

LIGHT

No Shame On You



CONTENTS

3 Eye Drops May Treat AMD

4 No Shame On You

9 Choosing Not To Suffer

12 A Body of Gratitude

16 More Than One Way to See It

20 Changing Perceptions

27 Home Is Where the Heart Is

35 *Taking It to the Next Level:*
Self-Forgiveness

40 God's Overwhelming Love

46 *Scripture Puzzle:* Home

PUZZLE ANSWERS FROM BACK COVER

Across:

2. Country; 3. Anyone; 6. Illuminated;
7. Compassion; 9. Rejoice; 11. Happiness;
14. Vineyards; 16. Present; 18. Building;
19. Homeland; 20. Everlasting

Down:

1. Mansions; 2. Command; 4. Wandered;
5. Remains; 8. Sojourner; 10. Wilderness;
12. Reserved; 13. Faithful; 15. Desire;
17. Troubles; 18. Blesses

EYE DROPS MAY TREAT AMD

For the treatment of age-related macular degeneration, eye drops may take the place of repeated needle injections into the eye, according to multiple reports.

As reported on the *VisionAware* website in February 2014, researchers at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston expressed optimism about tests conducted on laboratory mice. Then in May 2015, a report from a meeting of the American Society of Retina Specialists, posted on the website AMD.org, indicated that results with the eye-drop treatment had been mixed.

Now, a May 2017 report from the University of Birmingham in England, has indicated increasing optimism about eye drops. According to the *Science Daily* website, the university's Institute of Inflammation and Ageing conducted tests in which "laboratory research has obtained the same outcomes as the injected drug."

If eye drops can take the place of needle injections, this should result in fewer adverse side effects, reduced cost, and greater convenience.

No Shame On You

Delete those toxic "friends"



by Tammy Darling

When I was just a little girl my aunt took care of me while my mom worked. Although I loved this aunt dearly, she often said something to me that I didn't like: "Shame on you."

My infraction was often something minor, such as forgetting to wipe my feet when entering the house. Sometimes there wasn't anything I'd done wrong but those words would escape her lips, nonetheless. I wonder now how many times she heard those words herself as a child, as the phrase seemed to be ingrained in her.

And because I heard it so much, the words *shame on you* became ingrained in my own heart and mind for many years. In fact, it has only been in the last few years that I have broken free of the shame that haunted me nearly all my life.

For me, overcoming shame was not instantaneous; it seldom is. Instead, it is a journey in which we learn much about ourselves and God. As we are traveling on this journey of self-discovery, there are certain steps that are instrumental in overcoming the shame we feel.

CAN YOU IMAGINE?

In Genesis 2:25 we are told that Adam and Eve were created without shame. Can you even imagine how glorious and freeing that must have been? Then came the fall, and Adam and Eve (and subsequently all of us) were filled with shame.

You see, shame hides (see Genesis 3:8). And because shame hides, we must share our story by bringing it into the light so that shame can no longer hide under the cover of darkness.

Only when Adam and Eve came out into the light did God clothe them with His restorative grace. Shame keeps us hidden, but love draws us out. And just as it did for the two in the garden, God's mercy draws us out from our hiding places.

Because fear of rejection is working beneath our shame, we hesitate. But let us look at the facts: Even if someone does reject us because we share our shame story, it does not diminish our value. Do you get that? Our worth is not found in another person, nor is it found in our past. Our worth is found in who Christ says we are (John 15:15). And that is the biggest shame-buster there is.

EVICITION NOTICE

In our journey to become shame-free, we may find it necessary to sever unhealthy connections. Take inventory of your life. If there is anything in your past or present that stirs up shame in you, get rid of it. Delete those toxic "friends" on Facebook. Burn the evidence of your sinful past that you've been holding onto as memory keepsakes. Let go of all unhealthy relationships.

Give shame an eviction notice. When you refuse to let shame take up residence in your

life, it is forced to flee. Say a cheerful goodbye to the shame of your past. Then you will be able to bring to life a new beginning in the present.

Seldom is shame eradicated without help from others. We can spend years wrestling with shame in our own strength, which I did. But we can put our pride aside and seek help. Remember, there is strength in numbers, and God has called us to *relationship* (Ephesians 2:19). That means honesty and openness and vulnerability before others—trusted others.

If you are unable, at this point, to open up to someone you know, make an appointment with a Christian counselor. A trained counselor can begin to facilitate the healing process. By seeking help from others you will gain insight that you might not have come to on your own. It's a risk—this stepping out—but it is so worth it to be rid of the shame.

As we continue to journey out of the valley of shame, the enemy will try to trip us up. He does not want us free of shame; when we are free we will be walking in our true identity. That does not bode well for the enemy of our souls.

AGREEING WITH SATAN

Satan uses shame to demoralize us, and we tend to agree with him, thus setting ourselves up for condemnation. Remember that little verse that begins the eighth chapter of Paul's

letter to the Romans? "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." That two-letter word *no* is very powerful. There is *no* condemnation. There is *no* shame on you.

When shame rears its ugly head, renounce it; disagree with it; condemn it. By refuting the shame, you refuse to give it power. When shame-filled thoughts and feelings come, do not agree with them. Instead, speak truth. Speak it out loud. Never again agree with what shame is saying.

I have experienced much freedom from shame in the past few years but I am still on my journey. Just yesterday, shame threatened me like the bully that it is. But I have God, and God is bigger than shame could ever be (John 8:36).

Shame imprisons but God sets us free. When we start to experience victory over shame we will begin to recover those parts of ourselves that shame stole from us. What a joy it is to live as He created you to be.

