

Healing Your Crushing Soul Wounds

There are times in life when our hearts are overwhelmed with sorrow, grief and that unspeakable pain that permeates one's being. It's times like these that we must find the way to heal.

Allow yourself to become vulnerable to family and friends who truly want to help in your time of need. They love you and care about you. You will find you do not have to explain much; they already know and understand the situation. They desire to be a support beam for you to lean upon when you feel weak.

And then there are those unexpected people to whom God will speak concerning you to also find a way to reach out and help to carry you through. Don't be closed-minded; you may find a rich jewel in a new friendship that will bless you in your time of sorrow.

Then there are times when the people around you are not able to reach inside and heal the deep wound of sorrow. These are the times when you need to choose to grab hold of the Spirit of the living God for help, inner healing, peace and strength that does not come from this world.

I share a testimony in my new book, [*The Healing Creed*](#), about a woman who lost all five of her children in one tragic day. It tells how she finally found her way with Jesus to inner healing, peace and the strength to live another day with the assurance that it was OK to smile again. She overcame the fear-based control that prevented others to come near her. Her ashes, sorrow and hopelessness were healed by Jesus alone and transformed into His beauty. The spirit of heaviness fell off, and she found joy once again.

There are different levels of healing, and God uses people to

help us through difficult trials in this life. And then there is a deep inner healing that God alone can bring, but we have to choose to wipe off the ashes of sorrow and allow Him to wash us with His atoning blood and make us whole again.

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This Is How Holy Spirit Feels When You Criticize the President

This is a question on a lot of people's minds right now.

Are we, as Christians, allowed to criticize the president? And if we are, is there a line that can be crossed?

Is God displeased when we criticize the president, and if I choose not to criticize him, is that my silent approval?

Social media is extremely toxic right now.

Many who support President Trump are calling out those who don't. And many who are against President Trump equate him to Hitler and the Taliban.

It was no different with President Obama.

Christians criticized his looks and called him Hitler ... they called him an idiot, stupid and all sorts of degrading names (something I often spoke against), just as many are doing with President Trump now.

The question is, does this cross the line?

The Bible actually has much to say about this, and later this year, we'll delve even deeper into this issue of criticizing and mocking, but today let's look at what the Bible says about criticizing our president.

In 1 Samuel 26, David finds himself in a situation that may would consider favorable.

He finds the place where Saul is camped out in his hunt to kill David. Saul and his men are in a deep sleep, and here is David standing right over Saul.

Saul's spear is right next to him ... the setup is perfect!

David—by all accounts—has a right to kill Saul. It would be considered self-defense. Saul has spent all of his time and energy hunting David down to kill him like a dog; David has done nothing but run for his life for months now.

With just one blow, David's life could change. He'd be a hero, he'd be free!

But, instead, he chooses to do something probably no one understood, and surely no one agreed with: He chose to save Saul's life.

But lest you think that David was on Saul's side, this act was less about Saul and more about David taking a stand for God.

David understood a biblical principle many of us have forgotten today.

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. it is He who changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and sets up kings” (Dan. 2:20-21a).

David knew that God had chosen Saul to be king, and to lift a

hand against him would be lift his hand against God's anointed, an act that comes with serious consequences.

But how does this relate to today? No Christian would ever think of assassinating the president! Right?

Jesus makes a curious statement in Matthew 5 that I think bears looking at:

You have heard that it was said by the ancients, "You shall not murder," and "whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment." But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "Raca," shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, "You fool," shall be in danger of hell fire (emphasis mine).

What Jesus is saying here is that though the Old Testament law condemned a murderer to death, New Testament covenant takes this commandment about 10 steps further.

New Testament covenant goes past a person's actions and straight to the heart. And "... out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

Jesus is saying, if you show contempt for a person (*Raca*, which is Greek for "blockhead" or some other similar degrading word) and with your words seek to destroy their character ("You fool!"), you have literally murdered that person in your heart.

Your anger and contempt for them are equal to murder in your heart.

Criticizing the president's policies and attacking a president's person and character are not the same. David didn't agree with the things Saul did. He wasn't on Saul's side politically.

But David understood that he had to separate Saul's actions from his position. Although he was in complete opposition to Saul's actions, he had to honor Saul's position.

By honoring Saul's position, he was honoring God. So to lift his hand against Saul would be dishonoring God.

And, my dear friends, nothing has changed today. While we may have criticized Obamacare or the many executive orders he wrote, while we may be extremely opposed to President Trump's order to close our borders to certain countries, we must take great caution that our opposition to his policies doesn't turn into opposition to him. As Christians, we must learn to separate the president's actions from his position.

We may be opposed to his actions, but we must never lift our words against his character or his position.

To do so is very displeasing to God.

I am not for President Trump. I disagreed with some of his positions when he was campaigning, and I'm sure I will find myself in disagreement with him many times over the next four years.

Neither am I against President Trump. I am for God.

And because I am for God, I will do all I can to please God.

I will stand for truth every time, even when it brings me opposition:

- I will stand for biblical values.
- I will stand for family values.
- I will stand for moral values.

I stand for God, not for man.

And because I stand for God, I cannot raise my words against any man, his person or his character.

No, a Christian should not criticize the president. He may criticize a president's actions, but a Christian should always hold honor and value of a president's position and character in his heart.

For it is God who made him rise to that position. And God will honor those who honor their authority. {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her Bosnian hero. Together they live with their two active boys where she enjoys fruity candles, good coffee and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. Her passion for writing led her to author her best-selling book *The Missional Handbook*. At [A Little R & R](#) she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. You can also find her at [Missional Call](#) where she shares her passion for local and global missions. You can follow her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Google +](#).

Strengthen Your Marriage With This End-Times Principle

It may mean nothing to you, but my students having been eyeing this date on my dry erase board every day for the last two weeks, along with the ominous words “*examen acumulativo*.” Feb. 22 is the day they have to walk into class and be able to translate, into Spanish, 80 sentences out of the 125 they've been studying.

The first two weeks of study were pretty chill, but when I announced on Tuesday, “Two weeks until the cumulative exam,” I could see panic flicker across a few faces.

So it caught my attention yesterday when I read Tim Elmore's blog post, ["Five Reasons Why Deadlines Are Lifelines for Students."](#) He called deadlines a gift. My favorite two points he made were that deadlines create a very healthy sense of urgency and also help us to prioritize.

Which brings me to my crawl space.

Ah, you didn't even know I had a crawl space. It is mine alone, because both of my men are over six feet tall and beg me to retrieve things for them.

And do you know what I always think when I go down there after something? *What if I die and people come in here? What will they think of me?* Perhaps an extreme thought, but there you have it. So I have determined to clean out my crawlspace this winter. Really clean it out.

Yesterday I made my first trip to the thrift store, and I handed off quart jars that had been in the crawl space for years. There was a dead spider in one of them, which integrity says I should have cleaned out, but I did not. I hope someone at the thrift store is very, very brave.

Yesterday a friend sent me a link to a website called [Organize 365](#), which only poured gasoline on the fire of my decluttering flame. Over my after-school snack, I listened to the host talk about how to manage adult trinkets. She said this as I looked at my substantial snowman collection.

Yesterday (I know I keep saying this, but all of these activities in the same day began to layer in my thinking, like phyllo dough and butter in a good baklava) –yesterday I was working on writing a Bible study in 1 Peter, and one phrase lodged itself in my brain:

...you are to conduct yourselves in reverence during this time of temporary residence." (1 Peter 1:17, HCSB)

This life is my temporary residence.

Peter gives a deadline:

The end of all things is near... (1 Peter 4:7, MEV).

Mom and I were talking on the phone yesterday. (See? Yesterday was a big day in my soul.) Dad went to be with the Lord on Feb. 14, the same day my father-in-law went to be with the Lord 20-some years ago. So Mom and I we were sharing some quiet sorrow together. I was telling her how Dad's death was a transforming event in my marriage. Matt and I have a sweeter friendship and tighter love now, and I believe it's because we can feel the ever-present reality that we may not have tomorrow together. I'll come back to this thought in a second.

The crawl space isn't the only thing I've been tackling. Yesterday I had some filing to do and realized not one more paper would fit into the file drawer, so I spent the day cleaning out old files. I came across a few papers with my dad's handwriting on them.

"Did you keep them?" Matt asked.

"No," I said.

That brings me to my conclusion. We have a deadline. I haven't set out to be morbid, but I mean an actual deadline—a time coming when this life will end. And this deadline is a gift.

It creates a sense of urgency.

It helps me prioritize.

Jars filled with spiders, marriage, and papers with Dad's handwriting on them—how do I know what's important and how to live and what to keep and what to take to the thrift store?

The end of all things is near.

This one statement tells me to love my husband well today. It helps me make decisions in my crawl space. It loosens my grip on trinkets and tightens my grasp on what is valuable to God.

I pray for you now. May the Lord give you the gift of branding this deadline in your mind. May the reality of your temporary residence on this earth inform every decision you make in your home and every action you take in your relationships. May it create urgency in your heart and a sense of what is truly important in life.

Flee These 2 Hideous Joy-Killers

How long has it been since you felt joy?

I mean, real joy: [not just a happy feeling, but a deep sense of satisfaction](#) knowing that you are in the center of heavenly Father's will.

An unmistakable sense of His pleasure.

We don't lose our joy.

Joy can't be lost, the way we lose our keys or that \$5 bill that fell out of our pocket while we walked down the street.

Joy is not lost. You don't go to church on Sunday, get filled up with joy and then lose it somewhere between Sunday afternoon and Monday morning.

That's not the way it works. Joy is stolen, not lost. And joy is stolen when we leave an entryway in our life unprotected.

Joy cannot be taken away without our permission.

Just as no one can take away our possessions without our permission, there are things we often do that give the enemy an invitation to come and steal our joy.

When you leave your home or park your car, you lock your doors. Right?

You don't leave your home unlocked while you're gone.

You don't leave your car keys in the ignition.

This would be an invitation for someone to come and rob you. And it's the same way with the enemy of our souls. There are things we do to invite him to come and steal our joy.

If you're in a battle for your joy right now, you need to:

Lock your doors

Pull down the shutters

Pull up the moat

Put on your armor

When we feel joy has gone out of our lives, our first response should be to take a spiritual inventory, just as we would if we had discovered that we had been robbed.

We need to look at each area of our life to determine how the enemy gained entrance into our lives, and then we need to reinforce that weak area so he can't come back.

Two Things That Steal Joy in Our Lives

1. Disobedience

Disobedience is one of the most common ways the enemy steals our joy.

In this permissive society where authority figures are afraid to take a stand and demand adherence to rules, law and order,

we now have an entire generation to whom the word “obedience” sounds harsh, judgmental and legalistic.

This culture of rebellion has also seeped into the church.

Suddenly, God’s law is no longer the standard for most Christians; but rather, it is an evolving document subject to cultural norms and practices.

Over the past several generations, we’ve seen a slow drift away from the importance of obedience and the rewards it brings to our lives as believers. In its place, we have so minimized the importance of sin that we no longer see it as a serious matter that destroys our relationship with God and infects every area of our life until we no longer have a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

The enemy’s strategy is to steal, kill and destroy you. And one of the first ways he does this is by deceiving you into believing that disobedience isn’t a big deal.

[Another word for disobedience is rebellion](#), and this is what God has to say about rebellion: “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23).

If we want to live in the joy of the Lord, we must purpose in our hearts to live in obedience every day.

Does this mean we will never mess up?

No. Willful disobedience and unintentional sin are two different things, and in the Old Testament we see that there was a sacrifice for unintentional sin, while the punishment for willful disobedience was death.

While today there is no death penalty for willful disobedience, I do believe that when God’s people choose to willfully engage in sin, they invite death into their lives. They leave a door open to the enemy to come and work his

destruction of death in their hearts.

When Christians unintentionally sin or realize they have left the door open to the enemy through willful disobedience, they should humbly repent before the Lord and restore their relationship with Him.

2. Unforgiveness

I remember sitting on the couch in my mom's living room with tears running down my face. I was sharing with her my deep disappointment and disillusionment in ministry.

Ministry is hard.

Anytime you work with people it's hard, but there seems to be a greater expectation from people when you are in ministry. Some of that is well-founded, but sometimes the expectations are far too high, and the pressure to live up to those unrealistic expectations can leave a minister in a trap of failure and disillusionment.

But the real source of my depression wasn't that, it was unforgiveness.

The truth was that I had expectations of those around me that they hadn't fulfilled, and I was disappointed in them. Rather than admitting my own failure, I allowed that disappointment to turn into bitterness.

Unresolved hurt, disappointment or conflict doesn't just sit there. It gets infected; and when we fail to address that infection, it will fester and grow. Eventually it becomes a cancer that eats away at the very life of our spirit.

Jesus addressed this seriously when He said, "But if you do not forgive men for their sins, neither will your Father forgive your sins" (Matt. 6:15).

The book of Hebrews takes it a step further. "Pursue peace

with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord, watching diligently so that no one falls short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness spring up to cause trouble, and many become defiled by it” (Heb. 12:14-15).

We see here how bitterness “causes trouble” and defilement in our lives. It literally gives the enemy an open door to come in and poison our lives.

That’s why Paul said, “Be angry but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Do not give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26-27).

If we want to walk in abundant joy, we must purpose every day to forgive all who offend us. Big offenses. Small offenses. Every. Single. Time.

Live forgiving. This locks the door to the enemy and brings abundant joy of the Holy Spirit in our lives!

So let me ask you again: How long has it been since you felt joy?

Have you taken time to do an inventory of your spiritual life? Do you know how the enemy got in and robbed you of the joy that rightfully belongs to you as a child of God?

He has no authority to steal from you, unless you allow him to.

