

5 Foods That Are Good For Your Skin

There are various foods that help to make your skin naturally beautiful and healthy. But did you know that experts are now saying consuming these foods raw can be more beneficial for your skin?

A few of such foods are:

1. **Citrus and berries.** Vitamin C, abundantly found in citrus fruits, is a powerful antioxidant that increases the formation of collagen for promoting supple and soft skin. Berries are crammed with antioxidants that slow the process of aging. Moreover, the fiber contained in berries helps to eradicate harmful toxins out of the body before they cause skin disorders such as acne and zits. So, be sure to include at least one serving of fresh citrus and berries daily to achieve gorgeous skin.

2. **Pistachios and walnuts.** Pistachios and walnuts are loaded with vitamins B and E, which are known to protect the skin from cell damage. Vitamin E is a potent antioxidant that works by destroying the free radicals that accelerate skin aging. On the other hand, vitamin B enhances blood circulation and offers a youthful and radiant glow to the skin.

Experts suggest consuming pistachios and walnuts along with fruits in order to slow down the process of digestion and the breakdown of sugar.

3. **Spinach and kale.** Spinach and kale are green leafy vegetables that are rich in phytonutrients. They provide extra protection to the skin from the damaging effects of the sun's rays and keep the skin firm and smooth. Spinach is especially healthy since it is composed of nutrients such as lutein and beta-carotene, which have been found to increase the skin's

elasticity. It is suggested that consuming at least three cups of kale or spinach per week can do wonders for your skin. You can also consider mixing them together and relish the goodness of this delicious salad for beautiful skin and a healthy body.

4. Apples. Apples are another good source of vitamin C that works to increase the formation of collagen. The copper present in apples assists in the formation of melanin, which is a natural pigment found in the skin and works to protect the skin from the harmful effects of sun rays. You may consider adding chopped apples to a cup of yogurt or salad.

5. Almond milk. Another effective tip for increasing the natural glow of your skin is almond milk. It is rich in minerals such as manganese and copper. Copper is popularly known to boost the formation of collagen, and manganese has properties to protect the skin from damaging ultraviolet rays of the sun. You may drink almond milk as you would regular milk. It can also be used with cereal and blended with nutritious fruits to prepare a nourishing and scrumptious smoothie.

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For the original article, visit .

How Should We Respond to Vicky Beeching?

Believers throughout the English-speaking world were shocked and saddened to hear that Vicky Beeching, a greatly loved songwriter and worship leader, has announced that she is gay. How should we respond?

1. This should not be about your own feelings. When you sing to God words of worship and praise that someone else has written, it's easy to feel betrayed when that person lets you down. So it's understandable that some believers are asking, "How could she do this to us?"

The fact is that she didn't do this to you any more than she wrote worship songs for you.

According to her story, her sexuality is something she wrestled with for years, and as much as her "coming out" as gay was a public event, it was also an intensely personal decision before God, and that's where our first focus should be: praying for her to align her life rightly with the Lord.

To lash out at her now in immature ways will only drive her further from the cross. While it is fine to speak the truth to her in love—assuming she reads some of the comments addressed to her on blogs and social media—praying for the Holy Spirit to convict her of her error is even more important.

2. She will not be the last Christian leader to declare that she/he is gay. We are living today in a perfect spiritual storm in which biblical ignorance, moral compromise, and societal changes have combined to produce deep spiritual deception.

That's what opened the door for contemporary Christian music

artist Jennifer Knapp to “come out,” and that’s what opened the door for Jars of Clay front man Dan Haseltine to voice apparent support for same-sex “marriage” as well as for influential leaders such as Rob Bell and Jim Wallis to advocate for redefining marriage.

That’s also what opened the door for an evangelical publishing conglomerate to publish and aggressively promote a book devoted to promoting “gay Christianity.”

At any other time in church history, ideas like this would not been countenanced for a split second among committed followers of Jesus who were grounded in the Word. But today, professing Christians are questioning some of the most basic scriptural truths about morality.

You can expect a lot more surprises in the coming days—both from pastors and musical artists—but as painful as this is to witness, it is a necessary separation that will ultimately divide those who seek to change the Word from those who seek to submit to the Word.

3. God’s Word has not changed. If 10,000 pastors declared they were gay tomorrow, it would not change the truth of the Bible one iota. If 10,000 worship leaders declared that God had made them gay, it would not change a single scriptural truth.

As I have emphasized repeatedly, despite the increasing number of professing “gay Christians”—by which I mean those who claim that you can follow Jesus and practice homosexuality at the same time—there are “no new textual, archaeological, sociological, anthropological or philological discoveries [that] have been made in the last 50 years that would cause us to read any of these biblical texts differently.”

And so, once more, we see the fundamental error of “gay Christianity,” namely, people interpreting the Bible through the lens of their sexuality rather than interpreting their

sexuality through the lens of the Bible.

4. Boycotting Vicky Beeching's music is a matter of personal conviction. Although it appears that as a BBC broadcaster Vicky should be able to make a good living, she will lose royalties from the States if we no longer use her songs.

Should we attempt to punish her for coming out as gay? I don't believe so, if "punish" is the goal.

Should we continue to use her music? That's really a matter of personal conviction.

For some believers, it could be a serious distraction, putting the focus on Vicky Beeching and her sexuality rather than on Jesus the Lord and the glory of God.

For other believers, it is the truths and melodies of their favorite worship songs that help them connect spiritually, and they don't know (or care) who wrote what they are singing.

Either way, whether we use her songs or drop her songs, since she did touch many lives in the past, there are many people who should be praying for her.

5. Embracing "gay identity" is the real problem.

In her coming-out interview, Vicky stated, "What Jesus taught was a radical message of welcome and inclusion and love. I feel certain God loves me just the way I am, and I have a huge sense of calling to communicate that to young people."

Actually, what Jesus did in such a radical way was to reach out to the worst sinners of His day and change them by His presence and His words rather than affirming them in their sins. I call this "transformational inclusion" as opposed to "affirmational inclusion," which is not the gospel.

