On a recent vacation to Australia, my wife and I were treated to an amazing tour of an abandoned gold mine in Ballarat, Victoria. What secrets and heartbreaks that town held! One man’s trials and triumphs particularly spoke to me. Here is the story of Jack McAuley.

Mary, I have decided that I am going to sell my business and travel to the gold fields of Australia to strike it rich!"

“Strike it poor, you mean! Now, Jack McAuley, I’ll have none of that fancy dreaming while my babies and I go hungry!”

“Look, let me go and try it. If I don’t find anything, I will come back before the fall. I promise you that.”

Over his wife’s protests, Jack sold his coal wagon, his route, his grandfather’s gold watch, and a few other family heirlooms to get enough money to leave Wales in 1840 and travel third class to Melbourne, Australia.

After a long and difficult ocean voyage, he took the bumpy coach to the gold fields of Ballarat. There he was shocked to see how crazy the town was with gold fever. People were even digging in the city streets, hoping to find their fortune. When they did strike it rich, they would often squander their money on saloon girls or gamble it away, and be broke again in a few days.

Jack was determined that would not happen to him. No sir! With the last of his money, he bought a mining license and the food, equipment, and other supplies he would need. Then he set off for a promising site.

The days turned to weeks and the weeks to months. Every day he would return to his site and dig into the bowels of the earth like a tunneling mole. Jack was obsessed with one thing and one thing only—gold. But he did not find gold. Instead he found hunger, blistered hands, sore muscles, and disappointment that grew into desperation.

At the end of the day, as he lay in his cot, his thoughts turned to Mary. Her picture, framed with a lock of her hair, would be the last thing that he looked at before he went to sleep and the first thing he saw when he woke in the morning.

The second thing he saw every morning was his tentmate, also from Wales, a brute of a man named Brian, or as some called him, “The Mauler.” Brian had earned this name as a champion prizefighter. He stood a towering six feet five, and his fist was as big as a ham.

Everyone thought he was unbeatable until one fight that changed his perspective on life. Before he had been proud, surly, cursing continually, never speaking a kind word to anyone, but that night the unthinkable happened—he was knocked out cold. He lay in bed for weeks, drifting in and out of consciousness, struggling to recover. In his dreamlike state, he traveled through a tunnel with a light at the other end, met an angel who showed him his
entire life and gave him a choice
to return to earth or to give up
and die. He chose to live.

The experience remade him
into someone that his old bud-
dies could not even recognize.
What would they say now, if
they could see him kneeling
next to his bed and praying like
a little kid? Not having the heart
to fight any more, he traveled
to the gold fields to make a
new start in life.

Jack went to his food cup-
board to make his breakfast. It
was empty. Turning to his com-
panion, Jack said, “Brian, tomor-
row I am putting my things up
for sale. I’m getting out of here.
I don’t have enough for a ticket
back to Wales, but somehow I’ll
get a job in Melbourne. Then I’ll
go home to my pretty wife and
sweet children. I’ve got to go
before the quartz fibers kill my
lungs and there’s nothing left of
me to save.”

“Don’t give up, Jack. The
gold fever has you. If you don’t
quit, the good Lord will help
your dreams come true.”

“All those pretty words
sound good enough, but even
the gold fever can’t keep a man
working when he is down to
watery coffee and his last corn
biscuit. I can’t work the mine
anymore. It is just too hard.”

“No one is asking you to
work without food. I have some
grub left. Not much, mind you,
but enough to get you through
another day. Don’t quit yet.
Maybe tomorrow will be your
day. Wait and see. Just try one
more day.”

“I can’t take your food.
What will you do then?”

“One more day won’t make
much difference to this iron-
clad stomach. If you strike it
rich you can pay it back—with
interest if you like. That way it
won’t be charity.”

“It probably wouldn’t hurt to
try one more day,” Jack admit-
ted.

“Now you’re talking. Come
on and pray with me. Get down
on your prayer bones and let the
floorboards feel your sincerity.”

Jack felt a bit awkward
about the whole idea, but he
swallowed his pride and did
it anyway. “But, but … I don’t
know how to pray,” Jack stam-
mered.

“That’s OK, I’ve been get-
ing enough practice lately for
the both of us,” Brian said as
he closed his eyes and began.

“Lord, we are coming to You
asking for a favor. My friend
here, Jack McAuley, is down
on his luck and he needs one
of Your spectacular miracles.
You know, the kind that You
used to specialize in when You
walked the earth. Like the time
You told Your disciples to go
down to the lake and pull out a
fish and there was a gold coin
in its mouth. We need one of
those miracles tomorrow.

“You see, Jack here has left
his wife and children to come
here to find gold, so he could
give them a better life, where
the roof won’t leak and his
babies won’t go hungry. Please
help him to find some gold
tomorrow, or he is going to be
in a heap of trouble.

“Well, that’s about all. We’re
counting on You and know
that You will take care of us
like You promised You would.
Thank You kindly. Amen.”

In the morning Jack set out
to the field as he had done
every day for the past three
months. It was just another day.
His last, he thought.

“I’ll just dig today to humor
Brian. He did go to the trouble
to say that pretty prayer for me
and give me his last meal, so at
least I can show him that I tried.

Nothing special happened
that morning. He was about to
give up when his eyes spied
something shiny. He turned it
over with his pickaxe. Could it
be? He brushed away the dirt
that hid its glory. Yes, it was a
gold nugget the size of an apple!

He was rich! The rest of
the day he was too elated to
do much of anything else but
whoop and holler for joy, but
the next day he telegraphed his
wife with the good news. She
came on the next ship with her
children. She and Jack began a
general provisions store with the
gold he had found. They opened
up a shop in town called “The
Gold Bug” that became very
prosperous. Brian the Mauler
was their store manager.

So when you come to the
end of your rope, don’t give up.
Just look to God, follow Him,
and the storm will pass. The
rainbow will come, and you’ll
be glad you turned to Him. And
maybe if you reach out to help
someone in need, like Brian did
for Jack, He will reward you for
that, too.

But, you may say, “I will
never strike gold like Jack did!”
Well, if you look, you can find
something even more valu-
able than gold. The Bible tells
us, “How much better to get
wisdom than gold! And to get
understanding is to be chosen
rather than silver.” (Proverbs 16:
16.) Look for God’s gold, and
you’ll find treasure where you
never expected it.

If you’d like more inspirational
reading, subscribe to Activated!
Contact the address below, or visit
www.activated.org.