

AWAKENED

Learning to live the life we are given

by Andrea Foster

I was awakened. I don't suffer from insomnia, nor am I a worrier, but I was awakened for no apparent reason—or so it seemed. I was so tired and just wanted to go back to sleep. I have to be rested if I am to function in this busy life! But I was aware of something, and I could not ignore it. I was thirsty. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. I had to have water. So I dragged myself from the warmth of my bed, hoping there was a cup in the bathroom. And when I drank, the satisfaction was like nothing else. In that moment, that drink of water was exactly what my body needed. I returned to my bed. I had already had five hours of sleep. My body was fairly rested and my thirst was quenched. I prayed, read and then closed my eyes, hoping to fall back into that blissful state of sleep. No wonder I had been dreaming about water.

She weighed 40 pounds and was unable to sit up. Audrey was hospitalized due to her lack of interest in drinking formula and was treated for chest and ear infections. She'd suffered the worst seizure I had ever seen. Even the doctor was speechless as Audrey convulsed and foamed at the mouth. It was horrific.

The summer had been difficult. I was thankful for the VON nurses who came to the house to administer the needles, and for the social worker who assisted us with the mountain of paperwork required to get us the respite funding we needed. I was grateful that my family was close and able to assist us with our other two children, Lily and Russell, and for the incredible care we received from SickKids Hospital. But what had happened to my calling? Had I just imagined it?

best I could. I focused on Colossians 3:23,24: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord...It is the Lord Christ you are serving." I pondered the words of Jesus: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). I made a commitment not to worry about what the future might hold for my children, especially Audrey and Annie. That didn't excuse me from taking care of the paperwork or from being financially responsible. It meant I must work hard, but also drink the living water God wanted to give my parched soul. I needed to read the Bible, pray and allow others to pray for me. I also had to pay attention to the opportunities around me to serve, no matter how small they seemed. God had called me to do certain things, and it was up to me to recognize those things as He awakened me to what they were. My calling was still there.

I stayed plugged in to the weekly Bible study, attended church, and invested myself in those the Lord had placed in my life. I also did my best to get the paperwork done and spend time helping my kids do their homework. I asked people to pray for me when I felt drained. I

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In a similar way, in the fall of 2004, I experienced a spiritual awakening. It was eight months after my five-month-old baby girls had been diagnosed with tuberous sclerosis complex (TS). I had decided to attend our annual ladies retreat. I needed a retreat and looked forward to spending time with my sister and the ladies of our church family. The camp where we stayed was very similar to the residence building I had lived in when I attended Eastern Pentecostal Bible College a decade earlier. I had good memories of those days. I had felt a calling to go to Bible college when I was just seventeen, and it was that calling I wrestled with on this particular retreat in 2004.

My babies were over a year old at that point and had been through a five-week ACTH steroid treatment that summer. They had received needles every second day and were irritable and hungry. Annie gained weight.

I soon discovered that I was meant to be on that retreat. The speaker, Margaret Gibb, spoke about being in a "divine box." She talked about having dreams and callings and how life kept getting in the way, or so it seemed. I came to understand that my life was no surprise to God. He was not taken aback when my path wound this way and that. He knew the way and was undaunted by the enormity of the load that Kirk and I would have to bear. He was even willing to carry it for us and give us light to see our way. Not only would He be there every step and guide our every decision, but the God of the universe still wanted to use me for something. For now, though, I was in a divine box. I found comfort in that thought and began to explore what it meant.

I took a good look at my life and decided to do what this wise speaker challenged me to do. I committed myself to prayer, reading the Bible, journaling and taking care of my family the

allowed myself to be ministered to. I learned how to communicate with and manage respite workers. I learned that my calling is all around me—my neighbours, the person standing with me in the grocery line, or parents whose children also suffered from TS. I learned not to take for granted the moments I have with any one individual. It may be my only moment.

Five years after that retreat, my twins entered full day school. That was the year I began leading the ladies bible study. I can't say that I heard an audible voice from above, but in my heart I knew it was time. For the past four summers, my sister and I have also had the privilege of preparing the snacks for the Vacation Bible School that our church runs.

Kirk and I had many sleepless nights when our twins were toddlers. In desperation, we

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looked to the doctor for an answer. We were not excited to learn that people with neurological dysfunction usually have sleep disorder. Our girls still rely on melatonin to help them get the sleep they need. We were certainly not strong enough to manage this on our own. I needed the strength of God. I had to read the Bible, pray, write, and work hard at my daily duties. And I had to wake up to this truth: I need a break from children sometimes. I need my family, my church family, my Thursday morning ladies and my neighbours. Teachers, pastors, friends and doctors are all a part of our lives by choice—God's choice. God took care to position each of them alongside us.

I have learned that being in a divine box is not a bad thing. The Lord is preparing my heart for the future and, at the same time, using me in my present circumstances. I am still a stay-at-home mom dealing with children who have TS and all the usual pre-adolescent issues. I still do a dozen loads of laundry per week, and I rely on respite and retreats to help me refocus. I have decided there are no average people, minor duties or small jobs in God's eyes. He doesn't ask us to walk in darkness but offers us the light of Christ to guide us. He doesn't ask us to find strength where there simply is none. When you find yourself thirsty in the middle of your dark night, I urge you to drink. It is up to us to turn the light on and to drink from the living water that Christ alone can give. Wake up and take action. You will be satisfied. You will be able to do things you thought too difficult. Best of all, you will become more like Jesus.

Andrea Foster lives in Brampton, ON with her husband, Kirk, and their four children.



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