

Warning: Don't Use Probiotics Before You See This

Many of the common foods we think are “health foods” could be the real reason you aren't losing weight.

If you're feeling tired, craving junk food, bloating, dealing with skin blemishes or fighting brain fog, then you may already be at risk. One of America's top physicians has some new tips for achieving optimum health, including:

- What Are the Four Fake Health foods That Are Wrecking Your Gut?
- One Superfood You've Probably Never Heard of, but Which May Help Balance Your GI Tract

Visit for these surfire health tips and more.

{eoa}

Standing Strong When the Door to Your Dream Slams Shut

This past year has been difficult, to say the least. It has felt like a tsunami of problems slammed into my reality, and I was pulled out to the deep, struggling to keep my head above water. At times, I felt it would be easier to drown than try to stay afloat. But what I've come to realize is that God has never let go of me, even on those days when I've felt like waiting on Him to intervene was almost more frustrating than dealing with the circumstances at hand.

Sometimes it's the waiting on God that helps us become strong enough in our faith to endure the wait at all.

This is what I gleaned recently from my precious friend Wendy Pope's book titled *Wait and See: Finding Peace in God's Pauses and Plans*. Her book came at the perfect time for me, and it actually served as a sign that God was indeed intervening, just in different ways than I had asked for. I didn't need to keep feeling as though I were waiting for Him to do something, because behind the scenes of my life—scenes which I am not capable of seeing—God was indeed doing things on my behalf.

In chapter 4, Wendy's words were a comfort to my heart when she acknowledged that not only do we all grow weary of waiting at times—especially during difficult times when we desperately want God to act and fix our problems, and it seems He is silent—but that it is perfectly normal for us all to do so. And more importantly, God understands.

Just in case, like me, you are in a season of waiting on God to show you why you are enduring something hard or what His plans are or why doors aren't opening or why it seems He isn't answering those gut-wrenching prayers for which you've prayed for years, I wanted to share Wendy's insight about what we tend to do when the wait is long, arduous, confusing and frustrating. These are obstacles we tend to struggle with when we are honestly just tired of waiting on God to show us His plans, purpose or goodness—all of which are promised to us in Scripture.

Wendy shares five obstacles most of us struggle with when we are forced to endure a long wait for what our hearts desire most. And they are:

Obstacle 1: When we are weary of waiting on God, we waver.

In Wendy's words, "When the wait is long or filled with obstacles, the temptation comes to bail out and stop following God." She explained how our wavering thoughts get in the way

of us staying on the right path. One day we're trying to trust God's ways, and the next we're wondering what He is thinking. One day we feel confident and like we can get through this, then the next day we feel like God has abandoned us and we'll never make it through. One day we are OK with where God has us, and the next day a new problem rages in and strips away our peace. One day we love God and believe we are His beloved, and the next day we wonder if He even sees or loves us at all. She encouraged me by saying, "Each day provides a myriad of opportunities to lean on God's understanding than our own." I don't want my wavering thoughts to steer me not only away from God, but away from the peace and joy He wants me to have even in the midst of difficulties.

Obstacle 2: When we are weary of waiting on God, we fear.

Those wavering thoughts eventually turn into fear even though Scripture constantly reminds us not to fear. Fear keeps us bound and fuels our doubts about God's goodness and sovereignty. As Wendy says, we can always trust an unknown future to a known God every time, so fear is not necessary or helpful. I don't want to let fear keep me from experiencing joy, even when my circumstances don't feel joyful, while I'm waiting on God's plan to come to fruition. Less fear gives way for more peace in the wait.

Obstacle 3: When we are weary of waiting on God, we lack confidence.

I can't tell you how much my confidence has been shaken lately. Like Wendy, there was a season when I allowed doubt to dwarf my confidence. Some days I've had to fight the urge to focus on all my imperfections or shortcomings rather than all the good things God created about me. Or fight the urge to focus on the hurtful words or actions other people said or did and allow that to shape how I see myself and my worth, rather than seeing my worth and value through God's eyes. I don't want my lack of confidence—shaken by the broken world we live

in and the lost people in it—to bury so deep in my soul that it prevents me from having the confidence I need to stay strong in the Lord’s strength and confident in who I am in the Lord.

Obstacle 4: When we are weary of waiting on God, we can become self-focused.

