



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Pop the cork, I'm 40!

I ring in the big 4-0 this month, and for some time I have wondered how to best celebrate this milestone.

I thought about making my novel, *Candy Apple*, an e-book, and releasing it on my birthday.

I considered compiling past columns into a book, also for release on my birthday.

And I thought about writing an anthem to 40, something fun and witty to sum up the perspective this stage of life brings.

But in the end, I listened to the small voice inside me prompting me to share a truth that's changed my heart this year. It's something I've always known deep down but kept suppressed because admitting it made me feel weak. However, since my last birthday, my family's experienced three close calls that have forced me to acknowledge this truth. My entire existence depends on it.

And that truth is: I need God.

I need God when a huge oak tree falls on our new home, as one did last September, and forces us in a rental while we renovate for eight months.

I need God when a glass armoire falls on my nine-year-old, as one did in January, and she miraculously comes out with only a scratch on her wrist.

I need God when my baby has a terrible allergic reaction, as she did in February, and I must jab an EpiPen in her thigh before running her down the drive to the flashing lights of paramedics.

During each of these incidents, I realized how powerless and helpless I truly am. I realized the limits of my humanity, and everyone else's too. Humbled before God's throne and begging for a favor, I regretted not living my life more for Him. I regretted my unworthiness and the inequity of our relationship.

He'd spared my family not once, not twice, but three times...yet what have I done in return?

After each incident, my overwhelming emotion was gratitude. My next emotion was shame. I was ashamed of all the times I put God off or used Him as a magic genie. I was ashamed that the passionate love and indebtedness I felt after a big scare always waned once life returned to normal. I was ashamed by how often I ignored the small voice inside me, pursuing my own plans

instead.

In my crazy but enlightening year, I've seen how quickly a loss can occur. I've seen accidents happen without warning, and I understand how these moments illuminate what matters most. Life – that's what matters. We get one each, so let's not waste it.

So I celebrate my birthday by toasting my creator. I thank Him for breathing life into me and allowing me the gift of hindsight and reflection. I was created for a purpose, as were you. I suspect I'll spend every waking day trying to pinpoint what, exactly, my purpose is.

And while I wish my faith statement had come sooner, I suppose I needed 40 years of experience to prove how weak I am alone and how strong I am in God. I need Him in hard times to help me survive, in good times to keep me humble and aware that every blessing and convenience I enjoy stems from His grace.

When I wake up in the morning and see, it's a miracle.

When I throw my legs off the bed and walk, it's a miracle.

When my kids run up to me and tell me what they want for breakfast, it's a miracle.

Constantly God works miracles in my life and the more I recognize them, the more passion and indebtedness I feel. It doesn't take a big scare to love God, just a daily awareness of what He does.

One day I'll stand before His throne again, wishing I felt more worthy but grateful His love and grace surpass all understanding. My life's not about me, it's about Him. And honestly I'm okay with that, because there's freedom in playing the supporting role I was cast for. It feels natural, and when the limelight does shift my way, I know it's for His purpose.

It's all for His purpose, after all. My life, your life, this prelude to the Kingdom. I thank God for my 40 years on earth and thank you, my beloved readers, for being part of my journey.

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