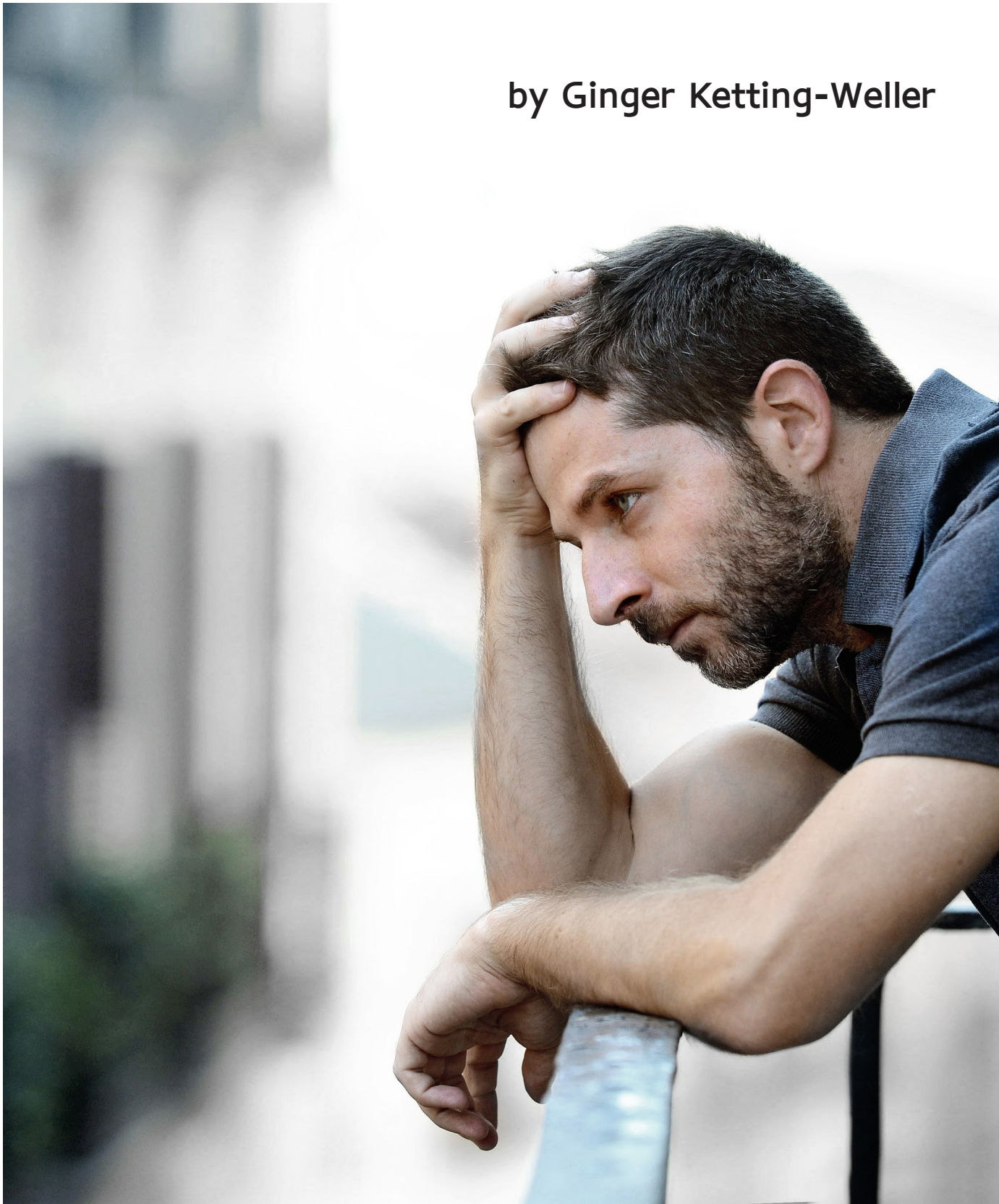
I allowed shame to condemn me for far too long. But no more. Praise God, there is no more shame on me!

Tammy Darling is a freelance writer living in Three Springs, Pennsylvania.

Grudges, part 4

Choosing Not To Suffer

by Ginger Ketting-Weller



Two descriptors that I believe characterize the nature of grudge-holding are *suffering*, and *narrowed vision*. Let me take those two characteristics one by one.

The whole focus of a grudge is that you have been hurt, and you deliberately nurse that hurt. Now, think of the meaning of the word “nurse.” A nursing baby draws life-giving nourishment from its mother. Similarly, a grudge draws in its nourishment from the person feeding it—by supplying it with that person’s own life forces. Nursing a grudge means making that past insult or injury a part of yourself, *making it an extension of you*.

But why do that? The rehearsal of a past insult or injury only serves to extend it. If it’s a small offense, it grows bigger. If it was a brief hurt, it lasts longer. *Why do that?*

Recently my husband said something that startled me: “We all get hurt by others, but it is our choice whether or not to suffer.”

OUR CHOICE

When we let go of harm that has been done to us by someone else, we choose not to be harmed over and over and over again by that person. We refuse to let them make us suffer. You and I have the power to choose freedom from that original injury. We *do have* that power of choice.

Landing at the Denver International Airport recently for a work trip, I reveled in the big

sky over the prairie to the east. When you stand at the edge of the prairie with huge fluffy clouds scudding across the blue expanse of the heavens, it's a feeling all its own. Your heart grows bigger. You know in your bones that you can only lay claim to a tiny-but-free place in this universe. Yet anything is possible.