In an interchange with American family activist Scott Lively,

Vicky claimed that denying her gay identity is what caused her so much torment over the years, and we need to accept our sexual orientation as a gift from God rather than battling with our own selves.

But as Pastor Kris Vallotton noted in an extensive Facebook post (that I cited in *Can You Be Gay and Christian?*) in which he described his years of pastoral counseling, "These experiences have taught me that when you define yourself by your temptations or your passions (instead of managing your appetite and resisting temptations), there is no bottom to that cesspool! The truth is that we all have temptations and appetites that are not healthy and must be managed, or we will live with a deep sense of shame no matter what values our culture tries to validate because God has written His own values on our hearts."

And so Vicky, if you will allow me to address you personally, you have told the world that you are same-sex attracted, but those attractions do not define you, and there are plenty of other Christians with deep-seated sexual desires that they have experienced all of their lives that are far more shameful than anything you have expressed.

And while it is absolutely true that God loves you even when you wrestle with same-sex attraction, He did not create you to be with other women. If He does not give you the grace to change your romantic attractions and sexual desires, then He will so fill you with His love and goodness and presence that His embrace will mean more to you than any human embrace.

I appeal to you, Vicky, to go back to God once again, to recognize that His Word really is clear in terms of homosexual practice, and that you can advocate for freedom and wholeness in Jesus without advocating for homosexual practice. (In fact, if you advocate for homosexual practice, you will bring people into bondage, not freedom.)

Perhaps the Lord wants to use you to bring liberation to others in a way beyond anything you yet know.

I know you have experienced a sense of a large burden lifting, but ultimately, it will prove to be more a natural euphoria than a spiritual one. So again, I appeal to you: Go back to the cross; go back to the secret place of worship; go back to the unchangeable Word; humble yourself in His sight, and He will give you grace.

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Ulf Ekman Faces His Accusers After Catholic Conversion

It caused more than just a stir when a well-known Swedish megachurch pastor told his congregation he planned to covert to Catholicism. In fact, Ulf Ekman described it as a a “real uproar” in his overwhelmingly Protestant nation and opened the door to “contention and debate.”

Despite Ekman’s well-known and growing fascination with Catholicism over a number of years, Word of Life members were shocked, and some were dismayed. Nevertheless, Ekman doesn’t see how he or the church could have handled it differently. These are among the revelations Ekman shared in a column written for the *Catholic Herald*.

“Yet there were many emotions: criticism, as well as sorrow and feelings of loss and rejection. How could I as a pastor leave my flock? Did I not betray them and my own calling? Didn’t I consider them Christians anymore? Was everything I taught before wrong now? Some wondered how I, who seem to have been standing strong for so many years, could fall for such an outright deception and lie. Accusations were hurled from left and right, and emotions ran high. Some still do,” he wrote.

Ekman made it clear that he’s not rejecting his background or the rich ministerial experiences he has had over the many years as a founder and leader of Word of Life. He stressed that he’s forever thankful to the Lord for that season but is immensely happy to be part of the Catholic Church.

“So now, as we begin this walk, there is so much to explore. Now that all our former duties, obligations and positions are gone, we can, at least for now, live at a pace that allows a more reflective life. We have been used to constantly upholding the ministry, our church. Now the Church lifts us up,” Ekman wrote.

“The sacraments have become a tangible reality in our lives, and they sustain us in a concrete way. Something—grace, I am sure—is here in a way that it was not before. A fresh breeze is blowing through our lives. We look forward to exploring and fully identifying with all that we now are a part of. It is very exciting to live fully for Jesus Christ—in the Catholic Church.”

‘The Fight Will Not Be Easy,

but It Will Be Worth It'

It is a crime against humanity.

Every year millions of women and children fall into the hands of traffickers in their own countries and abroad. Almost every country in the world is impacted by this injustice. In 2012, the International Labor Organization estimated that almost 21 million people worldwide were victims of forced labor and trafficking. Many of them are young women and children, and many are victims of sexual exploitation.

Statistics like these spur a desire to help those trapped in slavery. Unfortunately, it's not an easy task. The abolition arena is filled with well-meaning individuals who have been overwhelmed by the enormity of the issue. But this Aug. 6-8, more than 1,000 abolition advocates learned about the power of perseverance.

At the third annual Exodus Cry Abolition Summit in Kansas City, Missouri, event attendees became equipped with skills and strategies designed to help them persevere and gain ground in the long-term fight against human trafficking.

Founded in 2008, Exodus Cry is a nonprofit organization committed to abolishing sex slavery through Christ-centered prevention, intervention and holistic restoration of trafficking victims. Exodus Cry is best known for its award-winning documentary film, *Nefarious, Merchant of Souls* released in 2011.

In 2015, the organization plans to release its next feature-length documentary about the demand side of the sex industry. *Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution* will reveal undiscovered fronts in the war on human trafficking and unexpected hope for victims around the world.

The 2014 summit included keynote addresses from leaders in the

growing movement to abolish sex slavery, including Don Brewster, co-founder of Agape International Missions, an organization that is fighting the war against sex trafficking in Cambodia; Annie Lobert, a human-trafficking survivor and founder of Hookers for Jesus; and Benjamin Nolot, Exodus Cry founder and the director of *Nefarious*. The keynote presentations were enhanced by breakout sessions on public policy, online exploitation, deliverance and filmmaking. Worship sessions were led by prominent worship leaders and musical artists. Throughout all aspects of the event, the resounding theme was perseverance.

According to Brewster, some experts estimate that there are 1.2 million new people entrapped in slavery every year, or one new slave every 15 seconds. He acknowledged that those assessments can be defeating, and he stressed the need for unrelenting love in overcoming the obstacles faced by every abolitionist.

Brewster paraphrased 1 Cor. 13: "An abolitionist without love is nothing but an annoying sound," he said. "Until you experience the love (of God), you won't experience real transformation. When you pay the price to persevere in love, when you sacrifice to do that, then you get to be a part of God's miracle."