Focusing on our wants, needs and desires is one thing, but when we begin to focus not only on when God doesn’t meet those wants, needs and desires, but also on when He meets other people’s needs and desires, we will begin to feel jealous. We begin to think God isn’t fair. Why did they get a blessing, and I didn’t? Why did He answer their prayers and not mine? We may not want to admit it, but we’ve all done it, no matter what “thing” we are asking God for. I don’t want to let my focus on self become a hindrance in my faith walk, even when it seems God is fairer to someone else than He is to me.

Obstacle 5: When we are weary of waiting on God, we may struggle with unbelief.

When the Israelites made their exit from Egypt and escaped slavery, God knew they might change their minds and return to Egypt when they stumbled across some of these obstacles. He knew that unbelief would rear its ugly head, and it did. In *Wait and See*, Wendy wrote this regarding the last obstacle of unbelief, which struck a chord in my heart: “They surveyed the long, dusty road ahead and allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the impossibility of the situation rather than believing in the God of possibilities.” I don’t want my unbelief to blind me to the God of possibilities, do you? It’s such a sweet reminder that anything is possible in Christ and with Christ, but it usually does require us to wait. Let’s not let the wait rob of us believing God for the impossible.

Waiting on God is hard. Waiting on answered prayers or blessings or glimpses of hope is hard. In fact, maybe even

beyond hard. Trust me, friend, I know. But God is still God. His ways are not our ways, even when we can't understand them. We have to trust He knows best, even when it comes to unanswered prayers, hurting hearts, disappointment and closed doors. And even when we have a long, arduous wait before we catch even the tiniest glimpse of His plan to use our wait for good.

Are you struggling with any of these obstacles? It's OK. That doesn't make you a bad believer, it simply makes you normal, but don't let it make you pull away from God. Instead, let the wait pull you closer. The closer we are to God, the more we can trust His ways instead of doubt them.

I don't want to stumble over any of the obstacles of wavering thoughts, fear, lack of confidence, self-focus or unbelief, and I bet you don't either. But if you are stumbling, as we all have, and feeling frustrated while waiting on God to intervene, then *Wait and See* might be the perfect book for you for such a time as this. Just like it was for me. So I hope you check it out for yourself.

Waiting well teaches us to trust His delays rather than doubt His ways.

Waiting on God isn't wasting time, it's training time. Keeping company with God is how we learn to wait well, fight our inner battles and find rest.

Things don't always turn out the way we planned, but things always turn out as God planned

—Wendy Pope

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 1 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.*

How Holy Spirit Can Break Your Road Rage Addiction

It was 7:45 a.m., and everyone in Kalispell was trying to get to their posts for the day. I came to the stop sign at the south end of Helena Flats Road and waited for someone to close the gate so I could take a right onto the highway.

(I was a teenager when I finally figured out that when Dad said, "Who opened the gate?" there actually was no gate. He just meant there was a lot of traffic.)

Anyway, I was waiting patiently to turn.

The person behind me—not so much. He laid on the horn. When I didn't immediately turn, he honked and honked again.

Oh, was I mad.

Pulse-thumping. Blood-boiling. Teeth-clenching mad.

Finally, I was able to make my turn, just about the time the Holy Spirit said, "So." (Firm voice. Dad voice.)

In the same hour in which I took to the wheel of my car, I had been rolling the words of Peter around in my head: "not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for this very purpose that you might inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9, NASB).

"Give a blessing instead," the Spirit said.

Instead of "Are you kidding me? Jerk."

Instead of that.

I blew out the hot air that had been rapidly building and said, "Blessing?"

"Blessing," He said. "You heard me."

And so I began blessing Mr. Honking Driver. At first it was forced, but then I started to think about the soul of the man behind the wheel.

Did he know Jesus?

I prayed for him. All of my anger symptoms dissipated, and compassion filled me. Maybe he was having a horrible morning. Maybe his soul was dark and bankrupt of all that is good. I prayed for his family and his heart and his work day.

And I felt close to God. This was a kind of worship that was more than what I had been doing over coffee and a relaxed Bible reading not too many minutes earlier in my morning.

So the message I'm sending to you today isn't about blessing those who do evil to you, as valuable as that is. What I want you to know is that until you read the words of the Bible and go do them in real life, you'll never know the kind of

intimate relationship with God you long to have. It's in that moment of hard obedience, when you bend your knees to doing what is right, that you'll experience a deepening in relationship with the Father. You'll feel his pleasure and the benefit of obedience to your own well-being, and you'll want more of that.