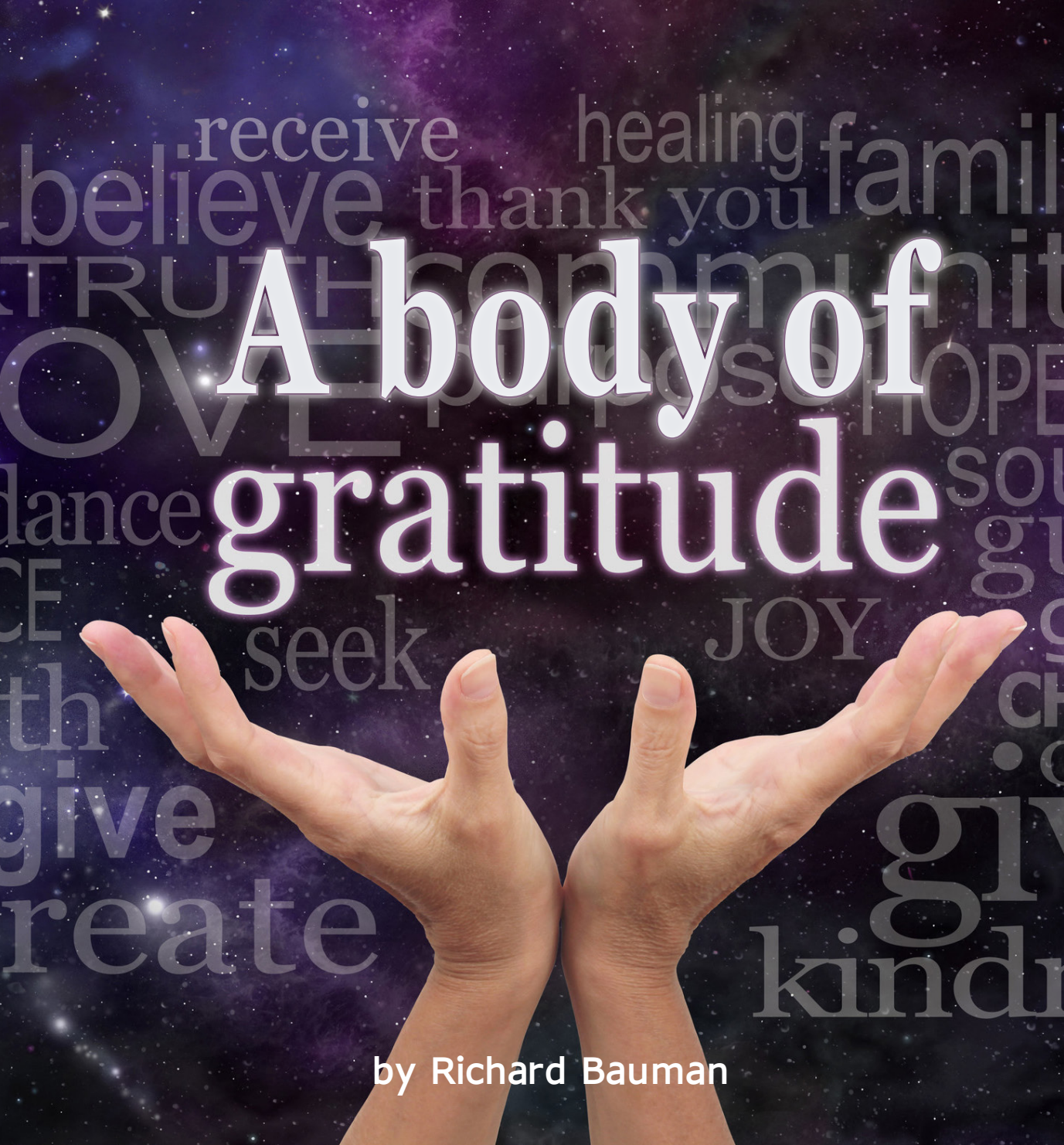
GET RID OF IT

That's how it feels to let go of a grudge. There's something about rehearsing a perceived injury that feels like dark, foreboding tunnel walls are closing in on all sides. Your inner gaze narrows. It focuses on every tiny feature of the injury that you felt so keenly. In that hyper focus, your vision is blocked from seeing other possibilities, from seeing the goodness of the great big universe around you. That universe can diminish and even erase that hurt that seemed so big and heavy.

Get rid of that close-up focus! Let the tunnels open up and your sky become wide and blue overhead. Let things take their rightful perspective in a wide-open life of freedom—*your* freedom.

You may have been injured, but you can choose not to suffer.

Ginger Ketting-Weller is Dean of the School of Education at La Sierra University in Riverside, California.



by Richard Bauman

It is easy for me to remember to thank God for the big things in my life, but it's also easy for me to overlook His generosity in the most common things.

For instance, I can easily forget to be grateful for the most familiar thing in my life, something I've literally had for a lifetime: my body. It is always there, always with me. Is

there anything I take more for granted than my body? I doubt it.

THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES

In his book *Who Needs God*, Rabbi Harold Kushner clearly shows how important it is to acknowledge God's generosity in giving us wholeness in mind and body. Kushner writes, "The first five minutes of a Jewish daily morning service contain blessings in which I thank God for the fact that:

- My mind works and I know it is morning,
- My eyes work,
- My arms and legs function,
- My spinal column works and I can stand upright,
- I have clothes to wear,
- I have things to look forward to during the day.

Without these prescribed blessings, it might not occur to me to be grateful for all those things."

I NEVER THOUGHT

Until I read those words, I never thought to thank God for eyes, ears, nose, and mind. I don't recall ever having looked at my feet and toes and knees that work so marvelously and thanking God for them.

The fact I have fingers, wrists, elbows, and shoulders that keep functioning day after day,

year after year, with virtually no maintenance, is worthy of thanksgiving. Yet, I hardly give them a thought.

It is common to pretty much ignore one's body until suddenly there is pain or something has gone wrong. For instance, I have gout attacks from time to time. They are excruciatingly painful, and when I'm in the throes of an attack I think about my foot, a lot, especially the big toe on that foot.

When my toes or other parts of my body become pain-filled, my attention is keenly focused on them and the pain. I waste no time in pleading with God to consider easing the pain.

On the other hand, when I have been gout-free—pain-free—I don't see my toes, my feet, and other joints as anything special. They are just a part of me, they have just been there.

I realize it's easy to be nonchalant about the gift of my body, a body that works smoothly and painlessly most of the time. But I also realize things can change, just as they did for Philip Simmons.

DIAGNOSED

Simmons was 35 years old when diagnosed with ALS, commonly called Lou Gehrig's disease. That was in the early 1990s. He died in July 2002, and in those intervening years, he wrote a book, *Learning to Fall*. Surprisingly, it isn't a book just about coming to grips with

a debilitating and deadly illness. Instead, it is about accepting life on life's terms, and living in the present moment—not in either the past or the future.

Simmons writes: "When fantasies of a better life consume us, . . . and fear of pending calamity drives us, we are robbed of the only gift . . . we can be sure of possessing: the present moment." Later, he writes: "The present moment . . . has become an endangered species. Yet more and more I find that dwelling in the present moment . . . is our highest spiritual discipline . . . our gateway to eternal life."

"Gratitude does not come naturally to most people," notes Rabbi Kushner. "We tend to assume we are entitled to all the good things in life just for being the nice people we are."

For those with chronic illnesses or disabilities, it is often difficult to be grateful for their bodies that don't work so well. But, thanking God every day for a mind and body that works as well as it does takes just seconds, and is a way to celebrate God and the many wondrous gifts He has given us, including a unique body and mind that He designed especially for us.

Richard Bauman is a freelance writer and photographer. His articles and photographs have appeared in more than 400 publications.

Challenges with eyesight—

More Than One Way to See It

by Naomi Turner



When the doctor told me I had macular degeneration in my right eye, I asked what caused it. His answer was, "If you had died when you were 20, you would not have it." He was saying that the challenges with my eyesight are age-related.

Before the problem began with my right eye, I had suddenly become totally blind in my left eye a few years earlier. Doctors seemed unable to understand why this happened with my left

eye, and have been unable to bring back any sight in that left eye.

This worried me more once macular degeneration was diagnosed in my right eye. My retina specialist has assured me that, with laser treatments, the sight in my right eye will be maintained. However, I cannot take that as a guarantee because I have met people who said they have not found anything to stop the progression of their macular degeneration. Still, I am thankful for the doctor's optimism.