It’s time to find the place of entry and lock it up! {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her Bosnian hero. Together they live with their two active boys where she enjoys fruity candles, good coffee and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. Her passion for writing led her to author her best-selling book *The Missional Handbook*. At [A Little R & R](#) she encourages women to find contentment in what God created

them to be. You can also find her at [Missional Call](#) where she shares her passion for local and global missions. You can follow her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Google +](#).

A Holy Spirit-Focused Way to Make Decisions

Decision-making is no fun. Especially when the decisions we're struggling with could have life-changing or drastic repercussions, or at a minimum have lots of pros and cons to consider. That's why in my [Proverbs 31 devotion](#) running today, I shared about being frustrated with having so many important decisions to make, and how I found myself wishing God would just give me a big ol' neon sign from above so I'd know which direction to take. Or if not that, maybe a big fluffy cloud to follow like the Israelites had in Exodus showing them which way to go. If they could get a cloud, it seems only fair you and I could have one too, right?

I shared a few weeks ago on my blog about [my personal situation](#), which has not only been a drain emotionally, but mentally, because I've had to make more hard decisions than ever before in my lifetime. It has not been fun. After all, who wants to finally make a decision (after a lot of stressing I might add), only to realize later it was a bad one, or at least not the best one that could have been made? I know I don't, and I dare say neither do you.

I believe that's why God brought the verse to my mind that says, "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way: (Ex. 13:21a). As I stated in the devotion, instead of a cloud, I had a cloudy mind. I was so

worried about making a wrong decision that I couldn't make any decisions at all. I felt lost in a wilderness, much like the Israelites. But through that passage, God helped calm my heart and my mind by reminding me that even if I make a wrong decision, He'll still be by my side to teach and guide me through the journey.

I had to change my thoughts about my decisions and stop thinking and acting that things were in my control. Here's what I chose to do instead, and maybe these tips will help you transform your thinking as well, especially if you're facing some hard decisions today, too:

- I chose to pray, and ask God to help me stop stressing over not knowing the future. The future is in His hands, regardless of the decisions I make.
- I chose to stop stressing over whether my decisions were right or wrong and believe He would be with me either way.
- I chose to stop obsessing over worst-case or what-if scenarios and focus my energies and thoughts on the potential positives instead.
- I chose to remind myself not to think negatively every time one of those nagging, worrisome thoughts bubbled back up to the surface. Reject them; move on.
- I chose to trust God. Because that's really the only choice I have. He is in control, and I am not.

You see, I had to intentionally choose to change my thinking, otherwise my thinking would have changed me. We may not have control over our circumstances, or even the outcome of our decisions, but we always have control over how we think about them. Hard lessons learned during the writing of my next book, which I am praying will help you decide to choose to intentionally think positive too. {eoa}

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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 3 children and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can connect with Tracie on her blog at www.traciemiles.com and all social media outlets.

Valentine's Day: The Secret Restoring Christian Marriages

While Valentine's Day has long become a commercial holiday about affection, flowers and chocolate, the story of Saint Valentine shows a more authentic love than the version Hallmark sells us today.

It is believed that Saint Valentine was executed by Emperor Claudius II in around A.D. 269 for refusing to denounce his faith in Christ.

This martyrdom is a real demonstration of what Paul is talking about in Ephesians when he says "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it"

(Eph. 5:25). As men, we are called to die to ourselves as we love our wives deeply.

Why do so many of us fail to live up to Christ's example?

The sad truth is that 68 percent of church-going men view pornography on a regular basis. Many Christian men will try to romance their partners this Valentine's Day, yet they will go and view pornography during the following month.

Pornography has been proven to have a devastating effect on relationships. Numerous studies show that men who view porn are more likely to enforce violent sex acts on their partner. To add to that, 56 percent of divorce cases show that porn played a role in the break up.

Many of these men are desperate for a way out. They've tried to stop but have failed at every attempt.

Men struggling with porn are dealing with high levels of shame and a sense of worthlessness. Chris Ogden, adults ministry pastor at Orlando's First Baptist Church, explains, "For a lot of guys who have struggled in the area of sexuality, the lie becomes This is just who I am. This cannot change. This will never go away. I might enjoy a week or a month [of sobriety] here or there but ultimately this is embedded in my soul, I can't get free of it."

Dr. Ted Roberts, host of the [Conquer Series](#) who has counseled thousands of men to freedom from pornography, discusses why so many people in the church can't stop viewing porn. Churches often treat this issue as a moral one, but fail to recognize it's mainly a brain problem.

"We tell men to try harder, pray harder, love Jesus more." Dr. Roberts adds. "But what starts off as a moral problem quickly becomes a brain problem. Telling a man to try harder is only tightening the 'noose' of bondage."

The good news is that there is a movement of men all around the world who are retraining their brains through the [Conquer Series](#), learning to defeat porn and walk in freedom. [Find out more.](#)

Ogden recounts what happens to these men as they go through the Conquer Series: “As the guys in our church walk through that, you could just see that flame of hope kind of rekindle, and going, ‘I not only believe what they’re saying is true, but I think it could be true for me.’ And I think when that switch happens, that’s when God unleashes the power in the guy’s life.”

The Conquer Series has become “ground zero” for the movement of men who are conquering porn. It presents the battle plan for purity. Over 350,000 men have gone through the five-week course. The Conquer Series is a six-disc DVD set, which also includes a leader’s DVD. They are currently offering a 14-day money back guarantee.

[Join the movement and order the Conquer Series this Valentine’s Day.](#)

Why You Feel Utterly Exhausted All the Time

I am tired. It’s a real truth. I have felt exhausted for several months. Finally my doctor gave it a name—adrenal fatigue—and added a level to it I didn’t like. It seemed to loom like a giant in my life, waiting to pounce on me. She gave me great supplements and advice, but the diagnosis just made me feel even more overwhelmed than I was.

For the last few weeks, I've let that diagnosis define me and those feelings follow me around. I was allowing it to seep into every pore of me and let it be me. Until today. Today, I decided, as a child of the King, I will not allow this to beat me. After all, I have the Healer on my side. I am an overcomer because the Overcomer lives in me.

Giant-Slayer

I began to feel a little like the teenage boy David who, upon delivering lunch to his older brothers fighting in the Israeli army, discovered that a giant named Goliath had the entire army of strong men scared spitless. Only one man had to defeat him. Yet no one, not even the burly King Saul, would take on the giant's challenge.

David had just enough brash faith to say, "The Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). We know the story. David is allowed to fight the giant and, in doing so, had the entire fate of the nation in his hands. He won, which was no surprise to him. He knew God was the one fighting the battle. God just happened to be using David's body.

David brazenly told Goliath, who stood over 11 feet tall, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have reviled. This day will the Lord deliver you into my hand. ... All the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17:45-46).

A Giant of an Opportunity

The rest is history. It was the day a mere boy saved an entire nation because He trusted in the Lord His God. He didn't see a giant. He saw an opportunity for God to get glory and praise out of an impossible situation.

I didn't see my issue as being a giant of an opportunity several weeks ago when I first learned about it. Now I see that being tired is a good thing. It tells my body when I need to rest. It tells me I need to take life at a more normal, human pace. It tells me I need to take time to just abide in the presence of God.

At age 60, I stepped into my destiny, what I was designed from the beginning of time to do. Age 60 is when I wrote and published my first real book. I have three under my belt now, along with two study guides. A fourth will be released soon. I travel, speak and coach. I love every minute I spend doing all of those things. I don't want to waste a minute of my life. I want to be productive and do everything that God has planned for me.

Rest Is a Weapon

Truth is I forgot one thing. It seems so insignificant and yet, God Himself established it among some of the first acts of creation. On the seventh day, He rested (Gen. 2:6). God—the supreme being, the Creator of the universe, the One who transcends all things, knows all things and has all power—rested! If He rested then, why in the world do I think I don't have to?

I do have to admit, the thought of 24 hours without doing anything both scares and refreshes me. I'm so wired to work that not working is going to be a difficult habit to get into, even for a few hours. I am one who has to work at getting rest.

God is showing me, though, that rest is a secret weapon He gave us to help us defeat the enemy. When we are exhausted, we are no good to God or anyone else. We must recharge our batteries. It's one of the main reasons Satan has us running here and there doing, doing, doing. If He can't tempt us with addictive substances, He will tempt us with overdoing good

deeds and exhausting ourselves so when the real battle we were meant to fight comes along, we will be too tired.

What God Wants

God wants me to prosper and be in good health even as my soul prospers (3 John 2). But my soul is not successful when it is exhausted and stretched to the max with little time for rest and restoration.

Click to tweet: "[God wants you to prosper and be in good health even as your soul prospers.](#)"

These days, I'm carefully monitoring my schedule, the projects I take on and even the books I write. No longer am I assuming that every great idea I get is one that has to be done right now. At any given moment, I probably have 30 books in my head that I would love to write tomorrow. I know God gave me a gift of writing, but I also know I cannot write 30 books by tomorrow or even next month, year or 10 years if I'm doing it in my own strength.

I lay each project at His feet and wait for His direction. If there is no direction then I leave that project there until He hands it to me with directions.

I do know that when inspired, totally allowing God to write through me, I can write a book in a month or less. However, I can't do that if I am exhausted and working in my own strength. I need to have spent time with God. I need to be refreshed, rested, unencumbered. I need His words to flow through me in creative ways. It need it to be His project that I am just stewarding.

Good Rhythms

In my life, I have so many more good rhythms—physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually—than I did even five years ago. Still, I'm learning with new and larger vistas and opportunities come even greater challenges requiring even

better rhythms to help ride out the waves that I see on the horizon.

The biggest challenge is to keep from trying to defeat the giants in my life by my own self-effort. No giant I have can be defeated without relying on the power of God.

When I'm weary of life moving way too fast, I am focused on me instead of God. I try things in my own strength, stretch my days into weeks and months of projects. And before long, a year has passed without any real time for recharging, restoring and renewing myself.

It's then that the giants of fatigue and labels with diagnoses strapped on come knocking at my door, threatening to overwhelm me with even greater dismay. And the thought of despair hits me: *If everyone is saying I should give up, maybe I should.*

Sweet Rest

Rest, though, is not giving up. Rest is embracing my humanity and making room in my life to allow God to enlarge everything about me. This time is a good time to renew my commitment to spend concentrated time alone with Him, to establish better rhythms of time to just be with my Creator in silence and solitude. No agendas. No pretenses. No push and pull of deadlines. With God, time stands still because He holds it in His hands.

It's time to understand once again that even the things that look like giants in my life all have to obey God, the very same God who lives in me.

He calls to me, "Make haste, my beloved" (Song 8:14). And so I run to Him.

Now what problem were we talking about? What did the doctor say? What deadline is looming on the calendar? It all fades away in His presence. Focusing on Him is what is important.

Everything else will fall into place when the main thing is the main thing in my life and yours.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

I hear His call and I will walk in tune to His rhythms of grace.

What does that look like for you? {eoa}

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Joyfully Following Holy Spirit's Unexpected Flow

I watched *Gettysburg* and General Robert E. Lee's anxious eyes on the eve of battle, as he spoke with a Southern drawl, “With the enemy out there up on the hill, they'll be ready to finish the job. But I don't even know how much is up there. How many men? How many cannon? I don't know the ground or the flanks. I don't know.”

Much like our weekend.

Matt had geared up all week for a very full Friday. As he left the house early that morning, I prayed silently that God would give him the strength for the day.

Two hours later, he was calling home. "I don't feel good," he said. I suggested he cancel his lunch appointment. Five minutes later he called again: "I really don't feel good." So he came home with one of those nasty winter viruses that has been going around, and I tucked him back into bed.

That explains why I spent Saturday afternoon watching *Gettysburg* with the sickie. Check that off the to-do list.

Then came the weathermen (aka liars.) "Biggest storm in decades," they said. "Expect an Arctic blizzard to move in Sunday evening and bring another two to three feet of snow." So I went outside with the roof rake and pulled the mountains of snow off of the roof to prepare for the next load.

But that storm of the decades went north and went south, and we got just a light snow and a few blasts of cold wind.

I kept hearing General Lee's words in my head. "I don't even know how much is up there. I don't know the ground or the flanks. I don't know."

I didn't know Matt would be sick all weekend and miss Friday appointments and preaching on Saturday. I didn't know I would have to put down my lists and do snow removal. I didn't know the big storm would skirt us but would be scary enough for school closures. I didn't know the Lord would give me Monday off, so that I could have an opportunity to tackle the chores I had neglected over the weekend.

I worshiped the Lord in all of this.

Lord, I prayed. We just don't know anything. We plan and gear up for what we think is coming, but we don't really know how things will turn out.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding” (Prov. 3:5).

We are dependent, and this is the sweet spot of faith—not knowing, which leaves us the two options of great anxiety or leaning all of our weight on the Lord.

So we make plans for this week, but I pray we will not lean too heavily on how we think things will go. May we trust the Lord, even if he asks us to put down our own lists and do something unexpected.

4 Reasons You Don't Have to Plaster on a Fake Smile

What happens when we go day after day, month after month, year after year and literally feel no joy at all?

Christians are supposed to be the most joyful people on earth, right?

But often, they are not. In fact, I'd venture to guess that there are as many Christians battling depression as there are unbelievers.

What has happened to our joy?

I'll never forget the day I was finally ready to admit I'd lost my joy.

Oh, it wasn't that I suddenly woke up one day and didn't feel any joy or happiness at all. It had been going on for quite a

while. I just didn't want to admit to myself, much less anyone else, that I was in a state of depression.

Smiling was exhausting.

I was done pretending everything was okay with me when it wasn't.

I messaged my best friends and asked them to pray for me, and then I did the best thing I could have ever done in that moment:

I took out my Bible, I turned all the way to the back and found the section header "Joy" [and began writing down Scripture references.](#)

Over the next few weeks, I began meditating on verses that spoke about joy and rejoicing.

I wrote them down on index cards and kept them in my pocket. Throughout the day I'd take them out, read them, and then in a very animated way I would point my finger in the air and say, "God! Do you see that? Your Word says that your kingdom is joy! You give joy! I want that joy! I need that joy! Give me your joy!"

At first, it didn't seem as though anything had changed.

But this practice is much like taking vitamins as opposed to pain medicine. You won't see a change in four to six hours. It takes days, weeks, even months of stepping out in faith and believing that God's Word truly does change us from the depths of our being. ...

until our emotions

until our mind

until our will

all come into alignment with what Scripture says.

God rewarded my faith, and slowly, I began to notice a change in my emotions. That change began to reflect itself in my body as my energy levels began to rise.

Over time, laughter once again flowed from me in a very natural way and the small things—like my son's dimply smile, and my husband's crazy silliness—gave me incredible pleasure and satisfaction.

While there are simple changes we can make on the physical level that help, [like cutting back on screen time so that our adrenaline isn't running on high all of the time, making healthy food choices and regular exercise that raises our endorphin levels,](#)

true joy comes from a supernatural source.

You cannot get joy from any tangible source. It is impossible! There is nothing in this life, in this realm, in this world that you can see, taste, touch, smell or hear that will give you joy.

It may give you pleasure and it may bring you happiness, but joy is supernatural.

What does the Bible say about joy?

1. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit

In Galatians 5, Paul lists nine qualities—or fruit—of the Spirit. The word Spirit in this verse is capitalized, meaning that he wasn't referring to our spirit, that these qualities are produced from inside of us, rather that these qualities are descriptive of the Holy Spirit.

He goes on to say that if we belong to Christ we have died to the passions and desires of the flesh, and we now live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit; so that these nine qualities of the Holy Spirit grow and become evident in our own life.

If we want to have joy in our life, we must first make a choice to [stop doing those things that grieve the Holy Spirit](#). We must walk away from the desires of the flesh and live disciplined lives. And as we choose to

discipline our mind
discipline our will
discipline our emotions

we will find a greater joy inside as the Holy Spirit has greater freedom to govern our lives the way God intended and the natural outcome of that is joy.

Just as we must prune a fruit tree if we want to have better, healthier fruit, so we must prune our own lives if we want the fruit of the Spirit to grow.

2. Joy and happiness are not the same.

Equating joy and happiness is like equating apples to oranges.

Joy is a quality of the spirit whose source is supernatural and is only dependent upon our abiding relationship with Christ. It is stable and cannot be taken away by outside sources.

Happiness is an emotion whose source is physical and is dependent upon circumstances and balanced hormones and mineral levels. It is unstable and subject to change at any moment.

Joy can lead to happiness, but happiness cannot lead to joy; because the physical cannot give birth to the spiritual.

You can be walking through the darkest hour of your life and still have joy.

In Hebrews 12:2b, we read that Jesus endured the cross and shame “for the joy that was set before Him”. Surely, enduring that level of torture, pain and ridicule was not just physically painful but emotionally painful as well. But He kept his eye on “the joy that was set before Him,” which was the salvation of the world.

When we choose to discipline our minds, our thoughts, and our emotions, we will find that while we may be going through the most painful circumstance of our life, we still have joy.

In fact, we may even find that our joy grows during this time, as we allow the Holy Spirit—and not our circumstances—to govern our soul.

As He continually reminds us to shift our eyes off of our circumstances and focus on what is good, true, honest, lovely, a good report, virtuous, and praise-worthy.

And that joy that grows in our life through godly discipline and the governance of the Holy Spirit will be a testimony to those around us.

3. Joy give us strength.

One of the most well-known verses of Scripture is from Nehemiah 8:10c, “For the joy of the Lord is your strength”.

The children of Israel had rebuilt the wall in Jerusalem, and the priest Ezra stood and read them the law. As he read the law, the Levites helped the people understand what they read. They were suddenly confronted with their sin.

Their rebellion had exhausted the Lord’s patience, and He

allowed them to be taken into captivity and the seriousness of that sin has now hit them with full force. Nehemiah knew a time of mourning and fasting was to come, but first, they were to celebrate that holy day of the Lord.

The joy of the Lord would give their bodies and spirits strength.

Proverbs illustrates this when it says a joyful heart is good medicine. But in contrast, a sorrowful spirit dries up the bones.

It is medically proven that depression can lead to osteoporosis among a long list of other physical ailments and diseases.

I love what Proverbs 3:7-8 says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your body, and strength to your bones."

