

The Secret to Weight Loss Is No Secret

The secret to weight loss is that there is no secret. Most of us simply have to eat less and exercise more.

You have to face this reality and quit looking for a pill or potion to solve your weight-loss need. So let's talk about the issue of managing your habits. Again the Bible comes to the rescue.

The main verse that has helped me here is 1 Thessalonians 4:4: "Each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor."

In the beginning, I didn't know how to "possess" my own body—I didn't know how to manage it. I had to learn. We can all do better about the way we eat. We can all improve. But how? How do we make choices that are healthy? How do we learn what is best for us?

Proverbs 4:20-22 is helpful: "My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh."

The place to start with lifestyle changes is the Bible—the Word of God. There are two basic things that the Word of God teaches with regard to losing weight and having a healthy lifestyle:

1. Eat in moderation. "And put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite" (Prov. 23:2). For me, and for many of us who are overweight, that means eating less. For all of us it means making healthier eating choices. For someone who is anorexic, it will mean eating sensibly—the right things

in the right portions to keep the body healthy.

2. Get the right amount of exercise. “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Overweight people don’t want to hear that. We blame low metabolism as the reason they can’t lose weight, and it is probably true for many of us. But some of you are skinny and you have terrible eating habits.

You are sneaking by because you have high metabolism. While many overweight people envy you, you too may be a glutton. (Tough talk, huh?) I’m not a scientist or a nutritionist, but I know we can’t use slow metabolism as an excuse to be overweight. We have to get our body moving. We have to exercise to get our metabolism going. If you do enough exercise and eat less, you will very likely lose weight.

How then shall you eat? The answer to what shall we eat is simple: *better* and *less*. Eat less, and eat foods that are as close to the way God made them as possible—straight from the ground, straight from the trees.

Eat food for health and not because you think it will make you happy.

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7 Honest Questions You Need to Ask About Your Marriage

Karen and I have been married 40 years, but the first three years of our marriage were miserable. We thought once we were married, things would be great and we would live happily ever after. Were we ever wrong! And our naïveté almost ended in divorce.

Thankfully, it didn't. And that's due in large part to our commitment then—and now—to marriage maintenance. Yes, that's right: I included now in that equation. Because whether you're on the brink of divorce or thriving in your partnership, marriage requires continual upkeep. Karen and I learned that the hard way, but hopefully you don't have to.

Have you checked under the hood of your marriage lately? Here's a seven-point checklist to keep your marriage well-oiled and running smoothly.

1) How is your relationship with God?

Your spouse can't meet your deepest needs, and you can't meet theirs. That may fly in the face of what our culture wants you to believe, but it's true. When God paired Adam and Eve in the garden, He walked with them in their midst. That's the picture of how marriage works—with God at the center. When Adam and Eve rebelled, their marriage suffered as they lost the garden God had created for them to share.

When Karen and I married, we were believers but didn't know how to rely on the Lord daily. Because of that, we tried to get our deepest needs met through each other, which only resulted in frustration and bitterness. We thought we'd made a mistake in marrying each other—but we didn't. Our mistake was in trying to squeeze God out of each other.

The most important thing Karen and I do for our marriage every day is to start each day with prayer, the Bible and seeking God. That's where we take our cares, needs, hurts and desires. In that daily prayer time, the Lord heals, fills and empowers us with His incredible love.

Because here's the truth: Our deepest needs are acceptance, identity, security and purpose. These driving needs motivate us daily whether we realize it or not—and only God can meet those four needs on the deepest level of our lives. When we lack a relationship with Him in which those needs get met, we automatically transfer that expectation to our spouse, thus setting up our marriage and our mate for failure.

The most important issue in your marriage is your personal, daily, dynamic relationship with God. If you're rusty in this area, you probably need to apologize to your spouse for putting too much pressure on them—and to the Lord for not keeping yourself in well-tuned, daily fellowship with Him. When you've been with God, you can love your spouse properly. You'll find your expectations right, your heart healthy and yourself ready to love out of the overflow of God's love that's already in you.

2) How are your marriage disciplines and traditions?

In marriage, it isn't what you can make happen but what you can keep happening. Many married couples become distracted after a period of time and stop caring for each other's needs. Then they begin to fight and a big blow-up hides just around the corner. If they work through it, they may go for a second honeymoon or romantic getaway. But once that phase is over, they go right back into the negative cycle of distraction, fighting, making up and so on. The longer this cycle recurs, the more dangerous it becomes and the harder it gets to make up and keep going.

Good marriages prioritize regular disciplines and traditions

that ensure the right things keep happening. For example, almost all good marriages include a date night or date day in the weekly or monthly routine. It isn't in response to a fight or a crisis. It is a proactive discipline in the relationship.

Early in our marriage, Karen and I walked together every morning for an hour and a half. We would pray for 45 minutes and talk for 45 minutes. It was one of the best things we ever did with each other.

Do you have a date night (or day)? Do you prioritize your marriage and protect the time and energy you have together? Don't wait for a convenient time. Make it happen, and keep it going.

3) Are you emotionally bilingual?

You're no doubt familiar with the old saying "Marriage is about becoming one." But maybe you haven't heard the cynical response: "Yes, but which one?"

In many marriages, a battle is forged to see which language gets spoken in the home—the man's or the woman's. But we are different by God's design, and we have different needs. Men need honor. Women need security. Men need sex. Women need nonsexual touch and affection. Men need to be friends with their wives. Women need open and honest communication. Men need their wives to be domestically centered. Women need their husbands to lead.

The essence of romance is speaking in your spouse's language as you meet their needs in love. Romance is not a language lesson; it's a language *demonstration*, where you enter your spouse's world and speak love the way they understand it. When a husband and wife both do this, they are in heaven. But many marriages never make it to that point.

For your marriage to succeed, you'll need to meet needs in your spouse that you don't have. And they'll need to do the

same for you. The greatest marriage is two servants in love who sacrifice for each other. The worst is two selfish people who demand to be served.

Again, we are different by God's design, and it is unchangeable. Because of this, one key to a great marriage is becoming emotionally bilingual. Don't speak love in your own language; speak it in your spouse's language. As you do, you'll see them light up and respond.

Are you emotionally bilingual? What's your spouse's language? How can you speak it today—and every day?

4) Do you make decisions together as equals?

Marriage is about sharing. Yet it's amazing how many couples don't share decisions. Either one spouse dominates the relationship or both people share the same house but live separate lives.

Karen and I make all our important decisions together, and this is crucial to the intimacy and goodwill of our relationship. We don't bully each other or make each other pay a price for being honest. When we make decisions, we first submit them to God and pray. Our marriage is not a battle of wills; it is a search for His will. Then, because we share all the big decisions, there's no chance for resentment or division to creep into our life together.

Do you and your spouse make decisions together? Do you respect your spouse's input? Are you willing to compromise, or is it your way or the highway? This is a big issue with a big payoff when you make the commitment to slow down, pray, talk and agree.

5) Who are your friends?

Paul doesn't pull any punches when he says, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Your friends are your future. You become like the company you keep. If you don't believe that, you're deceived.

Karen and I are committed to our local church and Christian friends. None of our friends are perfect, and we aren't perfect either, but we're all committed to living for Christ and to our marriages. In 40 years of friendship with dozens of couples, only one of those couples has divorced—and prior to that divorce, the husband left church and developed a close friendship with a ungodly man.

We live in an immoral, evil world. There's never been such a strong pull of sin on all our lives. In response, we must be honest about our vulnerabilities and need for each other. I doubt Karen and I would be together today if it weren't for the support and encouragement we received when we needed it most from our church and believing friends.

Realize that the "company we keep" includes entertainment, computers, Facebook and television. We must be careful and accountable about these things, as they have become prominent features in our culture and can be just as impactful on us as our friends.

Are you a committed member of a local church? Do you have friends who are committed believers and committed to their marriages? Are you accountable concerning your entertainment? The degree to which you take these things seriously is the degree to which your marriage has a chance to thrive.

6) Are you empathetic to your spouse?

Marriage research reveals one of the most important features in successful marriages is the ability to empathize with one's spouse. That simply means we are sensitive to them and "feel for them." It means we care about how our actions affect them. It means caring for what they are going through and just caring for them in general.

When we date and fall in love, we are naturally empathetic to the other person. We work hard at trying to please them. We're sensitive and try to do things to make the other person feel good.

But then life happens. And in the process of paying the bills, of children, of sickness, of money stress and work stress, of in-laws and the IRS, we wake up one day to find issues crowded between us. If those issues aren't dealt with properly, we end up hardened toward the other person. The empathy we once felt becomes frustration. We focus no longer on our spouse's feelings but our own.

When Karen and I were on the verge of divorce, I had become very angry with her. I felt mistreated and that I'd made a mistake in marrying her. It was all about me. As issues accumulated between us, I began focusing on the negatives in her and feeling sorry for myself. The young man who was so tender-hearted toward Karen when we dated became a hard-hearted husband who couldn't care less about how my behavior affected her. I was convinced that if Karen would just change, everything would miraculously become fine.

Even as I believed that, Karen suffered from my dominance and verbal abuse. The change in our marriage only began when God broke through my hard heart and let me see myself as I really was. At that moment, I realized how domineering and damaging I had become. Standing at the brink of divorce, I finally began to empathize with Karen again. I put myself in her shoes and came to the stark realization of what it must have been like to be married to me.

Being empathetic is a choice, not an emotion. Regardless of the condition of your marriage, start thinking about how your spouse might be feeling. Forgive them, and ask the Lord to give you the grace to act above your emotions.

7) Is your marriage first?

Genesis 2:24 says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and be joined to his wife." As I'm sure you already know, marriage requires leaving and cleaving. In other words, for marriage to work, it has to be first in your life. It won't work any other way.

Back when Karen and I were on the verge of that divorce, I was addicted to golf. I played almost every day. Karen complained about it because it kept me away from our family, and when I was home I was exhausted. Even though I told her she was first, it wasn't true. In real terms, golf came before her.

Part of the healing of our marriage came when I hung up my golf clubs for Karen. In doing so, I expressed to her in real terms she was first. The result was a resurrection in the garden of our love that had been destroyed through my distraction.

In real terms, your marriage must come before your children, your church, your friends, your smartphone, your family, your work and everything else going on in your life. This is the way God designed marriage, and it simply won't work another way.

Making your marriage first means saying no to other things. It means saving time and energy for your spouse every day and protecting your marriage from intruders. It means doing little things like turning off your phone when it's time to talk to them, ignoring incoming calls and texts, making eye contact when they speak, turning off the TV or computer to spend time together and putting down the newspaper so you can have a real conversation.

Does something else come before your spouse right now? Is your marriage really first? Keeping your marriage first—along with all these other checkpoints required for healthy maintenance—is crucial for keeping your marriage on the open road.

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Jimmy Evans discusses five key standards for achieving successful communication in your marriage at

3 Ways to Judge the Misuse of Spiritual Gifts

At some point, every pastor confronts a seeming paradox of Pentecost: If a person is demonstrating a genuine spiritual gift, how is it possible to misuse that gift?

Scripture doesn't leave us in the dark on this matter. Paul, in writing to the Corinthian church about the use of spiritual gifts in a worship gathering, made it clear: "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets" (1 Cor. 14:32, NIV). In other words, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to speak in tongues, to interpret tongues, to prophesy—but He does not force us to blurt out those gifts. He expects His gifts to be exercised with discretion and maturity.

The test that I believe should be applied to all spiritual

gifts is simple and threefold:

- 1. Does it glorify Jesus Christ?**
- 2. Does it edify the saints?**
- 3. Is it a good witness to nonbelievers?**

If it fails any one of those tests, it probably is out of order.

“But wait a minute,” someone might object, “if something is bringing glory to Jesus Christ, don’t the saints and nonbelievers have a problem if they can’t receive that?”

Not really. An utterance that simply proclaims praise to Jesus is not truly glorifying to Him if it is disruptive, compromises the spiritual life and growth of the redeemed, or puts a roadblock in the path of those needing redemption. Jesus is truly glorified when His church worships in unity, creating an environment where the Holy Spirit can powerfully convict and transform the lost.

The acid test of spirituality is whether or not a person can receive correction. The person who is unreceptive or even defensive because he or she is corrected in the use of a spiritual gift is really demonstrating a lack of preparation to be used in that gift expression in the first place. By the same token, a pastor who might read the guidance offered in this article and take offense should do some soul-searching. Is he or she truly prepared to encourage the kind of gift expression in the congregation that will bring about the fullest possible spiritual life?

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Not All Religious Spirits Are Created Equal

Religious spirits are nefariously nasty. The **spirit of religion** works to murder reputations, pervert the revelation of who we are in Christ, put us in bondage to legalism and much more. But I've discovered in recent years that all religious spirits aren't created equal.

Actually, a more accurate way to state it may be that all religious spirits don't manifest in the same way. Or, put yet another way, religious mindsets express themselves through manifold methods. I've often said you can't put a prophet in a box. Well, it turns out you can't put a religious mindset in a box either.

What do I mean?

Well, practically speaking, "**religion**" doesn't like a woman to preach. A man may support his wife completely in ministry, defying the **spirit of religion** that would keep her in bondage, yet offer prophetic words of judgment and cursing that stem from a Sons of Thunder mindset.

By the same token, a woman may not think of speaking an ill word against anyone—even if she doesn't agree with them—but nevertheless hold them to a set of rules and regulations to which she cannot even live up. That's called legalism.

The point, again, is that the **religious spirits**—or religious mindsets—manifest in different ways. We need to discern the operations of this wicked spirit in whatever form it reveals itself and resist it. Make no mistake, the **religious spirit** wants to keep you from entering into the fullness of the

kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17).

Religion's Hypocrisy

One of the earmarks of the **religious spirit** is hypocrisy. One may walk in obedience to the Lord—walking in love with their brothers and sisters in Christ—up until a certain point. Unless you cross that line, you'll never see their **religious spirit** in all its wickedness.

The woman caught in the act of adultery is a good example. You remember the story. The scribes and Pharisees brought Jesus a woman caught in sin—in the very act of adultery. They wanted to see her stoned and asked Jesus what He had to say about it (John 8:1-5). Of course, they didn't drag the man alongside her to be punished. Hypocrisy.

Of course, that's not the only way religion manifests hypocrisy, either. The apostle Peter wasn't likely to stone anyone for adultery. He understood the work of the cross—up to and only up to a point. Peter and Barnabas were enjoying eating with the Gentile converts in Antioch until the Jewish brethren came to visit from Jerusalem. Then he distanced himself. Paul rebuked him for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-21).

Religion's Manifold Manifestations

I focused on hypocrisy because it's the heartbeat of the religious spirit (or mindset). Although not reserved for believers—nonbelievers can have a legalistic mindset as well—Christians with a **religious spirit** are essentially working against the gospel in which they say they believe. Jesus said, "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in" (Matt. 23:13).

Now, many of the Pharisees quite literally would not enter in

to the kingdom of God. Still today we see that some Christians who have a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim. 3:5). Religious spirits deny the power and grace of God to change people and in doing so wax judgmental, self-righteous, prideful, critical, legalistic and argumentative with fellow believers (and lost souls).

That's hypocrisy because anyone who receives Christ should obey Him from the heart, and we are given one new commandment: to love one another (John 13:34). The religious spirit manifests with anything but love. Religious mindsets are often divisive, perfectionistic, guilt-heaping, condemning, intolerant and more.

Don't Go on a Witch Hunt

With all that said, it's important not to go on a witch hunt against people who are influenced by **religious spirits**—or any other spirit—or you may start flowing in the same mindset you are trying to combat!

I've discovered that most of us have religious mindsets about something or another. So we need to check our own hearts and motives above all—and when we see a person operating in a religious spirit, we need to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matt. 10:16). Sometimes we're called to confront it like Paul did with Peter, but most of the time we're called to our knees to ask God to break through their religious mindset with His light.

Let me repeat that: Most of us have some form of religious thinking. We don't need to be hypocrites by rebuking the religious around us. Amen.

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Are You Fighting the Right Enemy?

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12, NKJV).

Sun Tzu was a Chinese general, military strategist, philosopher and author who lived about five centuries before the birth of Christ. His book *The Art of War* is considered a masterpiece on military strategy. In it, he made this observation:

“It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.”

As Paul wrote, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but too many times, we as Christians lose sight of that. Our nature as humans is to want to have someone to look in the eyes, blame, fight and scream at. Many Christians fail to recognize the truth of Ephesians 6:12, so we attack the symptom (those around us) and not the problem (spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies).

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be

loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:18-20, NIV).

Although we sometimes fail to properly identify our real enemy, rest assured our enemy has no such problem. Our enemy Satan views the church united as his greatest threat and is constantly on the prowl to tear down agreement within the body of Christ. Until we recognize this, we will always be at a disadvantage strategically.

While Jesus has already won the ultimate victory, we must be ever vigilant in defending the biblical model for miracle relationships, our God-ordained weapon with which we fight the day-to-day battles while on this earth. To paraphrase Sun Tzu, if we understand the enemy and understand how we as the body of Christ should function, we need not live in fear but in confidence and victory instead.

Cain, Ham, Esau, Saul, Ahab and Jezebel—All Dead and Buried, Right?

So, how can we still be fighting them on a daily basis? While these historical and biblical figures have long since returned to the dust, the "spiritual force of wickedness"—the demon—that had attached itself to them during their life is still alive and well. We see them in our world and in our churches on a daily basis. You may know these spirits by other names or attributes:

- Cain—the spirit of jealousy
- Ham—the spirit of dishonor
- Esau—the spirit of bitterness
- Saul—the spirit of paranoia
- Rehoboam—the spirit of pride
- Ahab—the spirit of codependence
- Jezebel—the spirit of control

- Gomer—the spirit of seduction, harlotry and lust
- Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar (Job’s friends)—the spirits of religion and legalism
- Judas Iscariot and Demas—the spirit of betrayal
- Elymas—the spirit of manipulation

Each one of these demons has the ability to chip away at the miracle relationships Jesus encourages us to seek out. Each one of these has to be recognized, identified and dealt with using the proper “weapon of our warfare.” For example:

- Counter pride with humility (Ps. 149:4).
- Counter paranoia with a renewed mind (Rom. 12:1-2).
- Counter control with faith in God (Rom. 5:1-5).
- Counter lust with God’s righteousness (Matt. 6:33).

And the key to all of our weapons? Grace.

Grace is the key to our warfare. Grace is the “nuclear football” that arms the arsenal of faith. You have to know God’s grace, grow in grace, and show His grace. It’s not enough to simply waylay the enemy and take no prisoners. We must, as the blood-bought army of the Most High God, bring grace and freedom to those who have been held captive in the camp of the enemy.

Maybe you have misidentified your enemy. Maybe the person you think of as an enemy is the very person you are supposed to come alongside and come into agreement with. Maybe you have fallen into the trap of division and disunity and need a fresh start. You can walk in peace, freedom and unity today, starting right now.

Pray this prayer: *Dear Lord, forgive me for waging war against other people. I know my battle is not with them but with the enemy. Give me the strength and the power to wage war against the enemy. Satan, you are a liar, murderer and thief. You have been defeated by the blood of Jesus Christ. I choose to walk in victory today. I choose to forgive those who have hurt me*

and to move forward with my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

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Why It Really Matters That You Keep the Sabbath

During the creation account, God worked for six full days and rested on the seventh. Was He exhausted? Did He need time to recoup? Or was there a holy meaning for this seventh day?

According to rabbinical literature, in Genesis 2:1, when God finished the heavens and the earth, He then made it permanent. During those six days while God was creating, there was instability all around. Nothing had been made permanent as God

determined if this plan would work.

Then, in Genesis 2:2, where it says, "God ended His work," we find the Hebrew word *vayinafash*, which means *soul*. Rabbis teach that when God stopped creating on the Sabbath, the life source was brought down into each level of creation and became fixed there within its permanent fashion. Before the Sabbath came, the world literally stood by like a body without a soul, and every aspect of creation was without the inner essence of life. The holy Sabbath day brought the soul of creation, and through it, existence became whole.

Let me use the covenant of circumcision to show you a parallel. Why does God tell Abraham to circumcise his son on the eighth day? What is so special about the eighth day? Because according to rabbis, the Sabbath brings the soul. Just as it was necessary for the first Sabbath to arrive upon the world scene before creation was imbued with a soul, so it is with our inner essence of life. By establishing a Sabbath in a child's life, it would bring a permanence of his soul, enabling him to come into the covenant of circumcision.

So now let's go back to when God completed the work. The Sabbath confirmed the permanence of existence. In Exodus 20:11, God institutes Sabbath as part of the Ten Commandments. We read verse 11 this way: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth." In Hebrew, it really reads this way: "For six days, God created the heavens and the earth."

What's the difference? Rabbis teach that "for six days" means that God only put power in creation to last for six days, never forming it into permanence. Then, on the seventh day, God instituted the Sabbath, which God used to restore and revive the world's soul. This enabled it to carry on with the burden of existence for another six days. Therefore, through the process of Sabbath, the world is constantly renewed and given a new lease on life. Make sure you get this: Each Sabbath, God renews creation!

Adam, the first man, was created from the dirt of the earth. We are a part of God's creation, which means we are designed to be a part of Sabbath. However, we are the highest form of creation, with qualities like God, giving us free will to partner with God or reject His ways.

I believe that we are experiencing stress, anxiety, fear and failure—among other things—because we fail to participate in the life-restoring day of Sabbath. We live in a generation of distractions and opportunities on every side. You can fill your day with countless—and sometimes pointless—things to take up time. Because of the fast-paced society we live in, the culture doesn't participate in Sabbath, which forces many believers to not acknowledge it as well. The Sabbath was not instituted to put us under bondage, but, if acknowledged, it will restore and rejuvenate us to be people of God who make a difference in the world.

People do not understand the amount of stress and anxiety our current generation is under. Historians are declaring that when generations to come look back on this time period, it will be called the "age of anxiety." According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, 40 million people in the United States of America suffer from some type of anxiety disorder. Why are we in the condition we are in? We have more technology and luxuries than ever before to make life easier, and yet we still live under stress. These things can't replace a God-ordained day to be observed—the Sabbath.

Where there is lack of Sabbath, there will be an abundance of stress. The human body was created to experience stress and to react to it. Stress can be positive, keeping us alert and ready to avoid danger. But if a person continues to experience stress without relief or relaxation between challenges, it becomes negative stress. Negative stress without relief leads to distress, which then affects your natural body. The body under constant distress leads to physical conditions, including headaches, upset stomach, elevated blood pressure,

chest pain and problems sleeping.

Here are just a few facts about stress: Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health affects from stress. Seventy-five percent to 90 percent of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration declared stress a hazard of the workplace. Stress costs the American industry more than \$300 billion annually!

When we are stressed, it not only affects our health, but also causes us to be unable to make a positive impact upon those around us. God's design for man was for you to make an impact for six days and then give Him one day to rejuvenate you to be effective for another six. This keeps us God-focused, showing us the true source of grace is taking a day of rest to reflect, recommit to God and be in His presence.

My prayer for you today is that you will not read this article and wonder if Saturday or Sunday is the Sabbath day but rather would take a day of Sabbath rest so that you can recoup, reflect and recommit to God in order to make an impact upon the culture around you. The Sabbath will be the key to being an effective person for God in a distracted, unfruitful culture.

Thank you, Chik-fil-A and Hobby Lobby for being an example of what we can do as believers to be successful in only six days of business while honoring and dedicating one complete day to God alone.

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The Apostle Paul and Homosexuality—Answering Homosexual Objections (Part 1)

For almost the entire 2,000 years of recorded Christian history, the apostle Paul's condemnation of all types of homosexual practice was considered an unquestionable fact of biblical teaching. Not until the sexual revolution of the 1960s did "gay liberation theologians" emerge to dispute and distort the plain reading of Scripture on this subject. And as Michael L. Brown further notes in his excellent book *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* "Every major dictionary of New Testament Greek or Classical Greek understood Paul's key vocabulary (in particular, the word *arsenokoites*) to refer to men engaging in homosexual acts."

Furthermore, the historic theological consensus expressed no distinction between exploitative (prostitution, rape, pederasty, promiscuity, sex slaves) and nonexploitative (consensual, committed, monogamous) forms of homosexuality. The divine prohibition against aberrant homoerotic behavior was considered comprehensive and unequivocal. But that was then, and this is now.

With society's rapid moral decline, rejection of authority and a self-centered approach to life, God's Word has come under an intense, unrelenting assault. And only the strong have been able to withstand the anti-Christian onslaught.

We will be examining two particular Pauline passages with an emphasis on the Greek word *arsenokoites* (plural, *arsenokoitai*), which is properly translated as *homosexual*. We will also answer the common

objections to the traditional—and, I might add, the accurate—interpretation of each of these crucial texts.

First Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners [*malakoi*], practicing homosexuals [*arsenokoitai*], thieves, the greedy, drunkards, the verbally abusive, and swindlers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you once lived this way. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

First Timothy 1:8-11 says, “But we know that the law is good if someone uses it legitimately, realizing that law is not intended for a righteous person, but for lawless and rebellious people, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, sexually immoral people, practicing homosexuals [*arsenokoitais*], kidnappers, liars, perjurers—in fact, for any who live contrary to sound teaching. This accords with the glorious gospel of the blessed God that was entrusted to me.”

Many biblical scholars identify the word *arsenokoitai(es)* as a neologism (a newly coined term) created by the apostle Paul or Greek-speaking Jews living around the turn of the millennium. From the apostle Paul’s initial usage through 1453 A.D., the *Greek Language Thesaurus* at the University of California, Irvine, lists 73 occurrences of the *arsenokoit* stem. The first two are found in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, and all of the remaining 71 references come *after* the biblical citations made by the apostle Paul. Therefore, these later occurrences cannot be argued to have any influence on the meaning of Paul’s usage of the term—if anything, it would have to be the other way around.

So, where or how could he have possibly conceived of such a word? The answer is quite simple. We need only look to the

Septuagint (from the second century B.C.), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The authors of the Bible, including Paul, read and included quotations from the Septuagint in the New Testament. If we look at the Septuagint's translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, we find the two Greek stems from which Paul constructed the compound word translated as *homosexual*.

In particular, here's what we find in Leviticus 20:13: *hos an koimethe meta arsenos koiten gunaikos*. *Arsenos* is translated as *male*, and the word *koiten* means "to lie/bed with," which is a euphemistic reference to sexual intercourse. In fact, the linguistic connection between *koiten* and the English word *coitus* is noticeably apparent. As a compound word [*arsenos + koiten = arsenokotai(es)*], it is clearly referring to same-sex male intercourse.

The traditional understanding of Paul's grammatical structure is also confirmed by the homosexual-affirming *LGBTQ Online Encyclopedia*, which states, "And so we have, describing Oedipus, *metrokoitēs*, 'a man who lies with his mother,' *doulokoitēs*, 'a man who lies with maidservants or female slaves,' *polykoitēs*, 'a man who lies with many,' and *onokoitēs*, 'a man who lies with donkeys,' [slanderously] said of Christians in a graffito from Carthage of about 195."

Dan O. Via, the pro-homosexual professor emeritus of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, writes in his co-authored book *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views*, "The term is a compound of the words for 'male' (*arsen*) and 'bed' (*koite*) and thus could naturally be taken to mean a man who goes to bed with other men. True, the meaning of a compound word does not necessarily add up to the sum of its parts. But in this case I believe the evidence suggests that it does. In the Greek version of the two Leviticus passages that condemn male homosexuality (Lev 18:22; 20:13) a man is not to lie with a male as with a woman each text contains both the words *arsen* and *koite*. First Cor 6:9-10 simply classifies

homosexuality as a moral sin that finally keeps one out of the kingdom of God.”

Likewise, the ancient rabbis utilized the Hebrew phrase *miskab zakur* (lying with a male), which is taken from the Masoretic text (a Hebrew translation of the Old Testament) of Leviticus 20:13, to denote the sin of homosexual sex.

Emeritus professor William Loader, of Murdoch University in Australia, is a New Testament scholar and a strong proponent for same-sex marriage. Loader has written eight significant books on sexuality in early Judaism and Christianity, and he has established himself as one of the premier scholars on sexual ethics for this time period. In *The New Testament on Sexuality*, Loader contends that “it is inconceivable that [Paul] would approve of any same-sex acts if, as we must assume, he affirmed the prohibitions of Lev 18:22; 20:13 as fellow Jews of his time understood them.” Again, Loader affirms, “It is also hard to imagine that Paul would approach [issues of homosexual practice] without awareness of the prohibition of same-sex relations in Lev 18:22 and 20:13, which had come to be applied to both men and women.”

Besides the first-century rabbinical prohibitions against homosexuality, the instructions in Genesis (1:27, 2:24), the words of Jesus (Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9) and the apostle Paul’s own additional words (1 Cor. 7:2; Eph. 5:31) make it abundantly clear that the Bible defines marriage in opposite-gender terminology and forbids all forms of homosexual deviancy. There is simply no reasonable way to arrive at the ridiculous conclusion that Paul would argue to the contrary.

Objection #1: The apostle Paul was only referring to exploitative homosexual relationships when he referred to the word *arsenokoitai(es)*.

When reading the apostle Paul’s words about homosexuality, modern “gay apologists” assert either ambiguity or alternative

meanings for the original Greek word found in the biblical text. Instead of *arsenokoites* (plural, *arsenokoitai*), they claim that a much better and clearer Greek term was available for Paul's usage if he had actually intended to condemn nonexploitative, monogamous homosexual relationships.

However, there is absolutely no scholarly agreement regarding the identification of this elusive "better" Greek word. The suggested alternatives are all over the map, and there is nothing even remotely close to a consensus—even among liberal scholars. Some contend that the apostle Paul should have utilized *paiderasste* to more precisely indicate consensual same-sex activity between adult males. However, this term more accurately refers to adult male relationships with minor-aged boys, as can easily be seen by considering the very close Greek relative *paiderastía*, which is translated into English as *pederasty*.

Others argue for terms such as *arrenomanes* or *maiandros*, which were both extremely obscure terms during antiquity. *Arrenomanes* occurs in only two ancient Greek writings (. 8(2).43 and v.1 in) and *maiandros* appears in just one ancient Greek manuscript (. 83). *Arrenomanes* and *maiandros* are also literally interpreted as "mad after males/men," and each could actually be argued to have the more specific meaning of sex-crazed, promiscuous homosexuals.

As for the Greek words which were commonly employed during the first century to describe sodomy (*arrenomixia*, *androbateo*, *androbates*), each of them are definitely too general and imprecise. They can be broadly understood to mean sexual activities that are either oral, anal or animal in nature.

If the apostle Paul had utilized the word *androkoites*, the issue of ambiguity would have been even more pronounced since *andros* can be translated as either *man* or *mankind*. And,

of course, "mankind" includes both males and females. So, when the apostle Paul chose the linguistic stem *arsen(os)*, the result was much greater clarity and certainty. This distinct Greek term can only be properly translated as *male*.

Each of the aforementioned alternative terms exhibit greater ambiguity and/or are less descriptive of nonexploitative, monogamous homosexual relationships. Therefore, *Arsenokoitai(es)* unquestionably represents the best option at the apostle Paul's disposal. It also makes profoundly much more sense for Paul to choose a word derived from the Septuagint, a source that would have certainly been more familiar and accessible to him and his scriptural audience. As Dr. Robert Gagnon flatly told me in a recent telephone interview, "There is no better word!"

Objection #2: The apostle Paul had no concept of sexual orientation.

To begin with, such an assertion denies the critically important doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). Since the apostle Paul wrote every biblical word as he was "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21), his psycho-social knowledge of homosexuality is irrelevant. First Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 were actually written by the God who knows all things.

Not that I am agreeing with the popular, contemporary understanding of "sexual orientation," but such theories are actually nothing new. In fact, the great minds of the Greco-Roman world posited several hypotheses, each of which argued for a congenital, biological or other unchosen basis for homosexual attraction. The proposed theories are found in numerous sources including Platonic, Aristotelian, Hippocratic and even astrological texts.

They include the following:

1. A creation narrative involving the splitting of three original types of binary humans (Plato's *Symposium*, 189e-193c). As Robert Gagnon explains, "Aristophanes constructs a myth about human origins in which humans were once binary beings, one type consisting of man-man, another of female-female, and a third kind of male-female. When they attempted to extend their power to the heavens, Zeus sliced each in two and closed up the wounds. Ever since then, all humans long for their other half" (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 353).

2. A particular mix of male and female sperm elements at conception (Hippocratic treatise *De Victu*).

3. An inherited disease analogous to a mutated gene (Soranus, *De Morbis Chronicis*,).

4. Sperm ducts leading to the anus (Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1148b, lines 28-34; Pseudo-Aristotle, *Prob.* 4:26).

5. An inherited disease of the mind.

6. The particular alignment of the heavenly constellations at the time of one's birth.

7. And for women, the anatomical deformity of an overly large clitoris.

(The last three theories are described in Bernadette Brooten's *Love Between Women*, 140-141, 172, 242-43, 360-61; also John Boswell, *Homosexuality*, 52).

Some of the ancient theories are obviously closer to our modern explanations than others. What matters, though, is that many in the ancient world attributed one or more forms of homosexual practice to an interplay of nature and nurture. Others also viewed same-sex attractions as exclusive and very resistant to change. And every one of these theories predated the apostle Paul. So, he most certainly would have had access

to, and heard about, such concepts. Yet, despite the fact that these theories were not foreign to first century, educated Jews, the apostle Paul nonetheless unequivocally condemned homosexual practice.

Objection #3: The concept of committed, loving, monogamous relationships was completely foreign to the apostle Paul or anyone living during the first century A.D.

Gagnon confronted retired Episcopal Bishop Eugene Robinson for his repeated appeal to this erroneous objection during a 2012 debate entitled "A Conversation on the Definition of Marriage" held at the Skyline Wesleyan Church in La Mesa, California. On this occasion, Dr. Gagnon indicated that Roman poet Martial (ca. 40-104 A.D.) and satirist Juvenal (ca. late first century to early second century) each referred derisively to effeminate men who willingly committed themselves as "brides" to another man of equal age. For example, Juvenal mentioned Gracchus, "a man renowned for his family background and his wealth," who "wedded" a common cornet player through the issuing of semi-official "marriage" documents (*Satire* , 125, 129).

Even earlier, in Plato's *Symposium* (ca. 380 B.C.), Aristophanes remarked about male-male relationships: "They [the two men] continue with one another throughout life ... desiring to join together and to be fused into a single entity ... and to become one person from two" (192E). In the Greek historian Plutarch's *Dialogue on Love* (late first to early second century C.E.), Protogenes further argued for the superiority of committed homosexual male relationships (750D, 4).

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) also mentioned with revulsion "women ... contrary to nature ... marrying women," and he identified such arrangements as a violation of Scripture (*Paedagogus*). So, although committed homosexual relationships

were in existence during New Testament times, the apostle Paul still described them as unnatural and immoral.

Finally, the sequential use of the two Greek terms *malakoi(s)* and *arsenokoitai(es)* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 provides additional confirmation for the traditional understanding of Paul's negative viewpoint on homosexuality. In *The New Testament on Sexuality*, pro-gay William Loader reminds us that the apostle Paul "uses the two terms with reference to men who engage in same-sex behavior, with the first [*malakoi*] referring to the willing passive partner, whether by private consent or as a male prostitute, 'those who submit to sexual penetration by other men,' and the second [*arsenokoitai*] referring to 'those who engage in sexual penetration of other men,' which would have a broader reference and include, but not be limited to, exploitation, also by force." Likewise, Dr. Michael L. Brown in *Can You Be Gay and Christian?* explains, "Significantly, when the two words *malakos* and *arsenokoites* are used side by side, the sexual connotations are undeniable, which is why there is virtually unanimous agreement in all major dictionaries and translations."

The apostle Paul's condemnation of all types of homosexual behavior is clear and incontrovertible. There is really no ambiguity in his words, and every single homosexual counterargument falls flat when held up to the scrutiny of the linguistic and historical evidence. As the gay-friendly *GLBTQ Online Encyclopedia* specifies, "The bad news from the Christian Bible is that it condemns same-sex desire and same-sex acts without qualification of age, gender, role, status, consent, or membership in an ethnic community." And there is a substantial number of liberal, homosexual or pro-gay Ph.D. scholars who also agree that the Bible generally, and Paul specifically, forbids homosexuality.

Author's Note: *Two primary sources were utilized for this column: Robert Gagnon's excellent The Bible and Homosexual*

Practice and Michael L. Brown's highly recommended Can You Be Gay and Christian?

Jeff Allen is both senior editor and a columnist for *BarbWire*. He also serves as senior pastor in a mainline Christian church in Indiana.

Darlene Zschech Ends Chemo, Starts Worshipping Again

Nearly five months ago, former Hillsong Church worship pastor Darlene Zschech announced that she had breast cancer and would undergo chemotherapy. Now the popular singer and songwriter is thanking prayer warriors for their efforts during the battle.

Zschech announced she has officially finished her last round of chemo and says *hallelujah* is the best word to describe how she feels about it. The battle isn't over. She starts radiation this coming week—and that will last six weeks.

“I shall be glowing from the inside out,” she quips. “And then that's it. Never again.”

Zschech again thanks her fans for continued prayers.

“On the days where I have felt I cannot do it anymore, I literally have felt the strength of people praying for me,” she wrote on her blog. “The power of the Holy Spirit to comfort and strengthen has been beyond what I have ever experienced before. Again, I am so thankful for every one of you.”

Zschech says she's had a lot of time to think—and think deeply. During this time, she says, she's reflected and prayed

on many things.

“I cry easily, not necessarily sad tears, but tears all the same,” she says. “Even when I’m laughing I end up crying. I think the tears have taken the place of words for the time being. This too shall pass. One day the words to define this season will come. And I pray they bring hope to all who hear.”

“Even though I unashamedly begged for God to heal me before treatment,” she says, “He said to me that as I walked through He would never leave me.

“This is the truth for all of us today, no matter what you may be facing, even if God feels far away, our loving Father will never leave us or forsake us. I take great pleasure in knowing this beyond a shadow of a doubt. He is with me. He is with you.”

Zschech says she’s excited about leading worship Sunday at church—the first time since the journey started.

“Even if its [sic] a bit rough and ready, leading people to the courts of our God is my greatest honor. I simply cannot wait!” she says. “His presence truly is heaven. We will pray on Sunday night for all those needing healing, and for all of you who’ve asked us to pray for loved ones. Yes we shall. Healing, in Jesus name.”

School Shows Children Same-Sex Marriage Propaganda Video

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) sent Janesville School District in Wisconsin a letter Wednesday applauding its

apology for showing students a one-sided video that promotes same-sex marriage and attacks religious views to the contrary.

“Schoolchildren should receive an education that is free from ideological or political bias and that does not disparage any of their beliefs,” says ADF senior legal counsel Jeremy Tedesco. “Student indoctrination is inappropriate, especially on an issue as important as marriage. Students and parents deserve better. The district recognized its mistake and deserves to be commended.”

In April, students at Craig High School were shown a video that promotes same-sex marriage and condemns supporters of marriage between one man and one woman. The video shows students saying it is “insane” and “outrageous” that “only” 14 states (at the time the video was created) allow same-sex marriage. The video also shows students responding to Christian objections to same-sex marriage. Responses included, “Cry me a river, build me a bridge and get over it,” “You guys are basic and nobody likes you” and “No one cares what you think.”

The letter explains that Janesville School District “rightly determined that showing the video contravened its Academic Freedom and Controversial Issues in the Classroom policies” and that the video’s “disparagement of religious beliefs opposing same-sex marriage likely violated the Establishment Clause.”

The letter also notes that the “Board of Education recognizes students’ ‘right to receive competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.’” Moreover, the school’s policy “affirms that ‘although teachers have the right to express their own viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to indoctrinate students.’”

“Schools are wise to take an unbiased and objective approach when teaching about controversial social issues,” adds ADF

litigation counsel Jonathan Scruggs. “We commend the district for recognizing that the one-sided, anti-religious same-sex marriage video shown in class violated its policies and undermined parental authority. We hope more school districts follow their lead.”

WATCH: Duck Dynasty’s Phil Robertson Under Attack for Another So-Called Homophobic Rant

Duck Dynasty patriarch Phil Robertson caused a lot of controversy last year for statements he made against homosexuality. Now he is in hot water again.

Robertson’s new comments, which are causing some to accuse of him “unleashing another homophobic rant,” were made during an Easter sermon last month but are just starting to gain attention.

The 68-year-old’s comments can be heard in a 43-minute video of the sermon he delivered April 20 at White’s Ferry Road Church in West Monroe, Louisiana.

Watch the video below. Robertson’s homosexuality comments start at about 8:30.