MAKING THE ADJUSTMENTS

Losing one's eyesight does require a person to make significant lifestyle adjustments. Visiting the Braille Institute in Santa Barbara each week has been a great help to me. Many classes and activities are available there each day. When I am there, which is most Fridays, the activities include an exercise class called "Get Moving," an Italian cooking class titled "All Over Italy," a computer class on using the iPad, and also ceramics, bowling, music appreciation, walking for health, and a Trivial Pursuit game. My own current activities include the iPad class in the morning and walking in the afternoon.

I have met many people with eye problems, and have been privileged to talk with them and learn of their experiences.

Previous page: Braille Institute students in a bilingual class, taught by Julius (center), learn how to navigate their Apple products with VoiceOver and Siri.

One day at lunch I was sitting across the table from a man in his 50s. After I introduced myself, he asked how I liked the color of his eyes. He then explained that his wife got them for him. He is a geologist. When his eyesight began to worsen, it was discovered that he had cancer in one eye. It was removed. Then it was discovered that he had cancer in the other eye, so it was also removed. He is thankful for the caring and supportive wife who chose his eyes.

One woman I met is in her 30s. Fifteen years ago she was in an automobile accident. She was not expected to live, and remained in a coma for three months. When she did regain consciousness she was legally blind. Her teenage friends had a hard time relating to a blind person, and they drifted away. It was at the Braille Institute that she found new friends and again began to enjoy life.

A man in his 50s had a brain tumor several years ago. It caused him to become totally blind. But with the use of a long cane he is very mobile. He is thankful for a sharp mind, and he enjoys keeping up with current events on his computer.

LOOKING FORWARD

Another man who is in his 80s suddenly lost his eyesight seven years ago. Doctors were unable to determine why his optic nerve quit functioning. He still gets depressed at times, he said, but he is grateful for the many things he

has enjoyed throughout his life, and is looking forward to the day when Jesus returns and he will be able to see once more.

The apostle Peter's words are so encouraging: "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6–7).

It is important to recognize God's care for us. Sometimes that care comes to us through people, such as my friends who share with me the challenges of faltering eyesight. God's care also comes through organizations such as Christian Record, publisher of this magazine, and the Braille Institute whose services I enjoy each week.

THAT COMMENT

There are a couple of ways to view the doctor's statement that I quoted at the beginning of this article—the comment where the doctor said I wouldn't have had these eye problems if I had died when I was 20. One way is to think that growing old is hard, and there is definitely some truth to that. But there's another way to look at it: How blessed I am to have had this experience that many people don't have: this good long life of mine.

Freelance writer Naomi Turner, who is 87, lives in Camarillo, California.

Changing Perceptions

about what it means to be blind



by Beckie Ann Horter

In his 2003 book, *Blindsided: Lifting a Life Above Illness: A Reluctant Memoir*, author Richard M. Cohen captures the varying emotions associated with a chronic condition. Cohen suffers from multiple sclerosis (MS) which has resulted in, among other things, loss of eyesight and mobility problems.

THE VALUE OF DENIAL

One of the chief coping mechanisms Cohen has employed over his many years of MS is denial. He says it is a useful tool for anyone living with a disability. And while this may seem strange on the surface, I totally get it.

As you may know, denial is one of the first stages of grief. Though it may pass, denial often comes back around again—and around again—as new circumstances present themselves, and the disabled person finds himself or herself adjusting to new challenges.

Here is when denial can be a good thing: If we accept the definition of denial as “refusal to recognize or acknowledge (the disability)” or “a disowning or disavowal (of the disability),” then the disability loses its power to limit us. We take a reasonable risk. Try something new. Step out of the comfort zone, and enjoy a victory.

Cohen did this in his career as an award-winning television news producer and journalist, which included working with Walter Cronkite on *The CBS Evening News*.

Others I know, who have lost their eyesight, have also successfully navigated careers. They are teaching me much about living with my own disability, since I recently joined their ranks as a peer adviser with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB).

RELEVANT RESOURCES

The AFB is a national non-profit organization dedicated to promoting independent and healthy living for people with vision loss. The organization provides relevant and timely resources on its extensive website, www.afb.org.

The AFB was established in 1921 when a philanthropist with a heart for veterans blinded in World War I decided to create a national clearing house for information about vision loss and a forum for discussion among service professionals dealing with blindness.

In 2012 the AFB, in partnership with the *Reader's Digest* Partners for Sight Foundation, added VisionAware to its family of websites. VisionAware incorporated content from AFB's Senior Site, along with new information and resources for adults of all ages with vision loss.

The goal is to help adults and their families cope with age-related eye diseases—a growing public health problem in the United States.

According to some research, by the year 2030 rates of vision loss from diseases such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma,

and diabetic retinopathy are expected to double as America's 78 million baby boomers move through retirement age.

The VisionAware peer-advisers group that I recently joined provides blogs and articles to help others in a similar situation. We also answer questions from the public posted on message boards about specific eye diseases.

UNCOMMON ASSISTANCE

For example, I just shared my own experience of myopic degeneration with a person who wrote in asking about injections. It felt good to reach out and help another person struggling with the same condition with which I am dealing. Myopic degeneration is not all that common. This website brings us together.

Another way we connect is through monthly conference calls with other peers. These calls feel like an old-fashioned party line! Many voices chime in, laugh, and catch up with each other.

Ten to fifteen peer advisers from around the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and the U.K. participate in the call. We bounce ideas off each other and plan upcoming projects. Recently we've discussed issues such as a blind parenting series and what we should write for the holidays.

My own blog post, "Chaperoning a Field Trip with My Sighted Child," became part of the blind parenting series, and it seems to be

resonating with AFB readers. In it, I describe the challenges I faced when I agreed to help with my son's class trip to the children's museum. Now that was a growing experience!

To be honest, this whole being-part-of-a-group-of-blind-people experience seriously challenges me. It intimidates me, because the other peer advisers are so accomplished. They do not fit my former stereotype of blind people—the one I had before I became blind.

DEBUNKING SAD STEREOTYPES

Before I was one, I thought blind people were sad figures, merely existing in the world without much joy or interest in life. They accomplished little and their social skills were awkward.

I am finding out differently.

Our group of peer advisers includes educators, public speakers, social workers, writers, singers, a nurse, and a legal assistant, just to name a few. These are highly competent individuals who happen to have a visual impairment.

As Cohen has written, "People with a chronic condition fight two battles at the same time. One is the disease itself; the other is the perception of the disease."

I would add that the perception can be held not only by the general public, but also by the person *with* the disability.

