man's rule on earth has begun—a time of “great tribulation” (Matthew 24:15,21).

5. Great tribulation

During this final three-and a-half-year period, the Antichrist will enact a mandatory one-world credit system, creating a cashless society. The Antichrist government will use this new credit system to try to force everybody to submit to and worship the Antichrist, because no one will be able to buy or sell without a personal credit number, the “mark of the Beast,” in their hands or foreheads (Revelation 13:16–18). But God's children and many others will refuse to worship the Antichrist or receive his mark, and the Lord will take care of them (Revelation 12:6,14).

While the Antichrist and his followers are persecuting and trying to kill their enemies, God is going to let loose pestilences and plagues that will attack the followers of the Antichrist (Revelation chapter 8; 9:1–11; 11:3–6). The Tribulation will be like the last days of the children of Israel in Egypt, before Moses led them out. God's prophets will do mighty signs, wonders, and miracles to defend the Gospel and God's children, while God sends plague after plague on their enemies (Revelation 11:3,5–6).

A number of wars and the Antichrist's worldwide persecution of all who refuse to worship him

will make the Tribulation a time of trouble “such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21). But the Bible also tells us in several places and in several corroborating ways exactly how long the Tribulation will last—three and a half years, or 42 months, or 1,260 days¹ from when the Antichrist sets up his image at the Temple. God revealed this to encourage us to

***Just when the Antichrist thinks
he has the world in
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of His children out of this world.***

hang on and keep going for Jesus during what will be a very difficult period for Christians (Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 13:5; 12:6,14; 11:3).

During this time, “the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many” (Daniel 11:32–33). The people of the world are going to be more desperate for the truth than ever, and those who know God’s Word and are faithful witnesses for the Lord are going to teach and encourage millions. In spite of all that the Devil’s forces will do to try to stop them, millions of God’s children will keep going for God till the very end.

6. Nuclear war

At some point, possibly toward the end of the Great Tribulation or even after the Rapture (point 7), 10 “kings” will join forces with the Antichrist and together they will destroy

with fire “Babylon, the great whore” in a final judgment. From a number of Scriptures, this sounds like 10 of the leading nations of Europe (or perhaps “10 kings” refers to the European Community as a whole) will unite with Russia and turn on the United States in a nuclear first strike that will destroy her in “one hour” (Revelation 17:12–13,16–17; 18:2,7–8). How and when all of this will play out is still unclear, but as the time draws nearer, we will see exactly how these verses will be fulfilled.


7. The Rapture

At the end of the final three and a half years—“immediately after the tribulation of those days”—just when the Antichrist thinks he has the world in his grasp, Jesus will return to rescue all of His children out of this world. The Antichrist’s forces will be shocked as they, too, see the Lord coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:29–31; Revelation 1:7).

When Jesus returns, all of God’s saved children will be gloriously resurrected in what is known as the Rapture. The apostle Paul writes: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” (1 Corinthians 15:51–52). The graves of all the Christians who have already died will burst open and they will receive new supernatural bodies, like Jesus’ body after He was resurrected. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). □

(To be continued.)

¹In those times, months were precisely 30 days, and years were exactly 360 days.



My Little Girl

I DON'T KNOW IF IT IS THE SAME FOR ALL FIRST-TIME MOTHERS, but nothing holds my interest like watching my little girl. Her facial expressions, the excitement in her eyes, her curiosity—just about anything she does brings out the motherly love in me. And one wonderful day I realized that's how Jesus, in His unconditional love, is with me.

As I watched my Ashley Elle sitting up on the bed and looking at me with her bright blue eyes, all smiles, I thought, *How could I not love her? Sure, at six months she is as active as a puppy, she makes a mess sometimes, she fusses, she wakes up in the night and wants to be fed when I just want to sleep, but no matter what she does, there is no way that I could ever stop loving or caring for her.*

Then I remembered the previous day, when I had felt so low and far from the Lord. I had made so many mistakes! Surely He had stopped loving me—or so it seemed. Then, as I looked into my baby's eyes, He spoke to me. "How could I ever stop loving you? Why would I ever want to stop caring for you? You are the joy of My heart, and I love you. You are My girl. Sure, you aren't perfect and you sometimes make a mess of things, but that's all just part of growing up. I love you more and more every day. And don't worry, you will *always* be My little girl!" □

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Jesus, please help me to remember that You love me, no matter what. Even if I mess up, even if I feel lower than low, even if I feel I've failed You or others, Your love is still the most real and most concrete and most absolute truth in my life. You will never stop loving me, and that encourages me to keep going for You. It makes me want to love You back, knowing I could never love You as much as You love me. It makes me want to forgive myself, because I know that You have already forgiven me. It makes me want to lay down the burden of guilt or self-accusation and pick up Your joy and freedom and clarity of mind. I love You, Jesus, because You love me so much. Amen. □

A Persian fable says, one day
A wanderer found a piece of clay
So redolent of sweet perfume,
Its odor scented all the room.