What truth of God do you need to obey today?

These Deceptively Immoral Choices Muddy the Message of Righteousness

Seven days after the Women's March on Jan. 21, 2017, there was a second march on Washington—the annual March for life.

During those seven days, I witnessed three groups of women:

1. Women who were protesting their right to have an abortion and do with their body what they want
2. Women who were protesting President Trump but who are pro-life and thus didn't feel comfortable attending the Jan. 21 march.
3. Women who are passionately pro-life.

The aftermath of both marches has led to a lot of discussion that I feel has muddied the pro-life message.

One point in particular somehow didn't sit right with me, and for days, I've pondered why.

Now I know why. And that is why I am writing this article.

I would like to start off by saying that this article in no way is meant to judge any of the three groups of women. This article, is, however, meant to tackle a difficult topic and hopefully shine a different light on our discussion of life, abortion and adoption.

And I feel this is important, because no matter how you feel about abortion, the cold, hard facts are that millions of women suffer deep psychological wounds stemming from a decision they made to end their pregnancy.

The point made that left me feeling off was this:

Pro-lifers are not truly pro-life if they are not willing to step up to the plate and adopt all of the thousands of babies that will be born to the women who would have otherwise aborted them.

In the end, I have concluded that the argument made here is as effective as trying to put a Band-aid on an amputation.

Although intentions may be sincere, the method to heal the wound is too simplistic.

There is a much deeper issue, a deeper problem in society that must be resolved, and when it is, the argument will be null and void.

And the resolution to the problem must start inside the four walls of the church.

What is the deeper problem?

The church is no longer the standard-bearer for morality in society. There used to be a time when the church set the standard of morality, which was based on God's Word.

There was a time when it was simply unacceptable that couple would engage in intimacy before marriage.

Now, however, not the church, but Hollywood, is the standard-bearer. And the church is not only content to let Hollywood set the standard for ~~morality~~ immorality, but, for the most part, it has bought into its doctrine.

Even in the church, it is odd to find a 20-something who has saved themselves for marriage.

Most youth group and singles' group leaders admit that immorality is out of control in their churches. Some pastors have even given in to the narrative that it is impossible to reign in your hormones and resist the temptation to engage in intimacy.

And my question is this:

If the church refuses to be the standard-bearer for morality in society,

If we choose to watch the same movies filled with nudity and sex

If we choose to laugh at the same jokes

If we choose to use the same innuendos

If we choose to call the same actors and actresses "sexy"

If we choose to entertain ourselves with the same movies that mock the Bible, mock abstinence and mock Jesus Christ

If we choose to walk in the way of the wicked

Stand in the path of sinners

Sit in the seat of the scornful

Then what is our platform really all about?

Sin always muddies the message.

Our light has gone out, and we shouldn't wonder why the world chooses to use abortion as another method of contraception.

Then we should wonder who is going to adopt all of those babies born to women walking in darkness—that great, great

darkness—all because the light that was once within us has become darkness.

But, if we will be honest with ourselves for one blessed, holy moment, we will know that there are not enough pro-life families on planet Earth to contain the flow of babies born to women who would otherwise be ready to terminate their pregnancies.

So there must be another way.

There has to be another way.

And it's not education, because our society has educated itself into ignorance.

It has to be a holy cry of revival in the church. It has to be a church that falls on its face in repentance because it has failed to see how its tolerance of immorality has deeply offended a holy God.

It has to be wailing at the altar of sorrow for light that was extinguished decades ago without any notice at all.

It has to be a cry for the consuming fire of God to incinerate the philosophy of the world.

And then there must be dedication.

Once sanctified again, the church must dedicate itself: not to educating, not to philosophical platitudes, not to self-help seminars—but to winning the lost.

She must lay aside her fear of “proselytizing” and become obedient to Christ's command.

This—this is the only way abolishing abortion will ever work in our nation.

When men and women full of the Holy Spirit and power once again become the standard-bearers for morality in our society,

fornication will not be the norm!

And as we begin shifting the narrative on morality in our society, society will once again begin to view life as sacred.

All life.

Life conceived unplanned

Life conceived through rape

Life conceived that has unique needs

Life that has run its race and still has a few miles to go

Life that has received a terminal diagnosis

That message will ring out crystal clear when it is not muddled by our own tolerance and immorality of sin. {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 +.