Corey Russell, a senior leader at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, urged attendees to overcome the angst that abolitionists often feel as witnesses to oppression and to embrace the compassion that God is calling them to by becoming people of prayer.

Russell emphasized that the dialogue of prayer—both in speaking to God and in listening for His Heart for others and ourselves—is a critical piece of becoming fully committed to the difficult work of abolition. He also charged attendees to personal holiness, warning them about falling prey to temptations.

“We have no power in heaven when that which we want to bind has bound us,” Russell explained. “This burden started with God, and He has brought you up, into His heart.”

Nolot reaffirmed the need for perseverance. He empathized with the feelings of many abolitionists who are immobilized when they become aware of just how big the task is. But Nolot also outlined a healthy picture of an abolitionist.

He recounted two of Moses’ battles: one fighting for the freedom of a Hebrew slave and the other standing with his people at the Red Sea awaiting certain slaughter. Nolot noted that while the circumstances were similar, Moses’ heart was different. In the first scenario, Moses ran scared. In the second, he stood in faith, transformed by God after his time in the wilderness. Nolot challenged abolitionists to embrace their wilderness season as a time to wait on God and grow in Him, so that when difficulties come, they will be able to persevere.

The Abolition Summit did more than charge attendees with a list of tasks; it provided the formula for maintaining a life in God and fighting the battle against human trafficking until the day when every person is truly free.

While human trafficking remains a global crisis, positive developments in Exodus Cry’s departments of Prevention, Intervention and Restoration offer additional motivation to persevere.

Exodus Cry safe homes, or Lighthouses, continue to provide victims with a haven for seeking restoration, and a screening of *Nefarious* on Capitol Hill resulted in new anti-trafficking legislation. In addition, Exodus Cry concluded *Liberdade* this summer. The initiative—designed to bring freedom to the women and children trafficked in Brazil through prayer and outreach—resulted in heightened awareness about sexual exploitation and the training of Brazilian abolitionists who

are now better equipped to fight trafficking in their own country.

“We want to do more than just talk about human trafficking. We want to abolish it,” Nolot noted. “We are making progress, but we can’t do it alone. We need each other, and we need God’s intervention and direction. The fight will not be easy, but it will be worth it.”

Your Battle Scars Don't Define You

Michael Card wrote a short book called *The Walk*, detailing his walk of discipleship with his mentor in college. It’s one of my favorite little books, and I drew a lot of personal application from it. But I know if I ever wrote a similar book, it would be called *The Limp*. This was reinforced to me after I fell in my back yard last week and wiped off several layers of skin on my knee. My knee is starting to heal, but it is very sore, and I know I will likely have a permanent scar there.

I have other bigger, permanent scars. I’m permanently affected by type 1 diabetes. I wear an insulin pump all day every day, a permanent reminder of a problem with my body that affects every moment of every day of my life. I have still bigger scars, marks on my heart and soul rather than my outward body from long-term suffering over things I can’t control.

Many of us bear such scars. These scars and limps could be the consequence of your own sin. They could be the results of someone else’s sins against you. It could be the death of a loved one or the betrayal by a loved one. It could be an

illness that will not go away, a physical ailment that will affect you the rest of your days on Earth. Whatever it is, it's not going away, and while you may be able to ignore it for periods of time, your awareness of it never fully fades. It's always there at some level.

Like Jacob, we walk forward in life with a permanent limp that reminds us over and over of a painful event. Our scars contribute to who we are. My scars and limps don't define me (either physically or spiritually), but they have become part of my identifying features.

Brown hair, green eyes, scar on left knee. Compassionate, witty, constantly bracing herself against the next wave of pain. You and I are more than our scars, but we are not less than them. Jacob was still a father, a son and a husband after his hip was put out of joint. But he was a father, a son and a husband with a limp. He could kick and scream all he wanted that he didn't want to limp (which I have tried), but his limp was still there.

Jacob had to figure out instead how to walk forward with that limp. That is the issue for any of us with emotional, spiritual or physical scars and limps that reflect long-term suffering.

As I was walking today, I noted that, given the pain and rawness of the wound on my knee, I was much more cautious with my steps. My physical limp slowed me down and made me pay attention to the cracks in the sidewalk. It made me more aware of the potential ways I could fall. Similarly, my emotional and spiritual scars make me pay attention to my own heart and to zealously guard it.

I watch closely for the ways that Satan tempts me to react to my pain that will actually harm me more. I pray diligently that the Lord would keep me from the evil one and help me obey.

We probably easily recognize the drawbacks to walking with a limp. But for once, I am thinking of the wisdom that can come from such caution. I may walk forward slowly and more tentatively, but that caution, submitted to God and seeking His face with each step, can be a very good thing, evidence that my suffering is being used to grow me into maturity.

2 Cor. 12:7-10, So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Adapted from Wendy Alsup's blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.

Mainstream Media Vilifies Israel, Ignores Hamas' War Crimes

When observers describe or denounce Israeli military actions against terrorists in Gaza as "disproportionate," they glibly

assume sweeping legal conclusions without sufficient proof or analysis. But the evidence shows that Israel has acted with disproportionate decency, while Hamas has committed war crimes.

Hamas' indiscriminate rocket and missile attacks—which now total about 3,500 in the last month—target primarily Israeli civilians. The effects of Hamas' attacks have been serious—contrary to what most media reports suggest:

1. Increasing premature births
2. Shutting down Israel's biggest airport, blocking 90 percent of incoming and outgoing passengers
3. Forcing about 8 million people to live on the edge 24/7, fearing that if their missile-defense system or scramble to shelters falters, they could die
4. Constant interruptions throughout the day and night with as little as 10 seconds to find shelter
5. Billions of dollars in economic damage

The principle of distinction requires belligerents to distinguish between combatants and civilians. Hamas' violations of this principle amount to a double war crime: first by targeting Israeli civilians, and second by using Gazan civilians as human shields for these attacks, thereby making it much harder for the IDF military response to distinguish Gazan combatants from noncombatants.

