

3 Ways to Grieve Without Letting It Consume You

When we do not know who we are in Christ, we will search for an identity.

We find it in our abuse, our career, our role as a mom or a homeschooler, our weight loss—and our grief.

If we allow our grief to define us, we can potentially allow it to become an excuse for isolation, laziness, irresponsibility or even neglect.

What was at first a state of shock now becomes our lifestyle, because we've given grief more room in our lives than it was meant to have. It's become who we are, not what we do.

We need to learn to distinguish events, experiences and emotions from who we really are.

Grief is an experience, not an identity.

3 Ways to Prevent Grief From Becoming An Identity

1. Find out what God says about you.

Find verses that describe what God says about you and write them down.

You can find a lot of verses that express who you are in Christ in the book of Ephesians. I have listed some in this post, [10 Verses About Your Identity in Christ](#), and even created a downloadable set of memory verse cards for you to print and use.

You can also find my [30 Day Prayer Challenge on My Identity in Christ](#) here, with 30 verses from Scripture that affirm who we

are in Jesus.

2. Express your emotions through the prism of Scripture.

Emotions are not wrong, as long as they are under the submission of the Holy Spirit. When emotions are given room to run our lives, we will live in continual drama.

Over the past six weeks, I have been on a journey of learning how to live with peace from the inside out, free from the drama around me and from the anxiety I'd normally feel.

3. Honor your loved one.

In his book *Grieving With Hope*, Samuel J. Hodges lists ways that we can honor our loved ones in our grief without getting stuck in a continual cycle of grieving.

Making our grief an identity, in fact, dishonors the one we've lost.

We need to honor them by adjusting to a new normal, a new life without them. It isn't disloyal; it is honoring the life we've been given by God.

While the pain of our loss will always be with us in some measure, we can still live in joy.

Grief doesn't have to define our lives.

God wants us to live in the joy and peace He gives, even when we are walking through seasons of grief.

If you have experienced a loss, I encourage you to get *Grieving with Hope* today and begin reading about how to navigate this difficult season of grief in a way that brings hope and healing. {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live with their two active boys in the country, where she enjoys

fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an Associates of Practical Theology and is passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author a number of books. She is the author of A Little R & R, where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at these other places on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

Answer Your Divine Assignment With These 3 Scriptural Strategies

I look at the account of Deborah's integrated approach to life, work and ministry as one of the most complete and succinct examples of one who leads leaders. Picture Deborah the prophetess and judge going about her business in the house of Israel day in and day out. This mighty woman of God was positioned strategically for dramatic deployment into action. As Deborah performed her duties, I doubt she ever dreamed she would call a king to war and ride a horse into battle—but she did.

If you sound the call, be willing to go.

In the account in Judges 4, Deborah called Barak forth and spoke to him words like this: "Barak, has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go gather your men'..." (Judg. 4:6 paraphrased). Barak was a leader of Israel. These words must have struck him as a startling reminder of something he already knew in his heart. So why did Deborah need to deliver the message? Perhaps it was because Barak was not acting upon

his commission from the Lord. As the drama unfolded, Barak was encouraged to fulfill his God-ordained assignment to defeat Sisera, but not without demanding that Deborah ride into battle with him. In response, she mounted up and cried, "I will go with you." Many of us in this hour of cultural upheaval are looking for someone to go with us as well.

What kind of woman does such things? Who was Deborah?

Judges 4:4-5 says, "Now Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess. She judged Israel at that time. She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim. The children of Israel would go up to her for her to render judgment."

We see immediately that Deborah flowed in spiritual ministry as a prophetess, that her professional role was as a judge over the nation, and that she was married. She also had a great "office" with a view under a palm tree. We don't see any hesitation in Deborah about moving in her spiritual gifts or office as she performed her role as a judge. We see a woman who had certainty and confidence in who she was in God, and better yet, it seems she knew that God was in her.

Know who you are in God.

Deborah didn't divide her life up into two tracks: The Spiritual and The Professional. Granted, the culture Deborah found herself in was an integrated one, unlike our western culture that leads to compartmentalized living. Nevertheless, Deborah didn't stop to say, "I can't prophesy today because I am going to work—I have to sit on the bench under the palm tree and render decisions and judgments. I'll follow up on this at church when I see Barak. I'll call him aside to give him God's reminder." No, not this woman!

She sent word to Barak, brought him into the office and delivered the word with such confidence that it seems he was compelled to issue an ultimatum that she come with him into

battle. Barak refused to go without her. Was it the strength in Deborah's spirit that caused Barak to invite her to ride into battle? We see power in Deborah's words because her life and her identity were firmly grounded in God.