3 Slippery Ways Your Worship

Could Morph Into Witchcraft

Can Christians delude themselves into thinking that they are worshiping God, when in fact they are engaging in witchcraft?

Sound a little incredible?

And yet, there are three enemies of our soul that, if left unconquered, will not only lead us into great delusion and destruction, they will actually turn our worship into witchcraft.

While Saul was certainly not God's original plan for Israel; after the children of Israel insisted God give them a king, God chose Saul.

In today's vernacular, Saul was called.

But just like Saul, it is entirely possible for you to use your area of ministry for sin. Saul is a classic example of someone in ministry – no matter how legitimate – using that ministry to build their own kingdom, to exalt themselves and for their own sinful desires.

When we reach 1 Samuel 15 we see that Saul has fallen so deep into the trap of self-worship that it has turned into witchcraft.

To be sure, all worship that isn't sincere worship of God is witchcraft!

3 Ways Worship Turns to Witchcraft

1. When we fail to address our insecurity.

When Saul comes on the scene in 1 Samuel 9, he is insecure and self-deprecating. This is further witnessed in chapter 14, when Jonathan had eaten honey during a time when Saul had placed his army under an oath of fasting.

Saul was more willing to put Jonathan to death for his transgression than to admit his own mistake in leadership.

In looking at the leadership of Saul, we clearly see what happens when a leader leads out of insecurity.

In chapter 14, we find an army reduced to one-fifth of its size, with limited weaponry, low morale and now weakened with hunger.

Furthermore, the people are not behind Saul; they are simply doing what they have to do with no passion or vision. In the end, they rise up against Saul and save Jonathan—who, while his father sat under a tree, chose to step out in faith and obedience to go against the Philistine army.

God rewarded his obedience by confusing the army into turning on itself!

Saul's insecurity led not only to his own personal disaster, but nearly destroyed his army and certainly alienated his people from him.

Insecurity is just another word for pride. An insecure person is a person who is preoccupied with themselves: how they look, how they appear to others, whether or not they are accepted by their peers.

Many times, insecurity is linked to perfectionism, which is yet another word for pride. Any time we are more focused on ourselves than on God and others, we have pride in our hearts.

Pride is nothing more than self-worship.

Pride is the elevation of self. Insecurity is the elevation of self, only often repackaged as false humility and self-deprecation. Perfectionism is the elevation of self, always having to be the best, never able to allow others to be better

2. When we fail to address our fear.

In 1 Samuel 13, we find Saul and his army about to go to war against the Philistines. He is waiting on Samuel to offer the sacrifice, but Samuel is late. Scripture says that Saul waited 7 days for Samuel to come, but he still hadn't shown up.

In the meantime, the troops were getting restless and were deserting him.

Saul was feeling his authority slip away from him, and out of fear of losing his authority over his troops, he makes a fatal error.

He offers the sacrifice himself.

Out of fear, he assumes a level of authority God never intended him to have, and as a result, the generations following him would never rule over Israel.

Fear is a lack of trust in God's sovereignty and a refusal to live under His authority.

The problem is, when we refuse to be under God's divine authority and to accept the human authorities He has placed over us, we are living in rebellion.

This weakens any authority we may have.

In Matthew 8, we read the story of the centurion who comes to Jesus asking Him to heal his servant. When Jesus offers to go to his house, the centurion gives this curious answer, "For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this man, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it'" (Matt. 8:9).

He says, I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. He is both under authority and in authority.

And his authority is strengthened by the fact that he chooses to submit to someone higher than him. But this submission requires trust. You cannot submit to someone you don't trust.

Fear is a lack of trust; you can even say fear is a refusal to trust.

In fact, for the Christian, fear is a rebellion against God's command, because throughout Scripture, God commands us not to fear.

3. When we fail to address our disobedience.

Throughout these chapters in 1 Samuel, we see that Saul's fear and insecurity led him to disobey God in a multitude of ways.

But we come to the point in chapter 15 when God calls him out for his witchcraft. Indeed, even the Word says that Saul's so-called sacrifice to God was really only self-worship!

God had sent Saul and his army to attack Amalek.

In chapter 15, verse 3, God commands Saul to "utterly destroy" everything and everyone. He actually gives him a comprehensive list, so that there is no room for confusion or interpretation.

But in verse 9, we see that Saul spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings, lambs and "all that was good".

Then in verse 13, he says, "I have carried out the word of the Lord."

