

Billy Graham's Daughter Offers Post-Inauguration Appeal to Heaven

“Now may the God of perseverance and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6).

The inaugural address of the 45th President of the United States was unlike any other that I can remember. With three former presidents sitting behind him, Donald J. Trump laid down the gauntlet. Actually, he flung it down like a warning shot across the bow. The old way of doing things has ended. A new era has begun. Although we may disagree with what he said, we have to agree it took enormous courage to say it in that setting and on that occasion.

While President Trump made a clear statement to the political world, I would like to make a clear statement to the religious world. I have just watched the inaugural prayer service in the National Cathedral. President and Mrs. Trump, Vice President and Mrs. Pence, and their families were in attendance along with many other dignitaries. Two of my family members and many of my friends participated. But the program also included Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and representatives of other religions. While I appreciated the effort to unify people as we seek God, I've asked myself: How can light unify with darkness? How can truth unify with the false? Because the living God who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was included in the program of the prayer service in America's National Cathedral as though He is just one of many gods.

Let me be clear. When we pray, with one mind and one voice we are to glorify—not just any god—not just the god of our choosing or one we are comfortable with or the one who is revered by a religion or tradition. We are to glorify the one true living God who is the Creator—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the One who came down in human form so we could see Him and hear Him and know Him; the One who died on the Cross to be our Savior in order to offer us forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with Himself; the One who rose from the dead as Lord of lords to offer us eternal life; and the One who is coming soon as King of kings to rule the world in righteousness, justice and peace.

Please, America! Don't turn to just any god. Turn to the one, true, living God who loves us, who will hear us, who will forgive us, and [is] the only One who can bring healing to our nation.

That's His promise—if we turn to Him (2 Chron. 7:14).

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5 Ways to Win Your Unbelieving Spouse to Christ

You cry. You pray. You wonder how long you can hold on. You wrestle with guilt and loneliness. You look at other Christian couples with envy. If you're a believer, daily life has special challenges when your spouse is not a Christian.

And whatever your spouse's spiritual status, you also still have all the other "stuff" of married life to contend with: communication, intimacy, money, in-laws, children and more. You may struggle with the same false beliefs about marriage and need to be reminded of what is true about marriage.

You may be tempted to believe that other couples where both partners are Christians have it much easier, or that if only your spouse would "become a Christian," everything would be OK. That's not necessarily so. Some of the most heartbreaking stories I hear are from those whose Christian husband or wife abuses, betrays or otherwise causes them extreme pain.

That said, some of your challenges may be unique. How do you deal with your spouse when they don't share your faith? How do you balance what may feel like competing loyalties? Is it worth it to keep on praying?

Paul encouraged anyone whose husband or wife was not a believer to remain married if their spouse was willing (1 Cor. 7:12-14). God may use you to draw your spouse to Himself (1 Cor. 7:16).

But what practically can you do to both survive and "help" God bring your spouse into His kingdom? Here are five keys:

1. Don't play junior Holy Spirit. God has not given you the job of "fixing" or "saving" your spouse. That's His job. No human being has a right to play Holy Spirit in anyone else's life—not even your spouse's. (You do have a job, though. More on that in the coming steps.) God honors your spouse's free will, and you need to do the same.

This means no nagging, no flaunting your spirituality, no belittling, no arrogance, no using Scripture as a weapon. Put yourself in your spouse's shoes. If some behavior would push you away or make it less likely you would want to join your believing spouse as a Christian, be extremely cautious and

prayerful before acting in that way. Using truth as a weapon or acting arrogantly righteous will not win your spouse's heart to Jesus.

2. Be a walking advertisement for God's kingdom. If you were looking at or living with you, would you want what you had? If you were an unbeliever, would you want to join yourself in being a Christian? All of us are broken and in need of Jesus' transforming grace. But to the degree you demonstrate that transformation in your daily words, actions and the way you love, you are either an appealing incentive or a stinking obstacle in your spouse's journey to God's kingdom (2 Cor. 2:16).