Deborah was such a great leader because she understood her assignment, she was confident in God's leadership and she acted on her assignment in God's timing. Because of her leadership, we read that those who followed were following with all their heart.

Understand the assignment and the timing.

The enemy got word of Barak's campaign and responded with 900 chariots of iron. Barak may have been shaking in his boots or perhaps he was just waiting for the right moment to launch the attack—either way, once again, it was Deborah who called the charge.

Judges 4:14 says, "Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get up, for this is the day that the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men behind him."

We see Deborah literally calling Barak "Up!" to go into battle. What was the protocol in the military? Who was in charge? God used Deborah, the prophetic judge and wife, as a military commander to bring victory in battle. All of Sisera's army fell by the edge of the sword—not a man was left.

What was Deborah's secret? How did she overcome the stigma of being a woman in office, flowing in the prophetic at work, and leading in battle? Is it possible that Deborah flowed powerfully in these arenas of family, government and religion, surmounting each challenge as though it was all in a day's work, because she was grounded in God? We tend to wrestle in our culture over moving between different cultural spheres. Deborah had her own struggles, but the answer in both time periods is the same: be rooted and grounded in the love of God

so that He is the one we please above all else. We have given too much power to others to define us. Oh, that we too would run and live as Deborah did, with the primary goal of pleasing God. {eoa}

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6 Helpful Reminders for the Mom Struggling to Walk in the Spirit

Although all three of my children are now older (and they're all pretty awesome, I might add), I vividly remember those days when mom duty was draining my peace and stealing my emotional and physical energy. Maybe you can relate to having "those days" too.

You know... "those days" when you might snap if you hear one more disrespectful teenager comment or have to deal with one more ounce of girl drama or unfair sports team decisions.

Those days when you find yourself hiding away in the closet and eating Oreos, while trying to tune out the words "Moooooom, where are you?" echoing through the house. Those days spent praying for the supernatural ability to be a happy mom and a positive role model, rather than a frustrated, short-tempered hot mess of a mom who is at wit's end with dealing with hormones, social lives, wardrobe crises, rules being broken and being the maid and taxi driver. Those days

when money is low, burdens are high, and you are just plain tired of being a grown-up, much less having to be responsible for other people's emotional and physical needs.

The happy days certainly outweigh the trying days, and I would not trade in a single moment of motherhood for a gazillion dollars. In fact, being a mom has been the greatest blessing of my entire life! Nonetheless, those trying days can zap a positive attitude quicker than one can say "you're grounded." Worse yet, the weight of losing confidence as a mom as a result of frustrations and perceived failures can cause any mom to feel weary and unqualified.

Below are a few tips to help you remember to stay positive, so you can remain a positive, confident mom and role model for the kids God has placed in your care:

1. Know that you can never love too much.

Whether girl or boy, children need love, hugs, attention and compassion. Love is the basis for their lives, regardless of their age, and has a huge impact on their own self confidence. Don't worry about spoiling your daughter by loving on her too much, or making your son less masculine if you shower him with hugs. God is love, and He calls us moms to be love too—even when the kids are not being lovable. You may not always feel like the perfect parent or be able to buy them everything they want, attend every ballgame or dance recital, and never lose your temper. But you can always make sure they know how important they are to you and that they are loved unconditionally. When our children feel loved, it fills our hearts and boosts our confidence as moms, and reminds us we must be doing something right.

2. Allow yourself to live and learn.

They don't say parenting is a journey for no reason. With each passing year, we learn a little bit more about how to be a better parent and effectively raise our children to the best

of our ability. What we did with our first child, we may or may not do with our last, because we've lived and learned some lessons. Give yourself some grace when you mess up, recognizing that each parenting experience, good and bad, is a learning experience. Allowing ourselves to stumble in our parenting, and being willing to either forgive ourselves or ask for forgiveness from our children when needed, helps us build confidence in who we are and what we were called to do.

3. Tune out the voices of criticism.

From the moment you swaddle your newborn infant to the first day your teenager asks to go out on a date, people will be full of advice. Full, I tell you. Sometimes the advice is valid and helpful, while other times it may be overbearing, intrusive and critical. The trick is learning to filter the advice we receive with our own gut feelings and faith beliefs; appreciate the advice but determine what works best for you and always run your decisions by God in prayer. Just because we may disagree with someone's advice or parenting style doesn't make their ways wrong or our ways wrong. It just makes us different.

Our kids are just that—*our* kids. Although we can seek advice from others and respect suggestions from other moms or trusted resources, what is most important is that we recognize God gave us our specific kids for a reason, knowing that we have been divinely equipped in unique ways to raise them. We may not be an expert in raising someone else's child, but we are the expert in raising our own, and believing that can help us have confidence for those trying days. Trust that God has equipped you to be the mom your child needs and will give you the wisdom to carry out the task of motherhood.