When Samuel confronts his disobedience, he defends himself by saying that the things they saved back were to sacrifice to the Lord. As if the Israelites didn't have their own sheep and oxen to use for sacrifice, they chose to use the sheep and oxen that God had commanded them to destroy as worship to God.

This, in fact, wasn't worship of God at all.

In verse 12, we read these interesting words I had never read before, "...it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went up went to Carmel and set himself up a monument ..."

While Saul was supposedly sacrificing to the Lord, in reality he was worshiping himself.

And his self-worship will soon be deflated when Samuel speaks these famous words:

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Obedience is better than sacrifice,

a listening ear than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

Are we guilty of disobedience in our worship?

Have we brought the world into our worship?

Would we rather do what's popular, what's going to get us attention, what's going to heap praise for our abilities, what's going to bring in numbers?

Have we failed to utterly cut off the world so the purity of God's authority is witnessed in and through us?

If not, our worship has turned into witchcraft.

Saul's life is a warning to the church of what happens when we think we can defeat the enemy outside of us without first

having defeated the enemy inside of us.

His failure to defeat his insecurity, pride, and disobedience prevented him from leading his army into battle against the Philistines in chapter 14 and from utterly destroying the Amalekites in chapter 15.

If you fail to defeat the enemy in these three areas, you are worshiping yourself. And any worship that isn't worship of God is witchcraft!

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 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 +.

3 Prayer Strategies to Make Your Marriage Rock-Solid

Happy and lasting marriages always contain one core, but seemingly elusive, element: prayer. Prayer releases a relational resource into the marriage and family. Hearts are filled with peace; we have energy by which we interact in a quality way with those around us; and when prayer abounds, a deterrent is in place against potential attacks from the enemy. A prayerful marriage maintains a preemptive posture, a

defensive boundary making relational intrusions less likely. How can we build a marriage like this?

1. Connect Individually with God

The first and foremost way to have a prayerful marriage is to keep your individual lives full of consistent encounter with God. Guys: Be a praying husband. Gals: Be a praying wife. The result: Your marriage will be prayerful.

Each spouse seeking to abide in God's presence produces a life-giving flow in the marriage. It's virtually impossible for a married couple to grow stagnant in their relationship when each spouse is having fresh encounters with God. The joy of discovery becomes a source of strength to the marital bond. The more I personally discover the treasure I have in Christ, the more I have to invest in my marriage.

In our book *Longing for Eden: Embracing God's Vision in Your Marriage*, I said it this way: "When I'm filled to overflowing, my marriage gets the spillover. The more beautiful God looks to me, the more beautiful my wife looks to me." A useful metaphor for me is that of a contact lens; once inserted, your vision is transformed. When I'm seeing God rightly, perceiving His glory, every facet of my marriage is enhanced.

2. Stay Connected with Your Spouse

The second path to a prayerful marriage is to stay connected with your spouse.

Marriage is a holistic relationship. You can't get more comprehensive or integrated than a one-flesh union. Yet tragically, many couples fail to be intentional over the years to maintain a connection in the various lifelines of their marriage. Consider this quote from *Vertical Marriage*.

"We have observed that married couples, who seemed to have unending conversations while dating, oftentimes reach a place where they must be intentional in choosing to communicate.

Life has transitioned, schedules are busy and we just don't talk like we used to. This is normal but must not be left unattended. Husbands and wives need to keep the lines open, from everyday surface topics to the deeply felt matters of the heart."

To help facilitate these vital lines of communication, our premarital manual, *Vertical Marriage*, offers sample questions to ask each other. One of my favorite of the 13 topics is Friendship and Affection, with conversation starters such as, "Am I your best friend?" "How could our personalities better blend together?" "Do we hug, smile and laugh together enough?" These are meant to be a springboard into deeper dialogue and hopefully incubate ideas for setting goals or planning constructive activities to enhance your friendship.

A great companion topic to the above is Spiritual Identity & Unity. The goal here is to know the condition of one another's heart—What is God saying to you lately? Where are you most vulnerable to the enemy's attacks, and how can I specifically pray for you?

It may seem a bit awkward or unnatural at first to "interview" one another with such questions, but we have found that if couples train themselves in this fashion, it will soon become organic—the questions will be modified to your style and become more fundamentally a part of your conversations without even having to use the list.

Being consistent in connecting makes for an easy pivot into prayer. Best friends are the best candidates to be prayer partners.