You will not be perfect. When you mess up, apologize and ask for forgiveness. Let God continue to grow you. Keep investing deeply in your relationship with your spouse. Let God's love keep teaching you how to love better. That may be the factor God uses to save your spouse.

3. Keep feeding yourself. Any marriage is a marathon, not a sprint. This is never truer than when your spouse is not a Christian. And to make it, you must be very intentional about keeping your soul and spirit filled with nourishing food. It may be easier than ever to neglect this when your spouse does not share your faith.

Jesus regularly needed time alone with His Father while He was here on Earth, and you need the same. Find ways to stay connected to other believers even if you can't attend church weekly. Spend time reading or listening to inspirational media. Invest time in God's Word and in prayer. You're responsible for keeping your own soul filled up, regardless of what your spouse does or doesn't do.

4. Watch for God's work in your spouse's life. God loves your husband or wife more than you do. He is working to draw them to Himself. He knows better than you do what their brokenness

is, where they are vulnerable, what barriers they would have to overcome and what it would take to win their heart.

You may, as a believer, get an inside view of how God deals with someone who is “hard to get.” Or you may not see any evidence that God is doing anything; don’t let that fool you. Sometimes God allows life to break a person in order to give His Holy Spirit an open door; your interference could possibly prolong that process. And He may use your love as a demonstration of His own love to them.

If your spouse shows an interest or asks questions, be yourself. Don’t pounce. Freely share your own journey, struggles, victories, fears, hopes and faith. And if God uses someone else to speak into your spouse’s life, don’t be jealous; be grateful.

5. Continue praying. Prayer works. How long does it take? Only God knows. And only He knows the specifics of the outcome. Don’t believe the lie that prayer doesn’t work just because you don’t see your spouse coming to Christ. The stories are too numerous to believe otherwise, and God’s Word affirms it.

So keep on praying—whether it’s 7 days or 70 years. Pray for yourself—for your own character growth, wisdom, courage and perseverance. Pray for God to continually show you how to love well. Pray for your marriage—for the connection between you. Pray for your spouse—that the Holy Spirit never stop doing His work in their heart, regardless of what it takes.

Will your spouse become a Christian? I don’t know. But I do know that God can use you as one of His best tools to minister His love to your spouse and draw them to Himself.

Question: If your spouse is not a believer, what special challenges are you facing? What has given you courage or helped you in this journey? {eoa}

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For the original article, visit .

Take This Simple Step to Tackle the Impossible Task

I just spent four delightful days with my mother in Wyoming—eating a flaky quiche at Lander Bakery, ordering a new skirt from QVC and wandering unhurried through Hello the House, which is one of those surprisingly amazing stores tucked into the quiet main street of a town of 7,000.

But the sweet time ended, and Matt and I arrived back to Real Life after a 12-hour drive.

There was a moment in the kitchen when I contemplated hyperventilating over the week to come. Not only was I heading back to school, but it was also my week to teach the large group times in Awana, and the next night, I was hosting a ladies' get-together.

And then there was the fact that we had binge-watched HGTV at my mom's, so I also felt like I should redecorate my entire house.

But maybe that could wait.

Back to the idea of hyperventilating. I looked at the mountainous week to come and thought, *No way. Not even possible.* So there was the option of full-blown panic, total

hopelessness and shoulder-scrunching anxiety—you know, the usual.

Or.

I could look to God as “Magnificent Sherpa,” and I say that with reverence.

When I think of the Sherpa, I picture people who are acclimated to the extreme climate, altitude and rigorous climbs of some of the highest mountains in the world—people who know the way and can get you to the summit, while helping you carry your load.

So hey, I chose option B. Choosing one of my larger Post-it notes, I wrote down the impossible to-do list. Sticking it to my calendar, I confessed to the Lord my feelings of weakness and inability to pull off all of those activities. Then I told God I was completely trusting Him to help me conquer the impossible.

A miracle happened after that: I went to bed and slept like a baby for eight hours.

