

Reach UP

The Magazine to Empower and Enrich Today's Urban Woman

Winter 2013

Love
JOY
Peace

Life is a
Gift

Faith
Where I'm From

Lifestyle
When Autism is a Gift in Disguise

Do you like receiving a gift? I know I do. In a healthy relationship gifts are given and gifts are received. Gifts are an expression of love without strings attached. Even though gift cards have become popular to give, a gift card can't say, "I bought this for just for you" or "While I was making this, I was thinking of you."

God loves to give us gifts too. And when He gives us gifts, we are definitely on His mind. God's gifts may be talents you have, or even your purpose or destiny. His gifts certainly center around life: this beautiful earth, sunrises and sunsets, friends and pets, trees and oceans, music and colors, poetry and love.

And sometimes God's gift comes in the package of a tiny baby. Jesus came to us as a baby, and we celebrate His birth at this time of year. But even though He was a precious child and a good boy, when Mary was presenting Him for dedication at the Temple, the prophet told her that this innocent child would pierce her heart.

How could something or Someone so good cause pain?

Jesus was a bubbly baby, and like any mother, Mary cuddled and cooed over him. He grew up a normal boy, with a childhood like that of any child. But Jesus' entire mission on earth was to go to the cross for us.

That was the pain that pierced Mary's heart. No mother can bear the sight of her child being mistreated or tortured. Jesus had done nothing to deserve such treatment. The emotional pain for Mary must have been crushing.

This gift of baby Jesus gave Mary wonderful moments, but there were three unbearable days when Jesus, her wonderful gift, focused on His mission and went to the cross to take our punishment for sin. He did it for the good of all mankind, though it meant physical and spiritual agony for not only Him but also those who loved Him.

We all experience difficult and painful events in life. You'll read about one of those in this issue. Victor Velez and his wife received a wonderful gift -- their son, Jacob. The pain came when they discovered their son was autistic. But through Jacob, they have learned more than they could have imagined. They still see Jacob as a gift.

Not everything in life is fun. But everything in life can bring us closer to each other and to our God who loves us. Life is a gift. Seeing, smelling, and hearing is a gift. Creating music or art is a gift. Cooking is a gift. Being loved is a gift. Growing through tragedy is also a gift.

Crystal Wacker

Editor-in-Chief
Reach UP Magazine

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Where I'm From

By Julie Livingood

George Ella Lyon's poem, "*Where I'm From*," describes her background through family, events, and places from her childhood. The poem is lovely, and it touches my heart each time I read it.

Unlike this poet's memories, my childhood memories from childhood are that of pain, rejection, isolation, and fear. When I was very young, my father often came home drunk and fought physically and verbally with my mother. I hid in my closet from fear. They divorced when I was five, and a year later he drowned in the dark water of a muddy river because he was drunk while fishing.

My mother remarried, but things didn't get better as I hoped. No, my stepfather sexually abused me from age nine to age thirteen. Besides that, we moved three times while I was in high school, so I had few friends.

These experiences left me damaged emotionally. To numb my feelings, I developed an alcohol problem of my own. I hid my alcoholism pretty well, but I couldn't erase my feelings of shame and worthlessness.

A few years later, some coworkers shared the love of Jesus with me and continually prayed for me.



Still, it was a long time before I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior and became a child of God. When I did, I began to study the Bible. I learned that God is love, and we can call Him "Abba" which means "Father" or "Daddy God." Over time, I received and experienced His love -- Heavenly Father love. I began to heal from the inside out. Before

experiencing His love and healing, the word father represented only pain to me.

The song "*Child of the Father*" by Cheri Keaggy says it beautifully:

**I am a child of the Father
And I know what that means for me
It means I'm loved and I'm
spoken for It means I'm
wealthy in heavenly things
I am a child of the Father
And I know what that
means for me
It means I'm redeemed and
forgiven
It means I'm holy and
blameless and free**

Now when I think about "where I'm from," I smile and thank God for being my Father.

Where are you from?

Did you have a lifetime of pain, rejection, poverty, or shame? Did your father disappoint, hurt, or abandon you? God the Father can be trusted; I have experienced that. He loves unconditionally. I've experienced His love no matter what I've thought or done. He is faithful. I've experienced that He is there when I needed Him. He is the Father I always wanted. And He wants to be your Father as well.



When AUTISM is a Gift in Disguise

by Victor Velez



My wife and I received a gift twelve years ago – a baby boy we named Jacob. We had a great life. We were happily married and working in full-time ministry when Jacob joined our family.

Our little guy was amazing. He wasn't even two years old and he knew all his colors, the names of animals, and he could count to ten. Proud daddy that I was, I knew he was well on his way to being the first doctor in the family.

We were on top of the world, feeling as though nothing could trip us up in this awesome race that we were running.

