

# 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 mani

fested 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.](#)

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*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.*

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## When God's Love Seems Impossible

For a long time, I struggled to win God's **approval** through human **determination** and **achievement**. But the yoke of **religion** never permitted me the unattainable luxury of **acceptance**.

From the time I was a little girl, I wanted to **love** God, but I just didn't think I could love Him enough. Imagine my relief when I began to understand that God put the desire in me to love Him and that He would make it **possible** for me to fulfill it.

In commenting on the greatest commandment—to love God with every part of our beings (Matt. 22:37)—Matthew Henry wrote, “All obedience begins in the affections, and nothing in religion is done right, that is not done there first. ... Man is a creature cut out for love.”

It's possible to work for God and not love Him. But it is foolish to settle for demanding religious observances that are void of passion and eternal value.

Loving God fulfills our primary need for intimacy. If we don't devote ourselves to Him, we are apt to go astray.

I've had more than one married person tell me that although having a devoted spouse is a blessing, it is not a substitute for the intimacy we are designed to enjoy in God's presence alone. Most of us know this already, but either out of habit or in response to what we perceive as a desperate need, we try to fill this God-given desire for intimacy through unhealthy means that eventually will imprison us.

Why do we shy away from intimately knowing our heavenly Bridegroom? In *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer says that one major hindrance in our face-to-face experience with Jesus is the veil that continues to cover our hearts.

This veil is comprised of what he terms the "self sins": "self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration [and] self-love," among others. They are hard to unseat due to the fact that they are so tightly interwoven into our nature and upheld by our culture.

Rather than a burdensome obligation, the command to love God is, in essence, the pronouncement of a liberating privilege, for Scriptural commands can only be obeyed by the Spirit of God in us. Anna Rountree says, "Only God can love God."

How freeing that knowledge is. Henry put it this way: "If [love] be the fulfilling of the law, surely the yoke of the command is very easy. Love is the rest and satisfaction of the soul; if we walk in this good old way, we shall find rest."

If we've placed other things in the space God formed within us for Himself, these will obstruct our view of Him and leave us empty and enslaved. But giving first place to our First Love and offering to Him what He desires most will bring liberty and the fulfillment of our deepest needs for this life and the one to come.

**Brenda J. Davis** is the former editor of SpiritLed Woman. She lives in Sanford, Fla., with her Schipperkes, Grayson and Mercy.

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## What Am I Doing Wrong?

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# Improve Your Health With Laughter

*Negative emotions can affect your physical well-being. But keeping a smile on your face contributes to emotional and physical health.*

Two of the greatest healing forces in the world are available to you at this very moment. They are the healing power of laughter and the restorative strength of joy. A merry heart is your greatest weapon against deadly emotions.

The Bible affirms the healing power of joy when it says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person’s strength” (Prov. 17:22, NLT). This scriptural truth suggests that laughter holds as much healing power as medicine. Is it any wonder that those who laugh easily often live longer than those who do not?

When you laugh, powerful endorphins, which act much the same way as morphine, are released in the brain. Endorphins trigger a feeling of well-being throughout your entire body. So you

see, a merry heart really does work like medicine!

An enormous amount of research supports this fact. If a person is happy and at peace with himself and his surroundings, he will have significantly fewer serious illnesses than the unhappy person.

In the Department of Behavioral Medicine of the UCLA Medical School, Norman Cousins conducted extensive research into the physical benefits of happiness. He established the Humor Research Task Force that coordinated worldwide clinical research on humor. Cousin's body of research proved conclusively that laughter, happiness and joy are perfect antidotes for stress.

Long ago Isaiah wrote, "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, whose thoughts are fixed on You" (Is. 26:3).

A noted doctor once said that the diaphragm, thorax, abdomen, heart, lungs—and even the liver—are given a massage during a hearty laugh. That's a good internal workout!