4. Focus on what you're doing right, instead of what you feel you're doing wrong.

It's easy to get hung up on our imperfections as parents—like

those times when we leave the baby crying in the crib longer than we should because we were physically exhausted. Or when we punish our toddler for spilling milk because we are already stretched thin. Or when we lose our temper when a teenager speaks disrespectfully and yell regretful words in anger. There is no such thing as a perfect parent, but most likely our parenting successes will far outweigh our mess-ups. If you've been feeling like a less-than-confident mom lately, give yourself a break. Instead of obsessing over your mistakes or shortcomings as a parent, focus on all the good things you do for and with your kids. Instead of worrying if your faults are going to scar them for life, focus on all the sweet and wonderful things you are shaping within them and teaching them. Think positive about yourself, and that optimism and confidence will equip you to help your children learn to think positive about themselves too.

5. Don't compare yourself to other moms. It's hard not to compare—when you see a mom who lost all her baby weight, manages to keep her kids under control in the grocery store, and keeps them all dressed in cute outfits along with matching bows which might be too big for an adult head, much less a small child's. It's hard not to compare—when you see a mom who seems to have perfect teenagers or young adult kids, who attend bible study every week and seem to never get into trouble. But everything about parenting is a package deal. No mom goes through this journey of parenting without her own set of mess-ups, struggles, successes and failures. Even moms who seem perfect on the outside struggle with insecurities and their own set of child-rearing problems and frustrations too. Remember that if God thought enough of you to bless you with children to raise—whether you gave birth to them, adopted them or have just taken them under your wing—He has also gifted you with the ability to do a great job if you put your mind to it and keep your heart tied to His. Comparison is the thief of joy, so don't let the thief rob you of optimism and confidence in who you are as a person or a mom.

6. Be a positive thinking role model for your kids. You are the only mother your kids have, and you are the right person for the job—but it's important to remember that our attitudes and outlooks are contagious. When we focus on being positive thinkers and asking God to help us break free from chronic negativity, optimism can spread from our hearts into those of our children. Kids need confident moms, and our confidence comes from Christ and knowing that we are not only fearfully and wonderfully made, but loved and gifted with the ability to be the mom our kids need. When we intentionally strive to not only be a more positive person but a positive role model for our children, we play a critical role in training their minds with the habit of thinking optimistically too. {eoa}

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Your Fiercest Tactic for Defeating Devilish Darkness

Our world is increasingly dark. Through the aid of traditional news sources, online and social media, the darkness seems to be growing more dense and pervasive. The result is a climate of anger, fear, hatred, persecution, prejudice, violence, immorality and danger. There is a spirit of oppression, agitation and uncertainty. As I have pondered the global condition, I've wondered if it really is worse than the first century A.D. when armies were mobilizing, nations were shifting, the people were cowering, and the men who were leading bordered on the insane... yet held absolute power.

Into that first century world, good news erupted like the sun bursting through blackened, stormy clouds. The good news that there is one, true, living God who loves each and every man, woman, and child so much that He gave His own Son as the sacrifice for sin. Anyone and everyone who chooses to place faith in His Son Jesus receives forgiveness of sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life! The good news for those who believe in Jesus is that God transforms each one from the inside out. He replaces war with peace, hatred with love and fear with the hope that this life is not all there is—the best is yet to come. He gives life purpose, meaning and eternal significance.

I suspect what makes today seem worse than the world of the first century is the saturation of news and opinions through the web and social media. Therefore, I believe the time has come for you and me to rise up, to offer hope. We can use the same social media and web platform to proclaim good news. The time has come to heed what God said through Isaiah the prophet: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For the darkness shall cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord shall

rise upon you, and His glory shall be seen upon you. The nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising" (Is. 60:1-3).

In 2016, I offered *God Speaking: Are You Listening?* Together over 200,000 of us listened to the reading of God's Word from Genesis, Matthew, Acts and Revelation. It was thrilling. Many of you wrote expressing what my family and I were also thinking: "Let's do it again!" So I asked the Lord to make me aware of when He would want to speak to us all once more, at the same time, through a Bible listening program. To my mind, He seemed to whisper that the time is now. It's time to rise up, to rediscover the same power of God that changed everything in the first century. That power is still available—undiluted and undiminished—to change our world today. It's the power of God's Spirit working through ordinary men and women who proclaim the Good News.

So once again, AnGeL Ministries is partnering with Faith Comes By Hearing to offer *God Speaking: Rise Up!* The book of Acts will be our base, the person of the Holy Spirit giving birth to the Church will be our subject, and the early disciples will be our role models. As the Apostle Paul embarks on his three missionary journeys, planting churches all over the known world, we will then listen to the letters being read that he wrote to those early churches—letters that conveyed Good News that turned the world upside-down... or perhaps I should say rightside-up.