Then one day, we noticed that all the speech that our son was using was rapidly decreasing. We tried to think that it wasn't a big deal. After all he was just a baby.

On a routine doctor's visit we were first introduced to the idea that something may not be quite right with our perfect son. We were referred to a specialist who could monitor him in a social situation. They said they wanted to see how he reacted in a room full of "normally" developing children.

As we watched our son through the window, without the doctor even saying the words, we knew something was wrong. The pain was so unbearable, so deep, that we could barely talk on the drive home.

Autism.

How can this be God? We are in full-time ministry. We didn't have time for Autism!

I have to admit that I was very angry at God. "Why would you allow this to happen to us? We've spent our lives serving you God, and autism is what you give us in return?"

Our plans, hopes and dreams for our son lay shattered around our feet. Were they broken forever? I wondered.

After a very short bout with self-pity, we asked God to forgive us and to help us help our son. We realized that we needed to be pro-active, so we took a class about autism so we could better understand how to help Jacob.

Honestly, this was a very dark time in our lives, though we were determined to do all we could to help Jacob. We truly felt as if all of our dreams had been shattered.

Like most people we had awesome plans for our lives. These dreams and goals almost never include the "What If's" in life, do they?

For us, just a sentence -- four words from the mouth of the doctor: "Your son is autistic" -- tripped up our lives. Autism had invaded our lives forever.

If you are in a like situation, it is okay to fall when life trips you up. We did, but then you have to get up. Dust yourself off and with God's help, face it.

Autism awareness is more common today. It is mainly due to the number of children affected. And a few famous families have had autism invade their lives as well.

The most important thing you can do as a parent facing autism is to arm yourself with knowledge. Many resources are available to educate you about this disorder.

Getting your child help as soon as possible is so important. We were fortunate to catch this neurological disorder early, so our son has been exposed to treatment and specialized services since before his second birthday. This was critical to his successful development throughout childhood.

I believe the biggest battle parents have when dealing with Autism is getting over the initial shock. As parents, we tend to take the diagnosis personal. This is a natural reaction. But getting stuck in our personal pity party can delay the critical early intervention that can set our special children on a path to a more productive future.

Believe it or not, autism is not the end of the world. The Lord has been so faithful. We have learned so much about the love and mercy and patience of God through the life of this young man, Jacob. I wouldn't trade him for any child in the world.

We are fortunate that today there are so many resources and advocacy groups and programs that can help parents who may be struggling with "what to do with this autistic child." We had to learn a whole lot, and fast. If it weren't for our faith in God and all the help we found, we would not have made it. In the toughest times, God gave my wife and me supernatural strength and unity.

And now we have hope for an amazingly bright future ahead for our son. We love the gift of our son.

LEARN THE SIGNS OF AUTISM

The following red flags may indicate your child is at risk for an autism spectrum disorder. If your child exhibits any of the following, please don't delay in asking your pediatrician or family doctor for an evaluation:

- ✓ No big smiles or other warm, joyful expressions by 6 months or thereafter
- ✓ No back-and-forth sharing of sounds, smiles or other facial expressions by 9 months
- ✓ No babbling by 12 months
- ✓ No back-and-forth gestures such as pointing, showing, reaching or waving by 12 months
- ✓ No words by 16 months
- ✓ No meaningful, two-word phrases (not including imitating or repeating) by 24 months
- ✓ Any loss of speech, babbling, or social skills at any age

Did you know...

- ✓ **Autism now affects 1 in 88 children and 1 in 54 boys**
- ✓ **The number of kids with autism is growing**
- ✓ **More children will be diagnosed with autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes & cancer combined**
- ✓ **Boys are four times more likely than girls to have autism**
- ✓ **There is no medical detection or cure for autism**

These facts and more at www.autismspeaks.org

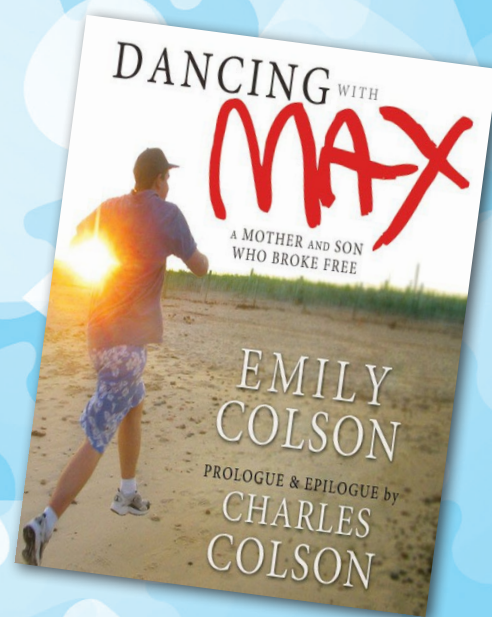
Meet a remarkable young man.

Max doesn't communicate like we do. But he communicates better than we do about the most important things.

Max doesn't think like we do. But his actions reflect deep spiritual truths.

With honesty and humor, Emily Colson shares about her personal battles and heartbreak when, as a suddenly single mother, she discovers her only child has autism. Emily's writing will make you laugh, cry, and inspire you to face your own challenges.

Available online at www.emilycolson.com or amazon.com



small steps BUILD BIG

ARKS

by Bonnie Nyachae



Imagine walking up a flight of stairs, but one of the steps in front of you is missing.

Not too hard to walk over that one...right?

Now imagine three or four steps missing in a row. And what you want is upstairs!

It seems silly and maybe even a little impossible to try and leap over the missing steps.

During a walk through the park last month, I became overwhelmed by the goals I wanted to meet. The tasks looked gigantic and I felt so puny.

As I prayed, God showed me that people in the Bible didn't achieve anything by taking giant leaps. They took small steps that built faith and endurance, and they gradually gained the knowledge they needed for bigger plans.

Do you know the account in the Bible about Noah and the Ark? It's in Genesis. What if Noah had skipped the part about making sure there were no gaps between the wood where water could come in while building the ark? The story might have ended in tragedy.

God reminded me on my park walk that I wasn't by myself. Philippians 4:13 came to mind: ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*** Noah knew God was with him. How else could he have built an ark?



I realized I couldn't reach my goals if I skipped steps. But, what is that first step?

Hmmm. . . surely Noah drew up a blueprint of his building plans.

A couple of years ago, I took an online art journaling class that assigned students to draw a map of their goals. During that time, I had a toddler. I was working on writing a novel while I was trying to carve out time for creating art. So, being the free-spirited creative type that I am, I made a goal-map of me diving in the ocean. My goals were written in air bubbles. I spelled out my novel name in the picture of the coral and drew a treasure chest on the ocean floor filled with art supplies. Now as I look over the map of my goals, I see my accomplished goals and how small each one was to get to the ocean bottom.

Maybe Noah wasn't an artist. You certainly don't have to be VanGogh or Rembrandt to have fun creating your own goal-map. Borrow crayons and paper from your kids, and get them involved. They, too, may want to make maps of their own goals.

Then let everyone hang the maps of goals on the wall or the refrigerator. Put star stickers to mark each accomplished step.



Let God guide your steps. The Bible says in Proverbs 16:19 that a man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. Don't get stuck on how fast you want to reach your goal or how far you have to go. Staying power is the key here. Focus on the little steps and do each one to the best of your ability.

Noah's head could've exploded if he knew how long the ark was going to take to build. Rest assured that Noah had off days too. His family may have had to remind him at times to get his rear in gear when he was sidetracked or ran out of steam.

Be accountable to your family. Trust me, your kids will let you know when you're slacking or distracted. But they will encourage you in each step, too.

“ FOCUS on the little steps ”

As you make New Year resolutions, remember the story of Noah and the Ark. Set your goals; map out small steps to attain them. Trust God to help you. And if you should get overwhelmed, remember that at least you're not building an ark!



Van Gogh "Starry Night"



Rembrandt, "The Sisters"

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or Call: **916-872-0471**

www.solavei.com/crystalwacker

What could you do with an extra \$20 a month?

Buy your kids school supplies? Get your nails done? Save for a special day? The goal of **Reach UP** is to provide tools that help women "reach up." While RU can't guarantee that any program works absolutely, Solavei is an opportunity for you to consider. At the very least, it can help your budget.



Given to you by:

Work hard and it can be a source of income. Read the following and decide whether Solavei is for you.

One of the missions of Solavei is to help people with their monthly budget. Instead of spending money on expensive advertising, they pay people who promote Solavei cell phone service to others and get them to sign up.

- 1 SIGN UP** with Solavei and immediately reduce your cell phone bill to \$49 + tax each month for unlimited texting, data & wireless on a 4G network.

Please NOTE: There is a one-time \$49 activation fee.

Additionally, many cell phones can be used with Solavei. Our representative can help you find out if your phone can be carried over. If you use your own phone, the SIM card is a one-time cost of \$29.

You can also keep, or port, your phone number.

You must have a Social Security number, a credit or debit card, and be over the age of 17 to earn money.

- 2 TELL** your friends about how you are saving money with Solavei. When three people sign up, you earn \$20 a month for every month they stay with Solavei. If only one person of those three people gets three people to sign up, they get \$20 and YOU get another \$20!



- 3 Don't be afraid to try.** But be prepared to learn about Solavei and work it. The reward on your Solavei pay card will be worth it.