When we choose to walk in the spirit, we will have joy. And the natural outcome of both is a healthy body and strong bones.

4. Joy cannot be taken away.

Stuff happens. Life happens.

We experience financial setbacks, an unexpected diagnosis, a death in the family, or wave after wave of small things that begin to accumulate.

Happiness dissipates, but joy doesn't have to.

The only one who can take away your

joy is you.

God doesn't take away your joy. Circumstances cannot take away your joy. Mean people and bullies do not have the power to take away your joy.

Only you can take away that joy, and the only way you will find your joy is lost is

- when you stop focusing on Christ and start focusing on your circumstances
- when you stop identifying with Christ and start identifying with your past
- when you choose to live in sin

Those are the only three things that will cause your joy to be taken away, and all three of them rely on decisions made by you.

In John 16:22, Jesus promises His disciples that there will come a day when their persuasion that Christ was the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy and that He had risen from the dead would be so firmly planted in their hearts that literally nothing could take away their joy.

And truly, each of them walked through horrific persecution, and all but one were martyred.

Their joy was never shaken, because their focus wasn't on the persecution, the tyrannical and maniacal rule of Nero, but on Jesus Christ.

And when our eyes are focused on Christ, nothing and no one can ever take it away.

Do you want that kind of joy in

your life?

Do you want that joy that acts as a strong foundation for your life, on which you can plant your feet and joyfully endure the hurricanes of life?

Do you want to be 100 percent sure that no matter what happens, your joy will never be taken away?

This month, we are praying through Philippians, and we'll be talking more about how we can maintain our joy even through life's difficult seasons.

I hope you'll join me. {eo}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her Bosnian hero. Together, they live with their two active boys where she enjoys fruity candles, good coffee and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. Her passion for writing led her to author her best-selling book [The Missional Handbook](#). At [A Little R & R](#) she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. You can also find her at [Missional Call](#) where she shares her passion for local and global missions. You can follow her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) and [Google +](#).

Satan Covets This Powerful Blessing in Your Basket

I had the oddest experience today that got me to thinking about how the enemy covets our blessings. I was shopping in

the woman's department at a local store. I found the perfect skirt, blouse and blazer outfit needed for my next ministry trip to Tanzania.

- It was the right fabric for the hot and humid weather,
- It was a great color for me.
- It was very versatile.
- It was able to pack well.
- And it would wash and wear easily.
- It was one of a kind, not another one like it on the racks.
- And the price was great.
- It's as if God fashioned the outfit for my needs and desires.

I placed the outfit in my cart and continued shopping. But while I was browsing the racks, I noticed another woman nearby who was getting a little bit too close for comfort. I brushed it off, figuring she was focused on her shopping and didn't realize how close she was to me.

I turned aside to check out a blouse, when all of a sudden, this woman came up from behind me and pushed me into the clothing rack, stole the dress from my shopping cart and ran off!

In all honesty, I was taken off guard, flustered, and couldn't get out of that store fast enough. Once back in the car with my kids and good friend who accompanied me I started to detox my spirit and soul from the ugly greed of someone that would do such a thing.

But then I got to thinking about how our enemy, Satan, comes to steal, to kill and to destroy us (see John 10:10). And my thoughts went deeper than just his thieving, murderous and destructive behavior against us, but to the real motives behind his wicked attacks.

Let's look back to the woman at the store today. She didn't

try to steal my purse hanging over my shoulder, which possessed the provision: my money to purchase this outfit. She coveted the blessing in my basket: the outfit itself. And so much so that she did not care how unbecomingly she behaved to get it. She pushed me aside and nabbed it from me.

This is exactly how the enemy behaves, and the true reason behind his behavior. He covets our spiritual attire, God's glory. He's jealous of what God has fashioned for us. He sees how God has uniquely designed our ministry attire, and he wants it. And he will stop at nothing to try and swipe it from us.

Christians often look at ministry attire as being a part of the five-fold ministry, but whether you realize it or not, all of God's people are called to the ministry of reconciliation (see 2 Cor. 5:18). And it might just be your blessing of healing that he wants to nab from your basket to try to prevent you from shining hope to the sick and hurting around you. Perhaps your healing already manifested, but he tries to steal your testimony by putting lying symptoms back on you. Maybe he tries to steal your witness by attacking your marriage.

What blessing is Satan trying to rob you of? And more importantly, what can you do about it? Plenty!

1. Repent of sin if you need to.
2. Pray in the perfect will of the Father as you pray in the Spirit.
3. Declare the power of the blood of Jesus Christ over you and your family.
4. Put your faith into action, and do what God is calling you to do.

Doing these four things alone will help you to recover from the attack of the enemy and cause your spiritual attire to shine for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

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