Of course, I'm talking about myself here. My perception of blind people nearly kept me from joining them. I didn't want to be seen as "one of them." I almost let my denial of my own condition (which I could have kept secret) stop me.

But I had been praying for the next right step in my writing, and the AFB kept coming up from different sources. I see that as God's leading. And of course it makes sense to take your message outside of your little circle. For me, "outside of your little circle" means writing for people who are not Christians.

Why subject myself to this discomfort zone? Simply because of the great commission. It's very clear in Matthew 10: Jesus sent His disciples *out*.

NOT PREACHING TO THE CHOIR

So my internal dialogue changed. I thought, *Let's not just preach to the choir. Let's use the common ground of vision loss to bring others hope in Jesus. Be a shrewd Christian and sprinkle your writing with your beliefs, and pique the interest of others as Paul did with the Athenians in Acts 17.*

For me, it's a step in faith. We never fully realize the effect of our efforts while we're in the midst of them. I hope to be part of the movement that is changing perceptions about the disabled, and I think I'm in good company.

Helen Keller worked tirelessly toward this goal when she partnered with the AFB for more than 40 years.

Today the AFB is in the process of digitizing the Helen Keller Archival Collection in New York City. The project, made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities, preserves and provides access to a unique collection of Keller's papers, letters, scrapbooks, artifacts, and photos. It is the world's largest repository of materials about and by Helen Keller, containing more than 80,000 items.

By December of 2017, the site will be accessible online to blind, deaf, deafblind, sighted, and hearing audiences around the globe.

When I hung up the phone after beta testing the archive site in February, I reflected on how my life has changed since my own vision loss.

It seemed I had become part of the blind community. Part of their world. But was it really a separate world after all? I've often pondered that question, and what I'm finding out is this: It all depends on your perception.

Freelance writer Beckie Ann Horter lives in western Pennsylvania. Find her website at www.ThisAbidingWalk.com.

Home Is Where the Heart Is 🏠

by Bert Williams



Home is where the heart is, or so it has many times been said. And I believe it, at least on one very important level.

Home for me, at the moment, consists of my daughter and son-in-law's house as my wife spends her days being the full-time nanny to our twin nine-month-old granddaughters, (see page 27). There is nowhere I'd rather be. This is home. At least it is for now.

But if a place is considered home "at least for now," is it actually *Home*? I mentioned "one very important level" in the first paragraph. It seems that there are other levels which, though perhaps not as important, should not be ignored.

So, where is home?

Is home the town where I grew up? Is it where Donna and I first lived when we were married? Is it where our kids were born, making our family complete? Is it the place where the kids graduated from high school and headed off to college? Is it the place where we plan, eventually, to retire?

Where is home?

THINKING BACK

I'm sitting here thinking back over our years, and I'm trying to see which place comes most sharply into focus.

I can't escape thinking about the most exotic place we lived. I remember that one day, as

we were driving, I said to Donna, “I don’t know where we’ll live next but wherever it is, it’ll be boring.” And it’s true, California is boring, compared to Kenya.

We lived in Kenya, in East Africa, for seven years, earning a living by working at an international high school. That school is the place from which our kids graduated and went off to college. Those were formative years for all of us. Amazing years.

Such a place—Kenya. We went on countless safaris in fantastic game reserves—Maasai Mara, Samburu, Meru, Nakuru, Tsavo, Amboseli. We went adventuring on incredible mountains—Mount Elgon, Mount Kenya, Aberdares, Cherangani—and Mount Kilimanjaro just across the border in Tanzania. We climbed them all—spending the most time in the Aberdares range and on Mount Kenya.

Oh, the memories—elephants in the fog; our first leopard sighting one dusky evening; a hyena sniffing our son’s head one night through the nylon wall of our small tent; our Suzuki four-wheel-drive vehicle catching fire.

NOT THE TYPICAL WALK

And I could walk out the door of our house, during those Kenya years, and on a two-or-three-hour walk have a good chance of startling a herd of impala or zebra out on the savannah. Sometimes we didn’t even have to go

anywhere; giraffes would wander through the campus of the school where we lived, startling our resident herd of gazelle. Yes, Kenya is the place that created our most exotic memories.

But every two years we would visit family and friends back in the U.S., and in the weeks leading up to those trips we would always talk about “going back home.” And then, two months later, when we were preparing to head back to Kenya, we would invariably talk about “going back home.” We were confused about home during those years.

THE 49TH PARALLEL

But not only during those years. Donna and I grew up in the San Joaquin Valley in California. Shortly after we married, we headed for a job in British Columbia, the westernmost province of Canada. We lived in B.C. for nearly ten years. We enjoyed our years there very much, but we never drove south across that border at the 49th Parallel without feeling like we were going home—even though we had never lived in Washington state.

The Canadian national anthem begins, “Oh Canada, our home and native land.” We enjoyed singing that anthem many times with our Canadian friends, but we also never failed to think, as we sang, that our own home and native land was actually to the south of where we stood singing.

And yet, not long ago we traveled back to British Columbia to visit good friends. As we drove familiar streets, commenting on changes that had transpired in the intervening years, we could not help but feel that, in some sense, it was home. I don't suppose a person can drive past the hospital where one of your kids was born without having feelings like that.

LONGEST OF ALL

Just a few months ago we moved—so that Donna could be nanny to the twins—from the home in which we have lived the longest during our 44 years of marriage. That was in Lincoln, Nebraska. We lived for nearly 12 years in a 90-year-old house that consumed many hundreds of my discretionary hours in a variety of renovation projects. Donna spent countless hours in the large yard, planting and tending to flowers, shrubs, and a productive vegetable garden. The house is in the heart of the city but it's also in a mature urban forest with nooks and crannies of wildness sprinkled among the older homes. During our years there we experienced visits from raccoons, possums, foxes, a woodchuck, a flock of four turkeys—the turkeys came by often—and multitudes of squirrels two of which met their demise as we watched them carried off by red-tailed hawks.

So, where is home? The most exotic place? The place where the kids were born? The place where we lived the longest? The place where

we live now? The place where we plan to retire? All could, in their own way, be reasonably considered home.

LIKE A STOPOVER

Not everyone has had the good experiences of home that we have had. I know people who have been raised in abusive homes. I know people whose homes have ended in divorce. I know people who live in harsh poverty. I know people who live lonely lives in nursing homes. I am quite sure that some people reading this magazine have less-than-good experiences of home. It may be that you, especially, can relate to these words in the well-known “faith chapter” in the biblical book of Hebrews:

Each one of these people of faith died not yet having in hand what was promised, but still believing. How did they do it? They saw it way off in the distance, waved their greeting, and accepted the fact that they were transients in this world. People who live this way make it plain that they are looking for their true home. If they were homesick for the old country, they could have gone back any time they wanted. But they were after a far better country than that—*heaven* country. You can see why God is so proud of them, and has a City waiting for them (Hebrews 11:13-16 Message).