Join me each day for ten days from May 26, the Day of Ascension, until June 4th, the day of Pentecost. Let's listen to what God has to say for 40 minutes each day, together online.

God *is* speaking. Will you listen? Rise up, and proclaim Good News! {eoa}

Reprinted with permission from Anne Graham Lotz's blog.

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Paul Vehemently Warned Us About This Gospel Perversion

If being good and keeping the 10 Commandments (or at least some of them) were enough to make us good enough for heaven, then Christ died for no reason at all.

Christmas was pointless.

Easter was even more pointless.

Paul's letter to the Galatian church is a reprimand to Messianic Jews (*Jews who had received Christ as their Messiah*) for their prejudice against Greeks who had received Christ and requirements to keep certain cherry-picked, Jewish ceremonial laws as a fulfillment of their salvation.

In Galatians 3:10, Paul said this:

For all who rely on the works of the law are under the curse. For it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them."

James, in James 2:10 actually echoed this later when he said: "For whoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point is guilty of breaking the whole law."

Before we examine the dangers of trying to keep the law, I feel it is important to preface it with this truth:

There are a lot of Christians who declare they are free from the law, and therefore almost completely ignore the Old Testament and find the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) irrelevant to today's believer.

They misunderstand what Paul is teaching.

First, we must understand that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed (Jesus and His redemptive work are hidden all over the Old Testament in the sacrifices and ceremonial laws)

And the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

Jesus, Himself, said in Matthew 5, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill."

Jesus' life and sacrifice did not make the law irrelevant; they fulfilled it.

However, there are still parts of the law that God expects us to obey, and that is what we will look at today.

There is a huge difference between living under the burden of the keeping the law for our validation and acceptance by God, and being obedient to God's Word because we love and respect Him. "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

The former is a perversion of Christ's sacrifice, because His sacrifice already made us accepted and validated:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love; He predestined us to adoption as sons to Himself

through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace which He graciously bestowed on us in the Beloved (Eph. 1:3-6, emphasis mine).

The former places upon us a burden and obligation from which Christ already set us free 2,000 years ago; the latter is a choice we make to live our lives in a way that glorifies God.

3 Dangers of Trying to Keep the Law

1. It is impossible to keep.

There are not “laws”, there is one Law. Anytime you read Scripture, you never see it refer to Law as a separate law, such as—you keep the fourth commandment and do no work on the Sabbath at all, but slip up sometimes on the fifth law and disrespect your parents.

The Law is one solid document. It is a whole, not a sum of its parts. If you look at the Law as solid piece of granite, and you somehow break a part of it, you have broken it completely.

This becomes a problem for the one who bases their validation and acceptance by Christ on their ability to keep the Law, because even Paul admitted that it is impossible to continually keep the Law and not slip up somewhere.

2. It diminishes Christ.

“Brothers, I am speaking in human terms: Though it is only a man’s covenant, yet if it is ratified, no one annuls or adds to it” (Gal. 3:15).

When you sign a contract, neither party is able to annul or add to that signed contract.

How much more a divine covenant with Almighty God?

The New Testament is that new covenant, signed in Jesus’

blood, that set us free from having to live under the burden of keeping the Law for our validation and acceptance by God.

When we continue to live under that burden of law, we diminish Christ and the sacrifice He made.

We offend Him.

3. It makes us critical.

Anytime we base our own validation and acceptance by Christ on our own ability to keep the Law, we become critical and judgmental.

We become very hard on ourselves, because every day is a reminder to us that we are completely incapable of keeping the whole Law without slipping up.

We also grow very critical of others around us who daily make mistakes.

We begin to measure their level of salvation and their dedication to Christ by what they do and do not do. And while in chapter 5, we'll see that our liberty in Christ does not give us an excuse to live in willful sin, neither have we been entrusted with the measuring rod of holiness and Christian dedication.

Anytime we begin to measure others' righteousness and Christian dedication by their actions (or lack of action) we should become frightened, because that is the exact judgement Jesus was talking about in Matthew, and He said: "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Jesus Came to Set Us Free From Keeping the Law

Jesus' sacrifice fulfilled the ancient laws, sacrifices and ceremonial customs God had prescribed to cover the sins of the Israelites so that He could look upon them without destroying

them with His perfect holiness.

Now our sins are not just covered, they are removed as far as the east is from the west.

We are no longer “sinners saved by grace”, but we are justified, made holy—we are just as if we’ve never sinned.

In Romans, Paul talks about being “slaves to righteousness,” and by this we get a picture of a slave being set free, but returning to his master out of deep love and devotion and choosing to serve his master—no longer out of obligation, but out of love, devotion and respect.

And this is why we continue to obey the law.

We don’t keep the law—the law is no longer our guardian: “But now that this faith has come, we are no longer under tutor” (Gal. 3:25).

When we still lived in sin, the law apprehended us and kept us under its guardianship until Christ came and set us free.

Christ came, and by faith in Him we have become justified—just as if we never sinned.

Now we don’t keep the law, we are not kept by the law ... We obey the law out of deep love, devotion and respect for our Master, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because we want Him to be glorified in all in the earth.

My little children, I am writing these things to you, so that you do not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. Whoever says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word truly has the love of God perfected in him. By this we know we are in Him.

Whoever says he remains in Him ought to walk as He walked.

The New Commandment

Brothers, I am writing no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you have heard from the beginning. 8 Yet a new commandment I am writing to you, which holds true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

Whoever says he is in the light but hates his brother is in darkness even until now. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

And when we live in this kind of liberty, we set our brothers and sisters free to live in the same liberty. We no longer look at them as “Jew, Greek, slave, free, male or female” – in other words: We don’t rate our brothers and sisters according to their ethnicity, social standing and outward displays of Christian dedication because we know there is only one standard of Christ’s validation and acceptance: The blood of Jesus.

And under the blood, we are all one in Him.

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their 2 active boys where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an Associates of Practical Theology and is passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author a number of books. She is the author of *A Little R & R* where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at these other places on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

Responding Like Jesus When Your Husband Doesn't Want to Talk

Are you hammering at a brick wall, trying to get it to talk? When your spouse will not communicate, that's what it may feel like.

One frustrated wife wrote to me recently, "Our communication is terrible ... My husband is a clam, and I don't know how to get him to communicate his feelings. He has never been able to. And I've done everything the wrong way to try and get him to open up."

Perhaps you can relate. You don't need to be reminded that nagging your spouse and berating them for not communicating is a losing strategy. Enough of that.

So, your spouse should communicate better, or more, or more deeply, or more consistently, or more understandingly or with less anger. But they're not reading this; you are. So here are some things for *you* to do if your spouse struggles to communicate.

1. Deal with Your Own Heart First

Simply doing your homework before trying to communicate may make a lot of difference. You can't change your spouse, but you can work on changing you. Perhaps you already know some ways you've tried to communicate in the past that didn't work; write out some opening lines and practice some healthier ways to initiate a conversation if necessary.

Make sure your own heart is open. If it's not, spend some time in prayer or whatever else you need to do to deal with your heart before going any further. If you want your spouse to share vulnerably, you'll have to be vulnerable yourself. You need some measure of healing yourself before you can be useful in helping your spouse go there.

2. Learn to Feed Yourself

If you're the one always trying to communicate, step back and consider what you're trying to achieve. If you're running on empty and desperately grasping at your spouse to fill you up, you're certain to be disappointed. You're responsible for feeding your empty soul. Find some healthy ways to get your own mental/emotional/spiritual needs met; time with healthy friends, in nature and with God.

When your own soul is filled up, you'll have so much more to bring to your marriage. You'll be able to understand your spouse with more clarity and empathy and be more creative in finding effective ways to communicate.

3. Enter Your Spouse's World

Study your spouse. Understand what makes them tick as much as you can. Spend conscious time and energy seeking the key to their mind and heart. Observe the world through their eyes. Show interest. Ask questions. Don't come with any agenda other than to understand. When possible, join them in some endeavor they enjoy or are working on.

Entering their world will help you understand more of your spouse's personality, how they process information, when their mind and heart may be most open and what is important to them. Understanding those things is invaluable in letting you know the best ways to communicate. There are plenty of people (especially men) who communicate best while engaging in some activity together.

And don't make the mistake of assuming your spouse should communicate with as many words or in a similar way as you do. Look for the ways in which they do communicate and respond positively to that.

It's also important to understand whether your spouse's personality simply struggles to communicate or whether this is a deeper failure in the relationship. Refusal to communicate can, at times, be a sign that pornography, infidelity, or other big issues are present and need to be dealt with.

4. Draw Out Your Spouse

There's a big difference between trying to force someone to talk and inviting them into a connection that is appealing, safe or exciting. Are you creating a safe space for your spouse to share themselves? How safe with you would you feel if your positions were reversed? Look for the fear. Is there some place your spouse is afraid? Be the safe place to deal with that.

Listen with your heart. There are many spouses who have learned how to help their husband or wife express things they were unable to otherwise. Helping your spouse in this way may be one of the best gifts you can give them, and you'll only get there by having an open understanding heart.

5. Over and Over and Over Again

If you've led your spouse to believe (perhaps unconsciously) that communication is fruitless or will be met with criticism or anger, it will take time for both of you to develop some new patterns. Marriage the way God intended it is a place for both partners to have their deepest hurts guarded carefully and to find healing. You undoubtedly have added to each other's pain; that can start to change now.

If one positive communication happens, resist the urge to gloat or criticize or demand. Learning new skills takes

time—for both of you. Keep studying your spouse, creating safety, drawing them out and praying. A more satisfying marriage for both of you is worth the effort.

Your Turn: What skills have you learned about helping your spouse communicate? If you're lacking here, how are you going to practice new skills now? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

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Most Believers Overlook This Unusual Source of Spiritual Strength

The joy of the Lord my strength. But how? These are great-sounding words, but I never thought that the joy of the Lord could literally become strength to my body. Recently, though, I had a head-on collision with this the reality of this verse, and it changed me.

Healed by Joy

I was hurrying from the bookstore into the room where worship for the women's conference had already begun. It happened quickly. I walked by two women I didn't know as one touched me on the arm and said, "Do you need prayer?"

I stopped in mid-stride thinking of all the issues I'd been experiencing, not the least of which was stage three adrenal

fatigue. I also have other diagnoses, many stemming from the fact that 13 years ago, I weighed 430 pounds. Even though I've lost more than 250 pounds, I still have residual issues such as joint pain and nerve damage.

"Yes, I do need prayer," I replied. I could have gone with my first thought which was, "I don't have time now." A little voice sitting on my shoulder whispered that in my ear. It just proves that the evil one always knows when victory is headed our direction and will try to stop it.

In the course of the next few minutes, Lynda and Chantel introduced themselves and prayed for me. I've been prayed for many times by some of the best healing ministers, but when Chantel prayed, something happened. There was a tangible shift.

Over and over her prayer was, "Lord, infuse her with joy. Joy, Lord. She needs Your joy." At first when she prayed for joy, my logical and rational left brain came against it. It was telling me I didn't need joy because I wasn't sad or depressed. This was a true statement. I was just ... tired.

Tangible Power

The left brain stopped chattering when I began to literally feel power surging through my exhausted body and brain. Logic can't come against what we feel. Feeling is a right brain process that basically says, "Wait, left brain, this is different. Something real is happening here. Let's pay attention." It started in my gut and moved up like a lightning bolt into my brain. Every part of me along the way felt it.

Adrenal fatigue for me was way more mentally exhausting than physically tiring. But still I had to sleep more, guard overloading my schedule and not overdo anything. I had to pull back. That day, this infusion of strength was tangible.

Scripture says, "Christ's explosive power infuses me to

conquer every difficulty” (see Phil. 4:13). I’ve quoted this Scripture many times, but right then I experienced it firsthand. Strength came into my body through a prayer for joy.

Still, I was puzzled. So, I asked Chantel, “Why did you pray joy for me?”

She answered, “I always pray for joy, especially when people are exhausted, because the Bible says, ‘The joy of the Lord is your strength’ (Neh. 8:10b). When we feel weak, we need strength, we need joy.”

How Does It Work?

I was intrigued and wanted to study it even more. How does the joy of the Lord become my strength, and how can I make sure I always have it?

I learned that joy is not happiness. Joy is a deep-seated emotion anchored in the assurance that no matter what situation I am in, God is right there with me.

Happiness depends on my current situation, whatever is happening in the moment. That emotion will likely be gone when I face any sort of angst or difficulty.

Joy, though, is lasting. It is the deep feeling of knowing that even in the midst of life-defeating situations, God is in control. He is the Source of true strength. It’s a supernatural strength. It cannot be explained in human terms. It makes no sense.

What God Wanted

After a year of extensive writing, coaching, speaking engagements, workshops and interviews, this conference was the first time in four months that I had ventured for a week-long trip away from home. God wanted to show me that strength does not come from my humanity. He wanted me to know the truth of

this Scripture: “My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:26).

In Nehemiah 8, the people had been listening to the law being read from daybreak until noon. They were weeping as the words were read. Nehemiah said, “This day is holy to the Lord your God. Stop mourning and weeping” (Neh. 8:9).

He then added they were to celebrate because the joy of the Lord was their strength. Then the Scripture said, “Now they got it; they understood the reading that had been given to them” (Neh. 8:12, The Message).

How Remembering Helps

Whatever words the people had heard felt burdensome until they understood the meaning was that God was watching out for them. He alone was their strength. He had brought them through great difficulty.

They remembered their legacy. They remembered how God had led them and was still leading them. That brought them deep joy. Remembering how God had led them in the past empowered them to understand He would do the same in the day they were in and in the future. They had nothing to be sad about.

When I remember what God has done for me, when I share my testimony of His goodness and faithfulness in my life, it brings me joy, and that joy strengthens my faith in God who has never failed me and will never leave me to face life alone.

How Strength Comes

Paul tells us, “for the kingdom of God does not mean eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 4:17). Joy is an integral part of the kingdom of God coming here on earth because to have the joy of the Lord means to trust His strength to see us through.

Paul goes on to talk about what God told him. “He said to me, ‘ But He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will boast in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. So I take pleasure in weaknesses, in reproaches, in hardships, in persecutions and in distresses for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 9:12).

Strength comes when we admit our weakness and rely completely on who God is and how He has operated in our lives and longs to continue to lovingly lead us.

There is nothing like the joy which comes in that realization.
{eoa}

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Why You Might Have a Faulty Understanding of Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare is dangerous. But it’s not for the reason we usually think.

Say “spiritual warfare,” and people get all worked up. One camp studies demonology, tends to see a devil behind every bush, and is always looking for the right techniques to defeat Satan and those under his control. Another camp sees spiritual warfare as something weird, a distortion of true Christianity, and at best something best left “over there” in third-world countries where witch doctors do their black magic. Still others see spiritual warfare as the primary way to advance the kingdom of God, the strongest tool in evangelism, and the deciding factor in the triumph of the church in a dark world.

There are issues with each of those viewpoints. The term “spiritual warfare” doesn’t appear in Scripture, and therefore we must be cautious in how we think and talk about it.

Honestly, spiritual warfare is dangerous! Yes, we’re talking about an enemy more determined than any ISIS terrorist and more cunning than any multi-drug-resistant superbug. He’s been around longer than any of us, and he’s filled with hatred for our God and for us as His followers.

But that’s not why spiritual warfare is dangerous. We’ve too often gotten it backwards.

What the Bible Says

Think of what we know about how Jesus dealt with evil as we read about Him in the Gospels. Satan and all his forces were arrayed against Jesus in a greater dimension than we will ever know or experience. The future of the entire human race rested on His shoulders. And yet we never see Jesus hunting down demons, worrying about what the devil was doing or frantically wielding some power we’re not sure we really have ourselves.

Think of how we see Peter, John, Paul, and the other early believers deal with both the human and unseen opposition to their mission. Can you imagine any of them losing one minute of sleep worrying about what the devil was up to? Or flinging around spiritual weapons in an attempt to extend the kingdom

of God by force?

Instead, Jesus, Peter, John, Paul and the others simply followed the mission God had given them to do and resolutely allowed nothing to move them from that course. If the devil was unhappy about that and stirred up trouble, so be it.

You and I don't have to go out and defeat the devil. Jesus already did that – and won! (Matt. 28:19, Col. 2:15).

Yes, we resist. (James 4:7). But that doesn't mean frantically flinging around spiritual weapons.

Yes, we understand the devil's schemes. (2 Cor. 2:11). But we don't obsess over what he's up to.

Yes, we get wounded in the cross-fire. (1 Pet. 5:9) But we don't have to fight the battle Jesus already won.

What Spiritual Warfare Is

So what *is* spiritual warfare?

Remember that if it was about power or territory or who was stronger, this cosmic war would have been over a long time ago. But this war is about something else.

It's about who has your heart. It's your heart both God and the enemy are after.

This war is about who you will listen to, obey, follow, honor, believe, trust, love and worship.

Spiritual warfare is about seeing the victory Jesus has won, choosing to take your stand on God's side, and refusing to allow anything in earth, heaven or hell to move you from that place. It's about standing firm in the position God has placed you (Eph. 6:13). It's about the condition of your heart.

It means standing firm when your business gets into trouble, your family is torn apart or a loved one dies. It means

refusing to quit when you get wounded in the crossfire. It means embracing the good and the bad in this world (as the faith heroes did in Heb. 11:33-38), remaining true to your mission, and holding on to faith in the eventual outcome (Rom. 12:1-2).

We will not do this perfectly. We will make mistakes. But spiritual warfare means getting back up, seeking God's forgiveness, allowing Him to change our character and continuing on.

When is Spiritual Warfare Dangerous?

So when is spiritual warfare dangerous? When we focus on techniques instead of the mission. When we get worried about the devil instead of following our Leader. When we go out swashbuckling against evil on our own instead of standing firm where God has placed us. When we get tied up in learning right things more than having a right relationship with the right Person.

Spiritual warfare becomes dangerous when it becomes about anything other than the state of our hearts.

Isn't that refreshing? The battle is won. We know the end of the story. All that's left for us to do is attend to the mission God has given us for today.

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One Easy Way to Brighten Somebody's Day With Jesus' Love

We were asked not to bring birthday gifts—only some kind words to say to her. So we finished off our hamburgers and gathered in a small circle in the living room. It wasn't hard to think of things to say to this sweet friend, but my favorite was when one of her co-workers sat forward and said that when things get crazy at work, "She's like an island of safety to me."

Isn't that a rich statement to make about a person?

This co-worker talked about being able to look over and get an encouraging look in the middle of a hard day.

Looks are powerful. Not the kind of looks that you see in a mirror but the kind that you speak to someone with your eyes in a tense moment.

I've got your back.

I like you.

You're going to get through this.

What mistake? I didn't see any mistake.

Love you. It's OK.

You know the kind: Mercy-filled looks. Grace-filled looks. Islands of kindness and goodwill.

It doesn't take a preacher or some super-gifted follower of Christ to offer that to people on a daily basis.

Paul says it like this:

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted” (Eph. 4:32a).

Turns out a man can be an island after all.

This got me thinking about my Spanish class and all of the complexities of relationships that swirl about in that small space for 45 minutes every day. It’s easy for things to go awry with 17 people in a room, but I hope I can at least offer each student looks that make him or her feel safe and cared for. Seems I can at least do that, as I trust Jesus to fill me and overflow from my eyes every day.

And I pray that the grace of Jesus will pour out through you, in the way you look at your people. May they feel safe. {eoa}

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Why Your Willpower Will Never Be Enough to Accomplish Your Dreams

We are told that we are the author of our own life story.

“So make it a good one,” they say.

We are told that our children are blank slates, and we as parents write on their hearts through our parenting and through our “present-ness” in their lives.

But do we actually wield this much power?

Are We the Author of Our Own Life Story?

I'll never forget the first time my dear friend and blogging bestie Mandy first saw her name in print in a book.

She was ecstatic!

It was her dream to become an author, and this was a small glimpse of that dream coming true. I rejoiced with her, because I knew what that felt like.

Yet, while she worked diligently at her dream of authoring a book, there was another Author at work in her life.

She had seen other dreams come true in her life; but the story behind those dreams coming true were not written in a way that she would have ever authored.

Her dream to become a wife happened much later than she had wanted.

Her dream to become a mother happened in a much different way than she would have ever chosen.

Her dream for adopting a child fell through a couple of times before she was certain that she could safely hold baby Judah forever in her arms and in her heart.

Most certainly, she would have never penned the ending of her story the way it happened.

No, I do not believe that Mandy was the author of her own life story.

Someone else was holding that pen.

And yet, when we read *Worshipful Living*, we see how she understood that through all of the trials and disappointments, God was molding and shaping her life.

She understood that the journey to the dream—albeit filled with twists, turns, detours and potholes—was as important as the destination, because it taught her much about God. It taught her much about faith. It taught her much about herself and areas of growth and maturity that were still needed in her life.

Who Is the Author of Our Life Story?

As a part of my daily prayer, I like to write down names of God. Some of the names are borrowed from Scripture, some of them are descriptions of what God is and means to me.

Yesterday, I wrote down “Author of My Life”, before I even really thought about what that meant.

The more I pondered on this, the more I realized how true this is.

As much as we work to accomplish our own dreams and plans, “life” happens. Reversals take place. Circumstances beyond our control occur, and we’re forced to comply with peace with them.

And if these circumstances are beyond our control, we must conclude that we, in fact, are not the author of our life.

Something bigger is at play here.

Scripture says, “There are many plans in a man’s heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord will stand” (Prov. 19:21).

The word “counsel” in the Hebrew means “purpose” or “plan.”

Our Life Is Not Our Own

Why would God give us a will to choose if He is the author of our life?

We can choose to follow His purpose and plan for our lives, or

rebel. Rebellion, however, never ends well for us; because there is another figure in all of this who has another purpose and plan for our lives.

“The thief does not come, except to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Which story will we choose?

Life abundantly or a life of destruction?

Mandy chose well.

She knew she was not the author of her life. She knew her Creator had held the pen in His almighty hand eternity before and had already written the pages of her life before she was ever born.

“Your eyes saw me unformed, yet in Your book all my days were written, before any of them came into being” (Ps. 139:16).

She knew it was up to her to live a life of worship—a life that daily brought glory and honor to Jesus Christ.

And she did that well.

And that is what we can learn from her life—and her graduation day.

To daily make the choice to live within the story God has written and through that story to live a life that daily glorifies, honors and worships Him.

This is worshipful living! {eoa}

Rosilind, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their two active boys, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an associates of practical theology and is

passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author a number of books. She is the author of A Little R & R where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at these other places on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.