Instead of watching films or television dramas that drain and depress your spirit, choose something that can put a smile on your face and feed your healthy emotions.

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**Don Colbert, M.D.**, *is a family physician and nutrition expert. His latest book is I Can Do This Diet (Siloam Press).*

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## **How to Bear the Fruit of the**

# Spirit

Jesus taught His disciples that fruitfulness was His purpose for them. He told them, “‘You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain’” (John 15:16, NASB). He also taught them that they could be fruitful only by learning to abide in Him.

The principle of abiding must be clearly understood so we avoid trying to bear fruit in our own strength. The Scriptures teach that these true Christian virtues are the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of human effort.

Many people today are attempting to produce the fruit of the Spirit through natural efforts and character-building. They exercise their wills to produce character through philosophy, education, ethics, anthropology, mental sciences or controlled environment. The results achieved from this human effort, though they may involve temporal good, are not the eternal fruitfulness that is produced by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ produced by the Spirit of Christ in the believer's life. The more completely one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the greater will be the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in his life and work.

Only when a believer is full of the Holy Spirit, continually yielding to Him, can he exhibit the full fruition of Christian virtues. When Christ is formed in the believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, true Christlike character will be as natural a result as pears growing on a pear tree. It follows then that if one who professes to be a Christian is devoid of fruit, he obviously does not have the Spirit of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is produced automatically when we are yielded to the Holy Spirit and are walking in obedience

to Him.

When Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit in writing to the Galatians, he is restating the Sermon on the Mount. This description is the ideal Christian life presented in concentrated expression.

Paul's love chapter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13) is the summary of his list of the fruit of the Spirit. He is teaching the very same principle of Christian life when he writes to the Philippians: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8). Any concept of Christianity that does not have as its basis the character of the fruit of the Spirit is a false teaching of Christianity.

The Scriptures clearly teach that natural man cannot hope to develop godly character without the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Paul describes the striking contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit:

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Spirit-filled men and women can be distinguished by their fruit in the same way that a carnal person can be identified by fleshly works. If we are abiding in Christ, the fruit of the Spirit will be manifest in our lives; it cannot be hidden. So, also, are the works of the flesh manifest in one who is not abiding in Christ.

A carnal person is one who is not governed by the indwelling

Spirit of God. This egocentric, self-centered life manifests the works of the flesh, while a Christ-centered life manifests the fruit of the Spirit.

The great struggle within each believer is the struggle between self and Christ. If self wins, it becomes the central force of life, causing a person to be completely self-centered. Every descriptive characteristic of a self-centered person starts with the word "self": selfish, self-pitying, self-glorying, perhaps even self-hating. The list of "self" words seems unending.

If Christ wins this battle against our self-life, He becomes the center of our personalities, and we become Christ-centered. The happy consequence of a Christ-centered life is the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit.

The principle of fruit-bearing is a "life-principle." Life develops from a life-source; it cannot be manufactured. Fruit is not made; it grows as the requirements of the life-principle are met. In contrast, the works of the flesh are described in the Scriptures as a negative result of human effort without the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures clearly teach the life-principle involved in bearing fruit. The flesh can produce nothing but evil works, while the Holy Spirit produces Christ-life fruit. The former requires self-effort and results in death; the latter requires obedience to the Holy Spirit and produces life and peace.

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**Dr. Fuchsia Pickett** ministered for over 50 years. She was an author, well-known Bible teacher and considered a mother in the faith in the charismatic movement. She passed away in 2004.

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# 6 Ways That Women Answer God's Call

Prophetic voices around the world are confirming that now is the time to release **women** into **ministry**. We are experiencing a new **move of God** on the earth, and God is raising up women to play a key role. In fact, He is calling and anointing women today as never before. They are part of **His plan** to crush the enemy's head.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God told Satan, who had appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent and deceived her, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Gen. 3:15, NIV). This is an incredible redemptive promise, foreshadowing the final victory of Jesus (the offspring of the woman) over the devil and his evil cohorts.