“What are thou?” was the quick demand.
“Art thou some gem of Samarkand,
Or spikenard rare in odd disguise?
Or other costly merchandise?”

“Nay, I am but a piece of clay.”
“Then, whence this wondrous sweetness, pray?”
“Friend, if the secret I disclose,
I have been living with the rose.”



LIVING WITH THE ROSE

The secret
of a closer
relationship
with Jesus

CHRISTIANS ARE SUPPOSED TO TRY TO BE LIKE JESUS—living as He would, acting as He would, speaking as He would, and even thinking as He would. But how do we accomplish that? How can we be more like Him? As in the Persian fable, it comes from living close to Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Many of us do spend time with the Lord, but how much *quality* time do we spend with Him, where we shut out the business of the day and give Him our full attention, communing with Him, enjoying Him, and getting to know Him better in

order to become more like Him? If we don't, no matter how many good qualities we possess or how dynamic we are or how dedicated we are, no matter how good we are with people or what else we may have going for us, if we're not spending time with Jesus, we're not going to be a very good reflection of Him or His love to others.

The dictionary defines “communion” as “a feeling of emotional or spiritual closeness, a connection.” So communing with Jesus means to make an emotional and spiritual connection with Jesus. Praise, prayer,

and reading God's Word are all ways of making and sustaining that connection. These are the lifeblood of our spiritual lives, the most vital ingredient in our walk with the Lord—prayer, praise, and the Word.

Many of us tend to pick up the pace when our workloads and responsibilities increase, and that leads to more stress. Taking time off and relaxing alone or with family or friends can help relieve the pressure, but friends or family or time alone can't give us what Jesus can.

Hobbies can also be relaxing and fun, but if we're not careful,

Getting to know Jesus better

God sent Jesus to show us a picture of what He Himself is like.

John 14:7–9

Colossians 1:15

Hebrews 1:3

Jesus showed us God's love by dying for us.

John 10:11

John 15:13

Romans 5:8

Jesus came to proclaim the truth and destroy the works of the Devil.

John 18:37

1 John 3:8

Hebrews 2:14–15

Jesus knows our human weaknesses and sympathizes with us.

Hebrews 2:17–18

Hebrews 4:15

Hebrews 5:8

Jesus taught with power and authority.

Luke 4:32

John 7:46

Jesus was humble.

Philippians 2:5–8

Matthew 11:29

Luke 22:27

John 13:3–15

Jesus has hope for everyone, even sinners and outcasts of society.

Matthew 9:9–13

Luke 7:36–48

Luke 19:2–10

Luke 23:39–43

John 8:1–11

IF YOU'RE NOT ALREADY BENEFITING FROM THE KIND OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIP with Jesus you have read about on the preceding pages, it may be because you haven't taken that all-important first step—receiving Him into your heart. You can do it right now! He says, "I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in" (Revelation 3:20). Simply pray the following prayer:

Dear Jesus, thank You for dying for me so I can have eternal life. Please forgive me for every wrong and unloving thing I have ever done, come into my heart, give me Your gift of eternal life, and help me to know You and Your Father's love. Thank You for hearing and answering this prayer and for being with me always, from this moment on. Amen.

they can actually contribute to the problem by taking time away from the essentials, including the *most* essential—taking time with the Lord. That's a common mistake people make—filling every spare moment with more "busyness," when the Lord wants them to take that time with Him.

The surest way to complete and lasting renewal—in fact, the *only* way—is to spend time with Jesus. We need His love and strength and wisdom, and the only way we can get those is by spending time with Him.

But carving out time from your daily schedule is no guar-

antee that you're going to get closer to the Lord; it's what you *do* with that time that counts. You need to get still, empty your mind of the business of the day, and let the Lord fill you with positive, encouraging, strengthening, faith-building thoughts from His recorded and living Word.

Jesus said the requirement for a fruitful life is abiding in Him. "Abide in Me, and I in you" (John 15:4). "Abiding in Jesus" means staying connected with Him by taking time to read His Word and pray and listen to Him.

It's easy to let prayer become a formality, but one thing that

can help you avoid that is to think of the Lord as the Friend, Counselor, and Lover that He wants to be to you. As someone once said, "The more one loves Jesus, the more he delights to be with Jesus alone. Lovers love to be alone."