Perhaps even more vivid are these words of Paul to the believers in Corinth:

Compared to what's coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we're tired of it! We've been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home. . . . The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less (2 Corinthians 5:2-5 Message).

Whatever your current experience of home may be, don't plan to settle for anything less than what Paul promises. And don't for a moment imagine that you're not good enough to receive this promise of home. Of course you're not good enough! Of course. No one is. But that's beside the point. Listen:

With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? . . . The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture. . . . None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely

convinced that *nothing*—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us (Romans 8:31-39 Message).

So there it is. Home is, indeed, where the heart is. If your heart is set on that heavenly home, you can be confident that Jesus is there ready to welcome you home.

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LIGHT

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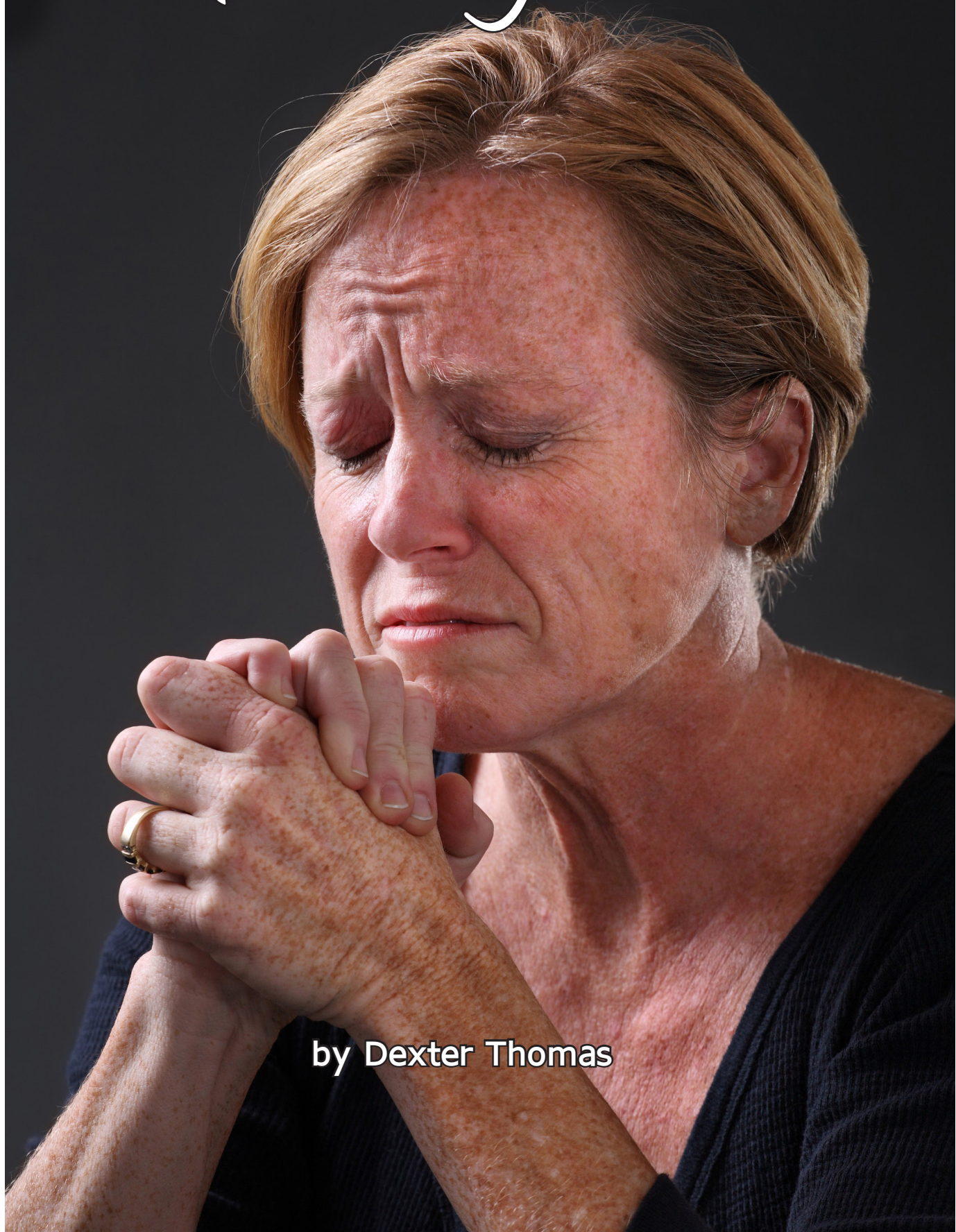
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Taking It to the Next Level—

Self-Forgiveness



by Dexter Thomas

One of the ways you can punish and bring harm to your own sense of wellbeing is by being unforgiving to yourself for past failures and present tendencies. Refusing to release yourself can lead to shaming, blaming, belittling, and condemning yourself. Such toxic feelings keep you seeing yourself as a loser, a victim—as someone who is not worthy of the joys of life.

Here is a powerful way to forgive and release yourself for making those mistakes.

1. LOOK FOR THE ROOT

First, look for the root. I usually consider myself a down-to-earth person, so when I find myself bragging about my accomplishments it troubles me. I used to beat myself up for this ignorant practice when it surfaced. *After all, I thought to myself, those people I'm bragging to cannot do anything for me. And who likes a cocky, boastful person?*

Then I noticed a trend. Whenever I got to feeling lonely or vulnerable, this behavior would show up. So, instead of seeing it as a personal characteristic, I now see it as a symptom. It's also a clue that I need to connect with my inner circle. Hear their voices, share some stories, and catch up.

It's sad that, prior to this revelation, I was so focused on condemning myself for this shortcoming that it blinded me to something

deeper. I'm not making excuses for being boastful. I don't have a change of heart with such behaviors. They are definitely not cool.

However, I am freed by this insight to look deeper at the source of the symptoms rather than at the symptoms alone. By so doing I can find healing from the root rather than being upset about the fruit. So I've created a list of what I call my circle of intimacy: people I can call on a weekly basis to laugh, cry, and celebrate with—both their joys and mine.