But many women lose sight of the fact that **Christ** in them will crush the enemy's head. They shrink back in fear that Satan will bruise their heels. They need to remember: A promise is different from a prophecy. A promise is a sure thing; it will be done. They can rest assured that God's redemptive promise will be fulfilled.

Women have nothing to fear from Satan, but he has reason to fear them! Why? Because in this "now" season, God is calling them to rise up as "now" women and help usher in the new thing He is doing.

## "Now" Women Initiate the New Thing

What does a "now" woman look like? Studying the account of Jesus' first public miracle gives us a clue. John 2:1-3 says,

“On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine’” (NKJV).

Notice Jesus’ response to his mother: “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come” (v. 4).

Basically, He was saying, “Why are you telling me about the wine? It’s not time for Me to display My glory.” But look at Mary’s reaction: She didn’t pay any attention to Jesus’ comment! Like all “now” women, she knew when it was time for something to happen, and she was prepared to initiate the new thing.

Mary told the attendants, “Whatever He says to you, do it” (v. 5). Here is an example of a woman initiating the new thing. In response to her initiation, Jesus gave instructions to the servants to fill the stone waterpots with water so He could create the needed wine. Many times, women initiate the next move of God on the earth, just as Mary initiated Jesus’ ministry of miracles.

### **“Now” Women Conceive the New Thing**

In Hebrews 11:11, Sarah is recognized as the first woman of faith: “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” Though she was old, she conceived the new thing God wanted to birth—Isaac, the child of promise. Like Sarah, “now” women conceive the new thing.

Such women are desperately needed in the church! If there is one thing wrong with us right now, it is that we’ve lost the passion to be able to conceive the new thing God wants to do on the earth.

## **“Now” Women Announce the New Thing**

“Now” women not only initiate and conceive the new thing, they also announce it, as Mary Magdalene announced the resurrection of the Lord to the disciples. The Bible tells us that Jesus chose her—a woman—to appear to first (Mark 16:9).

Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that Jesus was alive. Jesus knew the others were too filled with fear and unbelief to announce His resurrection. In fact, they didn’t believe Mary when she made the announcement, but she knew she had seen the Lord. Like Mary, women are about to become the next trumpeters of faith throughout this land.

## **“Now” Women Intervene**

The life of Abigail exemplifies another attribute of “now” women—their ability to circumvent trouble by intervening at the right moment. In 1 Samuel 25 we learn that Abigail was married to Nabal, a businessman in Carmel who was very wealthy. He had a ruling authority in that area, and David, who had been out warring in Nabal’s territory, hoped to receive refreshment from his household. Although David approached Nabal with a right spirit, Nabal replied foolishly, refusing to be hospitable to David and his men.

David was upset by Nabal’s response because he had been protecting Nabal’s property. He decided to retaliate.

Notice what happened next: Nabal’s wife, Abigail, intervened. She “made haste and took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys” (v. 18). In other words, she by-passed her foolish husband. She sent her servants ahead of her but did not say anything to Nabal about her plan (v. 19).

When Abigail saw David she dismounted, bowed her face to the ground and said, "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant" (v. 24). Then she proceeded to apologize to David and beg him not to take offense.

Abigail positioned herself correctly; she humbled herself correctly; she interceded correctly. And notice the results: David received her intercession. When she told her husband the next morning what she'd done, "his heart died within him, and he became like a stone. Then it happened, after about ten days, that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died" (vv. 37-38). When David heard this news, he proposed to Abigail and took her as his wife (v. 39).

God has placed many "now" women in difficult situations in which they have the opportunity to intervene. When they do, God intervenes on their behalf.

### **"Now" Women Know the Time of Change**

Naomi is another example of a "now" woman—a woman who knew when it was time for change. She had moved to Moab from Bethlehem with her husband. But then she lost him as well as both her sons. Realizing that Bethlehem held the key to her future, she decided to return.