It is innately in each one of us, single or married, to be interwoven with like-minded souls. Invariably, when we have counseled couples in crisis, a common issue has been the slow erosion over time of meaningful attachment. Hence the imperative need for a godly routine of connecting. Priority

one, if you're married, is your covenant partner.

3. Pray Together in a Way That Is Uniquely You

My third suggestion for couples is this: pray together in a way that is uniquely you. I know of couples who pray together for a few minutes before bed each night—heavenly pillow talk. This would not be the most productive for some of us who are fast-tracking into sleep mode once we hit the sheets. But again, do what works for you.

Other options I've heard of: prayer-walk together (exercise + prayer), read through a devotional (daily or weekly), pray spontaneously as you feel the need (while driving together, for example).

However you approach praying together, I would suggest starting with small goals, reachable ones, to build momentum. Planning too big (praying together for an hour a day) may lead to discouragement when goals are not met.

There are many avenues through which God desires to reveal Himself in our marriages. Without question, integrity of character and acts of service are vital, but the greatest avenue, I believe, is the unlimited power and reach of our prayer lives.

S. D. Gordon, in *Quiet Talks on Prayer*, says it best: "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. It is not the only thing; but it is the chief thing ... You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do not more than pray until you have prayed."

What are some questions you're considering using to start conversation with your spouse and the Lord? {eo}

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.

This Sneaky Stronghold Can Quickly Upend Your Blessings in Christ

We've talked this whole month about our identity in Christ.

We've looked at what the Bible has to say about our identity in Christ and how to leave our past behind us and walk in freedom. We've examined Bible verses that speak about our identity in Christ and learned how the book of Ephesians can help us build that identity in our hearts. We've even looked at failure and how we can redefine failure so it is a momentary event and not an overshadowing production that takes over our whole lives.

But once you've embraced your identity in Christ, can it be destroyed?

Is it possible to walk in your identity in Christ, only to regress to a life of insecurity, hurt and disappointment under a weight of failure and bitterness?

Yes, it is.

There is one thing that will destroy your identity in Christ. There is one thing the enemy will use as a strategy to cause

you to walk away from a life of freedom and grace and back into bondage.

Paul said, "For freedom Christ freed us. Stand fast therefore and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

The one thing that will destroy your identity in Christ is unforgiveness.

The Bible has a lot to say about the importance of forgiveness in the life of the believer. In fact, in a few months, we will take an entire month to study what the Bible has to say.

But the reason unforgiveness will destroy our identity in Christ is because it shuts off the fountain of grace from flowing into our lives.

Without the continual receiving and giving of grace, our identity in Christ begins to wither and die. For our identity in Christ to grow and give life, both to our spirit and to those around us, we must have a constant flow of grace in and through us.

Unforgiveness stops that flow every single time.

Unforgiveness is literally a rejection of that grace.

That is why Jesus said in Matthew 6 that if we do not forgive our offenders, He cannot forgive us our offenses.

This presents a huge problem for us when we refuse to forgive. Harboring unforgiveness actually prevents our own sins from being forgiven.

As the weight of our own sins continual to pile up between us and God, the life of the spirit—the free grace of God—is shut off. Without the flow of grace into our lives, our identity in Christ experiences crisis, and we slowly begin to sink back into the bondage we lived in before He set us free.

The only solution for this is to embrace God's grace:

Not just so that we can be free, but so that we can set our offender free as well.

You see, in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant, the master not only forgave the servant a large amount of money, but he set him free.

Had the master not forgiven the servant, he'd have gone to debtors' prison until he paid back the debt. And given the size of debt he owed, he would have been in prison for the rest of his life.

It has been said that forgiveness isn't something we do for others but for ourselves.

I disagree.

Forgiveness is something we do for others as well as for ourselves. Forgiveness is a spiritual act. It has to be, because it requires the grace of God to forgive.

And I am convinced that when we embrace God's grace and choose to extend that grace in a supernatural act of forgiveness, a miraculous freedom takes place in the other person's heart as well as in ours.

Perhaps they are not immediately aware of that freedom, but I do believe that our choice to forgive causes a spiritual release to happen inside them.

If we want to daily strengthen your identity in Christ, we must daily make a choice to forgive anyone who offends us. We must daily choose not to hold their offense against them, thereby releasing to them the miraculous freedom that Christ extends to us continually.

This choice, and our decision to follow through with it, ensures that grace is daily flowing in and through us in

abundant measure.