2. BE REALISTIC

Second, release yourself by being realistic. Most people who emotionally beat themselves up over their mistakes fail to see how it hinders their growth. You cannot mistreat yourself and then be surprised that you're not progressing in your life. Here's a way to practice releasing yourself whenever you find yourself repeating unproductive patterns.

A close friend called me in distress. She was running a summer camp for kids and had forgotten how consuming it was of time and energy.

"Why am I so stupid?" she moaned. "How could I forget how wiped out I was last year?"

I reminded her that if you don't do something often it will be difficult to recall all the things you didn't like about it, and all the ways you wanted to change that experience if you took it on again.

A year had passed since her involvement in the summer camp. Time had softened and obscured her memories. I wasn't making excuses for the unproductive repeated behavior. However, I was pointing out ways in which she could use her energies to break this unproductive pattern of behavior rather than using her energies in a harmful way.

She could include keeping a diary, for example—a way to remind yourself what worked and didn't work rather than only depending on memory. But, whatever you do, just telling yourself how dumb you are doesn't contribute to your growing or improving.

3. REFRAME

Third, release yourself by reframing the story. So here's the idea: You cannot consistently make yourself feel bad about past mistakes and at the same time prosper. This is a misappropriation of essential emotional energies—emotional energies that could be invested in pushing you forward.

For example, do you ever think back on relationships you were in and wonder how you put up with such craziness? Maybe you were screamed at, degraded, cheated on, lied to—maybe even physically abused—and you just put up with it. You tolerated the mess because you thought you couldn't do better. As you look back, your heart is filled with pain, and shame. You begin to see yourself as ignorant. You refer

to yourself by some unflattering names, none of which appear on your birth certificate or driver's license.

Instead of thinking how dumb you were, create a forgiving story: *I have been growing since then. I do far better than that now.*

Mistakes do not have to define who you are. This is powerful: *You are not your mistakes.* Nothing you do or say, no matter how harsh you are about those past blunders, changes anything. No matter how unforgiving you may be toward yourself, you cannot take back the mistakes. But you, as a person living in the present, can change. You can learn to make better decisions. You can become a different person and attract different kinds of people in your life.

Reframing allows you to be released from past failures. Focus on the new you—the person you are becoming, not on the old mistakes that brought you shame or embarrassment.

Take time out to celebrate the progress you've made.

Dexter Thomas, a regular Light columnist, is the author of How to Stop Your Brokenness from Keeping You Broke. It is available from Amazon.com and other booksellers.

God's Overwhelming Love

EMERGENCY

*"Please, God,
I Don't Want to Die!"*

by Ken McFarland

It was February 26, 2012.

"Please, God—I don't want to die—not now!"

But the evidence seemed clear that my desperate prayer was already too late. The icy realization swept over me that I was dying—that I had probably already passed the point of no return. Someone would eventually find my body, lifeless, on the floor.

I staggered to pick up my cell phone. I dialed 911.

Less than five minutes earlier, I had been comfortable, peacefully trying to drift off to sleep. Comfortable, that is, except for what felt like a touch of heartburn. I got up to find some antacid, only to find that I was out of antacid. So I fell back on the old backup home remedy: a spoonful of baking soda in water. I mixed it up—and down the hatch it went.

I had done this occasionally in times past and found quick relief. But this time, something went horribly wrong. Instantly, I was plunged into searing agony. My abdomen began to swell—to balloon rapidly right before my eyes. It felt as if my lips were sealed over a fire hydrant, and I was being filled to a breaking point.

The pain was excruciating, and I began bellowing loudly, but between gasps I managed to get my address out to the 911 operator. "Please hurry," I begged. "I'm about to explode."

Lying on the floor, I could only continue bellowing, and though I realized some nearby neighbors might be able to hear, I didn't care. Soon, I heard the siren blaring. Paramedics loaded me onto a gurney. Now outside, I tried to stifle my screams of pain with my hand over my mouth, but with little success. Once in the ambulance, I pled, "Please hurry—I'm about to explode!" I writhed and shouted as the pain saturated my entire being. My abdomen by now was enormous, the skin stretched impossibly tight. I felt my consciousness slipping away—a sensation of dark clouds closing in from all sides.

At last, we arrived at a hospital. Still screaming, I was wheeled into the emergency room. They must have quickly given me something, as I do remember the pain abating as somebody said they needed to do a CAT scan.

That's the last I remembered until I woke up in a place I learned was the Intensive Care Unit. I must have, by now, had some fairly heavy meds in me. Everything was foggy.

In due course I would learn that following the CAT scan I had been rushed into surgery, where they found that I had had a perforated ulcer near the bottom of my stomach—an ulcer I didn't know was there. I had never had an ulcer in my life, as far as I knew. When I swallowed that baking soda, the ulcer went ballistic.

I would also learn that as a result of the surgery, along with removing the ulcer, the majority of my stomach was now gone. I was left with maybe 20 percent of the stomach and with other compromises to the digestive tract. What remained of my stomach was surgically connected to less-damaged areas of the upper intestine.

What I could not know at that time was that the events of February 26, 2012 would prove both life-threatening and life-altering.

FOUR MONTHS IN ICU

That day began what would become a full year of hospitalization and treatment—the first four months lying virtually motionless in ICU. There would be multiple surgeries, alarming weight loss and weakness, loss of strength to the point of being barely able to raise my hands from the bed—and then, eventually, exhausting physical therapy. It was my closest-ever brush with death. Before I would once again walk normally, speak normally, live normally, well more than a year would pass.

But this difficult passage was also a time of an outpouring of love and concern and caregiving that overwhelmed me and reminded me again of those challenging cancer years thirteen years earlier, when I had experienced the goodness of friends and family during a three-year battle with sarcoma back in the late 90s.

BUSY WITH MY PART

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you,” says the LORD” (Jeremiah 29:11-14, NLT).

A future. A hope. Plans for good.

OK, then, God. I’ll stay busy with my part: praying, looking, and finding. A day at a time.

Between that battle with cancer years earlier, through the gastric crisis of 2012, and a few subsequent surgeries for other issues, I have piled up close to 20 surgeries in my lifetime—and I hope fervently that I’m done with them! But one thing I do know is that without God’s immediate love and presence, I never would have made it to write these words.

NOURISHING ART

Gifted Christian artist Nathan Greene paints amazing scenes in breathtaking detail. One of them, entitled “Chief of the Medical Staff,” sustained me through many of the worst times I spent in hospital ICUs and rehab centers. In the painting, a surgeon and his staff work intensely on the patient on the operating table. Unseen to them, yet visible to the viewer of Nathan’s art, is the figure of Jesus—the Great Healer—guiding the surgeon’s hands as he works.