Hamas exhorts Gazans to act as human shields, and its combat manual encourages this war crime while admitting that Israel avoids civilian casualties—an avoidance that Hamas exploits for tactical advantage. Legal scholar Alan Dershowitz deftly highlights yet another proof of Hamas war crimes: Hamas chooses to locate its military efforts in the most densely populated parts of Gaza, instead of in the far less populated

areas nearby—a decision calculated to maximize Gazan civilian deaths. Cynically breaking all rules, Hamas even uses ambulances to transport fighters and converts Gaza’s hospitals into command centers, weapons depots, and rocket-launch sites.

Hamas perfected suicide bombing and is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and Europe, so its war crimes are unsurprising, even if the media concealed Hamas’ barbarism for the last month. But what of the oft-repeated but seldom questioned claim that Israeli military actions are “excessive” or “disproportionate?”

The first duty of any state is to provide security to its citizens. Adjusting for size differences (the U.S. has about 473 times Israel’s land mass, and 40 times Israel’s population), what would be the U.S. military response if Al-Qaeda took over Mexico and launched about 47,300 projectiles per day at the U.S. mainland, killing 120 U.S. civilians and 2,560 soldiers and causing significant property damage, widespread insecurity, and travel shutdowns? Such a comparative context supports those proclaiming that the IDF and Benjamin Netanyahu deserve a Nobel Peace Prize for their restraint during such a challenging war.

As of Aug. 9, Israel’s military had attacked about 5,000 targets in Gaza (4,762 during the first 29 days of Operation Protective Edge and a few hundred more since) resulting in 1,915 deaths (according to the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health). Even if this total were accurate and represented entirely civilian deaths, the strike-to-kill ratio absurdly implies that Israel’s military needs about 2.5 attacks to kill one person.

But if Israel’s goal were just to kill Gazans, it could kill well over 1,915 with a single airstrike. Why spend so much on intelligence gathering and precision-guided bombs (or force Israeli citizens to endure so many costly weeks of war) when the IDF could raze half of Gaza in an hour? The fact that the

IDF has struck so many times with proportionately few casualties shows the extent of its restraint and precision while destroying the terrorist infrastructure threatening Israelis.

Israel has made extraordinary efforts to minimize civilian casualties—despite Hamas' plan to maximize them. Israel aborts airstrikes that will result in excessive civilian casualties, warns civilians to clear areas that will be targeted, and loses ground troops in densely populated areas like Shejaiya to avoid airstrikes that would kill far more Gazan civilians. Israel chose not to target Gaza City's main Shifa Hospital, even though it knew that Hamas leaders were cynically hiding there, and an airstrike could have substantially harmed Hamas' military leadership.

As this article explains, Israel sacrifices blood and treasure to minimize harm to Gaza's civilians. And yet somehow Israel is still accused of deliberately targeting civilians even when Hamas' misfired rockets are responsible or when an IDF mistake happens. But as Colonel Richard Kemp argues, "Mistakes and malfunctions happen in all fighting armies and in all conflicts. Do those who condemn the killing of Palestinian civilians as deliberate acts by the IDF suggest that ... incidents in Gaza [in which the IDF accidentally kills Israeli soldiers] are also intentional?"

Some of the same media outlets that rushed to portray Israel as using disproportionate force have belatedly acknowledged that fighting-age men are vastly over-represented among Gaza's dead, strengthening Israel's claims all along that it has done its best to target combatants and avoid civilians.

Israel's restraint is all the more remarkable given the genocidal intent of its enemy, as clearly stated in the preamble to Hamas' covenant and demonstrated by Hamas' genocidal missile attacks on Israel's nuclear reactor (for more on Hamas' genocidal plans, see this article by Jeffrey

Goldberg). Would the U.S. military be as careful as Israel has been to avoid civilian casualties when confronting an enemy trying to kill millions of Americans and destroy the United States.?

The knee-jerk assumption that Israel uses disproportionate force oversimplifies complex situations requiring deeper analysis and overlooks the powerful factors limiting Israel's military:

1. Internally, Israeli democracy subjects leaders to checks and balances from a vigorous political opposition, independent investigations (such as the Winograd Commission), and a defiantly free press and protest culture (including anti-war protests in Tel Aviv); so when about 90 percent of a normally fractious democracy supports military action, the country clearly faces very serious and legitimate threats.

2. Externally, the military actions of Israel are more scrutinized than those of any other country (as Bret Stephens brilliantly highlighted in 2009), and therefore always carry a greater risk of war-crimes accusations, anti-Semitic attacks abroad, and unprovoked attacks from neighboring countries (over a dozen rockets were fired at Israel from Lebanon during the current conflict in Gaza). Such realities compel Israel to use force judiciously.

In the end, Israel must protect its citizens from an Iran-backed terrorist army that is disproportionately willing to kill Israeli and Gazan civilians. It continues to face disproportionate blame despite its disproportionate efforts to defend its population more humanely than any state in history has. Only if Israel decisively defeats Hamas can real peace come to Gaza—one more reason to let Israel's soldiers finish the job before granting them the Nobel Peace Prize.

Noah Beck is the author of *The Last Israelis*, an apocalyptic novel about Iranian nukes and other geopolitical issues in the

4 Hilarious Ways to Improve Your Health Right Now

What is a sure-fire way to improve your health that is free? Laughter. It's one of the most often overlooked ways we can, and should, live better.

Yes, the ability to laugh seems to come naturally to some people. But everyone, even the most serious personality types, can develop a funny bone. It's a wonderful way to stay healthy.

As researchers examine the keys to longevity, they are now discovering overwhelming evidence that living long has less to do with exercise and eating right than the way we THINK.

Just look at the majority of centenarians, and you'll notice they have a zest for life, a natural curiosity and, yes, a sense of humor. You'll notice a lightheartedness among people who've outlived their counterparts.

This is all about stress. Stress is far more devastating than most people realize. It literally debilitates your entire system. Anger, fear, unforgiveness and yes, a sour attitude, all contribute to stress.

Conversely, letting go of anger, resentment and not taking ourselves too seriously immediately contribute to stress relief and an overall healthier you. Research shows:

1. Laughter improves your heart. Our blood vessels function more efficiently when we laugh because blood flow increases,

which protects us against heart attacks and other cardiovascular problems.

2. Laughter is a natural painkiller. Just as when we exercise, when we have a good laugh, our body releases endorphins, nature's painkillers. They are those feel-good chemicals that make us feel happy ... some say it's like a "natural high." In fact, scientists say endorphins are so powerful, they rival the impact morphine has on our body, but with only good side effects.

3. Laughter relaxes the body. It's a natural stress reliever. In fact, the effect of a good laugh lingers for 45 minutes in the form of less physical tension and greater muscle relaxation.

4. Laughter also boosts the immune system. Tickling the funny bone causes ugly stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline to diminish. When that happens, your body increases its production of disease-fighting antibodies, which kill all those pesky bugs that circulate during cold and flu season.

So, are you one of those people who take life too seriously? You can change. Just make an effort to lighten up, and it will get easier.

So how do you laugh more?

1. The first step is to smile. Smiling leads to laughter. One thing you'll notice right away is that when you smile at people, they smile back.

2. Take it a step further, and you'll notice that laughter is contagious too. If you spend time around a bunch of people who are constantly uptight and frowning, just remember, you can single-handedly turn things around. Make it a point to joke and smile, lighten the mood whenever possible, and just watch how others will follow suit without even knowing it.

3. Seek out people who laugh and smile, and spend more time with them.

4. Watch funny television shows, movies or listen to funny podcasts or CDs in your car. Watch funny YouTube videos. But make sure they're clean and edifying. They are out there.

5. Look at the humor in yourself and in less-than-perfect situations.

Don't be surprised if you suddenly have more friends. Everyone wants to be around people who have mastered those skills. And it only takes practice.

Laughter is a fantastic way to defuse conflict. In the morning, make a conscious effort, a vow if you will, to joke about yourself and sticky situations in the day ahead.

Having a good sense of humor isn't just about adding levity to stressful situations. It can be a way of commenting on the everyday situations as well.

I am so very grateful for the jokesters in the CBN News room. Recently on *The 700 Club*, we aired two stories about James Brown, who had an amazing Christian testimony. One of the stories was about the new biopic based on his life and the other was the re-airing of an interview James Brown did with *The 700 Club*, back in the 1980s.

One of the women in the newsroom, Andrea Garrett, in honor of our recent emphasis on James Brown, sent an email around with a link to the hilarious James Brown parody that Eddie Murphy performed on *Saturday Night Live*, which at the time was so wildly popular it became a pop-culture phenomenon. What a laugh we all had.

For the original article, visit .

It's Time to Get on God's Calendar

Note: As I said last month in Dan Juster's article for Reconnecting Ministries, I am beginning a new focus with The Reconnection; to bring this issue in God's family to the forefront of the church by interviewing many of its leaders, both from Jewish and Gentile perspectives; where they will be free to express their views and beliefs.

But, what will this spiritual reconnection between Jew and Gentile actually look like in the church as it begins to take hold and develop amongst us? I truly believe that the full revelation of this new unity in the family of God will only develop as more of His love and forgiveness flows between both groups. In my mind, this will naturally broaden our tolerances of how each of us practice our faith in Jesus/Yeshua, with some overlaps I might add that will become wonderfully enriching to us all.

Papa Don Finto, as I call him, who is one of my mentors in the faith, pastored Belmont Church in Nashville, Tennessee for over 30 years. More recently over the last 10 years, God called him out to help father and mentor Messianic leadership in the church, which is so greatly needed. Papa Don overflows in the Spirit with the Father's love and runs a ministry with Tod McDowell known as Caleb Company, which is training church leadership to refocus on Israel. Don Finto has a great love for Israel and the church and has written 2 books on the Reconnection, which lay a wonderful foundation for Christians first discovering and embracing the Israel piece, a phrase he has devised and one that I use regularly in my sermons and teachings. "Your People Shall Be My People," is one of the

titles. So here's what he has to share with us (Grant Berry, Reconnecting Ministries).

We have been robbed of a significant part of our godly heritage through a calendar that was intentionally removed from the biblical one. The early believers in Jesus were all Jewish. Not until Cornelius were the Gentiles received into the fellowship without converting to Judaism. But even these early Gentile followers observed the biblical feasts as a prophetic statement of their newly found faith in the Jewish Messiah who is also Redeemer of the nations. When Paul wrote to the predominantly Gentile believers of Corinth, he spoke of "Christ, our Passover lamb (who) has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival ..." (1 Cor. 5:7-8). The biblical feasts had become the feasts of the Gentile believers as well.

Paul's special assignment was to Gentiles (see Acts 9:15), yet he never lost his passion for the Jewish people and remained an observant Jew all his life, always going first to synagogues with the message of the gospel, before going to Gentiles (see Acts 13:5, 14:14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8). Late in life, Paul told the Roman commander, "I am a Jew" (Ac. 21:39), and to the Sanhedrin, "I am a Pharisee" (23:6).



As Gentile believers increased and Jewish persecution, including the destruction of Jerusalem that followed, the church began to lose touch with the Jewish roots of their faith and turn against their Jewish brothers and sisters. By the time of Emperor Constantine in the early 4th century, the estrangement had become so severe that Constantine called the bishops together in the Nicene Council in order to finalize the church's separation from these "polluted wretches" who had killed Jesus.

They needed a resurrection day other than Passover. Passover was too Jewish. At the conclusion of the Nicene Council, Constantine had his way. The Roman calendar had conquered. The annual celebration of the Lord's resurrection would now have a new name—Easter—strangely similar to Eostre, the Teutonic goddess of spring, dissimilar to Pesach or Passover. The Roman calendar, named after Roman gods and Caesars, replaced God's calendar, and for the next 16 centuries, both the church and the synagogue agreed that Jewish people who became followers of their Messiah must relinquish all their Jewishness and get on the non-biblical calendar. If they refused, they were persecuted and often killed. Can you honestly believe this? But it is sadly true of our church history.

The prophet Daniel had envisioned four great beasts and a king that would "change the set times and the laws" (Dan. 7:25). In his insistence that the church change the calendar of God, Constantine became a foreshadowing of another world ruler who is to come. And the church was further divorced from her roots and her spiritual "parentage."

Our Roman/Gregorian solar calendar has no biblical significance. God's calendar is based on lunar months with a solar year. The sun and moon are to "mark seasons and days and years" (Gen. 1:14). The first day of the new moon following the vernal equinox in the Spring is the beginning of God's year (See Exodus 12:1). Months always begin with the new moon. The 14th or 15th of the month will always be a full moon. The days begin in the evening (See Genesis 1:5).

Passover (Pesach) is always on the 14th day of *Nisan*, also called *Abib* (meaning *barley*). God told Moses to "tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb" (Ex. 12:3). The lambs were to be "year old males without defect" (v. 5), and were to be sacrificed on the 14th day of the month (v. 6). Israel was to

“take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses” (v. 7). “The blood will be a sign ... when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (v. 13), was the Lord’s assurance.

John’s gospel indicates that Jesus’ “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem took place on the 10th day of Nisan (see John 12:1 and 12), the day the lambs were selected. All the gospel writers tell of the questions and scrutiny that Jesus endured over the next four days as He was brought before Caiaphas, Annas, Herod and Pilate. On the morning of the 13th of Nisan, after being carefully examined by Pilate, Pilate declared, “I find no fault in this man” (Lk. 23:4 KJV). In other words, “This lamb is flawless and ready to be sacrificed.” Jesus was taken to the execution site and nailed to the cross. At three in the afternoon (See Luke 23:44-46), after three hours of darkness, and at the exact time when Passover lambs were being slaughtered for the evening feast, the soldiers pierced the side of Jesus, and redeeming blood flowed from His side.

HaBikkurim

A relatively unnoticed “first fruits” festival (HaBikkurim) occurred three days later when the priest was to waive a barley sheaf as a celebration of the harvest that was to come (See Leviticus 23:9-14). Paul calls Jesus’ resurrection from the dead the first fruits of all those who are to follow (See 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 24).

Shavuot

Fifty days after Passover was the festival of Pentecost (Shavuot). Pentecost is not just a “Christian” festival, but a biblical feast of harvest that also commemorates the giving of the law on Sinai. This is the day God chose for the initiation of the “law of the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2), a day when Joel’s prophecy that “I will pour out my Spirit on all people” (Ac. 2:17) began to be fulfilled. Pentecost is one of the

“appointed feasts of the LORD” (Lev. 23:2), and always arrives on the 6th day of the 3rd month, the month of Sivan.

Yom Teruach, Yom Kippur, Sukkot

After the spring festivals, there is a long season of growing and harvesting before the autumn festivals that celebrate the final harvest. Jesus compared Himself to a master who entrusted talents to his servants, went on a journey, then “after a long time” (Matt. 25:19) returned to hold his servants accountable. There is “a long time” between the spring and the autumn feasts.

Three feasts take place in the fall: the Feast of Trumpets (Yom Teruach) on the 1st day of the seventh month of Tishrei, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) on the 10th day of Tishrei, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) from the 15th to the 22nd days of Tishrei. Jewish tradition calls the first day of Tishrei *Rosh Hashana* (“head of the year”), and celebrate this day as the beginning of the civic year, but the beginning of God’s year is in the Spring, on the first day of Nisan.

The fall festivals are important for us because they have yet to come into their full prophetic significance. If Jesus used God’s calendar for the Spring festivals, we can well assume that He will do the same with the Fall feasts. In Paul’s letters to both Corinth and Thessalonica, he refers to a trumpet call that will resound at the second coming of Jesus. The Day of Atonement is a day of introspection and judgment. Tabernacles looks forward to the time when we will “tabernacle” together with God.

But there is more! Jesus calls Himself “the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 22:13). He often begins and ends at the same place. He left from the Mount of Olives and He is to return to the Mount

of Olives. There seems to be biblical evidence that Jesus will not only return during the Fall season, but that He was born during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Zechariah “belonged to the priestly division of Abijah” (Lk. 1:15), serving in the Temple in the eighth rotation, thus the later part of the fourth biblical month (See 1 Chronicles 24:10). Mary’s pregnancy occurred six months later when “God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth (v. 26), thus the later part of the tenth biblical month. This would mean that Jesus was born nine months later, in the later part of the 19th month following Gabriel’s announcement to Zechariah, thus in the later part of the seventh biblical month at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. No wonder John said that “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” (John 1:14 Amplified). It’s fascinating, don’t you think?

We’ve been robbed of our heritage and our connection to our roots, which is why Grant Berry burns the trail to help reconnect us spiritually with his ministry focus. God has a calendar; we have a calendar. He will never get on ours, but it’s best we get on His!

8 Ways to Defeat the Goliaths in Your Life

Before you conquer Jericho, you must seek God for His war strategy.

Joshua never had to face the kind of fearsome threats that challenge believers today. When he led Israel into the Promised Land, he didn’t have to worry about the likes of

Saddam Hussein, chemical weapons or suicide bombers. On the home front, he didn't have to concern himself with job layoffs, rising gas prices, a shaky stock market or the loss of his retirement portfolio.

But Joshua did have to face his own set of giants. Just across the Jordan River were real threats that had many of his fellow Israelites shaking in their boots.

How did he approach these giants and ultimately defeat them? By pressing into the Lord to gain a fresh strategy for each new battle.

In the perilous times in which we live, many people are filled with fear. There are giants in the land. As Christians, we need to follow Joshua's example. By seeking God each day for fresh words of divine strategy for ourselves, our families and our nation, we can defeat the giants.

Don't Believe the Bad Report

Before the Israelites crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land, Moses sent a team of 12 men to spy out the territory. When the spies returned, 10 of them gave a fear-filled report.

They had seen giants in the land. Next to these giants, they had seemed like mere grasshoppers. Israel could never go up against them and win.

But two spies—Joshua and Caleb—came to a different conclusion. Yes, the giants were big and strong, they said; but they could take the land because the God of Israel was more powerful than any giant.

Unfortunately, the people of Israel chose to believe the report of fear. Never mind that they'd witnessed God's powerful signs and wonders during the course of their escape from Egypt.

Their "grasshopper mentality" resulted in their refusal to

battle the giants and take the land God wanted to give them. Instead they wandered aimlessly in the wilderness for 40 years. Joshua ended up leading an entirely new generation into the promised land.

When we look at the dangers facing us in the world today, do they appear to be giants, while we seem like grasshoppers? Or do we, like Joshua, have faith that our omnipotent God is greater than any enemy we might encounter?

Joshua's Secret

Joshua spent 40 years in the wilderness with the rest of the nation of Israel. His time was not wasted, however. He spent his days in the "secret place" of God's presence, getting to know the Lord in an intimate way.

Whenever Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to meet with the Lord, Joshua would linger nearby (Ex. 33:11). Joshua loved being near the presence and the glory of God.

God used this wilderness period in Joshua's life to prepare him for the monumental battles that lay ahead. By the time he was chosen to be Israel's new leader, he was known as "a man in whom is the spirit" (Num. 27:18).

To overthrow the giants, Joshua would need to draw on the intimate relationship with God that he'd developed in the desert. He would need to seek fresh revelation on a daily basis.

God's Ways Are Not Our Ways

On their way into the Promised Land, the Israelites faced many challenges. Yet with each new challenge, God gave Joshua a unique strategy for success.

Many of the strategies didn't make sense from a military perspective. But as Joshua and the people followed God's ways and not their own, they experienced victory.

The first challenge came before Israel even crossed the Jordan. Under God's divine guidance, Joshua sent two men to spy out Jericho, the first city that Israel would have to conquer.

Once inside the city walls, the two spies were directed by the Lord to a very unlikely hiding place: the home of Rahab the prostitute. It was probably the last place the men expected God to send them. But the Lord knew that Rahab was the one person in Jericho who would take them in.

Because the spies followed God's unusual strategy, they were kept safe. In the process, Rahab came to faith in God and was saved from Jericho's destruction.

When the spies returned to Joshua, they were flush with victory. They immediately filed this faith-filled report: "Truly the Lord has delivered all the land into our hands, for indeed all the inhabitants of the country are faint-hearted because of us" (Josh. 2:24).

With that first challenge successfully behind him, Joshua moved on to the next one: how to get the entire population of Israel across the Jordan. The timing could not have been worse. It was flood season, and the river was overflowing its banks.

Joshua could have said, "Lord, can't we just wait a little longer, until the waters recede?" Instead he listened for God's divine strategy.

The Lord's instructions were specific. First, the priests who were carrying the Ark of the Covenant would step into the river. As their feet touched the water, the current would be held back supernaturally, and the rest of Israel would cross on dry land.

The priests would remain in the riverbed until Joshua appointed one man from each tribe to pick up a stone from the

spot where the priests were standing. Then the stones would be used to build an altar to God so that, as Joshua declared, “all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty” (Josh. 4:24).

Israel’s supernatural crossing of the Jordan made a powerful impression on their enemies. According to Joshua 5:1, “their heart melted; and there was no spirit in them any longer because of the children of Israel.”

When We’re Weak, He’s Strong

The Israelites must have been thrilled with their success and eager to hear God’s next miracle strategy. But the divine instruction that followed was probably not a welcome one.

That generation had been born in the wilderness, and the men had never been circumcised. Now God said each man would need to be identified as a child of Abraham, qualified for covenant blessing, through the act of circumcision.

Here they were, about to go into battle to take the city of Jericho, and the Lord was commanding them to do something painful, something that would make them vulnerable and weak! How could they defeat Jericho if they could barely walk?

But God’s strategy was perfect. He would show Himself strong in their weakness.

Circumcision was only the first step. Through a special visitation from heaven, Joshua was given more divine instructions that must have stumped Israel’s military minds.

Can you imagine this scene? Joshua, Israel’s fearless leader, steps up to the platform. A cheer goes up.

He clears his throat. “The good news is, the Commander of the Lord’s army has just appeared to me,” he says.

The people whoop and yell, waving their shields and jabbing

the air with their swords.

Then he continues: “The bad news is, He gave me the battle plan.” Kicking the sand with his toe, he mumbles, “Uh, priests march, trumpets blow, everyone shouts, walls fall down.”

The confused soldiers scratch their heads. No commander on Earth would plan for a battle like that!

True. The strategies that God gave Joshua for overcoming obstacles and defeating giants were, to say the least, unusual and creative.

Yet the Lord knew the timing and strategy necessary for each victory. When Joshua and the people trusted the Lord’s wisdom above their own and obeyed His direction, God moved with supernatural power to bring them to victory.

Slaying Our Own Giants

Like Joshua, you and I are challenged by many giants. New and potent dangers are all around us, both in the world and in our personal lives.

But we don’t have to shrink in fear. Just as God guided Israel supernaturally, He will also guide us if we learn to be like Joshua and seek Him on a daily basis.

We can have fresh revelation and know God’s divine strategy for each new battle—no matter how big or how powerful the enemy might be. How do we do this? Here are eight keys:

1. Return to your first love. Spend intimate time alone with God—not attending church, not serving in ministry, not reading the current Christian best-seller. Be together, just the two of you.

Cut fluff from your schedule. Lop off any areas of your life that don’t correspond with God-given assignments. Spend long hours waiting in His presence.

2. Intercede. Through prayer, fasting and worship, go into the heavenly war room and get fresh strategies and weapons for each day's new battles. Take comfort knowing that Jesus "always lives to make intercession" for you (Heb. 7:25).

3. Lay aside differences. Do a personal inventory of your relationships with family and friends. Where necessary, relinquish your rights, forgive and love one another as an act of worship to God.

4. Trust Jesus. Identify your fears. Do you see yourself as more than a conqueror, or are you a grasshopper hiding in the giant's shadow?

The issue is your trust in Christ's eternal character. Ask the Lord to show you the strongholds of fear in your life and how, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you can bring them down.

5. Have an ear to hear. Hearing the voice of God is a survival mechanism for us all. The Lord promises that His sheep will hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:3-4). Press in to hear the voice of God, confident that He wants to speak words of deliverance to you.

6. Rest in Him. Did you know that rest is a form of spiritual warfare? Isaiah 30:15 says, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." God wants to give you rest and peace in the midst of turbulent times. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Jesus promised ().

7. Ask for the lost. Ask God how to knock down the fortified walls in your heart and in your world. And while you're at it, ask Him to show you the Rahabs in your workplace, school or community that He wants to pluck from the rubble. Don't be surprised if He uses them to communicate divine strategies that will save your life as well as theirs.

8. Feed your spirit on the goodness of God. Meditate on Psalm

91 and keep a journal of God's faithfulness in your life. Remember His faithfulness as you approach each new battle.

Declare that by grace and faith in the finished work of Jesus, you are an overcomer. God will crush the enemy under your feet! He has done it before; He will do it again.

Before Joshua led the Israelites into the promised land, the Lord told him: "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you. ...Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:3, 9).

You and I have that same promise today. Don't be afraid! Our giants are nothing more than grasshoppers in the eyes of our omnipotent God.

*The late **Jill Austin**, founder of Master Potter Ministries, traveled internationally as a conference speaker for more than 25 years.*

When 'Til Death Do You Part' Becomes a Touching Reality

The marriage vow says "Until death do you part." Sadly, many married couples never make it that far. So when I heard this tribute by Karl Strader to his wife of 60 years, Joyce, at her memorial service last Friday, it brought tears to my eyes.

Karl and Joyce Strader were well known for many years in both the Assemblies of God and also in the charismatic movement. They have been completely retired for more than a decade, and you don't hear much about them. But they were my pastors when

I was a teen, and they probably had more impact on my life during that stage than anyone else other than my own family. In fact, we were so close over the years that some people thought I was related to the Straders.

When I was in high school, they invited the teenagers to their home for an “afterglow” after church services and talked to us about dating and marriage. When my wife, Joy, and I got engaged in 1972, we were in Joyce Strader’s class. She gave us a book on marriage and had a little reception in Sunday school when we were married 42 years ago tomorrow. She used to write notes to me when I was at the University of Florida. She was an intercessor before that term was popular. I knew she prayed for me.

When *Charisma* appeared on the scene several years later, Joyce wrote an article in the first issue on “the chambered nautilus.” Karl was on the cover of *Charisma* twice in the early days.

I asked permission to reproduce this eulogy that Karl wrote about his beloved Joyce. He was too emotional to read it, so someone else did. I think it will touch you and let you know that marriages can be strong and healthy until “death do you part.” Then, if you want to read her eulogy and what her oldest son, Stephen, and her other family members wrote, click [here](#).

Tribute to Joyce Arlene Wead Strader

by Her Husband, Karl Strader

Joyce Arlene is a true queen. She was and still is royalty! When we were married, I told her that I loved her, dearly, but that I loved Jesus, even more. She told me, essentially, the same thing.

She’s the most attractive and finest lady I’ve ever met. I am so thankful to God He’s let me take good care of her for more

than 60 years. The last three or four years have been some of the most special years of our lives. I've been right at her side through all of our 40 years here in one church in Lakeland, but also in Indiana, in Florida at Southeastern University; from Tallahassee to Key West in Youth Work; in conferences, camp meetings, and missions trips all over the world. She's had her own radio broadcast and has helped me in all kinds of special productions, especially for Christmas and Easter, and has taught public school in Lakeland for many years.

When she finally went to the hospital after avoiding it for more than 80 years, except to have our four children, her nurses told me privately that they'd never taken care of such a lovely person, (she always gave them that "big smile of hers"), more than any other patient they'd ever ministered to!

Our four children, all of them, including Dan with his phone calls, and when she visited him, and our grandchildren, all of them, and even the two great-grandchildren when they came to see her, have been right with her to help her with all her needs throughout their whole lives. We have a loving, wonderful family, along with their spouses who love their mother, grandmother and great-grandmother dearly. Our extended family members, many of whom are here today, have a remarkable relationship with Joyce as well. Also, here today are many of her choice friends that, through the years, she has personally ministered to, including many of our fairly new friends we have made at the Estates, the Villa, and the Manor, which is now our home in Lakeland, and has been for the last 10 years. We have grown to love all of you that have changed your schedules around so you could honor her here this morning. Thank you for showing kindness honoring both Joyce and me and our family members. We love you so much.

Now what about me! I'm hurting ... like crazy. I need prayers like anyone else that's lost someone so very dear. I had no idea that it would be this severe! But in talking with the

Lord about it the Tuesday night after Joyce went to heaven, Monday noon, during the middle of a nap, He wants me to spend the time, whatever it is, that I spent in being married, for God; that is, I believe God wants me to revive a prison ministry, to work with my son, Stephen, on an outreach to our local ministers in this area, and to develop a worldwide radio, TV and website ministry in English, Russian and Spanish ... until God calls me home, in addition to the six services a week I have going on right now at the Estates, at Auburndale Life, and at Ignited. Plus, I want to give a minimum of at least 10 percent of my time to God in prayer, and I want to study the Scriptures and the articles of great Christian leaders on how to "Rule and Reign with Jesus" throughout eternity. But I still want to be "available"—as much as you really need me—for my precious family and friends!

When we helped to build the Estates back in 1985, I never planned to retire there. I thought we were building it for people who "missed the rapture." Well, Jesus delayed His coming in order that more folks could be "saved." So, I figured God wanted us to be there to be "salt" and "light." That's where I plan to live for the next 35 years, or until God comes for me sooner!

Thank you for offering up a prayer for me. I really need you.

Steve Strang *is the founder and publisher of Charisma. Follow him on Twitter @sstrang or Facebook (stephenstrang).*