One of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, chose to leave her native land and go with Naomi. Together they began to rebuild their lives. Ruth went to work gleaning in the fields of a man named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband.

When the harvest ended, Naomi realized that it was again time for change. She felt that Ruth needed a more stable situation. She told Ruth she wanted to secure a future for her and sent her to Boaz, hoping that he would take care of her because she was a relative (Ruth 3:1-2). Naomi seized the opportunity to activate a cultural law of redemption in order to protect her daughter-in-law.

She then gave Ruth several instructions: to wash and anoint herself, to put on her best garment in place of the widow's garb she had been wearing, to wait for the right timing and to lay down at Boaz' feet. These actions required Ruth to fully submit to what God was trying to do.

The result of Naomi's taking action at the right moment and Ruth's obedience was that Boaz got up and blessed Ruth. He also promised he would abide by the law of redemption and care for her if a closer relative would not do his duty.

Do you know what this means for women today? When they do that which God is asking them to do when He is asking them to do it, they will receive a blessing. If they know the time of change and go through the process of cleansing themselves, receiving a new anointing, removing their old garments, moving in at the right moment and submitting themselves to the full purpose of God, they will be blessed.

"Now" women know when it's time for change. If they move to initiate the change at the right moment, they will secure their future. Why is this important? Because if women can discern by the Spirit what God is doing and rise up to pray, His plans will be fulfilled.

### **"Now" Women Awake**

Deborah was a woman who woke up to God's purposes. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* states that the general concept of "awakening" captures the notion of either rousing oneself or being aroused in order to take action, as in the call for Deborah to "wake up" (Judg. 5:12, NIV) or "awake" (NKJV). Such a call is usually accompanied by urgency and intensity, as indicated by emphatic repetition: "Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song!" (v. 12; cf. Is. 52:1).

Deborah had been judging Israel for several years before she planned the war against Jabin. But before she could arouse the tribes to go to war, she herself had to rise up with a renewed

spirit.

Deborah had characteristics that I see God awakening at this time in women all over the world. She was a prophetess. She was a ruler. She was a warrior. She was a psalmist. And she was a mother of Israel. My encouragement to women is, awake and arise now, and demonstrate the change that God is longing to bring in our day.

*Chuck Pierce has been affiliated with the World Prayer Center in Colorado Springs, Colo., and Global Harvest Ministries. He is president of Glory of Zion International Ministries in Denton, Texas.*

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## **T.D. Jakes: God's Call on a Woman in a Man's World**

It is said that this is a man's world. It is not a man's world. Men may be occupying many seats of authority, but God is in control.

If God blesses you, do not fear. A blessed woman can survive—even in a man's world. The challenge is to receive what is yours without becoming bitter about the times it was withheld from you.

In Numbers 27 a story is told concerning the daughters of Zelophehad who went to Moses to challenge the fairness of the "good ol' boys" policy that would deny them the right to inherit their father's wealth. Their actions suggested, "We are women, but we are blessed women."

They challenged the system at a time when women were

considered second-class citizens. In spite of public opinion, they chose to speak up for their rights, and they got what they fought to attain (see vv. 5-8).

The daughters of Zelophehad were not disrespectful or rude. They went through proper channels, but bless God, they went through.

God is a good Father. It is His will to bless you. Don't worry about who is against you; just keep thinking about who is for you.

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad outlines the first case of gender discrimination mentioned in the Scriptures. And the court of heaven ruled in favor of these women who knew how to go after what their father had in his estate.

Perhaps there are some things your Father has for you. Do not be intimidated. In spite of what you don't have, look at what you do have and keep on walking. By God's grace and power you can receive your inheritance.

As a father, I need to know that I have prepared for my children's today and their tomorrow. I would be angry to think that although I had left an inheritance for my daughters, they were living in poverty.

God is a better father than I am. Why don't you as a woman of God go after what the Father has willed to you?