We were created in the image of God. He has called us to be kingdom ambassadors here on earth. Our purpose is to reflect Him and glorify Him in all we do.

When we live and walk in this, we are living and walking in our identity as sons and daughters of God.

And we can only fulfill this when grace is flowing freely as we daily walk in forgiveness.

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 and 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 +.

What the Bible Has to Say About Last Week's Women's March

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:10).

My oldest granddaughter, Ruth Bell, just turned 15. She is spectacularly beautiful, with a sweet, strong spirit. One of the birthday traditions in our family is that each of us gives

the one who is being celebrated a Bible verse. The verse can be one of blessing, challenge, instruction, promise or exhortation. My selection of the verse I felt led to choose for Bell this year was affected by what I saw on news reports the day after the Inauguration of the 45th president of the United States.

Various news outlets played video and audio reports of hundreds of thousands of women all over the world marching in protest of President Trump. It was an incredible sight to see women flooding the streets, not only in Washington, but also in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, London and dozens of other major cities. They were peaceful, vulgar, at times obscene—marching for what? They claimed to represent all women, yet a common denominator seemed missing, unless it was fear of President Trump and the possibility that he may interfere with their right to easily accessible abortion for anyone and everyone, at any time and for any reason.

When I opened my Bible the morning following the march of women, this is what I read in my previously scheduled devotions for the day: Proverbs 9:13-15, 18 (NIV): “The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, [wives, mothers, soccer moms] on a seat at the highest point of the city [in the workplace, in leadership positions], calling out to those who pass by ... But little do they know ... that her guests are in the depths of the grave.”

My heart aches for many of the women I saw marching, women who have joined a “movement” that is deceptive and in the end, will be destructive and lead them to a spiritual and moral “grave” (see 2 Tim. 3:6-9). I pray earnestly for them to turn to the one, true, living God, who is the only One who can give them the deep, permanent peace, love, hope, and security we all long for.

With these sights and sounds still fresh on my mind, the verse

I have chosen for our beloved Bell is one I share with you, too: “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30).

My prayer for beloved Bell—and for the women of the world—is that as she fears God and seeks to grow in her personal knowledge of Him, she would become a woman of great wisdom and understanding who shuns evil and serves Him faithfully (see 1 Sam. 12:24). {eoa}

Anne Graham Lotz, second child of Billy and Ruth Graham, is the founder of AnGeL Ministries and chairman for the National Day of Prayer Task Force. She has authored 15 books, including her latest, The Daniel Prayer.

This Mindset Blocks the Ultimate Refiner's Work in Your Heart

I am a refiner. That means I always know what I don't want much more than what I do want. However, it is paramount for me to know what I want. Otherwise, how will I know when I have achieved it? How can I get others to come along with me if I have no idea what I want? It's only in the refiner's fire that we find out.

Refining

Refining is a great strength. It means I can tell the pitfalls of a situation whether it is establishing a new business, starting a coaching group, writing a new book, creating a new course, quitting a business and starting another, working on

my personal and family goals or deciding what to fix for supper.

My refiner's mind first lists why I shouldn't do something before it lists why I should. Recently I was on a business call when I got what could be a phenomenal suggestion for changing the way I do my business. I hadn't worked with this person before, so I was a bit guarded.

She said, "What do you think of that idea?" Immediately I went into refiner's mode, telling her why it wouldn't work. I knew what I was doing and tried to stop myself, but it came out of years of living in mentality of believing nothing like that will work for me.

Negatives

I brought up all the negatives. Those come more readily to me than the positives. I usually talk myself out of any new and different idea even if, as she pointed out to me, it might be way more beneficial to those I work with than the way I am currently doing things.

After the call, I asked God, "Why do I always think of the negatives first?"

He said, "Because you are afraid of failure."

"God, why am I afraid of failure?" I asked.

He didn't hesitate to answer. "Because you are a perfectionist. You like everything refined. You walk through life as a refiner making sure everything works. Many times, this means you don't really by faith, but by logic and reason."

"I really don't like being a refiner. I just don't know any other way but to refine things."

"Don't be so hard on yourself. You've had a lifetime of

believing you can't. I will show you what you can do with Me. Look at all the options, but don't leave Me out of the equation. Walk by faith, not by sight" (see 2 Cor. 5:7).

Ultimate Refiner

I realized in that moment that God is the ultimate refiner, who refines me with fire.