But the Lord won't force Himself on you. He waits to see how much you are willing to abandon all other distractions in order to put Him first. If you have Him in first place, then you will see and feel His power and help in your life beyond what you ever imagined! □

**IT HAPPENED
TO ME**

GRANDPA'S SMILE



HE LAY COVERED IN WHITE HOSPITAL SHEETS, hooked up to a maze of tubes and wires. As I approached, I barely recognized him—the pasty skin, the sunken cheeks—but when he opened his eyes and smiled at me, it was all I could do to keep from jumping into his arms like I always had. Grandpa, whom I loved more than anyone else in the whole world, had had a serious heart attack.

Grandpa had always been my best friend, as well as my confidant and counselor when I had had problems with friends or siblings. As the youngest child in my family, I was shy, gangly, and unsure of myself, but Grandpa had always known how to give me the boost I needed. If I needed a playmate, he joined me in my games. If I needed a shoulder to cry on, I knew where to find one; Grandpa's big, warm hugs were the most comforting place on earth! If I needed correction, he gave it firmly but gently. He would reach deep into my heart and make me want to change for the better. He also prayed a lot, and was quick to remind me that prayer was the surest way to make good things happen.

I was 14 years old, just leaving childhood behind, when we were called to the hospital. One by one, from the oldest to the youngest, we were allowed into Grandpa's hospital room to see him for just a moment.

After a smile and feeble but cheery, "Hello," Grandpa took my hand. "Joyce, you have always been my favorite youngest granddaughter. I know that sometimes you have a hard time finding your place. You often feel like you don't know what to do, and you worry that you won't

>> BY JOYCE HANCOCK SUTTIN

amount to much. But I want you to know that God loves you and has a special plan for your life.”

Mom gently tapped me on the shoulder and guided me out of the room. “Grandpa is tired and needs to rest,” she said.

A couple of days later I saw Grandpa again. This time he was in his best suit, lying in a coffin. Almost overwhelmed by the scent of so many flowers, I had my final moment with him. This time his shiny blue eyes didn’t open. I shook with fear and emotion as I approached, but then I saw his face. His radiant smile told me that everything was okay. Grandpa had died like he lived—smiling. People talked for days about Grandpa’s smile. The undertaker said he had tried for hours to change Grandpa’s expression because he had never seen such a thing and thought it was a little eerie. Grandpa left us little in the way of money or possessions; his last will and testament was the smile of peace and satisfaction on his face.

My family had always attended the same church in a country town so small that it doesn’t even show on a map of the northeastern United States. Every Sunday, Grandpa had arrived at least 20 minutes late. And every Sunday, a band of as many as 30 children had trailed in behind him. That had been his little ministry, rounding up the children from poor families that lived in the hills and bringing them to church.

Years later, in a bank in a nearby city, a young businessman overheard my dad tell someone his name.

“Hancock?” the young man asked. “Are you by any chance related to Ed Hancock?” He went on

to explain that when he had been a boy growing up in the hills, my grandpa had always made sure he got to church.

“That was nice, but what really changed my life was when he told me, ‘I know you come from a poor family and feel like you won’t amount to much, but I want you to know that God loves you and has a special plan for your life.’”

Throughout my teen and college years, faced with atheistic professors and skeptical friends, I struggled with my faith and sometimes wondered *what* I believed. But even at my lowest point, I had proof of God’s existence in the memory of my grandpa’s smile and faith.

I decided 31 years ago to give my life to the Lord and see what He could do with a nobody like me. I have since traveled to 10 countries, doing volunteer work, sharing God’s love with others, and winning people to Jesus. I overcame my shyness, have spoken to large groups, run seminars, and taught hundreds of children, teenagers, and young adults. I have done *lots* of things that the shy, awkward 14-year-old Joyce Hancock never dreamed she could.

As I remember the faces of those I have prayed with to receive God’s wonderful gift of salvation, I can’t imagine a more wonderful or worthwhile life. Still God continues to bring special ones across my path. I see their fear and timidity, and take their hands. Without thinking, the words pour out. “I know you sometimes feel like you don’t know what to do, and you worry about what you will become. But God loves you and has a special plan for your life.” □

Even at my lowest point, I had proof of God’s existence in the memory of my grandpa’s smile and faith.

POSITIVE PERKS

When life gets to be too much, when everything around you seems to be falling apart, when you feel that nothing you do helps, what should you do?— Think about Me. Think about how much I love you. Think about My power. Think about all your blessings, and thank Me.

You can praise your way right out of a bad mood! If you thank Me for all the good things in your life, the negative feelings will dissipate.

You may sometimes find yourself in situations where there doesn't seem to be anything at all good to thank Me for. Well, then thank Me for the good that will eventually come out of the bad, because if you love Me, sooner or later it will. That's explained in the Bible, in Romans 8:28: "All things work together for good to those who love God." For My children who love Me, I can bring good out of anything.

Let Me change your difficult day into a happy one. You can always find something to thank Me for. Praise Me for one thing, and you'll usually be reminded of another, and another. Happiness will find you as you focus on Me and on the positive.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE