

Personal Reflections:

What areas of my life need God's love more?

Where is His love asking me to serve others?

X-Games Insights:

X-GAMES



ACTION GUIDE

***"I came so they can have real and eternal life,
more and better life than they ever dreamed of."
-John 10:10***

The **X Games** is an annual event with a focus on extreme action sports. These activities are perceived as having a high level of inherent danger and adventure. They often involve speed, height, and a high level of physical and mental exertion.

The distinction between an extreme sport and a conventional one has as much to do with perceptions about levels of danger involved as well as the amount of adrenaline generated.

At Levant we are convinced that God has called us to live out this type of radical life of adventure with Him. Over the next several weeks we plan to seek God and join others in living our lives to the fullest! Will you join us?

You hold in your hands your personal action guide. It is a collection of stories from people living life on the EDGE at Levant. Real people, real life. At the end of each story there is a question to think about. When you have a moment, I invite you to the Personal Reflection page with that similar question. Writing down your thoughts in the space provided helps to solidify what God is doing in your heart and mind.

Each Sunday should provide you with a note-taking guide and hopefully you have been able to find a way to join a few others in an X-Games growth group. Under X-Games Insights I invite you to jot down 1 or 2 major thoughts God may be showing you throughout the week.

See you on the flip side!

LOVE TOO

"Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these."

Mark 12:31

A friend recently put three questions to me that changed my self-image and view of others.

- 1) Do you believe that God loves you unconditionally?
- 2) Do you believe that the unconditional love of Christ lives in you?
- 3) Do you love yourself and those around you with the unconditional love of Christ?

I choked on the last question. *Did you, too?* I am too full of self and sin and imperfections! Of course I don't love myself that way. I thought, "Well, why not?" Romans 8: 1 says "There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." I belong to Him, so do you, so what's the deal?

I quit condemning myself and am learning to love myself as He made me, with all my foibles. A sense of humor can't hurt, either! When you have a healthy love for self, you can't help but love others (your neighbors). It can't be done by putting yourself down (and making a liar of God, who loves you, and says YOU are worthy of love). Would you enjoy being with someone who is down all the time? Not likely. Do you think others enjoy being with you if you are always picking yourself apart?

Relax! I find that the love I give comes back to me. Because my confidence is in God, I can broadcast love and acceptance to others. So can you.

Where is God asking you to broadcast His love to others?

LOVE ONE

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength."
Mark 12:30*

It was an unusually warm day in early March 1990. I took my dog and walked up our country road, savoring the smell of fresh earth where the snow had melted, the promise of spring in the air. Birds twittered noisily, probably staking out the best branches to build their nests.

Still feeling the profound loss of my father who died of cancer in November, I was full of questions. Why did he have to die? I still needed him and wanted my sons to know him. Only 61 years old, he had so much more to give. Though we were separated by many miles geographically, we were close in heart. I plodded along, weighted with cloying sadness. The dog trotted ahead, happily sniffing out places that dogs find so interesting, oblivious to the tears running down my face.

I thought about my own life. What difference was I making in the lives of my children? My friends? My co-workers? Would I leave a void anyplace if I ceased to be? Suddenly, I cried out, "God, what is my purpose? What do you want me to do?" As surely as if He spoke to me audibly, I heard loudly in my spirit: "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. That is all I require of you." So eloquent in its simplicity. Simply to love Him. He'll take care of the rest.

"I do love you, Lord. Help me to love you more!" Comforted, I called the dog and we turned around and headed home.

What areas of my life need God's love more?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WEEK 1 — THEME: Faith & Goodness

Faithful One — Joyce Klau
Catch Me! — Fern Bertch
Steppin' Out — Jen Pearson
NY Goodness — Brad VanRiper

WEEK 2 — THEME: Knowledge & Self Control

God's Heart — Rich Bianco
God's Hand — Loni Nagle
X-treme Control — Alicia Reukauf
Without A Doubt — Tina Garver

WEEK 3 — THEME: Perseverance & Godliness

What's At Stake? — Alicia Reukauf
My Dear Kristy — Carol Rowland
Crisis Of Belief — Bob Dahlin
A Walking 360° — Alicia Reukauf

WEEK 4 — THEME: Brotherly Kindness & Love

Destined to Shine — Gaby Garver
Act Of Kindness — Brad VanRiper
Love One — Joyce Klau
Love Too — Joyce Klau

FAITHFUL ONE

"I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Romans 12:1

I was at Houghton College, sitting in Chapel the night of July 28, 2003 with my husband and son. It was Sunday School night at Family Camp, and the atmosphere was charged with the feeling of camaraderie and friendly jousting between the district Wesleyan churches, over which church brought the most Sunday School members to the service that evening.

The preacher gave a riveting talk about surrendering ourselves to God, and what that meant. He spoke about giving our children to the Lord, since we don't own them; they are His gifts to us, and if we'd take our hands off them He can use them. We stood and sang "I Surrender All," and I held out my hands in a visual symbolic surrender. I really meant it, more than ever. I felt I gave my ALL to God that night, and I felt peace.

Within 24 hours of my surrender, I stood in an ICU next to the lifeless body of my son Gabe.

What about that surrender? I thought about Job's statement: *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."* Did my severe loss negate that surrender? Do I think I could do a better job at taking care of what's "mine"? No. I meant that surrender of myself and all that I have, and I still do. "By the mercies of God," I surrender to the One who knows and loves me best.

In what area of your life can your faith lead you to surrender?

Personal Reflections:

Will you unwrap your God-given gifts?

What God-given gift will lead you to your next act of kindness?

X-Games Insights:

ACT OF KINDNESS

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God forgave you." Ephesians 4:32

I travel on business both domestically and internationally, flying somewhere most of the time. I enjoy watching people during my wait time after my Blackberry gets a bit boring. Many times there are trips right around the holidays where weather, scheduling, mechanical or other problems occur. And with the energy crisis, airlines are putting more planes out of service, scheduling fewer flights and trying to streamline their operations just to survive.

Our society is always in a big hurry, and many times I've observed people who appear to be professionals getting angry with the airline gate attendants when their flight is delayed or canceled. I must admit in my younger days I have been known to react with the same impatience, and have even expressed my disappointment to more airline employees than I care to admit.

I've discovered airline gate attendants and customer service folks really respond to something so simple as an "act of kindness" in a difficult situation. They've been able to turn difficult situations into new experiences, and in the end it turns out better than it would have without. Give it a try both on the road and at home and see what a blessing will come from a simple act of kindness.

When was your last random act of kindness?

CATCH ME!

"Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1

"Come on Sweetie, you can do it! On the count of three, okay? Ready?" My husband was urging our little girl to jump into the pool for the first time. He promised to catch her. My daughter didn't seem convinced. Neither did I. My girl was so tiny, Bob was so far away, and the water so deep. God blessed me with a lot of good qualities, but fearlessness was never one of them. I bit my lip. Would she do it? Would she trust her Dad? She looked at me and I could tell what was going on in her mind - the inner struggle of trust and faith.

How often in life do we feel like the child on the edge of the pool - not knowing if we should jump, not sure whether our Father would make the catch? So often in my life I've felt at the end of my rope - desperately clinging and flailing about in the air only to hear God tell me to let go of the rope and trust Him to catch me when I fall. And in that analogy I've wondered why we have to fall at all? Why can't he just lift His hands to our feet so we can just step off the rope and into His hands? Why do we have to commit to the jump? I suppose it's because stepping off the rope would require no faith in anyone but our self.

"One, Two, Three, Jump!" My little girl closed her eyes tight and leaped. Her daddy caught her. My daughter was all smiles and so was I. The first of many leaps of faith she'll probably have to take, but our Father has large hands. He'll catch us every time.

Is there an area where my faith needs to step out?

Personal Reflections:

Where do I need to surrender?

What is my next step of faith?

X-Games Insights:

DESTINED TO SHINE

*“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
Matthew 5:16*

Do you feel “gifted”? Some days I do and others I don’t. The actual definition of gifted is: “endowed with great natural ability, intelligence, or talent”. I believe God has gifted each one of us. But just because you are given a gift doesn’t mean you have to unwrap it.

So many of us choose not to unwrap our gifts from God. Whether it is because of pride, ignorance, lack of courage, lack of time, or unwillingness, we push aside God’s gifts and pretend they aren’t there.

I have trouble using my gifts because I don’t want others to think I’m showing off. While there are inappropriate ways to use your gifts that draw attention away from God, packing your gift away because you don’t want others to feel inferior is wrong.

In the words of Marianne Williamson, *“Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine... We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just some of us, it’s everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people the permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”*

God designed us so that we would all work together to do great things for His Kingdom. Can you imagine what would happen if everyone used their God-given gifts? Our church, community, country and even our world would be a very different place.

Will you unwrap your God-given gifts?

Personal Reflections:

How can your “crisis point” develop godliness in you?

How is your godliness influencing those around you?

X-Games Insights:

STEPPIN’ OUT

*“Goodness & love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.”
Psalms 23:6*

I have learned a lot in the past year through God and Levant. I started going to the Gateway Center and volunteering my time cutting hair after talking and working with my friend Lorna, who was working at Gateway.

I have always liked helping people, but sometimes didn’t know what to do or how to go about it. God put this on my heart to, volunteer once a week, and it really has been great for me. I’ve learned a lot about not judging people and realizing that I am there to help out anyone, not just who I thought deserved it.

I have grown a lot because of this and God has shown me many things. I have learned to be a blessing and not to try to figure out the who’s and why’s of everything. I know I need to listen to God and not try to interpret things into my own ideas, because that always makes it harder.

Many times I have thought about helping someone then I think, “well I don’t have the time or money.” But I am realizing that if God wants you to do something, you need to do it, and I have found it will all work out.

What is it that God would have you do today?

NEW YORK GOODNESS

“Fruit that the light produces consists of every form of goodness, righteousness, and truth.” Ephesians 5:9

During a family trip to New York City in April 2000, my two teen-age boys and my wife encountered something that we had not planned for. We planned to see the sights of “the City”. What surprised us was the number of homeless people on the streets asking for money.

Some of them followed us and begged for a handout, we were easy marks. I reminded my family that we didn’t want to “enable them,” that the money we gave would likely be used for alcohol or drugs. My heart was hardened and I was not as compassionate as I should have been.

The topic of discussion over dinner was: What is the correct Christian response to homeless people who have needs? I ‘m afraid I didn’t offer any acceptable alternatives.

We all left the restaurant fully satisfied and carrying our white take-home boxes to our refrigerator in the hotel room when our oldest son bent over and gave his box to a homeless man. He looked back at me and said- “Dad , He looked hungry and he won’t be able to buy drugs with my gift!” I realized that I observed some of the “fruit of the light in the form of goodness” from my son.

Where have you seen the light of goodness recently?

A WALKING-360°

“Set an example for the believers in speech and in life...”

1 Timothy 4:12

The other night I saw a former student of mine leading a discussion group for the youth. This caused me to think back again to that 22 year old teacher, fresh to the classroom and even adulthood. It was a time, even in my youth, to set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. I had a lot to learn as I started teaching, but God, through my parents' training and my personal choice to follow Him, truly let me live out those verses.

Twenty years later as I ended that teaching career with far more experience and skill than I started, it is still time to set an example. I delight in knowing that 2 John was written to someone else, but it is also my legacy. John writes, "Dear lady... it has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth just as the Father commanded us." (verse 4) I certainly wanted to teach my students English, but my main goal was that they learn to walk in His love.

Now, as I see "my children" teaching, working with the next generation of youth, and making an impact in their communities, I am humbled and proud that God let me be part of the influence in their lives because He could use my example as I followed Him. Trust me - it is a beautiful spiral.

Who in the next generation will you influence; who is He expecting YOU to reach with simple committed love?"

CRISIS OF BELIEF

“Is the Lord’s arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you.”
Numbers 11:23

Have you ever reached a “crisis point”? That place where you feel you are doing what God wants you to do, but everything seems to be falling apart. Our “crisis point” came when my wife and I felt God leading us to move from Ohio to NY. We decided to put our house up for sale, look for a job, and put it in God’s hands.

The job came first, so I moved the week after Thanksgiving, leaving my wife and three boys in Ohio. Our house was not selling, which made it difficult to purchase a house in NY. Months went by as our family was separated with no end in sight. This was a sad, lonely, frustrating time as we prayed constantly, waiting for things only God could provide. I became very frustrated and angry with God. My wife and boys were far away, our finances were a mess and we had no home. Why didn’t God answer? What was He waiting for? Did He know where I was? Could He reach me?

I read Numbers and was reminded that God can do anything. He reaches down from His throne to wherever we are, His power without limit, and He always keeps His precious promises.

God provided us a buyer for our house and a new home in NY. Now when I go through a “Crisis Point” I ask myself “Is the Lord’s arm too short to meet this need?” and I remember that He is able to do all I can ask and more.

Are you in a “crisis point” today?

Personal Reflections:

What is it that God would have you do today?

Where have you seen the light of goodness recently?

X-Games Insights:

GOD'S HEART

“Have you ever come on anything like this extravagant generosity of God, this deep, deep knowledge? It's way over our heads.”

Romans 11:33

About six years ago, I made the biggest mistake of my life. I was unfaithful to my wife. Since that time, I have felt like life was an uncontrollable downward spiral: another failed marriage, problems at work, an unexpected pregnancy, and another failed long-term relationship. I had lost faith in God. I made a huge mistake. It felt like I was being punished over and over for it. My ex-wife had forgiven me, our families had forgiven me. Why hadn't God forgiven me?

It wasn't until last spring when I lost my coaching job that I realized God had different plans for me. I was trying to live life on my own, instead of turning everything over to Him. He knew all along what I had failed to realize... I couldn't do it without Him.

I'd sat in church and listened to the sermons and sang the songs, but I never let any of it in. Once I let God into my heart, everything changed. I had everything I wanted in life – children, family, friends – right in front of me. God is the foundation of my life and now I am complete.

God is generous. The knowledge that God possesses is way over our heads; it was way over my head. I experienced what it felt like to be on the outside, but God was there holding the door open for me and welcomed me back in.

What knowledge from God do you need in your relationships today?

Personal Reflections:

Where is God asking you to remain faithful?

How will you allow your faith to overcome that unexpected outcome?

X-Games Insights:

~ KRISTY continued ~

It was getting dark around 9:30 pm, again the park police asked that we stay in the picnic area. It was a numbing feeling – helpless – then we started to pray. Around 11:30 Kerry said that we needed to all stand together, hold hands and pray that the Lord would take care of Kristy.

“Our time is in your hands” Psalm 31:15

“Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” John 6:68

About 5 minutes later, we heard what sounded like 4-wheelers up and down the trails. At 12:10 the police car came and asked for Kristy’s Dad. They put him in their car. As we watched his head just fall, we all knew at that point, Kristy was now with the Lord.

Sorrow filled our eyes with tears, our hearts with great sadness. Our choice was to find hope in Christ, and we knew that Kristy was now at peace with him.

When has remaining faithful given you a different outcome than expected?

GOD’S HAND

“I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10

One of the biggest God-moments of my life happened when I was 15. I found out my mom was pregnant before she had told anyone else, besides my dad. She had always had some trouble with her other pregnancies, and when she said she started having trouble this time, she asked if I would pray with her.

She quoted a verse from scripture that says “where two or three are gathered in my name I am there too and will answer your prayer.” So, we knelt by the bed and prayed for God’s help for this baby and my mom.

After a difficult pregnancy (2 months of bed rest in a family with 5 other children) my mom delivered Ashley Noelle on Christmas Eve. I always felt that God had such a huge hand in that and as a teenager that was an awesome thing.

Now whenever I, or someone else I know is facing difficult times, I remember that and try to bring my concerns to God knowing he truly cares. I have a sister who is proof.

What “proof” do you have of God’s Hand?

Personal Reflections:

What knowledge from God do you need in your relationships today?

What "proof" do you have of God's Hand?

X-Games Insights:

MY DEAR KRISTY

*"The testing of your faith develops perseverance."
James 1:3*

There was a terrible thunder storm on this Sunday afternoon in June. The sky was purple, and it rained in buckets. We received a phone call late Sunday afternoon, our niece 16 year old Kristy Lynn was missing.

She had gone to Alleghany State Park with her half sister Angie and Angie's boyfriend. They were hiking on a trail when the storm came. The three of them became frightened and started to run to the car. However, only Angie and her boyfriend made it back.

Angie and her boyfriend had gone to the park police around 3:30 to inform them that Kristy was missing. The park police didn't seem too concerned. They told Angie and her boyfriend that many people make wrong turns on the trails, and she would find her way out. They were not content with this, so a park policeman put them into his car and they drove around the park. No Kristy anywhere.

Around 6:00 pm the park police called to tell her Dad, that Kristy was missing. That is when we got the call.

My husband Kerry and I grabbed flashlights, blankets and coats, praying that she was okay and that God was watching over her. When we arrived at the state park, we were met by the rest of the family. We were all put into a picnic shelter and told to stay there. Kerry and his brothers of course ignored this and started walking up the trails calling for Kristy, to no avail.

~ continued on next page ~

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Galatians 6:9

I like to eat -- regularly! But I was facing a difficult situation with no extra time in my too busy schedule. A loved one's life choices were at stake. So I committed to giving up my Tuesday lunch break to pray instead of eating. This was certainly worth a little sacrifice on my part.

I didn't tell anyone else, just took my Bible, a notebook, and my concerns to lunch with me. I prayed for my loved one and anything else the Lord laid on my heart during that time, jotting phrases or sentences to indicate what I had prayed for or praises I had. Periodically I would review the notebook, and when I noticed prayers answered, would put a little smiley face next to it.

This pattern lasted over a year, and it was definitely a spiritual battle. Many times things with my loved one got much worse instead of better, and Tuesdays were often days of hard circumstances at work or at home. But knowing what was at stake, and that God cared even more than I did, I persisted in prayer; and saw God at work.

My loved one will still have a long road to walk because life is full of daily choices, but I have seen more wisdom and character development in them and me. I am so grateful God reminded me that I couldn't control anything, but He would use me as a catalyst for change if only I would be faithful.

Where is God asking you to remain faithful?

X-TREME CONTROL

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

Philippians 4:5

Extreme Sports means challenging, risky, rewarding activities. For me, at this stage of life, that describes parenting.

Let's see: extreme sports also includes repetition of learned skills, self discipline to handle new challenges and adventure. Yep. I'm still there.

And then those marvelous, timely scriptures from Philippians pop into my head. Others often see gentleness and patience in me, but do my children and those around me? Not as consistently as I would like. I try to focus on my virtues even while knowing I have flaws. My kids tend to pick up on my flaws even while they know I have some virtues.

In the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5, gentleness is right there beside self control, along with patience and kindness and their sweet companions.

Knowing the scripture is great; it is letting God help me walk those truths day by day that keeps me humble and dependent on Him and His help.

And by His grace I am improving. I think my children even see that from time to time. As I humble myself and rely on God my gentleness becomes more evident to all. Maybe it's time to humble yourself and depend on Him just a bit more.

Would those around you characterize you as gentle and self-controlled?

WITHOUT A DOUBT

“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings like eagles, they shall run and be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:30

As I started a brand new academic program, I had my doubts. Negative thoughts told me I was not smart enough and that I was wrong in my understanding of the next step of faith God would have me take. As the program was explained to me, I was overwhelmed. There was no way I could possibly do all that this advisor was telling me I had to complete. Even if I did, the program had not yet been approved.

Another voice was telling me “Just trust in Me. I will take care of the details.” Until this, I had never truly trusted in God.

As I learned to trust in Him, I completed the list of undergrad classes and applied for the grad program. I was rejected. That voice was still telling me “Trust Me!” I talked with the Dean, and I was finally accepted. My program, however, still had not been approved.

At each step, it was obvious God was in control, which helped me stay in control, and I left the matter in His hands. Five weeks before school began, my program was approved.

In what area of your life does God need to be in control of today?

Personal Reflections:

Would those around you characterize you as gentle and self-controlled?

In what area of your life does God need to be in control of today?

X-Games Insights: