

Watch for These Clues—God Might Be Speaking to You

Yesterday I pulled out a manila file labeled “colors.” That’s the theme of the week in my Spanish class, so I have plans to bring colors to my students through various mediums.

Skittles are on the docket, because if a student tastes the rainbow, he might be more motivated to remember its colors. I also have a color by number, a color wheel and a stack of paint swatches. For my upper-level students, I have a devotional blog post about colors to translate.

We do a variety of activities, because one pass over information isn’t enough for anyone to learn well, and the same is true in the way we learn from God.

God often speaks to us in multiple layers.

For example, over a week ago I signed my very first book contract, and that is a strange new world for me. Matt keeps imagining my grand book tours on the East coast, bless his heart.

But the whole book thing sent me into a fierce heart battle over motive. I set a stopwatch, and I clocked myself lasting about four minutes with godly motives. Then off my wretched heart would go—longing for fame.

I would halt those thoughts and go through a Scripture list I’ve made up, to define my purpose in writing: To glorify the name of the Lord, to help others know him, to shine light into a dark world and to teach people to live by God’s commands.

Then pretty soon I was imagining myself famous again.

Oh Lord, help me.

Friday night I told Matt about my struggle as we crawled under the covers.

“I can’t seem to maintain a humble, godly motive for even two seconds!” I told him.

“You should be encouraged that you recognize your wrong motives,” he said. “That’s a sign the Holy Spirit is working in you. You know, it’s funny because our sermon tomorrow night is about motive.”

Sure enough, the sermon passage:

“For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you” (1 Thess. 2:2, NIV).

By the end of the singing and sermon that night, I was fully reminded that I am a sinful woman, and my motives are naturally impure. During the closing prayer, I sat in my chair and held my head in my hands.

Dear God, redeem my motives from the dark side.

The next day I was reading a book by Paul David Tripp called *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*. He writes:

Sin makes us glory thieves. There is probably not a day when we do not plot to steal glory that rightfully belongs to the crave glory that does not belong to us.

Yes, I am a thief.

Then I sat down to write my next newsletter to those of you who have subscribed to my website (if you haven’t subscribed, wanna join us?) I want to send you guys something valuable each month, and it’s going to be a homemade micro-lesson in how to study the Bible. As I was preparing this Bible study for the newsletter, I did the scientific thing and opened to the Psalms, closed my eyes, and let my finger fall on a verse

for us to study. Don't you know my finger landed on a verse about glory and motive? (Coming to you this Sunday.)

But God wasn't done talking to me about motive yet.

Yesterday I watched a news video about a pastor in Germany who is facing fierce opposition because he is preaching that Jesus is the only way to God. But he said he also started getting thousands of encouraging emails from followers of Christ, and he started to think he was really something.

"I am really a great pastor!" he said to himself.

Then he shook his head in disgust and said he had to remind himself, "No, I am nothing. I am only a sinner. I am only a tool for Jesus Christ."

Yes, brother. Me too.

So my point is that good teachers layer information, so that it sinks in and makes a lasting impression in the learner's thinking and lifestyle. Like God keeps impressing on me that I need to be rescued from bad motives.

God is an excellent teacher, and when He wants us to know something, He very often will bring the same information to us from multiple directions.

On our part, we have to be excellent listeners who are attentive 24/7. Bibles open. Hearts prayerful. Reading and listening to things that are bringing us godly messages and not just entertainment. We also have to be hungry to grab the new information and believe and obey it.

What message has God been sending to you from every direction lately?

Christy Fitzwater *is the author of A Study of Psalm 25: Seven*

Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard. *She is a blogger, pastor's wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana. Visit for more information about her ministry.*

Beware of These 2 Unhelpful Extremes When Processing Intense Grief

I think one of the most difficult emotions we process is grief.

Grief can happen for many reasons, not just the passing away of a loved one. We grieve for lost opportunities, loss of a friendship or relationship and disappointment or disillusionment.

I'll admit, I've never grieved well.

While I am a sensitive person, in the sense that I feel things very deeply, I am not always very comfortable with extreme emotion either in myself or expressed by others.

And grief is a very extreme emotion.

My response has been to first allow myself to be consumed by it, and then find an escape from it.

My escapes are:

Food

Busyness

Never allowing myself to be alone

Noise

None of these is healthy, and none of them bring true, lasting comfort and peace.

What Does the Bible Say About Grief?

There are two extremes in Christianity. One extreme gives way to emotions and feelings. These Christians glorify feelings above God's Word, which has led to a great imbalance in theology because truth becomes subjective to your feelings, which are often led by cultural norms.

The other extreme is to negate the importance of emotions and feelings. All extreme feeling, whether sorrow or joy, is "of the flesh". This causes a suppression of emotions and a desensitization to those around us as well as to the Holy Spirit.

Neither of these extremes is good, both are unhealthy. God created our emotions for a purpose.

In fact, we see in the Gospels that Jesus expressed a lot of emotion: joy that led to dancing, sorrow that led to weeping, anger, compassion and even exhaustion.

The key to dealing with grief, as in any emotion, is learning what to do when the emotion comes.

Isaiah 53:4a says, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;"

We Do Not Grieve Alone

When we think of Jesus on the cross, we think of Him carrying the sins of mankind. But Jesus did not just carry our sin.

Jesus also carried our sickness.

Jesus also carried our grief.

Jesus also carried our sorrow.

Why?

Jesus carried all of these: our sin, sickness, grief and sorrow so that we wouldn't have to. The burden of any of these, and all of these, is too big for the human heart.

He went to the cross not only as our substitute for sin, but as healing for our sickness, grief and sorrow. Then after he ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit as our Comforter.

What Do We Do With Our Grief?

Grief, just as with any other emotion, is a signal.

While some emotions, such as anger or bitterness, signal that something is wrong, grief is a signal to us that we need to come back to the cross and let Jesus bear our grief.

Does this mean we should not have feelings of grief or sorrow?

No.

It just means that we don't have to bear them alone.

How Do We Respond When Grief Fills Our Heart?

1. Run to the cross.

When the feelings come, when the tears come, when the sense of loss and disappointment comes, we go to Jesus.

We lay them at the cross and remind ourselves of the precious sacrifice Christ paid for us so that we don't have to bear them alone.

2. Dig the Word.

What the does Bible say about the source of our grief? Write those verses down and remind yourself of them each time the emotion comes so that your emotions are expressed through the

prism of the Word of God.

3. Seek the Holy Spirit.

In John 14:26, Jesus told His disciples that when He left to return to the Father, the Holy Spirit would be sent to be their comforter, advocate, intercessor, and helper.

When our hearts are burdened and heavy, when we need that peace that surpasses all understanding, when we need comfort, we need to seek the Holy Spirit's comfort and help. He will remind us of the promises of God, He will comfort us with the truth of the Word that brings us true and lasting peace.

Are you grieving today over a loss?

Are you unsure how to find the balance between becoming overwhelmed or shutting down?

You will find your balance at the cross of Jesus. His sacrifice purchased the healing of your soul.

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 two active boys, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an associate degree in 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 +.

3 Strong Strategies for Effectively Communicating With the Opposite Sex

My husband is an outdoorsman, a man's man, and he loves and appreciates me as a woman. I have great respect and love for this man I married at 21. We grew up together in some ways, learning as we went, perhaps in a simpler time.

Rick embraces his manhood and honors me in my femininity. We allow each other the freedom to use our individual gifts. Rick is a strong person and has been used of God to run a business, teach children and later teach prison inmates, impacting the lives of many. Yet he has no problem with a wife who is a visible leader, and he securely cheers me on. Although he may appear to lead from the back of the room, he in fact leads by just walking in the door. Some men have been puzzled by our relationship and many have been challenged by his example to honor their wives as leaders. We don't always get it exactly right, but we always come back to the table to talk things through and I find safety in his love and esteem for me as his wife, who leads.

I am a successful business woman, an ordained minister, a wife to the Rick-man and mother of two incredible women of God. But primarily I am a child of God who is a woman.

How Can Men Honor Women?

I've missed some opportunities because I am a woman. I've been talked over, passed over, and overlooked by the good ole' boys at times. But I'm interestingly not bitter or halted by this because of a few key male influences in my life. My Dad was a man full of humility and grace who believed I could do anything God put in my heart to do. I entered college and the business world braced for the affronts sure to come from men

because of the acceptance by my father and mentor, Herbert Low.

My husband has esteemed me since the day we met at a dance in the student union building in college. His constant proclamations of love, undying devotion, and expressions of service puzzling and provoking other men to reconsider the role of a man more often than not, show anyone within view that I am loved (and nobody better mess with Linda). He's a gentle giant some say; others call him a lion. I call him the Rick-man.

Pastoral leaders in my life like Scott McKay and Mike Bickle have honored me with invitations to lead in ministry settings. Scott McKay was the first man to ask me to speak from the platform and expressed confidence that I had something to say as a woman. Mike Bickle welcomed me to the leadership of The Joseph Company. at the International House of Prayer.

Men, when communicating with women consider these suggestions:

- Hear us out without reframing our message in your own terms.
- Ask clarifying questions.
- Don't patronize us or condescend; we are tougher than you think and can take the heat of a good debate rendered with honor.

How can a woman embrace her destiny when interacting with men?

As women, we do the world a favor when we step up to the plate with brains and hearts engaged. Rather than looking for special favors as women, let's own who God has called us to be, bringing forth our creativity without sacrificing good process and emotional intelligence.

Basic communication tips for women that everyone will appreciate:

- Learn to talk in bullet points and avoid rabbit trails.
- State the action, then the reason. Men like a clear target.
- Communicate objectively.

For most of my career, I have been the only woman at a boardroom table of men and happily have not been keenly aware of the fact. That's because I've embraced my calling and believe I just might have something to contribute. If I don't speak up, we'll never know.

At this stage it's about getting the job done more than being a woman.

Let's work together to be at our best and get the job done.

Linda Fields founder of 7-Mpact, leads The Joseph Company as a mentor to young people and an executive leadership strategist helping individuals develop their leadership portfolios. Prior to moving to Kansas City, Linda led a successful corporate learning organization in Texas, which positively impacted over 150,000 participants. While she finds her MBA, entrepreneurial experience and university-level teaching beneficial, Linda credits prayer as the key to building a high performance organization which consistently delivered results with character, integrity and love.

As an international conference speaker, Linda's passion is to release workplace believers to impact their spheres of influence by stepping into leadership, staying on course and finishing well in their appointed destiny to know God.

Linda specialized in communication in her post-graduate studies at the University of Texas, earned an MBA from Southwest Texas State and received a Bachelor of Science in Business Education from Southwest Texas State. Linda and her husband, Rick, moved from Texas to join the International House of Prayer in 2007.

The Shocking Truth About Going to Church

Nearly 1/3 of the world population claims to be Christian.

Christianity is the world's largest religion, followed by Islam, which makes up just under 1/4 of the world population.

Looking at these statistics, one would think that Christians would have reason to be encouraged and happy that over 2 billion people self-identity as Christians.

But there is one verse in Scripture that makes me wonder if this is actually such good news.

“Strive to enter through the narrow gate. For many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24).

This verse is even more serious when viewed through the lens of these: “Enter at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many are going through it, because small is the gate and narrow is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

Jesus is offering a solemn warning here that there are many Christians who find the narrow gate and try to get through it, but find it impossible.

Why?

Because true Christianity doesn't jive with their personal theology.

Recently, my friend Gail from 1-Minute Bible Love Notes shared

an article to her Facebook page about how liberal Christians are twisting the gospel. The article is sound and speaks the truth about how Christianity in this generation is being perverted by those who want to believe that they can accept the message of tolerance and inclusion and still be Christians.

They can accept abortion and same-sex marriage and still claim to be Christian.

As I perused the comments on that post, there were some who started their comment off with "But my God would never ..."

And perhaps that is just the problem.

They have created a god who fits their personal theology, but that god is not the God of the Bible, and their theology isn't based on biblical truth.

In fact, less than 1/4 of Christians in America believe that the Bible should be taken word-for-word (Barna Research).

In Luke 13, Jesus went on to say that at the final judgment when the door of heaven is shut, there will be many demanding entrance claiming to have known Christ.

They knew the Bible.

They attended church.

They claimed to be a Christian.

But Jesus' words here are chilling, "I tell you I don't know you, where you are from."

It's not enough to self-identify as a Christian.

It's not enough to raise your hand, signaling to the pastor that you silently prayed the prayer of salvation.

It's not enough to even pray the prayer with the pastor after

the message.

In fact, it's not even enough to attend church for years, fellowshiping with other Christians, and doing all kinds of Christian things.

Entrance into heaven isn't based on a prayer, church attendance, and doing "Christian things."

Entrance into heaven is based on this one thing alone: A personal relationship with Jesus Christ that grows out of our acceptance of His sacrifice for our sins and our submission to the precepts and principles of His Word.

Salvation doesn't happen with just a prayer.

Salvation happens when we put our faith in Jesus Christ and His shed blood for our sin. This act of faith initiates the change that begins in the heart of a new believer in Christ.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your household will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

But if someone prays a prayer, but is not yet convinced that he or she is a sinner, that Jesus is the Son of God and that His blood is the final atonement for their sin, salvation has not yet occurred.

And all of the good Christian things they do and say will amount to nothing on Judgment Day.

This is my conclusion: So, while 1/3 of the world population claims to be Christian, I am left wondering just how many of those 2.1 billion people will really enter heaven.

And yet—it is not God's will that we live in cynicism and skepticism.

So, while we must conclude that there are many Christians who have yet to have a genuine experience with Jesus Christ, we

must also guard our hearts against a critical attitude.

Instead, we pray.

We pray that God will awaken the church.

We pray that the eyes of those who have heard the truth and not yet received it will be opened.

We pray that there will arise a remnant in this generation that will proclaim the truth of God's Word with strong conviction and boldness.

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 Associate's 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 +.

Cutting Off Shame's Rule Over Your Life

For two years, Diane lived with a man who was an emotionally and physically abusive alcoholic. She finally escaped from the relationship and went to live in a shelter for abused women, but the abuse had rendered her a broken, battered mess—inside and out.

Her exterior wounds healed, but all his harsh, critical words had buried deep in her mind, leaving her feeling hurt, resentful and worthless. She struggled with strong feelings of hatred toward this man who had broken her heart and her spirit. As a result, she became bitter toward all men, even her own brothers, as anger and negativity poisoned her mind. She was afraid to get close to or trust anyone, even God, and feeling the blessing of joy seemed a lost gift, impossible to find or feel again.

But after six weeks of intense counseling with godly mentors and teachers in the shelter, Diane moved in with loving family members and slowly began to heal as God helped her put the pieces of her heart and her life back together. Diane began reading Scripture and spending a lot of time in prayer, and after having been back at church for several months, she heard a powerful sermon about forgiveness that stirred her soul. She practically ran to the altar when the message was over, asking the pastor to pray her heart would soften towards her abuser and for God to give her the strength and ability to truly forgive. Although it didn't happen instantaneously, Diane's heart did soften over time. She eventually realized she had to let go of all those feelings of hatred and unforgiveness and let God fill the empty spaces where deep-rooted negativity had been living.

The shame, hurt, resentment and anger Diane carried against her abuser were only weighing her heart and attitude down, not her abuser's. They were robbing her of her joy, not robbing the abuser of his. She had inadvertently allowed her abuser to hold the key to her joy, and she finally decided to take the key back so she could be in charge of her happiness and her life once and for all.

Diane's choice to forgive is a beautiful picture of what it looks like to be set free from the anchors that hold us captive and pull us into the deep. She let go of the anchor of negativity and grabbed hold of the anchor of hope God was

offering. She made an intentional choice to choose joy and invite God to transform her thinking, and in turn, he transformed her life too.

Diane began to look forward to each new day instead of dreading it. She became excited to be with new friends, learned to trust people again, and allowed herself to believe there were good Christian men in this world. One of those men helped her embrace her value in Christ and Diane is now happily married to him! When Diane forgave the unforgivable, she broke free of the bondage of hatred and stopped the poison of negativity that had been coursing through her veins. When she made the decision to let go of her negative thoughts—even though she was fully justified in having them—the stronghold of negativity broke, and she anchored her heart in God instead, opening the door for His peace to finally take up full residence in her heart and for happiness and joy to fill her days.

Diane's story is only one of many I share in *Unsinkable Faith*, of women who invited God to transform their hearts and minds and who implemented the three steps into their lives, and who have experienced radical life change as a result. I am confident you'll find all their stories inspiring and hopefully will glean motivation to invite God to start writing a new story in your new life too.

We all have people who have hurt us or situations that have left us feeling broken. From time to time, we all struggle with feelings similar to Diane's—feelings that keep us stuck in negativity and steal our joy. So if we truly long to feel joy in our lives, despite our circumstances or the heavy burdens we carry, we have to let go of negative thoughts, and intentionally choose joy instead.

The choices we make today lay the foundation of what life will be like tomorrow. If we want a future filled with peace and joy and unsinkable faith, we first have to determine what we

need to do today to make that a reality. {eoa}

Tracie Miles is a national Speaker and Author with the internationally known Proverbs 31 Ministries and has spent the last 12 years inspiring women to live intentionally for Christ. She is the author of two best-selling books, Your Life Still Counts: How God Uses Your Past To Create A Beautiful Future and Stressed Less Living: Finding God's Peace In Your Chaotic World. Her newest book is Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live (April 2017). She is a contributing author to the popular Zondervan NIV Women's Devotional Bible, and the Proverbs 31 Encouragement for Today Daily Devotional Book in addition to being a monthly contributing writer for the Proverbs 31 Ministries Encouragement for Today daily devotions, which reach nearly one million people per day around the world with encouragement from God's Word. Tracie also holds the role as COMPEL Manager at Proverbs 31, has three children and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can connect with Tracie on her blog at [and](#) all social media outlets.

Warning Signs You're Not Following God's Direction

"Repent" is not a term most people feel all warm and fuzzy about. It was John the Baptist's favorite word, though. He used it a lot. But what does it really mean? Hint: it means a whole lot more than sorry.

Human Definition

Repent is a little-used word today. We seem to think it's

synonymous with saying, "I'm sorry." The minute we get caught, we feel sad about what we did for about half a second. The dictionary defines repent as to "feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin."

That's our humanity speaking. We're sorry that we did something wrong, like speeding, cheating on our taxes or eating brownies.

We have this mistaken idea that because no one else on earth knows what we did, it's OK. We just won't do it again, but because we think no one knows it, we continue to do whatever "it" is. Thinking this way leaves someone important out of the equation. He always knows what we have done. We may live in denial, but in the end, it won't do us any good because we aren't hiding anything from God.

It can be a comfort or a fear to know that God knows us completely, sees us completely and still loves us and longs for us to return to Him. "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I get up; You understand my thought from far off. You search my path and my lying down and are aware of all my ways" (Ps. 139:1-3).

God's Definition

Here's the biblical definition of "repent": "To turn from evil and turn to the good. To turn about or turn away from." This definition includes not just saying words, though confessing what we've done is the first step. Repentance includes action.

Paul said it this way, "Are you actually unaware or ignorant of the fact that God's kindness leads you to repentance, that is, to change your inner self, your old way of thinking—seek His purpose for your life?" (Rom. 2:4, AMP).

Or what about these words from Jesus? "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that

proves repentance; seek God's purpose for your life, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).

How to Repent

I live about a mile away from Interstate 70, halfway between Kansas City and St. Louis. If I go out to I-70 and say I am going to St. Louis, but head west instead of east, I will go by several familiar mile markers, which tell me long before I arrive in the wrong city that I'm not heading to St. Louis. I'm going in the opposite direction. When I enter the downtown Kansas City area and see no gateway arch, I finally get it. I've gone two hours in the wrong direction.

I will be really upset with myself. I'm really sorry I went the wrong way. I can even tell myself I'm sorry and admit my failure. I have confessed my wrong. However, I haven't repented until I turn around and go back down I-70, pass by Columbia and continue on to St. Louis. I have to do this, even though it will take me an extra four hours of my time.

This is the true meaning of repentance. We are headed in one direction. God sends us hints and clues, road signs all along the way. When the final major indicator sinks in, we know we have to do something different. Continuing in this direction is not getting us where we want to go.

It doesn't just involve admission of guilt. It involves a total 180-degree turnaround. We were going one way, and now we must act. We must turn around. Repentance will be proven by what we do next. God's actually watching to see if we live our lives in a way that indicates we have repented and aren't just sorry we're such a mess. There is such a big difference.

Just for Salvation?

Repentance is not just necessary for salvation. Although that's the main way John the Baptist was using it. It is also necessary when we find ourselves far from God or we are doing

something we know God would not approve of such as eating ourselves into oblivion. To continue on that path is only going to bring us a disaster of our own choosing. It's not God's fault. He has plans for our good, not our disaster (see Jer. 29:11).

We must turn around. That may or may not involve going down the aisle to talk to the pastor. What is required is that it must involve stopping the thing that we know is wrong and starting what we know is right.

We stop the offending action and start walking in the ways of God. It's a simple process I call stop-start and I teach it in Sweet Change Christian Weight Loss Coaching Group.

Stop-Start

The whole concept of stop-start is based around putting firm boundaries around the thing you want to stop and focusing on what you want to start. For instance, if you want to stop eating sugar and start exercising. Take the thought of eating sugar captive. Put a fence around it in your mind of course, but that's where the change must first take place. Make that fence electric! And focus on exercise. Write statements telling yourself when, where and how you will exercise. Focus on how good it will make you feel. Rehearse how much you desire to be obedient to God in doing this. Think, rehearse and then act—and continue to act. {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is a wife, mother, Christian weight loss coach, speaker and author of *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor*, *Sweet Freedom: Losing Weight and Keeping It Off with God's Help* and *Sweet Change: True Stories of Transformation*. Get a free chapter of all her books, plus many other free resources on her blog at [Teresa Shields](#) . Connect with her there or on her Facebook page, Twitter, Pinterest or Instagram.

Building a Joyful Marriage Despite Life's Devastating Skirmishes

What images are evoked in your mind when you think of a joyful marriage? Two smiley faces perhaps? A couple who is always looking on the bright side and is never discouraged? Measuring by this matrix alone, we will come up short more often than not. Let us consider a broader description of what joy is comprised of. Equivalent meanings include: fruition, maturation, gratification and fulfillment. This widens the road for us, providing a more objective grid by which to evaluate whether or not we have an enjoyable life.

If you've been married for any length of time, you know that daily skirmishes are not uncommon in a marriage—speed bumps, I call them. They slow you down for just a moment, but are not too difficult to overcome. Then there are times when there is out-and-out warfare at hand. The battle is raging, and the need to find a united marital front is imperative. Allow me to use an illustration drawn from one of my favorite periods of history.

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill were two leaders of nations allied together against the Axis powers in World War II. The book *No Ordinary Time* by Doris Kearns Goodwin describes what life was like on the home front in the United States during the war. She recalls one occasion when Roosevelt and Churchill had just spent three weeks together at the White House in strategic war planning and personal friendship building. These great leaders stood in front of war maps, played card games, solemnly reviewed the casualties of the war

and enjoyed good food and conversations. They battled with Congress over appropriation measures, and Churchill found time for his daily afternoon nap (a man after my own heart).

Upon his return to England, Churchill received a note that Roosevelt had wired ahead. It read: "It is fun to be in the same decade with you." Here are two commanders-in-chief, their kingdoms allied against a daunting foe, who took time to develop—and found delight in—a deep friendship.

Reading the president's message inspired me to reflect upon the last three-and a-half decades of my life, the highlight being the pleasure of partnering with one beautiful woman. Together, we have walked through our history, keenly aware of the plotting of the "god of this world." Like those great leaders, we see it expressed through evil nations, yes, but also in the attacks upon the marriage and family—our own as well as those whom we've pastored over the years.

It's been our experience to grieve over the casualties of this war—men, women, and children left broken in the wake of conflict. We have also rejoiced in the battles fought and won, restoration being God's specialty, and knowing that in Him all things are possible.

The book of Philippians is known for its theme of joy.

I thank my God for every reminder of you. In every prayer of mine for you all, I have always made requests with joy, due to your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (Phil. 1:3-5, emphasis mine).

Consider your spouse in the context of this passage, and you will see components of a joyful marriage.

I am my wife's chief intercessor, and she is mine, making requests on one another's behalf. We are journey-mates in the fellowship of the gospel, all about seeing the "good work" in

one another being advanced. Anne and I have garnered authentic, tangible joy over the course of our marriage, while also being aware that a fuller measure of joy awaits us on that future day.

We have found the path of true, lasting joy in a marriage to be from the inside out. Naturally, external benefits are appreciated and welcomed into the mix. We thank God for secure and abundant finances, good health, unity in family relationships, fun vacations and the abatement of spiritual warfare where seasons of peace reign. When all is running smoothly, almost anyone can maintain a level of joy.

In contrast, our need for joy is acutely felt in times of trial. We are exhorted to “count it all joy” when we are tested (James 1:2). The deeper meaning here is that we are to rule, have authority over, literally, to command our souls in the battle. Herein is the formation and ongoing development of the inside-out dimension.

Strong marriages, contending for joy, build their muscle here in the times of trial.

Jesus was anointed by God with the “oil of gladness” (Heb. 1:9) and yet was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Is. 53:3). He commanded His soul in the apex of His suffering, as He did throughout His life, choosing instead to see “the joy that was set before Him (Heb. 12:2).

Husbands and wives, fix your eyes on this Man, the greatest leader of all time. He is the author, the finisher and all you need in between, the one who will empower your faith and open your eyes to see the joy. {eoa}

Mike and Anne Rizzo *have been in pastoral ministry for over 30 years and currently serve as directors of Marriage and Family Ministries at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. They carry a passion for personal mentoring, teaching and raising up marriages that exalt the name of Jesus. Mike*

and Anne have three grown children and one grandchild, and are the authors of Vertical Marriage: A Godward Preparation for Life Together and Longing for Eden: Embracing God's Vision in Your Marriage.

Your Unique Role in God's Grand Storyline

The destiny of a woman has been contested since the fall in the garden (Gen. 3:15-16). A prolonged struggle rages between the seed of woman giving birth to the family of God and spiritual descendants of Satan that will end one day in victory when Jesus returns.

In a time of heightened attack on the sanctity of being created male or female, I am passionate about understanding God's viewpoint of women and how He feels about us. In a mother's womb, God literally created us as individuals, male or female (Ps. 139:13-14).

There's a grand storyline developing in history which has a starring role for women.

God highlights the role of women in several defining points in the life of Jesus:

1. Mary, the mother of Jesus: As a virgin, Mary gave birth to our Savior, Jesus Christ. Ancient belief held that the male was the only source of life and that woman's purpose was to carry the child and to give birth. Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton point out in their book, *Why not Women?*, that Mary was the only human source for Jesus' DNA (Luke 1:34-35.)

2. Women on the team: Several females were included in Jesus' ministry team (Luke 8:1-3).
3. The woman at the well: Jesus was interested enough in the destiny of a woman caught in sin that He told her about her past. When she responded, saying, "I know a Messiah is coming," He gave her the news that would change not only her life, but the whole village: "I am He," said Jesus. "You don't have to wait any longer or look any further" (John 4:26).
4. Mary of Bethany: Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed Jesus' feet with costly perfume and wiped His feet with her hair before His death (John 11:2; 12:3).
5. Mary Magdalene: After His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14).

What are some things men and women can do today to value the destiny of women as Jesus did?

Godly womanhood is an honor, a pure and holy pursuit that drops a plumb line for how to step up as a woman without resorting to clenched fists, raging at society with hands on hips demanding our rights—or succumbing to the silent tragedy of folding your hands in your lap and doing nothing, all the while screaming in quiet desperation. Women are struggling to find their place.

An Apology

As a believing woman in leadership, I want to apologize to women who didn't see a compelling picture from mothers in the faith of the ecstasy and extreme fulfillment of being a confident woman in God. For those who felt "less than" and gave in to self-pity, even betraying their own identity and settling for a mediocre version of the woman they are called to be, I wish we had shown you something greater. I'm sorry I didn't pave the way as a modern-day Deborah, a woman secure enough in God's leading to call a male military leader to do what God had called him to do, a powerful woman who mounted a

horse to ride into battle when it was necessary, a woman who was a key leader bringing peace in her community.

Have Christian women failed to live with passion and zeal because we didn't think we could or should? It's time to trade lackluster versions of leadership for a passionate pursuit of godly womanhood. It is time to be mobilized becoming who God has invited us to be, doing what God has given us to do for the harvest is here.

I want to apologize to those in my circles looking for an example of womanhood who didn't see me living and leading in such a way they could find a highway with neon signs (or at the very least a trail of breadcrumbs) leading to Jesus, the one who positioned women in high places at strategic times in history. It was a woman overshadowed by the Holy Spirit who brought Jesus into the world, and it was a woman who met the resurrected Lord at the tomb. Martha cooked for Jesus, Mary lavished her affection on Him by pouring costly ointment over Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. The love of Jesus truly sets a woman free to live and love with abandon. Oh, that this would be our testimony.

It is my desire that we change the understanding and expression of Christianity in the church as well as in the marketplace by passionately embracing the holy and pure pursuit of embracing Spirit-led women who buy and sell, have a voice at the leadership table, make tough decisions, rock the cradle, raise the evangelist, rise to global leadership levels—what glass ceiling?

Women, I urge you to embrace the opportunity to become women of beauty and substance, for God has created you in His image.
{eoa}

Linda Fields, author and speaker, is the director of 7-MPact Marketplace Ministry at the International House of Prayer Kansas City.

3 Scriptures to Change the Way Your Child Dreams

The gymnasium was full of high school students. They filled both sides of the bleachers from the first row to the last and all the way from one end of the gym to the other. There were also hundreds of students in chairs on the floor in front of me.

I was as ready as I could be with a message to encourage them. As I shared, I included Scripture relevant to God creating us on purpose with purpose for purpose: "But now, O Lord, You are our Father,' we are the clay, and You are our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand" (Is. 64:8).

"You brought my inner parts into being; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will praise you, for You made me with fear and wonder; marvelous are Your works, and You know me completely" (Ps 139:13-14).

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

I was impressed from the very beginning with the students' attention and quick responses. They were eager to be encouraged and challenged.

When sharing elements of my story and how I believe God created me to glorify Him, I kept asking them about their dreams. "What's your story?"

I wanted students to think about who they were designed to be and what they were created to do. I challenged them to be

realistic and to persevere and be diligent to achieve the dreams they could.

I then heard myself say something that until that day I had only said when speaking to parents and teachers:

Grieve what isn't, accept what is and work on what you can.

It's absolutely appropriate and even essential that children dream about their future. It becomes a problem when their dreams aren't realistic. To keep trying for something that can never be will only lead to frustration, deep depression, and possibly despair.

Although dreams have many positive facets, I believe they're relevant to suicide in at least three ways. That's why I'm including the topic in my programs more and more:

- If teens' dreams aren't realistic and they don't have a "plan B," discouragement defeats them.
- If teens' dreams are realistic, but they don't have the skills and/or character qualities necessary to accomplish them, anger creates *danger* (As we say at Celebrate Kids, "wishing it so won't make it so.")
- If parents have dreams that teens don't have for themselves or that teens don't believe they can reach, pressure persuades them to give up and give in.

Walt Disney was right about a lot of things, but not everything.

- He said, "Dreams are forever." I believe, "We should dream forever."
- He said, "No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing, the dreams that you wish will come true." I believe, "No matter how your heart is grieving, if you keep on believing in yourself, you'll think of new dreams."
- He said, "If you can dream it, you can do it. Always

remember that this whole thing was started with a dream and a mouse." I believe, "If you can dream it, you may be able to do it. Many great things start with dreams."

At the conclusion of my chapel, many students hung out with me. I loved chatting with them and hearing about some of their dreams. After a while, I noticed a girl on my left approach me with a notebook and a pen. She waited and then took advantage of silence: "You said something about grieving our dreams and accepting what's going on. I needed that. I loved the way you said it. Do you remember?" Before I could give her the three statements, many in the crowd agreed with her that it was valuable to them, too.

Grieve what isn't, accept what is and work on what you can.

Our teens need parents and others who dream realistic dreams for them and explain how they can fulfill them. Teens need people to teach them how to make the dreams come true.

Teens need parents and others who help them realize when dreams aren't realistic. Teens need people to walk with them through the disappointment and to give them permission to grieve the loss of dreams. Teens need people who help them move on.

Our teens need healthy role models—people who adjust their dreams and keep dreaming. People who don't give up, but alter their course of action.

Who will you be? What will you do? {eoa}

Dr. Kathy Koch ("cook"), the founder and president of *Celebrate Kids, Inc.*, based in Fort Worth, Texas, has influenced thousands of parents, teachers, and children in 30 countries through keynote messages, seminars, chapels, and other events. Among other groups, she is a featured speaker for the Great Homeschool Conventions and Hearts at Home. Among other books, Dr. Koch is the author of 8 Great Smarts:

Discover and Nurture Your Child's Intelligences *and* Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World.

Breaking the Stronghold of Worldly Negativity

Have you ever considered the power your thoughts have over your happiness?

Ever feel like since your negative circumstances or adversities aren't likely to change, that you can't ever live a life full of joy, peace or contentment?

Do you sometimes feel like your thoughts are bossing you around, causing you to feel stuck in unhealthy emotions and discouragement?

Sweet friend, if you want to start thinking differently and living differently, you have the power of choice in your hands. You can be the boss of your thoughts, rather than letting them be the boss of you, and when you choose to take charge, your life will radically change.

We don't have to stay stuck in negativity no matter what we're going through or how hard life seems. That's because we each have the power within us through Christ to transform how we think, which changes how we feel, which changes our perspectives, which ultimately changes us and the way we live life in a positive way. Positive thinking always leads to positive living, but it's a choice we have to intentionally make.

It's easy to overlook the importance of our thoughts and not

only the power they hold over our lives, but the power they hold to change who we are from the inside out. If we think negative, we'll be negative and live a negative life. If we intentionally choose to think positive even in the midst of negative circumstances, we'll become a more positive person and live a more positive, happy life. All too often we assume since we don't have control over negative circumstances or situations, we also don't have control over how we think and feel. But we do!

Romans 12:2 says: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." In this verse, God assures that we can transform our minds and thoughts patterns, and as you'll read in my book, many scientific studies prove that this is possible as well—thus science has finally caught up with Scripture. In writing *Unsinkable Faith*, I became utterly amazed at the results I read about from research about how changing how we think not only transforms us mentally, emotionally and spiritually, but also can physically transform the shape of our brain. I know you're going to be amazed and inspired too. Change is possible.

We all have the power in Christ to stop letting our thoughts and feelings cause us to sink by grabbing hold of the life preserver of joy God offers. We can have hope for a renewed mind and an amazingly positive, joy-filled life, despite the mistakes of our past, the hard circumstances of the present or the unknowns of the future, and despite how long we've felt enslaved to a negative mind-set. We can have unshakable peace, unwavering joy and unsinkable faith, even when the storms of life blow in.

All believers have the power of the Holy Spirit within them to break down the stronghold of negativity in their lives, no matter how many years negative thinking has taken up residence in their minds.

Our thoughts have power over our lives, and they can either boss us around or we can intentionally choose to be in charge and aware of our how we think. When we admit our need for change, and ask God to start the process of mind transformation in us, change is not only possible, but becomes a reality. If you're ready to start thinking and living more positively, let go of the anchor of negativity and get excited about the possibility of unsinkable faith and optimism becoming a reality in your life.

Pre-order your copy of *Unsinkable Faith* here. Every purchase made by March 31st will qualify for five free gifts worth \$60. See the sidebar on my blog for the freebies you can claim and how to get them! {eoa}

Tracie Miles is a national Speaker and Author with the internationally known *Proverbs 31 Ministries* and has spent the last twelve years inspiring women to live intentionally for Christ. She is the author of two best-selling books, *Your Life Still Counts: How God Uses Your Past To Create A Beautiful Future* and *Stressed Less Living: Finding God's Peace In Your Chaotic World*. Her newest book is *Unsinkable Faith: God-Filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live (April 2017)*. She is a contributing author to the popular *Zondervan NIV Women's Devotional Bible* and the *Proverbs 31 Encouragement for Today Daily Devotional Book*, in addition to being a monthly contributing writer for the *Proverbs 31 Ministries Encouragement for Today* daily devotions, which reach nearly one million people per day around the world with encouragement from God's Word. Tracie also holds the role as *COMPEL Manager at Proverbs 31*, has three children and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can connect with Tracie on her blog at [and all social media outlets](#).