If you have been walking around with a drab spirit and a broken heart, I am talking to you.

Don't spend another day wasted in regret, sleeping away your mercy and losing your chance to achieve. Get up and get busy.

You may have to work it out. You may have to push and shove. But life is worth the struggle. Your Father has blessed you with good things!

*T.D. Jakes is a charismatic leader, visionary, provocative thinker and entrepreneur who serves as senior pastor of the Potter's House, a global humanitarian organization and 30,000-member church located in Dallas.*

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## **Find God's Gift for Dealing With Conflict**

*Before Jesus died, He willed us His peace. But we forfeit His gift through strife.*

The Bible tells us that everything the Father has is ours through Jesus (see John 16:15). What does the Father have? He certainly does not have strife. On the contrary, everything He has ministers life to us. His kingdom is one of righteousness, peace and joy. So supernatural peace and joy belong to the believer.

Before He died, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you" (John 14:27, The Amplified Bible). In essence, He was saying, "I am willing you My peace."

God's desire for us is that we live in peace with Him, with ourselves and with our fellowman. He wants us to have peace in the midst of our current circumstances—peace in the morning, at night and all times in between. Peace is our inheritance! And it is a wonderful possession.

But strife is the thief of peace. Even a minor degree of strife will steal some of the peace that is allotted for us. Satan comes to kill, steal and destroy, and he accomplishes his goal, at least in large measure, through strife.

One type of strife he brings is confusion, a form of strife in your mind. A person who is confused argues with himself. His thoughts fly back and forth in conflict with one another. A doubleminded man is not at peace.

Yet the Bible clearly teaches us that peace of mind is our heritage. The devil attempts to steal it by attacking us with worry, anxiety and confusion. The Word shows us the way to maintain it:

“Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God. And God’s peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

“You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and hopes confidently in You” (Is. 26:3).

It is important to realize that peace is your inherited right. Otherwise, the devil may convince you that worry is your obligation when you have problems. Many mothers think they are not good mothers if they don’t worry about their children. These Christian women love the Lord, but they haven’t received a revelation on the dangers of strife.

Their minds are not peaceful; they are filled with worry, anxiety and turmoil. Upset emotions result. Worry leads to emotional upset. In John 14:27, Jesus advises, “Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed.”

Strife is not just a problem between people; it’s often a problem within a person. What is going on inside you? Is the

atmosphere inside peaceful or strifeful?

“But no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall show to be in the wrong. This [peace, righteousness, security, triumph over opposition] is the heritage of the servants of the Lord” (Is. 54:17).

Peace is our heritage. It is ours through the “blood line.” The blood of Jesus brings it to me. It is mine! I am determined that the devil is not going to steal my inheritance through strife. Learn to recognize strife. Refuse to allow it in your life.

Allow God to reveal the root of your problem. Satan does not want you to know the real problem. He wants you to run around in circles, so to speak, always looking for something and never discovering anything. We do not war with flesh and blood. Many times our problems are not what we think but have their roots in subtle, hidden strife.

In this way Satan deceives people. They spend their lives attempting to deal with the wrong issues. Start confronting the spirit of strife, and you will see many things begin to fall into place.

Keep strife out of your life; out of your thoughts, words and attitudes; out of your relationships. Be at peace with God, with yourself and with your fellowman. Peace belongs to you. Jesus has already given it to you. Begin to live in peace. Make a decision today: “I am finished with upset and turmoil; peace is mine, and I am going to enjoy it now.”

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# Easing the Pain of Blended Families

Blending families when divorced or widowed parents remarry can be a challenge. Here are some steps to take to help the process go smoothly.

**Stepmom.** What word pictures come to mind when you hear that word? Perhaps you are like my young **daughter**, whose first encounter with stepmom went like this: "Mommy, Mommy, Alison has a stepmom! Will she be mean and wicked like the stepmother in Cinderella? We've got to help Alison!"