I have no doubt whatever that the Divine Healer has been at work repeatedly in my own life—both during each surgery and in the rehabilitations that have followed.

Of course, Jesus is the Healer not only of broken bodies but of broken minds and broken hearts. I have lived long enough now to experience my share of those, too. At times, my mind has been stressed to its limits. And so often my heart has felt shattered, with its pieces lying around me like the broken shards of a piece of pottery that has toppled from its perch.

The impact of God's presence, power, love, and guidance in my life has been beyond the limits of mere words to describe. His impact has been incalculable.

But I am only one of some nearly seven billion flawed and needy human beings here on Planet Earth—people in constant need of God's touch to sustain them—people who urgently need to be made whole and to feel valued and loved.

And that, my friend, most definitely includes you!

Ken McFarland and his wife Phyllis operate Page One Sentence Doctors (pageonesentencedoctors.com), a publishing and editorial services business. They live in Clinton, Tennessee.

Home

A crossword puzzle by Richard Clark Jr.
(Answers from the NKJV. Puzzle on back cover.)

Across

2. Get out of your ___, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you.

Genesis 12:1

3. If ___ loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will . . . make Our home with him. John 14:23

6. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God ___ it. The Lamb is its light. Revelation 21:23

7. Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had ___ on you. Mark 5:19

9. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, "___ with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!"

Luke 15:6

11. When a man has taken a new wife, . . . he shall be free at home one year, and bring ___ to his wife. Deuteronomy 24:5

14. They shall plant ___ and eat their fruit.

Isaiah 65:21

16. To the ___ hour . . . we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 1 Corinthians 4:11

18. We have a ___ from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 Corinthians 5:1

19. They seek a _____. Hebrews 11:14

20. Make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an _____ home. Luke 16:9

Down

1. In My Father's house are many _____. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. John 14:2

2. For I have known him, in order that he may _____ his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD. Genesis 18:19

4. They _____ in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. Hebrews 11:38

5. Kings of armies flee, . . . and she who _____ at home divides the spoil. Psalm 68:12

8. I am a stranger with You, a _____, as all my fathers were. Psalm 39:12

10. Then the woman fled into the _____, where she has a place prepared by God. Revelation 12:6

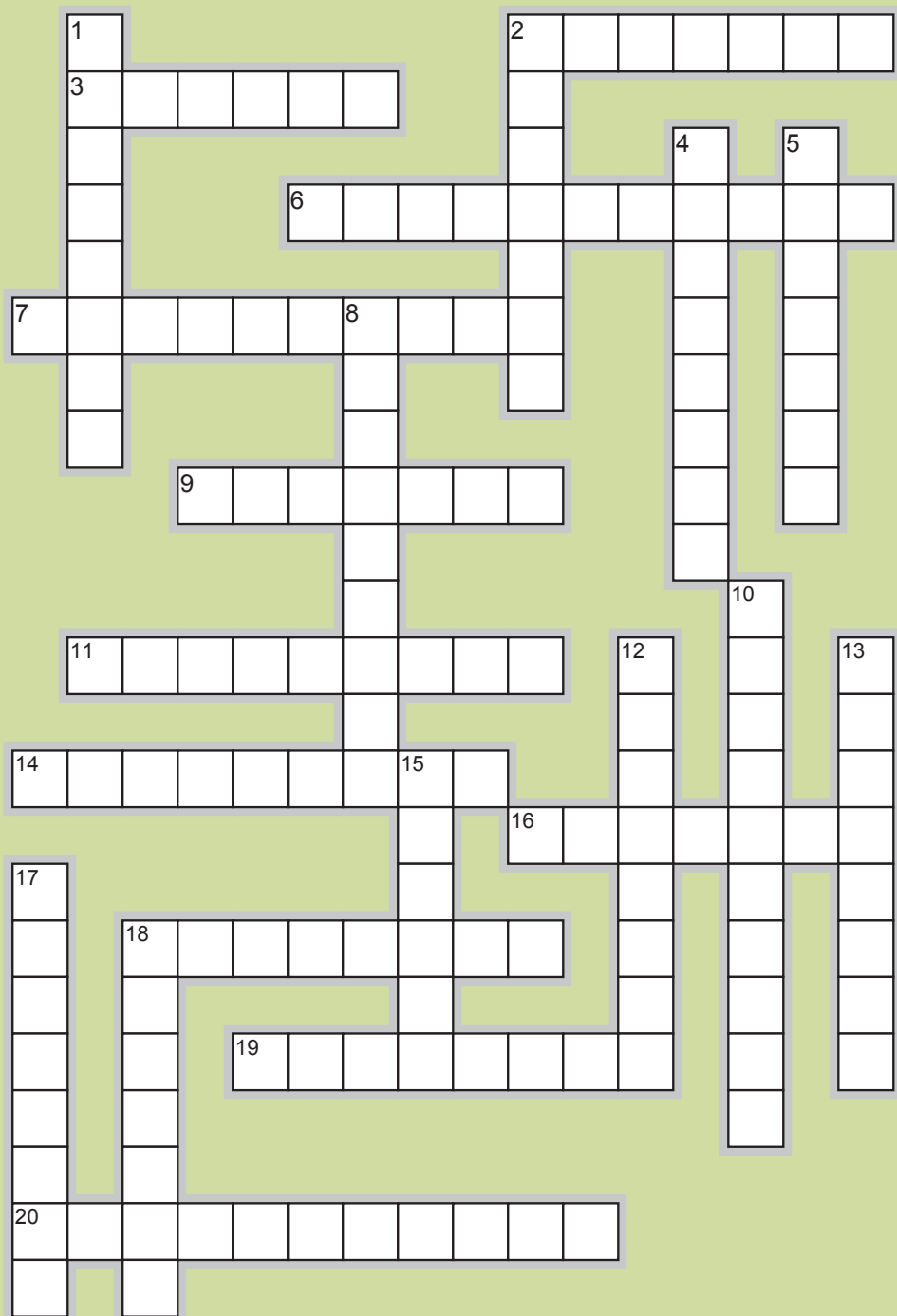
12. God . . . has begotten us . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, _____ in heaven for you. 1 Peter 1:3-4

13. Well done, good and _____ servant; you have been _____ over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord. Matthew 25:23

15. But now they _____ a better, that is, a heavenly country. Hebrews 11:16

17. He who is greedy for gain _____ his own house. Proverbs 15:27

18. The LORD . . . _____ the home of the just. Proverbs 3:33



Answers on page 2

LIGHT

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