

Find the Treasure in Your Husband

Have you ever had mixed emotions about your spouse? I have.

One day I got out of bed and began my regular devotional time with the Lord, reading the Word, studying a powerful book and praying. When I stood to my feet, I was filled with peace and gratitude.

The kitchen was first on my agenda. I don't know why, exactly, but I have a plaque over my stove that reads, "A kitchen is the heart of the home."

When I was growing up, my mother always kept a clean kitchen, with a pot of something deliciously fragrant simmering on the only thing fragrant about my kitchen that morning was an empty coffee pot, left sitting on the coffee maker with the switch in the "on" position, by my husband, Allan.

I picked up the pot and carried it over to the sink. There I discovered the spoon he'd used to stir the sugar in his cup, now lying beside the sink in a brown, sugary puddle. I grabbed a cloth and began to wipe the counter—muttering the whole time.

I decided to tackle the bathroom instead. You can probably guess what I found—beard clippings and blobs of toothpaste in the sink, and puddles of water on the counter top. I turned to grab a towel. As I did, I looked at my towel, folded neatly in thirds over the rack. My husband's towel was bunched and crumpled, as if he doesn't care at all about being neat. I stood there staring.

After a few moments, something happened to change my whole mind-set and along with it, my feelings. I looked from his towel to mine, back and forth.

I started to appreciate and praise God for our differences. Feelings of love, softening my heart, began to manifest.

Then I went back into the kitchen to clear the table. My eyes caught sight of his open Bible and a yellow highlighting pen.

I remembered the early morning I discovered him sitting there with eyes closed, offering up a silent prayer to God.

Instantly my attitude changed. I washed the coffee cup and spoon with love, thanking God for the blessing He had given me in my husband.

Allan is a man of integrity and honor. He works hard, freely gives of what he has and is a true worshiper.

If I had to choose between those qualities and neatness, well, bring on the cups and towels! Mom would be proud!

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The Secret to Losing Weight Permanently

God created us to be purpose driven. In other words, our natural inclination is to operate with an intent—a motive, so to speak.

The Bible gives us a number of examples of men and women who did extraordinary things (whether for good or evil) in order to fulfill a purpose or reach a goal. Jacob, for instance, worked 14 years for the deceitful Laban in order to marry the woman of his dreams (see Gen. 29). He had a motive (espousing

the lovely Rachel), which served to motivate him to work an extra seven years to accomplish his objective.

It is human nature to operate with a purpose and not wander about aimlessly. The majority of things we set out to accomplish are done with a motive. This is how the Lord created us, and this attribute of mankind extends to every aspect of our living and influences our spiritual as well as our physical lives.

It applies even to weight loss. Most people who set out to lose weight have a specific motive for doing so. Maybe the class reunion is fast approaching and you're determined to be only 10 pounds heavier than when you graduated, not 50. Or you may have booked a Caribbean cruise and simply refuse to slip on a bathing suit without first firming up and slimming down.

Is there a wedding coming up? How about a family portrait? Whatever the case may be, all too often our motivation for losing weight is simply the desire to change our outward appearance.

But remember Proverbs 31:30 tells us "charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting" (NIV). So if your objective for losing weight is only to enhance your looks, please take my advice: reconsider your motive.

Vanity Is Not a Virtue

Don't misunderstand me—there is nothing wrong with wanting to look good. After all, Queen Esther received a year's worth of beauty treatments before going into the royal chambers to visit the king (Esth. 2:12).

Our appearance is important, and first impressions (even second impressions) carry a tremendous impact. But there are a few reasons why appearance should not be the sole motivator for weight loss.

For starters, losing weight for cosmetic reasons is an entirely goal-oriented approach. We are determined to reach an arbitrary number on the scale or a certain size dress or suit.

Once the goal is reached (or once the vacation or the class reunion is over) we find ourselves without a motive, and we soon become unmotivated to continue doing those things we did to reach our goal in the first place—namely, eating right and exercising regularly. We have to shift our focus from the temporary to the permanent.

It's not about achieving the temporary goal of squeezing into a dress that was two sizes too small to begin with. It's about permanently establishing a brand-new way of living.

Ironically, another reason why appearance alone should not be the primary motivator is that many people are quite satisfied with their appearance. And because they are content with being "pleasingly plump," they have no real desire to lose weight—even when shedding a few pounds would improve their health.

I find this is especially common in African-American and Hispanic women, who are not as inclined to strive for society's standard of an acceptable body weight as are Caucasian and Asian women.

But though this high level of self-satisfaction might guard against conditions such as anorexia nervosa, it can be a real problem when contentment leads to complacency.

In my years of medical practice I've encountered a number of patients with serious medical problems related to improper diet, inadequate exercise and excessive body weight. But despite being diagnosed with potentially life-threatening illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease, and despite the crippling pain of conditions such as osteoarthritis, they felt satisfied with their appearance (vanity).

They didn't want to lose weight, even when their health was at stake. I've had patients tell me they were afraid they would look "sick" if they lost 10 or 20 pounds, not realizing those extra pounds might just escort them into an early grave.

If you want to lose weight, don't allow yourself to be driven by vanity. Vanity is not a virtue; it is the cousin of pride, and "pride goes before destruction" (Prov. 16:18).

The Proper Motive

Adopting a healthier lifestyle requires discipline, moderation and self-control—character traits supported throughout the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, for example, Paul says: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

"Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

"Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."

Paul compares the Christian life to an athletic competition here and in other parts of the Bible (2 Tim. 4:7; Gal. 2:2). What a powerful word picture to emphasize the benefits of living a life of discipline, moderation and self-control.

These character traits are perfected through the Holy Spirit and are vital to us if we are to mature on this Christian journey. And even though the prize Paul speaks of is our heavenly reward, we can't ignore the importance of exercising these same qualities in our physical lives.

It's actually difficult (if not impossible) to separate these two aspects of our existence since spiritual maturation

requires that we keep fleshly desires under subjection (including the desire to overeat), and that we become adept at resisting temptation (including the temptation to indulge ourselves with our favorite foods).

A professional athlete practices discipline, moderation and self-control whether she feels like it or not. Her body does not call the shots—she does.

In other words, she engages in rigorous training on a regular basis, no matter what the circumstances, and no matter what her “flesh” would rather be doing. The same is required of any woman attempting to modify her lifestyle to improve her health.

Our flesh ought not to control us. But without discipline, moderation and self-control, you’ll soon discover how easy it is for the flesh to overtake you and for your worthy plans of living a healthier life to fall by the wayside.

It requires self-discipline to crawl out of a warm and cozy bed for a brisk 30-minute walk. It requires moderation to stop at one scoop of ice cream or one tablespoon of gravy. And it requires self-control to keep on driving past your favorite fast-food restaurant.

Honor God With Your Body

When you start with discipline, moderation and self-control, and then add the proper motive, you will certainly see results. If you refuse to be motivated by vanity but let your main desire be to improve your health (or maintain the good health you already have), then you’re on the right track.

Think about it this way: As believers, our bodies are the living temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). So taking care of our bodies is one way we honor God. Losing weight as an effort to maintain the temple of God is an honorable endeavor; any other reason borders on self-centeredness and

vanity.

Let's compare it to the act of giving. We can give our tithes and offerings with a selfish, goal-oriented mind-set, focusing on the "good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over" return promised to us in Luke 6:38. But this is giving with the wrong motive.

The Bible says to "honor the Lord with your wealth" (Prov. 3:9). So giving is an act of worship, a way of honoring God.

It shouldn't be a selfish act prompted by the promise of how much we will get in return. The same holds true for any of the other ways we honor God.

Remember in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus described people who fasted and prayed just to call attention to themselves? He said their reward would be from men and not from God. The problem was that their motive wasn't to have fellowship with God through prayer and fasting but to receive recognition and attention from other men.

Everything—yes, everything—we do as believers ought to honor God, including our motive for wanting to lose weight. The incentive to adhere to a healthy lifestyle should be to honor God through caring for our bodies, His temple, and not any self-centered desire to improve our looks.

If we end up looking a little nicer in the process, then that's great, but it shouldn't be our primary motivation.