When I woke up the next morning at 5:15, I rolled up my sleeves and started plugging away at all that needed to be done. No anxiety. No hyperventilating. For sure, I dropped into bed exhausted at the end of the day, but it’s not so bad to take on a steep climb if you have hope of planting your flag at the summit.

King David sings these words to the Lord: “With your help I can advance against a troop, with my God I can scale a wall” (Ps. 18:29, NIV).

Don’t you think, more often than not, the coming week feels nearly impossible? But soak in the repeated phrase in David’s psalm:

With you I can.

With you I can.

So I pray for you today that you will die to your own self-sufficiency and turn your to-do list over to the strong shoulders of the Lord. May you be filled with hope that, with God's help, you can scale whatever wall stands in front of you.

10 Scriptures to War for Your Identity in Christ

Over the past 15 years, I have worked at leaving my past behind and walking in my new identity in Christ.

One thing that has been critical to this journey is surrounding myself with verses about what God says about me and my new identity in Him.

The Bible is filled from cover to cover with verses about who we are in Christ and about the fact that

- God's thoughts about us are numerous
- God's plans for us are prosperous
- God's redemption of us gave us new life
- God's sacrifice secured us in His family

And these verses line my war room wall (part of it is now located in my pantry and the other part in my journal), to remind myself of what God says about me in those times when the enemy wants to remind me of my past.

And when he reminds me of my past, I remind myself of what God's Word says, because that's even better than reminding him of his future.

It's better because instead of being focused on the enemy:

-I turn my focus immediately to God's Word.

-I fill my mind with Scripture.

-I replace the lying thought with biblical truth.

-I catapult myself out of negativity into victory.

Here are 10 Bible verses about your identity in Christ

John 15:15 – "I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I have heard from My Father have I made known to you."

Isaiah 49:16a – "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands;"

Romans 6:6 – "Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with Him, so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we should no longer be slaves of sin."

2 Corinthians 5:17 – "Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things have passed away. Look, all things have become new."

Ephesians 4:24 – "Put on the new nature, which was created according to God in righteousness and true holiness."

1 Peter 2:9 – "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may declare the goodness of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

Psalms 139:14 – "I will praise You, for You made me with fear and wonder; marvelous are Your works, and You know completely."

Galatians 2:20 – "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no

longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Philippians 3:20 – “But our citizenship is in heaven, from where we also await for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Colossians 3:1-3 – “If you then were raised with Christ, desire those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth. For you are dead, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (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. She can also be found at on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

2 Ingredients for God’s Glory to Be Released in Your Situation

Gabriel answers Mary’s honest question, “How can this be?” (Luke 1:34b). He says to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.

Therefore the Holy One who will be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The Amplified Version of the Bible describes this overshadowing as "like a shining cloud".

This is what happens when we activate our faith and believe in His promises. We allow His presence to come upon us and overshadow us like a shining cloud. In Genesis 1:1-3, we read about this overshadowing when God creates the heavens and the earth. It says in verse 2 that the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, is hovering and brooding over the situation, and His glory releases into the situation when the Father says in verse 3, "Let there be light."

This light is not the sun, moon and stars; God creates these in verses 14-19, on the fourth day of creation. What is this light that He releases in verse 3? It is the manifested glory of God. And it is in this realm where miracles release and manifest.

If we read through the rest of the encounter between Gabriel and Mary, we will see Mary's response: "I am the servant of the Lord. May it be unto me according to your word" (Luke 1:38a). She binds herself to the word of the Lord and releases the glorious power of the Holy Spirit into her life through the agreement of her spoken words, just as the Father did in the beginning of creation. And that's when the miraculous happens.

Does the Spirit of the Lord want to release in us an unimaginable miracle? Are we struggling to find the manifestation of this promise? We need to be like Mary: Surrender our will to His, and give the invitation to the Holy Spirit to manifest His shining cloud of glory over us to release and create our miracle.

Let's pray.

Dear Holy Spirit,

I am your bonds slave, I bind myself to You. I invite You to come and overshadow me with Your shining cloud of glory. With my spoken words of agreement, I release Your power to create Your miraculous will for my life.

In Jesus' name, I dare to believe and receive, amen. {eoa}

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Healing Soul Scars With 4 Jesus-Centered Tools

I grew up in a very healthy home environment.

I never once questioned my parents' love for me, and I felt very safe in talking with them about anything I was going through.

This is what makes my story somewhat atypical.

You see, I've lived with a broken area of my life that God has healed, but I've not publicly spoke about until now.

As I have been embracing my identity in Christ, I've realized that there are many women out there who need to hear my story of brokenness and healing, who need to know that their brokenness doesn't have to define them anymore!

I sat on the kitchen counter in my dorm room, it was late—very late—and I was the only one up.

As I sat there weeping and begging forgiveness from my

boyfriend for things long forgiven in my past, I didn't realize that this was only the first of such scenarios I'd endure in our relationship.

He had demanded that I give him details from my past relationships. I was hesitant because I knew he tended to be jealous, but he insisted, and slowly I began to recite for him less-than-stellar moments.

To be sure, I hadn't ever gone all the way in any relationship, but I'd gone far enough, and what ensued was a flood of words: whore, disgusting, immoral and more.

I wept and wept that night, begging his forgiveness and pleading with him not to break up with me. He wouldn't promise anything, but as it turned out, he didn't break up with me.

It would have been better if he had.

It would have been even better if I possessed even a shred of self-respect and realized that what I had just endured with him that night was the first sign of the psychological abuse that would leave deep wounds in my mind and heart.

But for some reason, my self-respect was blinded by his tall, lanky form—the quintessential cowboy. The Dr. Jekyll I had fallen for blinded the Mr. Hyde who would show his face more and more often.

He controlled every aspect of my life: what I ate, what I wore, where I went, with whom I spoke and what music I listened to.

And when I didn't do things his way, he'd lash out with anger and then withdraw and not speak to me for days.

Against my father's wishes, we got engaged one snowy December night. Yes, my dad gave his reluctant blessing because he knew that it was what I wanted, but he had very serious reservations about the man I'd chosen.

From that night, things only went downhill, and what should have been the happiest time of my life was a nightmare.

I was so terrified of his anger that I would begin each day resolute that I'd not do anything to make him angry.

All day long, I'd second guess even the smallest things, such as whether I was bending from the waist or the knees—because even this small thing could send him on a tirade.

At night, I'd lay in bed and rehearse every moment of the day in detail, picking through every little thing I'd done to be sure that any information relayed to him about my day wouldn't make him angry with me.

It was a horrid cycle of fear, anxiety, begging forgiveness when I "failed," and working to calm my hysteria with resolutions to do better next time.

The horrible thing about abuse is that once the physical wounds heal, the psychological scars remain. And they can fester for years!

Four months before our wedding, I gathered what courage I had—with the strong support of my parents—and ended our engagement.

I thank God that He rescued me that night, because after my ex-fiance walked out our door for the final time, more and more information began to surface about him that left me with a mixture of incredible relief and terror at what I'd almost committed myself to for life.

Over the next several years, God would slowly and lovingly heal the wounds in my heart and undo the psychological damage done to my mind.

He replaced the horrible names with a new name written in glory.

He replaced fear with an assurance that I was loved just as I am.

It has been 15 years since the day I walked away from that abuse and into a life of freedom and true love. God has given me a man who truly cherishes me. He has allowed me to share with this man about the things I endured—but the glory of that is, even as I write about it today, it's as if I'm recounting someone else's story.

And truly I am!

You see, I'm not an abuse victim.

I'm a new creation in Jesus Christ. He took that pain, the terror, the second-guessing my worth and value—all of that garbage from the pit of hell—and replaced it with healing, love and assurance of my worth and value as a daughter of the King of all kings along with all of the riches of heaven!

Here are 4 things I am doing to walk in that new identity in Christ:

1. Fill my mind with the Word of God. Each day we live, we accumulate information, and what we choose to fill our minds with shapes our worldview. If you want to replace negative self-talk, a damaged soul, a wounded heart or a mind filled with fear and pain, you need to start by filling your mind with God's Word.