Or maybe you know a boy like Billy—quiet, shy and frightened that his "new" mom will take off like his first. One year ago Billy's real mother abandoned the family, and now the stepmother is trying to love him. Billy is resisting. From his point of view, one **rejection** is hard enough.

Shari, an unhappy teen-ager, refuses to talk to her stepmom, who became part of the family after an affair with her **dad** that led to divorce and remarriage. Dad has repented of his sin, but Shari has no intention of accepting the "other woman" as her stepmother. She can't stop thinking about how Mom suffered as a result of her dad's **infidelity**. The stepmom is a living reminder of the family **pain**.

Such are the stories of **stepchildren** trying to adjust. Hurt and wounded, these kids can be a handful. Often their pain evidences in opposition, **anger** and flat-out rejection of the stepmom. And no one knows how difficult it all can be better than the stepmoms themselves. **Stepparenting** can be summed up by the Spanish phrase about social revolution, La lucha continua: The struggle continues.

The government estimates that by the year 2007, **stepfamilies**, or blended **families** as we sometimes call them, will outnumber

traditional nuclear families. Stepfamilies are an outgrowth of our **divorce** culture, the result of the growing number of failed marriages.

**What Kids Face** When families blend, everyone experiences change, but from the children's perspective, the world has turned upside down. Suddenly there is a stranger sharing the bathroom, giving directions and checking their homework. Dad is no longer exclusively theirs. Mom's daily presence is lost. Holidays become complicated. And what do they call this new person who shows up at the breakfast table with habits that annoy them?

Their former family has been torn apart and replaced with another. This loss and new arrangement are not by choice. Feelings of anger linger long after the parents' divorce is final. If the child hasn't openly worked through anger and forgiveness toward the original parents, these feelings carry over to the blended family as well.

Even in the best of situations, stepchildren struggle to find ways to honor stepparents without dishonoring biological parents. They experience a constant division of loyalties that evidences in the smallest of issues. It is this division of loyalties that resurfaces throughout the new marriage and serves as an unpleasant reminder of the price children pay for divorce.

And consider this: According to an article in the *American Sociological Review* titled "The Quality and Stability of Remarriages: the Role of Stepchildren," couples with stepchildren are more than twice as likely to divorce again (White and Booth, 1985), and children who live as stepchildren are more likely to move out of the household at an earlier age. Research indicates that families with stepchildren have more rivalry and aggression and less empathy and involvement.

**How Stepmoms Can Help** But what about the stepmoms, the

unforgotten women who need help overcoming the stigma of their new roles and adjusting to children who may resent their presence? Their challenge is to become accepted as part of the reconstituted family. Doing so takes time and effort. And their husbands, the ones who are supposed to support them through the adjustment, are often in precarious roles dealing with the guilt of divorce and loyalty to the children whom they have hurt.

Stepmoms don't always know what to do. The main problem for reconstituted families is that the original intact family is gone. That first model, no matter how good or how poor, no longer applies to the current situation. Consequently all members struggle with ambivalence, attachment, emotional reactions, reorganization, unresolved issues and spiritual redevelopment.

The stepmom typically has the added frustration of juggling the family's needs—her husband's, her own and their children's. Most times contact regarding visitation and extended family goes through her. And all too often, ex-wives are not eager to cooperate with stepmom's needs and wishes, particularly if stepmom is the woman who broke up the intact family.

When the new couple has a child together (ours), the **parenting** work goes easier because of parental cohesion that develops. Yet the interplay of relationships with "yours" and "mine" can remain stressful.

Keep in mind that remarriage is a complex process, not a one-time event. Remarriage is easier when:

- There is a reasonable interval between marriages, and losses are grieved.
- There is no shift in custody at the time of remarriage.
- Both families approve of the remarriage.