Keep Focused on the Goal

I'm convinced that one of the reasons so many people are unsuccessful with long-term weight loss is they are operating with the wrong motive. Keep the proper focus. Purpose in your heart that you will honor God by taking care of your body, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, and start making a change today.

A dear patient once assured me that she was going to dramatically change her lifestyle by eating right, exercising and losing weight right after the Memorial Day holiday. She was planning a large party that weekend, a culinary feast for more than 100 guests.

The only problem was that she gave me this promise not in late May but in the first part of April! She failed to understand that the best time to start changing bad habits is the present.

Caring for our bodies is not a thing we decide to do on some future date or for a limited period of time. Honoring the Lord should be our present and continual lifestyle, whether we're honoring Him in our worship, our giving, our service or even through taking care of our physical bodies.

Make a commitment today that you will rely on the Holy Spirit to strengthen your resolve. Then go ahead and break those old, bad habits and replace them with new, healthier practices that you'll follow for the rest of your life.

Don't even entertain the thought of how much better you'll look with a slimmer physique. Remember this—when the presence and the glory of God shines through you, you already look good no matter what the number on the scale. Once you get your motives in order, be prepared to reap the benefits of better health.

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When Your Kids Grow Up

Many women wrestle with **changing roles**, changing times and changing **relationships**. Much has been said about the changes in life, but not nearly enough in regard to the maternal heart that has unfortunately allowed itself to be defined purely by its relationship with **children**.

The children become **adults**, their needs change, and they are gone. But the woman who nurtured them must always remember she is more than their last assignment.

God has sustained you in this life because you are needed. Perhaps it is not a need that requires a clean bandage on an old cut. But you are needed.

Be careful that you do not hold those around you captive. You must love enough to let go.

It takes **faith** to let go of the former things. Many cling to the past because they are convinced that their better days are behind them. This attitude leads to great **depression**.

Accept the challenge to which God is calling you, and you will realize there are new levels of love and life before you. Take some of that stuff you jammed in the attic and move it to some place where it can be used. Renovate your life with **love** and **hope** and release bitterness.

A woman who can move on is invincible. She may affect her nation like Esther or lead her people like Deborah.

She may nurture someone else's child at the breast of her experience as Naomi did Ruth. She may be in a position to serve her **church** like Anna.

Whatever your next assignment in life, you will miss it if you yearn for yesterday. Let it go!

Many mothers end up with resentful children who feel smothered and angry because they are made to feel guilty for growing up. Preserve what you have with your children by allowing the relationship to change in your hand.

The caterpillar has been fed in the cocoon of your teaching and has come forth a butterfly. It will never need what it once needed, but in every flap of its lovely wings there is a tribute to the cocoon that allowed it the grace of change.

Your authority has changed. You move from an authoritative sovereign to an adviser.

Your word may not be law, and they may not wear the color you think they should. But if you respect yesterday's child and recognize that she has become today's adult, she will always love you for the tremendous contribution you made to that independence.

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When You Can't Forgive Yourself

First Corinthians 13, the great love chapter of the Bible, is a perfect demonstration of the cause and effect of total forgiveness. The apex of this wonderful passage is the phrase found in verse 5: Love "keeps no record of wrongs" (NIV).

The Greek word that is translated as *no record* is *logizomai*,

which means “not to reckon or impute.” The word is important to Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith.

For the person who believes, his faith is “credited” to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:5). This is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 13:5.

Therefore, not to reckon, impute or “count” the wrongs of a loved one is to do for that person what God does for us, namely, choose not to recognize his sin.

In the same way, forgiving oneself means to experience the love that keeps no record of our own wrongs. It is one thing to have this breakthrough regarding others; it is quite another to experience the greater breakthrough—total forgiveness of ourselves.

So many Christians say, “I can forgive others, but how can I ever forget what I have done? I know God forgives me, but I can’t forgive myself.”

We must remember that forgiving ourselves is a lifelong commitment. In precisely the same way that I must forgive others every single day, I must also forgive myself (Luke 6:37).

The Process of Forgiving

We must renew our commitment to forgive others each and every day for the wrongs done to us. Forgiving ourselves is also a daily process.

We may wake up each day with the awareness of past failures. We may have feelings of guilt—or pseudo-guilt, if our sins have been placed under the blood of Christ.

But forgiving yourself may bring about the breakthrough you have been looking for. It could set you free in ways you have never before experienced.

Sometimes we are afraid to forgive ourselves. We cling to fear

as if it were a thing of value. The truth is, the very breath of Satan is behind the fear of forgiving ourselves.

Jesus knows that many of us have this problem. This is a further reason Jesus turned up unexpectedly after His Resurrection in the room where the disciples were assembled both in terror and in guilt.

Jesus wanted them to know they were totally forgiven; He also wanted them to forgive themselves. He spoke to them as if nothing had happened (John 20:21). This gave them dignity and showed them that nothing had occurred that would change Jesus' plans and strategy for them.

I remember one Sunday just before I was to preach at the 11 a.m. service. I had an argument with my wife, Louise, and stormed out of the house, slamming the door in her face.

Before I knew it, I was bowing my head on the upper platform at Westminster Chapel before several hundred people. I was thinking, *I should not be here. I have no right to be here. Lord, how on earth could You use me today? I am not fit to be in this pulpit.*

There was no way to resolve the situation at that time. I could only ask God for mercy and try my best to forgive myself. Never in my life had I felt so unworthy.

But when I stood up to preach, God simply undergirded me and enabled me to preach as well as I ever had. When we are emptied of all self-righteousness and pride, we enable God to move in and through us.

Why We Can't Forgive Ourselves

At the end of the day, I believe there are several causes for our inability to forgive ourselves.

Anger. We may be angry with ourselves. Look at the Old Testament story of Joseph. As a type of Christ, Joseph said to

his brothers, “And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you” (Gen. 45:5).

These brothers were beginning to get the message that Joseph had forgiven them; he didn't want them to be angry with themselves. That is the way God forgives. Jesus does not want us to be angry with ourselves for our sins.

Not forgiving ourselves is self-hatred. Joseph's brothers had hated themselves for selling Joseph into slavery. They could not take back what they had done.

Some Christians who can't forgive themselves are, underneath it all, angry with themselves. But God can begin today to cause all that happened to fit into a pattern for good.

God will take the wasted years and restore them to good before it is all over. It is just as Joel promised: “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten” (Joel 2:25).

In some cases it is fear more than anger that is a barrier to our forgiving ourselves. Regret leads to guilt, and guilt can lead to fear: the fear of missing “what might have been” or the fear that what has happened cannot possibly turn out for good.

True guilt and pseudo-guilt. There are two kinds of guilt most of us will struggle with: true guilt (a result of our sin against God) and pseudo-guilt (when there is no sin in our lives). When we have sinned, we must confess it to God (1 John 1:9). The blood of Jesus takes care of true guilt by doing two basic things:

1. It washes away our sin—as though it never had existed.
2. It perfectly satisfies God's eternal justice.

Whereas discipline is necessary because we are sinners, sin that has been confessed to God is totally forgiven by Him. Any

guilt we feel after that is pseudo-guilt.

There are two kinds of false guilt:

1. The kind that comes when sin was never involved in the first place.
2. The kind that comes when sin has been forgiven by God.

Pseudo-guilt—though it is false—is also very real; we feel keenly guilty. But there is no good reason for the sense of guilt.

Take, for example, a person who is driving a car when a child runs out into the street at the last second and is struck down. The guilt can be overwhelming, but there was no sin. It doesn't need to be confessed to God.

The other kind of pseudo-guilt comes when you have confessed your sins but you don't feel forgiven. Once we have acknowledged our sin, we should accept our forgiveness and leave the rest in God's hands.

During the years I have developed a sense of failure as a father. I wish I had given more time to T.R. and Melissa in my early years at Westminster Chapel.

I now understand that putting them first—rather than my church or sermon preparation—would have allowed the Chapel to carry on just as well. Of course, I can't change the past.

But for me to continue to feel guilty over this is not pleasing to God because He has already totally forgiven me. If I let myself dwell on my failure, I am giving in to pseudo-guilt and sinning as I do because I am dignifying unbelief. I must keep destroying the record of my wrongs—every day.

Not forgiving ourselves is a subtle way of competing with Christ's atonement. God has already punished Jesus for what we did (2 Cor. 5:17). Instead of accepting Jesus' sacrifice, I

want to punish myself for my failures. This competes with Christ's finest hour.

Fear. Fear is one of the main reasons we do not forgive ourselves. The person who fears has not been made perfect in love, and fear "has to do with punishment" (1 John 4:18).

Recognizing that fear—and punishing ourselves for our mistakes—displeases God should result in an ever-increasing sadness for this self-loathing spirit. We are required to walk away from our past folly and not look back.

My wife was greatly blessed by the music ministry of Janny Grein and her song "Movin' On" at a Rodney Howard-Browne meeting. Louise remembers Janny shouting out the words, "Let the past be past—at last." God speaks those words to us.

Let the past be past at last. Forgive yourself as well as those who have damaged you.

Pride, self-righteousness and self-pity. Our unforgiveness of ourselves may be traceable to pride. We, in our arrogance, cannot bear having the Lord do everything for us so graciously, so we think we must help Him out a bit.

Our pride must be eclipsed by humility. We must let God be God and the blood of Christ do what it in fact did: remove our guilt and satisfy God's sense of justice.

Just as fear and pride are like identical twins, so are self-righteousness and self-pity. We feel sorry for ourselves and show it by not forgiving ourselves.

Pseudo-guilt can develop into very real guilt before God. It is false guilt, since God says, "You're not guilty." We make it into real guilt when we in effect reply, "Yes, I am."

The bottom line is this: Not forgiving ourselves is wrong and dishonoring to God. But God will use the sorrow we feel over what we've done to draw us to Himself.

Guilt and Grace

The initial work of the Holy Spirit is that He convicts of sin. When we walk in the light we know the blood cleanses us of sin, but walking in the light also reveals sin in us that we may not have seen before (1 John 1:7-8).

The sense of guilt God instigates is temporary. God uses guilt only to get our attention. When we say, "I'm sorry," and mean it, that's enough for God.

He doesn't beat us black and blue and require us to go on a 30-day fast to supplement Christ's atonement. He convicts us of sin to get our attention, but having done that, He wants us to move forward.

The ability to forgive ourselves therefore extends from an understanding of grace. Grace is undeserved favor.

Mercy is not getting what we do deserve (justice). Grace is accepting what we don't deserve (total forgiveness).

It may seem unfair when we have been so horrible. We have let God down; we have let others down.

But it is fair (1 John 1:9). The blood of Jesus did a wonderful job. God is not looking for further satisfaction.

All accusations regarding confessed sin come from the devil, who works either as a roaring lion to scare or an angel of light to deceive—or both (1 Pet. 5:8; 2 Cor. 11:14). Never forget, perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18).

Let The Past be Past

The sweet consequence of not keeping a record of all wrongs is that we let go of the past and its effect on the present. We cast our care on God and rely on Him to restore the wasted years and to cause everything to turn out for good.

We find ourselves accepting ourselves as we are with all our failures (just as God does), knowing all the while our

potential to make more mistakes. God never becomes disillusioned with us; He loves us and knows us inside out.

Moses, David, Jonah, Peter—all these men in the Bible had to forgive themselves before they could move into the ministry God had planned for them. It's time for you to follow their example.

That is exactly what God wants of you and me. Let the past be past—at last.

Read a companion devotional.

R.T. Kendall is the author of Total Forgiveness, published by Charisma House, from which this article is adapted.

Find the Courage to Proclaim Your Faith

As I go out into the world, presenting the gospel on television and radio talk shows or exalting Jesus from secular and religious platforms, I am treated with respect—most of the time. But reviews of my engagements are not always as gracious as my live hosts are. They sometimes describe me as a middle-aged woman parading a worn-out, old-time message that has no relevance in our century—simply because I lift up the cross.

I have been accused of trying to ride my father's coattails and make a name for myself because I have walked through doors of opportunity that have been opened for me to proclaim God's Word. I have been attacked as a Jezebel who is leading women within the church into sin by my own example of ministry leadership. I have been labeled unloving, intolerant,

exclusive, narrow-minded, fundamentalist, naive—and more. I have been excluded from social functions, platforms, seminars—and even from some churches.

When I look at John 15:17-27, which records Jesus' words the evening before His crucifixion, I see that Jesus prepared His disciples—and those like you and me who would follow them—for the kind of treatment they could expect from the world around them—a treatment that would require deep convictions and the courage to live by them.

Courage to Stand Out

Jesus began His challenge to stand out for Him in the world with the command “‘Love each other'” (John 15:17, NIV). He showed the disciples how they would find the courage to not only live their lives for Him on a daily basis after Jesus was gone but also give their lives for Him on a final basis in death.

Knowing how difficult it was going to be to live for Him in the midst of the world, Jesus reminded His disciples: “‘Remember the words I spoke to you: “No servant is greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also'” (v. 20).

They didn't just persecute Jesus; they crucified Him! Why do you and I think we will be treated any better?

Jesus gave five reasons for the world's persecution of Christians. These reasons have remained valid in the lives of believers down through the centuries:

The first reason Jesus gave is our identification with Him, whom the world hates: “‘If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated Me first'” (v. 18).

Hate Jesus? What evidence do you and I see of hatred toward Him today?

Is there an underlying hatred of Christ when His name is invoked in profanity, rather than the name of Buddha or Allah or Muhammad? At the very least, profanity reveals that deep within the human spirit there is no neutrality toward Him.

Recently on The View, a TV talk show that involves a round-table-type conversation among several women, Joy Behar remarked that she had successfully lost weight on her diet. She then exclaimed "Praise Jesus!" When the show was aired on the West Coast, the name Jesus was bleeped out! The same network that peppers its programs with God's name used in profanity found it offensive when His Son's name was used in sincerity!

The second reason we may be persecuted as Christians is our mandated separation from the world, which causes the world to resent us as nonconformists: "'I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you'" (v. 19).

When was the last time you refused to join in gossip? Or refused to lie for your friend? Or refused to go along to a movie filled with profanity and adultery?

Did such refusals cause you to be honored and loved and respected? If not, then you're getting the picture.

Third, we may encounter persecution because of the world's rejection of the truth that Jesus is God's only Son and the exclusive way to God: "'They will treat you this way because of My name, for they do not know the One who sent Me'" (v. 21).

In an article in the December 2001 issue of the Christian newsmagazine World, Gene Edward Veith warned, "The enemy, we are told, is not Islam but intolerance. It is that narrow-minded, restrictive view of religion that is to blame for the terrorist attacks and the Taliban oppression. People who think 'theirs is the only true religion' are the real enemy, a

charge, of course, that sticks not just to the Taliban but to orthodox Christians.”

Fourth, persecution may be directed toward us because of the world’s conviction of sin, which the truth reveals: “‘If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin’” (v. 22).

Recently I found myself in a situation similar to one I’ve been in many times. The driver of a cab I was riding in was lively and talkative, and his conversation was peppered with bad language. When he was getting my bag out of the trunk, one of the people who had come to greet me told him that I am Billy Graham’s daughter and a Christian speaker. His immediate reaction was, “If I had known, I would have cleaned up my language.”

I had not said a word to him about his language. But sometimes just our presence reveals the darkness of sin in the lives of others, and those who are convicted of their own sin by our separation from it resent us.

The fifth and last reason Jesus gave for persecution of His followers is the demonstration of God’s power in individual lives: “‘If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both Me and My Father’” (v. 24).

If you and I are not being persecuted, could it be that no one has seen any real change or evidence of God’s power in our lives? Have we so watered down and compromised our witness that the world around us doesn’t see any reason to persecute us?

What miracle that demonstrates God’s power can someone else see in your life? Is it when God set you free from alcoholism? When He reconciled you with your spouse—or your in-laws? When you experienced peace in the midst of turmoil or hope in the

midst of grief?

Courage to Speak Up

After delivering the chilling discourse that warned them of the persecution to come, Jesus revealed to His disciples the source of the courage that would be theirs as they sought to speak up in a world of hatred. The source was none other than the Holy Spirit of God—the same Spirit who indwelt Jesus.

What comfort the disciples must have felt as Jesus promised, “‘When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about Me’” (John 15:26). The source of power that filled Jesus, enabling Him to face His accusers and His execution with dignified compassion and courageous strength, is the same source of power that enabled the disciples to live and die for Jesus.

And it’s the same source of power available to you and me today! When we have the Spirit of the living God within us, we have no less courage, no less power, than did those 11 men around the table in the upper room!

When have you spoken up for Jesus? When have you told someone about Jesus who doesn’t know Him?

Are you recoiling in fear, protesting: “Anne, I could never do that! I’m afraid my neighbors would never speak to me again. I’m afraid my friends will laugh at me or be derisive about something that’s precious to me. I’m afraid to speak up for Jesus because I may lose my popularity or promotion or position or prestige or possessions.”

Jesus understands your fears. That’s why He has sent you and me the Holy Spirit. When we open our mouths, the Holy Spirit not only gives us words, He also clothes the words with power to make a difference in the hearer. And it’s the Holy Spirit who will fill you with such deep conviction, passion and zeal for the truth that you will be compelled to speak up!

One evening not too long ago, my brother Franklin and I were invited to appear together on Larry King Live, a popular talk show on CNN. Mr. King asked Franklin how it was that we were so bold in our faith. Was it hereditary?

I felt I had to say why I was bold—when my personality is basically shy. The reason is that I am convinced what I say is the truth!

And I wonder—maybe you and I don't need more courage; maybe we just need stronger convictions! Because when you feel deeply about something, you are compelled to open your mouth and speak up. Jesus stated this clearly to His disciples when He said, "'You also must testify, for you have been with Me from the beginning'" (v. 27).

Fewer than 60 days after that evening meal in the upper room, two of these same disciples—Peter and John—were arrested by the authorities in Jerusalem for speaking out about Jesus.

Facing the same religious court that had condemned Jesus to death, Peter—the same Peter who had been so terrified of the opinions of others during the trials of Jesus that he had denied His Lord three times—Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, boldly proclaimed Jesus Christ as the One "'whom you crucified but whom God raised from the is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved'" (Acts 4:10-12).

The authorities could hardly believe their ears! "When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus" (v. 13).

After a brief consultation among themselves, the religious rulers forbade John and Peter to speak in Jesus' name. The disciples' reply was a classic defense that rang as true in their politically correct, pluralistic, multicultural society as it does in ours: "'We cannot help speaking about what we

have seen and heard'" (v. 20).

They were compelled to speak up—they couldn't help it—because they had been with Jesus! They had been with Him when the blind received sight, the ears of the deaf were opened, the lepers were cleansed, the lame walked, the tormented were set free, the dead were raised to life!

How could they ever be silent again?

Our youngest daughter, Rachel-Ruth, recently gave birth to our first grandchild—a little girl named Ruth Bell Wright. She is softly pink with big blue-gray eyes, a halo of golden brown hair, perfect little ears, long fingers and—I could go on and on.

My husband and I are totally enthralled with this little girl. She fills our hearts! We can't help talking about her to anyone who will listen.

I'm not afraid to talk about her. I don't plan in advance how I will talk about her. I don't worry about offending someone with my talk about her. I don't read books on how to talk about her.

Little Ruth Bell fills my heart! And what fills my heart comes out on my lips!

Why do we make speaking up for Jesus so complicated? If He fills our hearts, He is going to come out on our lips! Like Peter and John, we will not be able to help "speaking about what we have seen and heard" of Him!

Today, in our God-blessed nation of America, no one is crucified or thrown to the lions or burned at the stake because he or she believes in Jesus as the only way to God. Yet the average church member seems to be so lacking in deep convictions concerning who Jesus is that he or she cowers under a raised eyebrow, a whispered innuendo or a politically

incorrect label.

Are you convinced that Jesus is the only way to God, the only truth about how to get to heaven, the only life that is eternal and abundant? Are you convinced that no one will ever be accepted by God the Father, except they come to Him through Jesus Christ?

If these statements, which paraphrase Jesus' own claims, are your convictions, then do you have the courage to state them publicly—today—to your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers? Many church members in our pluralistic, tolerant society not only lack the courage to stand up for the truth that faith in Jesus Christ alone is the only way to God; they actually reproach others who do stand up!

In the light of such spiritual anemia, my heart's cry is, Please, Jesus, give me more of Your courage in my convictions. I want the courage to stand out and speak up about my convictions in the way Christians have exhibited in every century since the cross and Resurrection.

In response to my heart's cry, Jesus has whispered in my heart, "I will give you more courage, Anne, when you stand out and speak up for Me!"

Anne Graham Lotz is the author of *My Heart's Cry* from which this article is adapted. Used by permission. For more on Lotz's ministry, [click here](#).

When You're Overwhelmed by Your Kids

I know there are days when all of us feel as if we are in over our heads. But when those days arise and courage seems to wilt, remember that God's grace is on you for these moments. He will strengthen you against all odds.

Some of you have always had someone else to rely on. But now you are facing the challenge of raising your children alone.

Are you alone? Not really. You never were. God has been there all the time. And the same God who brought you through all of your earlier challenges is waiting for you to acknowledge Him in your current situation.

Do you know that many of the blessings that are on you will pass to your children? For example, it is a blessing to have wise parents. Wise parents pass their reasoning and mentality to their children. This creates a generational blessing.

We have heard about generational curses, but we ought to understand generational blessings, too. If a drug-filled mother gives birth to a drug-addicted child, then why can't a spiritually regenerated mother have a child who has been blessed by her regeneration?

The favor of God is with you as a parent. His hand is there to bless you if you will trust Him.

God's design is to bring strength out of weakness and power out of pain. I challenge you now to allow Christ to equip you with the tools you need to become what God would have you to be as a single parent.

God's blessings can break out in your life as never before, but it takes faith in God. Faith is having the grace to accept

the challenges and the struggles of your course, but doggedly and tenaciously searching for the victory within the victimized.

You are the vessel God has chosen to labor with Him in forming the character of the next generation. You may not live long enough to see all of your fruit, but it will be your teachings, your standards that shape your family for years after you are gone. Do it with dignity and character. It is your contribution to the next age.

No wonder the enemy wants to overwhelm and discourage you. When he gets you, he gets two for the price of one. He affects you and the child in one blow.

Tell the devil no! Tell him he will not get a two-for-one sale here. You will guard with all diligence what God has entrusted to you.

Charge your children with faith and power. They are the future.

Consider this: "Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are children of one's youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate" (Ps. 127:4-5).

If my children are my arrows, they are my defense. They are my defense against emptiness. They are my defense against building a house that no one will inherit. They are my defense against having no hand to hold when death comes to carry me home. They are my defense against anonymity in the next generation.

You may never be famous, but your children might be. Few would recognize Martin Luther King Jr.'s mother. Few would recognize the names of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' parents. Even fewer would know Colin Powell's parents. But somewhere behind the curtains, in the shadows of the stage, there is a face, a

hand, an apron, a father or a mother who said, "I will raise my bow."

The Marvelous Work of the Holy Spirit in You

Many Christians seem to have the idea that the Holy Spirit is an "it," a manifestation of the power of God or the gift of tongues. But the Holy Spirit is none of these. He is the third Person of the Godhead, a divine Person with a plan for our lives.

And He doesn't come to us haphazardly; He is a Person of purpose. God has an eternal plan and purpose for every individual who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Holy Spirit is God bringing that purpose to reality as we learn to yield to His will for our lives.

Paul asked the Corinthians, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?" (1 Cor. 6:19, NKJV). The Holy Spirit does not reside in the church building; He lives in us. Though He resides in our spirits, His work is limited by what we allow Him to do through our souls and bodies.

That is why we need to die to our soulish nature; it is so we can cooperate with Him to accomplish His purpose. Our carnal minds need to be renewed by the Spirit of God within us to think His thoughts. Our wills need to be yielded to Him to obey His will. Our emotions need to be filled with the love of God. The Holy Spirit helps to ensure that these things happen by setting up residence within us and making His "temple" a place of discernment; victory over sin; refreshing; healing

and deliverance; soul-winning and missionary zeal; warfare against strongholds; and total restoration.

A Place of Spiritual Discernment

One of the first things the Holy Spirit does when He comes to dwell in our hearts is to make them places of spiritual discernment. The Holy Spirit living in us gives us the ability to discern what spirit we are encountering in a certain situation: the Holy Spirit, an evil spirit or the human spirit. Though everyone may not operate in the gift of discerning of spirits, when the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts, He brings His divine ability to discern.

Spiritual discernment is paramount in considering the purposes for the coming of the Holy Spirit because until He comes to us, we are living under the influence of another spirit. Paul declared, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:1-2, NASB).

Before our salvation, we were cooperating with the spirit of this world that is inspired by Satan. So our inner man was under the influence of that spirit. If we are going to submit to the Holy Spirit, He has to be able to teach us to discern which spirit is to abide there.

The Holy Spirit will put a caution in our minds when we hear something that is not quite right. Those checks become safeguards that keep us from error. We need to learn to listen to those impressions and then learn to test them, trying the spirits.

A Place of Victory Over Sin

The Holy Spirit came to make us victorious over sin. The Scriptures teach, "For sin shall not have dominion over you"

(Rom. 6:14, NKJV). There is the power of sin, the pollution of sin and the penalty for sin. God came to deliver us from all the dominion of sin.

When people do not live victoriously, they are not walking in the Holy Spirit. Even if they speak in tongues as an evidence of having received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, they may not be walking in the Spirit. He came to make this temple a place of victory over sin, and having that victory means we are walking in the Spirit.

Does that mean we won't ever sin again? No. But sin does not have to control us. As we yield to the Holy Spirit, He delivers us from sin, and we don't have to live in it. He changes our desires so we don't want to live the way we did under sin.

We don't have to have people watching us to make us keep the rules. We walk obediently because the victory is dwelling in us. We don't have to be restricted to turn off immoral programs on television. Our own desires scream against them. The Holy Spirit is controlling our desires and enabling us to hate the things God hates. So He came to give us that victory until sin no longer has dominion over us.

A Place of Refreshing

The Holy Spirit makes our hearts ready to receive the refreshing rain that God promises. He knows that without rain, we can't produce fruit. He knows that unless we have showers, our hearts will get hard.

Have you ever seen rain fall when the ground was so hard that the water didn't soak it? That is a picture of people who come to church when the Spirit is moving and the rain of His presence rolls off like water off a duck's back because their hearts are too hard to receive it.

The rain of the Spirit brings repentance. Repentance will

break up the soil of the fallow ground. He comes in conviction to our temples and prepares them as places where the showers of the latter rain of refreshing can fall.

A Place of Healing and Deliverance

The Holy Spirit has come to make our temples places of healing. Jesus is the Anointed One who brings healing and deliverance to captives. He acknowledged the fact that the Holy Spirit empowered Him for every good work when He stood up in church to read, “‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Luke 4:18).

The good news of the gospel is for the poor. The “poor” does not refer to people who do not have material possessions, but to those who recognize their need for God.

As we can understand from the passage in Luke 4, the healing that the Holy Spirit came to set up inside us is not limited to physical distresses. He came to bring divine help to the mind, to the will, to the emotions—to any part of us that has been injured or bruised.

In whatever way we are lame or crippled—physically, mentally or emotionally—He has come to bring divine enablement. We do not need to wallow in self-pity over our emotional hurts or use the past as an excuse for present failure.

We hear the cry so often today, “I was abused.” Though it is true that many have suffered deeply from traumatic experiences, it is equally true that the Holy Spirit came to bring healing. If, as Christians, we haven’t experienced His healing in certain areas of our lives, is it not that we haven’t allowed Him to do that healing work in us? We need to find a place of forgiveness and yieldedness to His love and power that will free us from the effects of our past.

You may ask me, "Have you ever been hurt or rejected or abused?" Of course I have. "Have you ever had anybody do something to make you bitter?" Of course I have. But I did not have to succumb to bitterness and other negative strongholds, for I discovered Somebody living in me who can handle it.

I have been given grace to forgive, and that becomes my key to the healing of my hurt. The healing of the Holy Spirit is for even the deepest pain: bruising, battering, broken hearts. He came to make us whole, not only in our bodies, but in our psyches and emotions as well. Though we are powerless to heal ourselves, the Holy Spirit brings healing by His divine power.

A Place of Soul-Winning and Missionary Zeal

The Holy Spirit comes to set up a zeal in our hearts for winning the lost to Christ. Jesus promised the disciples, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8).

One of the sure proofs that He has come to our hearts is that we become witnesses. Where do we begin to be witnesses? Jesus said we begin in our Jerusalem, the place where we live—in other words, our home base.

Your world is where you personally touch lives. The zeal and power to witness to your world is evidence that the Holy Spirit has come. It is the Holy Spirit's business to win the world to Jesus.

Jesus commissioned His disciples to go to all the world. A Spirit-led life will have that mandate. A Spirit-led church has the same mandate to go into all the world with the gospel. Where the Holy Spirit is working, He is working to bring souls of men to Jesus.

A Place Where Strongholds of Satan Are Conquered

Conquering strongholds is different from gaining victory over

sin. I know that some say the church is not to be militant, that we are to be lovers of the Lamb, cultivating a relationship with our heavenly Bridegroom.

I agree with them that we are to be in love with Jesus, but I disagree with the extreme of saying we are never to be involved in spiritual warfare. God gave the church the power over Satan. He deputized us, equipped us, and sent us out with authority over devils and diseases.

The church is learning both to worship the Lamb and to do warfare—not by our power, but by the power of the Spirit. It is God who pulls down strongholds, but He has to do it through the church. If we can stand against the enemy with vessels that are clean and release the Holy Spirit in us, He will pull down the strongholds of the enemy.

In the 1500s, the queen of England said she feared the prayers of John Knox more than she feared the whole enemy's army. He was a man of God who knew God's power over the enemy.

What does the enemy think of us? The church is not a weak, passive, defeated group of people. The church is the body of Christ anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel to the poor, to set the captives free and to tear down strongholds. The Holy Spirit gives us authority to take back what the devil stole.

A Place Where Backsliding Can Be Removed

The Holy Spirit comes into our lives to bring restoration to our souls. Everything the enemy has perpetrated against the human race, God has purposed to restore.

Jesus came to undo, outdo and overdo everything the devil ever did. The Holy Spirit is restoring us to relationship with God the Father and God the Son, teaching us to walk with Him in obedience and to enjoy the kingdom of God in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

These are the wonderful purposes of the Holy Spirit in coming to redeem a life from the power of sin. As He accomplishes them, we begin to walk more fully in the Spirit and to live in such a way as to fulfill the unique plan God has for each of us.

Read a companion devotional.

Fuchsia Pickett was a noted Bible teacher and author of numerous books, including *Receiving Divine Revelation and Presenting the Holy Spirit*, from which this article is adapted.

When Your Husband is Spiritually Clueless

More and more women today are sensing a call of God on their lives—a call to draw closer to the Lord, to grow spiritually and to minister in His name. But many hesitate to respond to that call.

“What will happen to my marriage if I become more spiritually mature than my husband?” wives often ask. “Will I become the ‘spiritual head’ of our family and be out of God’s order?”

“I want my husband to be the spiritual leader in our home, but he is not taking on that role for himself,” others say. “What do I do with my call while God is working in my husband?”

I believe God is pleased to know that such issues concern His spiritual daughters. You probably know at least one woman who did not ask these difficult questions—with disastrous results in her marriage.

Each of us needs to ask the tough questions and find the answers that fit our particular circumstances. Only then will peace, mutual love and respect be maintained in our marriages while we grow and minister in the Lord.

The guidance for this challenge, as for all the challenges we face, is in the Word of God. Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (NIV).

In other words, your situation is not as unique as it seems; according to the Bible, it has already been experienced by at least one other woman! God had the answer then, and He has your answer now.

As you begin your quest, an important scripture to consider is 1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." You are never alone! God is always with you. He loves and protects you and cares about you and your marriage.

According to the dictionary, "to care" means "to have strong feelings for." That's something to remember and meditate upon: The God of the universe has strong feelings for you!

And because God has strong feelings, you do too. After all, you were made in His image. It's no surprise, then, that many emotions rise to the surface when you feel a tension between your marriage and God's call on your life.

Taking the Risk Fear is perhaps the most common of these emotions. And it's a valid one because following your destiny in God can be risky for you and your husband.

You may not understand all that's happening to you and in you. What you do with your time may change. Activities that used to hold your interest may no longer do so.

Instead of watching television at night, you may find yourself choosing to read the Word and other books for self-

improvement. Instead of shopping during the day, you may prefer to have a small group or Bible study meet in your home.

You may change your circle of friends. Your appearance may even change as you begin to honor God with your body, His temple.

It is especially important that you remain intimate and connected to your husband during this time. He may or may not accept some of the changes he sees in you.

Even these healthy kinds of changes can be perceived by some men as threatening to the marriage. But by developing a humble spirit, you will ultimately add to your inner beauty, causing your husband to appreciate the changes he sees in you and lessening his own fears about your relationship.

The wrong response to fear is to try to control or manipulate the timing or degree of your husband's spiritual growth. If you do that, you will be out of alignment with God's design for a godly wife. And depending on your husband's temperament, you could cause him to rebel and retreat even further from God or develop an "Ahab nature."

You remember Ahab, the cowering, ineffective husband of Queen Jezebel in the Old Testament. In his book *The Jezebel Spirit*, Francis Frangipane describes a husband with the Ahab nature as a man who never truly exercises his spiritual authority.

Frangipane writes, "The man who cannot govern his household in godly, protective authority will not exercise his spiritual authority elsewhere." That's the exact opposite of what you want!

God's solution to fear is not for you to push but for you to put your faith in Him. If you have allowed fear to govern your behavior, repent and ask God to increase your faith. Believe in God's sovereignty and timing, trusting that He will work all things for your good. His Word says that God's plans for

you and your husband are not to harm you but to give you hope and a future (see Jer. 29:11).

Dealing With Anger Another common emotion is anger—anger directed at your husband or even at God for not seeming to act on your behalf. Hebrews 6:1 tells us that God’s desire is that we all become spiritually mature.

You see other husbands growing spiritually. So why is your husband the one dragging his spiritual feet?

Many Christian women have confided to me that their husbands won’t pray with them. Many have said they’ve had to take responsibility for family devotions—otherwise there would be none. And week after week, many women have had to bring their children to church by themselves.

How easy it is for anger to build up in such circumstances! But over time, anger can be stored and, if not resolved, turn into resentment and bitterness. When that happens, aggressive behaviors, either passive or overt, can begin to destroy the unity and intimacy that God intended for your marriage.

Again, we can go to God’s Word for insight. Ephesians 4:22-33 says that we must not sin in our anger but rather be “made new” in the attitude of our minds. We must “get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger” and “speak truthfully” to our neighbor. And in this case, your husband is your closest neighbor!

If you have spoken the truth—without anger or rage—about God’s desire for your husband’s spiritual maturity and his response is not what you had hoped for, you can find further instruction in 1 John 3:18: Love him “with actions and in truth.”

Addressing marriage in particular, 1 Peter 3:1-6 says that you can win your husband to Christ by your godly actions and

behavior—by living a pure, reverent life; by exhibiting a gentle and quiet spirit; and by remaining hopeful and not giving way to fear. Obeying God’s commands with a heart full of love pleases Him. In this attitude of faith, humility and love, you can “receive from Him anything” you ask (1 John 3:21-22).

No Comparison Sadness and rejection are two more common emotions experienced by women who are not able to share spiritually with their husbands. The grief and pain are very real, to be sure.

There is a special closeness, a deep connectedness, that comes in a marriage when a man and woman are growing together in the Lord. When that’s not happening in your marriage, observing other couples who seem to share spiritual intimacy only adds to your hurt.

It doesn’t help to deny the truth. You must face the pain of grieving to ultimately regain hope and joy.

How you respond in your particular situation is critical. Each marriage is unique. There is no point in comparing your marriage with another. In fact, God tells us not to compare ourselves with others (see Gal. 6:4).

Instead, ask yourself these questions:

Are you listening for the Lord’s voice? What direction is He giving you?

Are you interceding for your husband and your marriage?

Have you called on other godly women to pray for your situation?

Have you sought godly counsel from your pastor?

Is there a trusted Christian male friend who could begin to mentor your husband? Some men may not know how to get started on their spiritual journeys and could use the encouragement of a fellow journeyman.

The Spiritual and the Natural God's will for you and your husband is that you be united—"one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Spouses are to be in mutual submission (see Eph. 5:21).

Yet I have known Christian women who believed the Lord was calling them into ministries that would take them away from home for days and weeks at a time. Their husbands and children were not convinced that the Lord had called them out.

The women went anyway. Unfortunately, some of these women began to experience major spiritual and natural battles in their homes.

This is not always the case, of course. There are those who have genuinely received a call from God and whose families support their efforts and accommodate the women's commitment to follow the Lord. But in order to "live a life worthy of the calling [we] have received," it is important to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1,3).

God may indeed be calling you. Perhaps He is giving you a vision of things to come. Just as we anticipate the birth of a baby by preparing for its arrival, you can begin to prepare for what God is birthing in you spiritually. Then when the time is right, you will be ready.

As a young woman, I knew God's will for my life was to minister to my husband's and my children's needs. I knew God would not call me to a ministry that interfered with my primary calling as a wife and mother.

I ministered at the local level, serving in the church nursery and teaching Sunday school. Today our children are grown, and I am able to accept ministry opportunities on a broader basis. I know that my obedience to the Lord during the early years pleased God and prepared me for my current ministry.

Another woman I know made a decision early in her marriage not to leave her husband behind spiritually. She was concerned that the spiritual distance would create competition or separation between them on a natural level.

Instead, she determined to wait on the Lord to touch her husband so they could then journey together in the spiritual and the natural. Her obedience to the Lord brought blessing, as Deuteronomy 5:29 promises.

She prayed mightily and kept loving her husband unconditionally. Today, 10 years later, her husband is a deacon in their local church, and they are serving the Lord in ministry together. God is faithful!

Of course, some situations are extreme. Personally, I have not known many marriages in which the husband completely forbid his wife to go to church, bake cupcakes for a bake sale, help a widow or orphan, cook for a sick neighbor, read the Bible, pray, or speak words of godly encouragement to others; but they do exist.

If you are living with an abusive spouse under that kind of control, talk with your pastor and seek professional help. More than the spiritual aspect of your relationship is suffering.

Prepared by Love If that's not your situation, however, you can be sure your husband's heart is being prepared right now for spiritual growth and maturity as you and God love him with perfect, unconditional love. Remember, the Lord desires fellowship with your husband more than you desire it for him! And God wants your spouse to love and serve Him, just as you do.

God has a plan for your life and for your marriage. If He has indeed called you to a specific ministry, He is working out the details; you don't have to force it to happen. Your life, your marriage and your ministry are in His capable hands.

Read a companion devotional.

Julie Roe, Ph.D., is a Christian counselor whose practice is based in Sanford, Florida, where she lives with her family.

Is Lack of Self-Control Driving You to Eat?

Most of us don't want to admit it, but we've grown accustomed to overeating. It's time to repent and develop some self-control.

The Bible tells us that “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal. 5:22, NIV). All these virtues should be displayed by those in whom the Spirit of God resides. But I've observed that self-control, the last in the list, is often overlooked—much like young David was when the prophet Samuel told Jesse to assemble his sons so he could anoint one of them as the new king of Israel (see 1 Sam. 16:1-13).

We're diligent in our quest to become living examples of unconditional love, unspeakable joy and peace that passes understanding. We commit ourselves to serving in our local churches so that they grow to reflect the goodness and faithfulness of the Lord. We strive to show patience when we minister to a hurting and sin-sick world. Even past President George Bush publicly expressed his hope that America become a kinder and gentler nation.

But what has happened to self-control? Where is the zealous

pursuit, the burning desire, to restrain our flesh and govern our impulses? How is it that this last-listed fruit is so often neglected?

The problem is not just a “worldly” one. We see a disturbing lack of self-control within the body of Christ. It’s manifested in the sexual sins that plague both the laity and the leadership of our churches. It’s manifested in the gambling that causes Christians to spend their time and money (including their tithes) in local riverboat casinos. It’s manifested in the smoking, alcoholism and drug addiction that are ever-present problems within our congregations.

But the one area in which a lack of self-control has become most apparent is the area of food. Overeating—the sin of gluttony—has as its foundation a lack of self-control.

The consequences of gluttony have reached epidemic proportions in this country among both Christians and non-Christians. From the 1960s to the 1990s, the cases of obesity nearly doubled. Current statistics show that 55 percent of adults are overweight.

Some groups, such as African American women, are more prone to obesity than others. Sixty-six percent of us are overweight and 37 percent are obese. Along with the rapid rise in these conditions comes an increasing prevalence of weight-related diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and arthritis, according to a survey published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Don’t misunderstand me—I am not suggesting that every person who has a weight problem is a glutton. Obesity is a complicated disorder with multiple, often interrelated, contributing factors.

Eating is influenced by conditions such as stress, boredom and depression. For some of us, the problem is simply one of ignorance—not knowing how to interpret a food label, not

knowing how to prepare foods and not knowing which foods should be eaten in moderation.

For others, a lack of exercise is the major problem. This is especially true for overweight children who, in this era, tend to entertain themselves with television, video games and computers rather than bicycles, jump ropes and relay races.

What I am suggesting is that the sin of gluttony plays a major role in the obesity epidemic, and it's time for us to confront it. We have grown much too comfortable with self-indulgence.

We regularly eat more than our bodies require. We're guilty of eating for taste rather than for hunger. And we've conveniently ignored the call for temperance in the supermarket, in the kitchen and on our plates. As disturbing as it might be, this acceptance of gluttony shouldn't come as a surprise in a world that's overflowing with super sizes, jumbo servings and all-you-can-eat buffets.

To make matters worse, we are constantly bombarded with conflicting messages regarding food. This is especially true for women.

Take Cooking Light magazine, for example, which has a mostly female readership. Cooking Light is devoted to promoting all aspects of healthy living. It contains dozens of low-calorie recipes, and each issue has articles devoted to diet, exercise and nutrition.

But as you leaf through the pages of this health-conscious magazine, you'll come across numerous ads that promote unhealthy eating. Baker's Chocolate encourages you to "Indulge in the chocolate cookie recipe that's more chocolate than cookie." The American Dairy Association tries to convince you that cheese is a food with authority in its slogan: "Ahh, the power of cheese."

And Nabisco tempts you to submit to SnackWell's cookies: "Go

ahead. Worship the Devil's Food." Rather than promoting self-control, these ads entice us to yield to the cravings of the flesh.

We find ourselves inundated with these mixed messages. On the one hand, we're told to watch our diets, cut the fat and eat in moderation; on the other hand, we're encouraged to abandon our constraints and surrender to the sensuous pleasure of eating.

The outcome of this dichotomy is predictable. Because we are often ruled by our "sinful nature," which "desires what is contrary to the Spirit" (see Gal. 5:17), the messages that encourage us to indulge our flesh take precedence over those that advise restraint, and we find ourselves doing things we know we shouldn't. We see the proof of this in the ever-escalating prevalence of obesity.

Thank God for the Holy Spirit! Though yielding to the flesh may be the norm for the world, it doesn't have to be for Christians. Titus 2:12 tells us that God's grace "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age." The world may indulge its appetite and suffer the consequences of obesity, but the Holy Spirit gives us the power to say "No" to the tendency toward gluttony.

ARE YOU DIGGING YOUR OWN GRAVE?

Since there are so many variables influencing our body weight, how do we distinguish whether our problem is rooted in a lack of self-control or one of the many other factors that play a role in obesity? In my experience with both my clinical practice and my church-based weight-loss group, the Ex-Gravediggers, I've found that most women are willing to acknowledge anything but a lack of self-control when it comes to their weight.

I named the group the Ex-Gravediggers because many of the

participants had serious weight-related medical problems such as diabetes and hypertension. Instead of losing weight, these women were digging their own graves, one forkful at a time.

The Ex-Gravedigger weight-loss series includes a session on self-control. Invariably, most of the women in the group are quick to dismiss the idea that their problems stem from a lack of temperance.

“But I don’t eat a lot of food,” is the typical response I receive. In response, I came up with what I call the “Six-S Test,” which is helpful in determining whether a lack of self-control is part of the problem.

The Six-S Test asks the following:

1. Do you eat in response to the sight of food? Are you drawn like a magnet to a beautifully laid buffet or a work-of-art dessert?

2. Do you eat in response to the smell of food? Does a whiff from the neighbor’s grill on a hot summer day compel you to grab your plate and ring their bell?

3. Do you pay attention to your serving sizes? Has the fast-food trend of “super-sizing” everything extended into your own kitchen?

4. Are you prone to go for seconds? Is the first plate (no matter how much food you managed to pile onto it) never quite enough?

5. Do you eat on the spur of the moment? Are you able to drive by the local donut shop without pulling in?

6. Are you prone to snack? Is your grocery cart filled with more chips, pretzels, nachos and popcorn than broccoli, carrots, tomatoes and zucchini?

Every now and then, most of us are guilty of one, two or even

all six of these items. But what distinguishes the woman who has a real problem with self-control from the one who occasionally desires a second piece of pie is that for the former, yielding to the flesh becomes a regular and consistent behavior, and she has a difficult time resisting temptation.

Proverbs 25:28 says that when we lack self-control, we're "like a city whose walls are broken down." The walls of ancient cities served to protect the inhabitants from the onslaught of their enemies.

When we lack self-control, our enemy the devil has easy access to tempt us. He slips through the cracks of our broken-down walls and entices us to yield to the flesh and indulge ourselves with food. Once we've given in, our walls crumble even more.

Eventually, we cease trying to resist, deceiving ourselves that in our already broken-down state, continuing to indulge can do no further harm: "As fat as I am, what difference will one more scoop of ice cream make?"

STEPS TO SUCCESS

If you fit into the pattern of a woman who lacks self-control, the first step in correcting the problem is to acknowledge it. As simple as this sounds, I have found that it usually represents the greatest obstacle. It seems that no one—absolutely no one—thinks she eats too much. ("The problem is in my genes, not that extra slice of cheesecake.")

Acknowledgment of the problems the step before confession, and confession eventually leads to repentance. Repentance simply means that we agree with God that our behavior is not pleasing to Him—and then we change.

But keep in mind that in and of ourselves, we are weak. We must learn to rely totally on the power of the Holy Spirit if we want to achieve long-term success. And one of the Spirit's

attributes is self-control.

Self-control, like David, comes last in the list. But David didn't stay in the background forever. He came out of the field, was anointed by Samuel and went down in history as the greatest king of Israel, a man dear to God's heart.

It's time for Christian women to bring the "last" fruit of the Spirit—self-control—out of the background. It's time for us to line up every aspect of our lives (including our plates) with the will of God and subject ourselves to His precepts. Then we'll be equipped to take control of our weight and reap the benefits of better health.

Read a companion devotional.

Kara Davis, M.D., is a writer and physician who specializes in internal medicine. She combines medical knowledge with biblical wisdom in her approach to patient care.

When Loss Launches Your Destiny

*We can continue to live by **faith** and walk in favor even when our **prophetic destiny** seems to be on hold.*

Have you ever had a **promise** from **God** that you kept expecting to be fulfilled, but nothing ever happened? Have you had a desire that you felt God put in your heart that never materialized?

Did you once have faith to see the plan of God for your life

manifest, but now that faith seems dry and distant? Have you had great **expectations** for God to move on your behalf, but you are still waiting?

This is perhaps the most difficult aspect of **prophetic fulfillment: hope deferred**. It can be experienced as a promise that seems as though it will never be fulfilled, or it can be a promise fulfilled, but the fruit of that promise is dead.

Have you ever experienced the death of a promise? It can truly cause the heart to become sick (see Prov. 13:12). I know this is true from my own life.

God's Greater Plan Nov. 3, 1984, was a day of prophetic fulfillment for the Pierce family. It was on that autumn day that our beautiful daughter, Rebekah, was born. It was a joyful day that followed years of anguish, waiting and believing that God would come through on His word.

In 1980 God had spoken to my wife, Pam, and assured her that she would have twins. At that time, however, she was barren.

After the barrenness was broken, she gave birth to Rebekah and then to our son John Mark. In 1987 she became pregnant again—with twins!

Pam carried the babies to term and on Feb. 6, 1988, gave birth to beautiful identical twin boys whom we named Jesse David and Jacob Levi. God's promise was fulfilled!

But something was wrong in their little bodies. One baby had a serious heart problem, and the other had a serious liver problem. Within one week of their birth, both of our new sons had died.

I watched as they were born, and I held them as they died. The grief and mourning were almost overwhelming. The promise of these twins was the reason we could believe that the barrenness in our lives would be broken, and now, just as it

was being fulfilled, that promise had died.

When the second of our twins died, we had an outdoor memorial service, and Pam sang a beautiful song out over the field. It was an incredible moment.

One week later a friend called and said he had a real problem with God's allowing the children to die. The person also had a problem with Pam's seemingly unshakable faith.

My wife told our friend: "If there's one thing I've learned in my life, it's that the quicker I submit to the hand of God, the quicker I can resist the devil. I have chosen to submit to God's hand in this circumstance. And in submitting to the hand of God, I will receive the ability to overcome the enemy so that the double portion that has been robbed will be returned."

The Lord was speaking through my beautiful wife. Those words went deep into my spirit, and I have carried them since that time.

In the midst of our loss and resulting grief, we need to learn to submit quickly to God's greater plan for our lives. If we always do this, the incredibly hard things we go through will truly become a blessing in the hand of the Lord that will produce a greater prophetic fulfillment in our lives.

In my case, the Lord used the twins' deaths to bring tremendous restoration in my family. In this terrible loss and trauma, I watched Him restore our extended family, which had been so fragmented.

The death of one promise was the catalyst for bringing life and fulfillment to another; that is God's way. What happened in my family was a true miracle.

Loss Has Benefits We should allow God to work our situation for good and respond to His love no matter how difficult our

circumstances may be. Loss can produce a great acknowledgement of God within you if you will submit to His hand. There are other benefits as well.

Loss produces shaking. During times of loss, God begins to remove legalism, fear, condemnation and erroneous thinking about Himself. If you can endure the shaking, you come out in a much stronger place, which results in greater maturity.

Loss produces joy. There are many scriptures that link loss to joy (see Ps. 30; John 16:22). There is a certain level of joy we would never come to know if we had not experienced loss.

Loss produces change. In *A Grace Disguised* (Zondervan), Gerald L. Sittser, who lost his mother, wife and young daughter in a tragic car accident, wrote: "function as a catalyst that pushes us in a new direction, like a closed road that forces us to turn around and find another way to our destination."

Loss produces resurrection. David W. Wiersbe, in *Gone But Not Lost* (Baker), wrote: "God's response to death is always life. That doesn't mean He gives another child when one dies. It means that out of the sorrow and ruin of your 'other' life, God gives you a new life. God's response to loss is always restoration in some form."

When we are in very difficult situations, we can easily lose sight of God's promise. This is how we get off target in seeing God fulfill our prophetic destinies.

WHEN EXPECTATIONS ARE GONE Even though the body of Christ goes through great times of testing, we are not to grow fearful and discouraged. Discouragement breeds "hope deferred," which makes the heart sick.

When we have a measure of hopelessness within us, we lose our expectation of God. Then the biggest demonic force we have to contend with seems to be self-pity. It draws attention to our losses and stops us from seeing God's glory manifested in our

lives.

Instead of allowing our losses to direct us to God's continued perfect plan for our lives, we have a tendency to accuse God for the traumas we are experiencing. The power of this accusation leads to a type of fatherlessness.

Instead of experiencing the spirit of adoption, we feel abandoned. We can become unteachable and fall into apathy because we have no hope of healing or restoration.

We are called to fellowship with His sufferings. This fellowship must lead to the manifestation of His resurrection power in us.

We turn to self when we lose sight of the love of God. But faith works by love. Once we experience His liberty and love, we will be able to resist self-pity and overthrow hope deferred. An excellent scriptural example of this truth is found in the life of Joseph.

Joseph's Hope Deferred When we first read of Joseph, he is a young man with incredible favor and many prophetic promises. The famous "coat of many colors" represented both favor and a double portion anointing from his father.

In their jealousy over Joseph's favor, his brothers became enraged and literally tore Joseph's garments off. He was sold into slavery, and his favor was stripped from him.

But Joseph submitted to the Lord in the midst of the betrayal of his brothers, and the Lord brought him into a new position of favor with his master (see Gen. 39:4).

Then Joseph suffered further loss through false accusations by his master's wife. She ripped his robe off his body and used it as evidence against him.

Joseph was sent to prison, where he seemed forgotten and abandoned. Prophetic fulfillment seemed very unlikely by this

point.

Yet, his circumstances did not stop him from moving into a new dimension of favor. Genesis 39:21 says the Lord showed mercy on him and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.

While in prison he allowed the Lord to continue working through him in the interpretation of dreams. Joseph did not stop moving forward in the plan of God for his life. As a result, God found the perfect time to move on Pharaoh's heart and bring Joseph out of prison so that he could clothe him with favor once again (see Gen. 41:14).

But God Just as God moved on Pharaoh on Joseph's behalf, He can move on anybody on your behalf. We need to have confidence in God.

One of the most effective faith-building phrases in the Bible is "but God." It is in these amazing words that we find hope for what lies ahead because we know it will be in contrast to what we are experiencing. The following verses are just a few examples:

"My flesh and my heart fail; *but God* is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:26, NKJV).

"For indeed he was sick almost unto death; *but God* had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil. 2:27).

Joseph knew that (but) God had been at work in his life (see Gen. 50:20). In each instance when he was stripped of favor, God showed him mercy and reclothed him.

God brought about the prophetic fulfillment and destiny that was meant to be Joseph's portion. It was through this rejected prisoner that God saved the entire region from a devastating famine and restored the promises made to Abraham concerning

his family line.

Regardless of what you have been through that has deferred your hope, God is still able to fulfill the promises He has for you.

Just as the clothing that Joseph wore signified the favor he enjoyed, in the same way the spiritual garments that we are wearing represent our condition. Our garments may be made up of the pain of losses and hope deferred.

It doesn't matter what the enemy has done to distort your identity in God. You can shake off the remnants of those tattered garments and be reclothed!

You do this by making a declaration of what you believe God will do. Declare these verses over your life, and allow your expectations of (but) God to be renewed:

- Expect the Lord to raise up a standard against your foes (see Is. 59:19).
- Expect your spirit to arise with glory so that oppression and depression break off you (see Is. 60:1).
- Expect the Lord's presence to rest on you (see v. 2).
- Expect new vision to arise within you (see v. 4).
- Expect new joy to overwhelm you (see v. 5).
- Expect new favor to come upon you and new doors and connections to open for you (see v. 10).
- Expect the spirit of poverty that has been holding your gates shut to let go, and expect the gate of provision to come open and stay open (see v. 11).

After the loss of our twins, the doctors warned us not to have any more children because they might be born with the same defects. But God did not agree.

Since that time we have had two beautiful, healthy boys. I can't say that it was all easy, especially the first year after our loss, but God has shown Himself faithful to heal and

restore. He has moved us forward to new levels of prophetic fulfillment and continues to lead us on an incredible journey of faith and joy.

Loss is a painful fact of life. Yet as we submit to the hand of God, it can become a tool that propels us into a new season of promise and joyous prophetic fulfillment.

Read a companion devotional.

Chuck Pierce and Rebecca Wagner Sytsema have co-authored several books, including *Possessing Your Inheritance* and *The Future War of the Church*. Both are published by Renew.