2. Meditate on God's Word. Meditation takes the Scripture we've filled our minds with and plants it down deep. The biblical term for meditation means to mumble under your breath. Repeating God's Word to yourself over and over. This begins to reshape the concept we have of ourselves and our identity until our concept begins to agree with God's Word.

3. Speak truth to myself. The worst thing we do is speak lies to ourselves. And we do it so often and in so many ways.

Negative self-talk is so destructive to our identity in Jesus Christ!

The Bible says, "Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8).

These are the things we need to speak to ourselves. But let me caution that these things need to be things from the Word of God. Speak the truth of Scripture to your heart, because it is what has the power to change!

4. Replace old defaults with new patterns. When we begin walking in our new identity, it is easy to default back to old patterns when stuff goes wrong. When someone is critical of us, it is easy to default back to anxiety, fear, insecurity or anger.

Whenever we see those old defaults creep back, we need to replace them with new patterns from Scripture. We must remind ourselves that this old default is the old man trying to be resurrected, but that is not who we are anymore! We are a new creation; we have a new identity, a new name!

And as I've done this these past 15 years, it has made me a completely new person, so much so that I don't even relate to that girl so long ago who cowered in the corner in fear and intimidation!

You can be free!

You can live as a new creation!

You don't have be a victim any longer!

You can be so free that you can look back on today and say, "I can't believe that was me! I am so different now!"

Do you want to live free from your past? Do you want to live free from your pain? Do you want to live free from intimidation and fear? Do you want to live free in your mind from the negative thoughts and self-talk? Do you want a new identity?

My parents played an integral role in my journey, not just because they were there for me in the darkest moment of my life, but also because they lovingly pointed me back to what God's Word says about me. {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. She can also be found at on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Pinterest and Google +.

2 Surprising Ways a POW Persevered Through Years of Unspeakable Torture

Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale was an officer in the US Navy during the Vietnam War. He became a fighter pilot, and in 1965, he was shot down while returning from his second combat tour over North Vietnam. Held for nearly eight years as a prisoner-of-war in the infamous "Hanoi Hilton," he suffered

repeated torture and years in solitary confinement without any prisoner's rights and with no assurance that he would survive the war or live to see his family again.[1]

As the highest-ranking officer in the camp, Stockdale shouldered responsibility for the other men also held there. He made it his mission to do everything in his power to help the men survive unbroken while at the same time leading the American resistance against Vietnamese attempts to use the prisoners for propaganda. He instituted a cohesive set of rules governing prisoner behavior that provided the men with hope and empowerment. He developed an elaborate method of internal communication the men could use even during enforced silence or solitary confinement. Risking further torture or death if discovered, he found ways to forward secret intelligence to the U.S. government through letters he was allowed to write to his wife. Following his release, he received a total of 26 medals, including the Medal of Honor.

Could you survive that kind of trauma? What kept Admiral Stockdale sane during those years of imprisonment and torture? What allowed him to do so much to help so many other men survive unbroken?

The Stockdale Paradox

Researcher and author Jim Collins writes of an enlightening conversation he had with Stockdale. When asked how he made it through, Stockdale responded;

"I never lost faith in the end of the story. ... I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."[2]

But not everyone made it through intact. Who didn't survive? The optimists.

“They were the ones who said, ‘We’re going to be out by Christmas.’ And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they’d say, ‘We’re going to be out by Easter.’ And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart.”

And then Stockdale told Jim Collins the bottom line.

“This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”

That lesson has become known as the Stockdale paradox;

“Retain faith that you will prevail in the end regardless of the difficulties, and at the same time, confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.”

Your Stockdale Paradox

You and I are also in a war. No, we’re not flying fighter jets over North Vietnam. We’re not chained with leg irons or held in solitary confinement. We don’t have to communicate with our superiors through secret codes hidden in written letters. But we are in a war nonetheless.