"But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver, and they will present to the Lord offerings in righteousness" (Mal. 3:2-3).

God is a refiner in the best sense of the word, though. He refines for the end purpose of making me better by burning away the dross or the things that are worthless junk in my life. At the end of His refining fire, I should shine like polished silver.

I Want to Be Refined

Then it hit me. That's what I want. I want to be refined. I want nothing in me that is not of Him.

I want to fulfill the call He has placed on my life to write books, coach others to freedom from whatever binds them and share that message with all who will listen. That's my call. That's His mandate to me.

Everything in my life must fit within the perimeters of that calling. It doesn't matter how much money I make. It does matter how many lives I genuinely impact with that message. To do that will take money and resources.

I know part of that money must come from those in the coaching programs. They have to invest in order to be motivated to make

this lifestyle change. The level at which they invest will determine the level of their commitment to this journey.

The goal is to get people to committed to the journey long enough to understand what their real motivation should be for losing weight, gaining freedom from sugar addiction or receiving deep emotional and spiritual healing. When that moment of clarity comes, everything changes. Then it just becomes a matter of coaching them in how to maintain their freedom.

Bring People With Me

Now that I know what I want, I can bring people alongside me who have that same desire, who want to see people set free from addictions, especially food addictions. I can build a team to help me spread that message far and wide.

God is showing me how to bring that team together. Soon I will announce a Coach the Coaches program to train others to be coaches and join me in spreading this message.

I will continue doing what God has called me to do being careful to guard my time and energy level. I am only human. I cannot do it all myself. That's a good thing being a refiner has taught me.

I may change the way I coach. I may change how I write. I may change why and to whom I speak. However, I will not change who God called me to be—an author, coach and speaker. I will guard that calling with everything that is in me. I will stay in God's refining fire to make sure I do that.

Coach the Coaches

Those who are even remotely interested in the Coach the Coaches course, comment below. I need coaches I train to assist me in my calling. Eventually, I need coaches ready to go out on their own and coach others.

Those interested in losing weight and learning more about our Christian weight-loss coaching program, go [here](#).

This battle cry of freedom must sound throughout the world. “For freedom Christ freed us. Stand fast therefore and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

This is the year of the breakthrough. God is moving quickly in all areas of Christian ministry. Don’t hesitate to respond to His call. {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is a wife, mother, business owner, life group leader, speaker and author of *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God’s Favor* and *Sweet Grace Study Guide: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Overcome Sugar Addiction and Sweet Freedom*. Get a free chapter of her memoir on her blog at [Teresa Shields](#) . Connect with her there or on her Facebook page or Twitter.

Expose This Lying Thief if You Want to Walk in Your God-Designed Destiny

As I’ve been reading the book *Charis—The Power of Grace*, I have been inspired time and again to look at failure from a totally new perspective.

As a recovering perfectionist, it’s often a great challenge for me to take a risk.

What if things don’t go right?

What if I fall flat on my face?

I think we've all had these questions go through our minds, holding us back from walking into all that God has destined for our lives.

What's worse is when you've already failed.

When you've already fallen flat on your face.

You know what? I totally get that. I'll be honest right now and admit that failure is exactly why I'm tempted to walk away from music and totally embrace writing as my only creative outlet.

Music is too much in the moment.

Too much can go wrong.

Okay—in the spirit of full disclosure. ... the last time I led worship, too much did go wrong. I felt like a fool. I felt like a failure. I felt like I couldn't honestly even call myself a musician because I'd made too many mistakes.

I have been hesitant to even play piano for myself—at home. Playing piano in public has literally become unthinkable for me because all of those negative emotions come flooding back at even the thought of it.

Writing is safer.

I can spend hours editing, correcting and perfecting before the world is allowed to see my craft.

But this fear of greater failure, birthed by the disappointment of past failure, has held me back far too long. I've invested too many hours of my life in music lessons to just walk away.

So, I am printing out this quote and hanging it in a place where I'll see it every day.



This is a quote from the book *Charis—The Power of Grace*.

It reminds me failure doesn't define me. It isn't who I am. It shouldn't hold me back. It was an event. It happened, it passed and today is a new day.

Even more, it reminds me failure is really only another opportunity to try again.

This quote has helped me to completely redefine failure in my life, and I hope it will help you, too, to redefine failure.

It doesn't have to be a bad thing. {eoal}

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. She can also be found at on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.