- Children have contact with both their biological parents.
- Acrimony over the children is not present between ex-spouses.
- The stepdaughter is not adolescent. Daughters ages 9 to 15 have more problems adjusting to stepparents.
- Time is taken to adjust (usually between two to five years).
- The problems of stepmoms are recognized and validated.
- Mutual courtesy between stepmom and children, rather than mutual love, is the immediate goal.
- The biological parent handles serious discipline issues well.

Of course, many of you don't have these things going for you. But don't despair! There is still much that can be done to ease the blending of families. If you are a stepmom undergoing family adjustment, consider these strategies:

Continue to resolve all divorce issues. When issues of loss surface (and they will), freely discuss them. Loss is an ongoing process due to celebrations and life transitions such as graduations, weddings, births and so on that will require you to interface with the biological parents.

Give up the idea that you won't have difficulty. The **biblical promise** is that you will overcome problems, not avoid them.

Talk about feelings—guilt, anger, loyalties and so on. Validating feelings and not being afraid to allow others to express them is very important and goes a long way in helping family members feel supported.

Find a way to work with the biological mom. This will require prayer and humility—and may be a test of your Christlike character.

Be aware that problems with ex-spouses usually involve money, jealousy, competition and unresolved divorce issues. Clarify

and resolve these issues.

Negotiate your relationship with the children. Successful discipline occurs after stepfamily integration. When possible, support the biological parent.

Understand that you married your husband because you love him. You may not love the children at first—and may have to work on this. Ask God to put a love in your heart for them.

You have more to cope with than intact families. You should understand this before you remarry. In most cases, children are forever tied to the biological couple.

Keep your relationship with God strong, intimate and growing. You need His strength, love and wisdom.

Pray for the newly constituted family and the biological mother.

Stepmoms often ask in therapy why no one appreciates the load they bear. The answer has to do with the preoccupation of other family members with their own adjustments. In addition, women typically take responsibility for family relationships. Consequently, others expect them to carry the burden and be strong.

You may not always feel strong, and that's OK. Know that you aren't alone in your time of adjustment. God sees your difficulty and has the wisdom necessary to handle family matters.

Approach your loving heavenly Father. Ask for discernment and godly character in order to respond to each situation in a Christlike manner. He will give you what you need to be victorious.

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**Linda Mintle** is a national expert on the psychology of food,

*weight and body image and relationships.*

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# God's Answer to Dealing With Stress

If stress is affecting your **health**, God has an answer for you.

Most of my clients who are **chronically ill** have one thing in common—**stress**! I have found that in many cases, clients who have had **stressful experiences** in their lives, such as **divorce, job loss, sleep deprivation, death in the family**, trouble with children and loneliness have lowered immune responses, a condition that sets them up for various types of illness, including migraines, backaches, **chronic fatigue syndrome, arthritis, depression**, panic disorders, lupus and more.

It is important to remember that stress is stress, whether it is good stress or bad stress. Getting married, receiving a job promotion, going on vacation, giving birth, moving to a new home and graduating from college are considered happy events in our lives, but they also produce much stress. People in stressful situations—whether the situations are good or bad—tend to come down with the same types of chronic illnesses as a result of **lowered immune response**.

The good news is that God designed our bodies to handle stress. If we maintain a high level of immune system health, we may even thrive on it. How do we keep our immune systems strong? By eating right, getting enough sleep, exercising, having a good sense of humor and taking the time to relax and to pray.

Your best stress weapon, of course, is to cast all your cares upon the Lord. Do it daily. Do it minute by minute if you have to. But do it. God will see you through.

Recognizing the early signs of stress and taking action early on to handle it through exercise, relaxation, dietary changes and prayer rather than letting it become destructive will make a difference in your quality of life and well-being. You can't always avoid stress, but by learning to cope with it you can become an overcomer rather than a statistic.

**Janet Maccaro, Ph.D, CNC, is a respected lecturer and the author of several books on health and nutrition, including 100 Answers to 100 Questions about How to Live Longer.**