If you’ve made a decision to follow Jesus and taken your stand on God’s side, then you have an enemy. That enemy is not your boss, your children or your spouse. Your enemy is God’s enemy: Satan and his kingdom of darkness. And he is out to destroy us with more tenacity than any North Vietnamese army fighting

against the U.S. forces.

Your problems are in some measure part of the war between good and evil, God and Satan. Your problems may simply be keeping you from being as effective for God's kingdom as you need to be, or they may come more directly from Satan's opposition.

Regardless, your pathway out and to freedom is the Stockdale paradox—looking with brutal honesty at the factors involved in your distress, including spiritual warfare, while at the same time maintaining absolute faith in the freedom and victory Jesus makes available to you.

During his captivity, Admiral Stockdale did not spend his energy blaming U.S. government policy for their ineffective execution of the war, as ineffective as those policies were. He didn't rail against his captors for their brutality or wallow in self-pity. He focused his energy on surviving, resisting and helping others.

You too must focus your energy not on blaming others or wallowing in self-pity, but on surviving, resisting and then helping others.

The Two Action Steps

Those two ingredients of the Stockdale paradox provide an awesome road map forward whatever your problems may be: physical illness, psychological distress, financial trouble, relationship problems or spiritual oppression.

And usually any of those problems is also affected by your well-being in all the other areas.

Here's how to turn those two ingredients into action steps to deal with any problem you have.

1. Confront the brutal facts of your situation.

Faith does not refuse to be honest. Faith confronts the truth,

but faith also knows that what our physical senses see is only part of the truth.

How do you confront those brutal facts? Whatever your problem, consider these questions:


- What do I know about my problem? What do I need to find out?
- What outside elements (people, resources, etc.) are contributing to my problem?
- What have I done myself to contribute to the problem?
- Are there elements in my biology, family history or past personal experiences that make me more vulnerable?
- What psychological and spiritual vulnerabilities do I have? What strengths do I have in these areas?
- What resources do I have available? What resources can I access?

That's half of the equation. But it's not the end.

2. Develop and maintain faith in the outcome.

Admiral Stockdale maintained faith in the eventual outcome—that the U.S. army would eventually prevail, and he and his fellow prisoners-of-war would be released. When that would happen, and whether any one of them would personally live to experience that, was uncertain. We too can have absolute faith in the outcome of the war in which we live.

That outcome comes in two phases.

First, we can experience real and lasting victory here and now. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:15 ) It's here now. Today. Regardless of your past or your present.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection gained that victory for us. We can experience and walk in that victory here and now.

That means there is always hope whatever your circumstances:

- Your finances, health or marriage can get better
- You can make it through sickness, grief, betrayal or any other loss
- Pain does not have to break you; it can make you stronger

And second, this whole sinful messed-up world will be replaced by a glorious one when Jesus returns.

However good this life can get—or not get—it's not enough. Thankfully, we can know with much more certainty than Admiral Stockdale ever had what the final outcome of this conflict will be. Death, sin, Satan and everything evil will be forever destroyed.


The End of the Story

This war will not go on forever. We know how the story ends.

And the end of the story is—Jesus wins!

In the meantime, don't be afraid to confront the truth of your circumstances.

And hold on to faith in the eventual outcome of what God has for you.

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18 ) {eoa}

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Try This Uncommon Approach to Embark on Your Next Spirit-Led Year

At the beginning of each new year, we tend to make goals for ourselves that we would like to accomplish. And a couple of years ago, someone taught me to think of three words to describe my personal goals for the coming year. But as a Christian, I took this message to a deeper level and brought the challenge before the Holy Spirit, and I am asking you to do the same.

This past month had been so busy that I forgot to ask the Holy Spirit for three new words for this coming year, but last night, Jan. 1, He reminded me to ask Him, and He brought it to my remembrance again this morning. So, I asked Him for three words that would describe His plans and purposes for me this new year.

Here are the three words He gave me:

1. Advance
2. Shipshape
3. Expansion

Then I looked up the definitions of each of these words and prayed in the Spirit over them. I will spend the next few days seeking God's wisdom concerning His direction for each assignment He has just given to me.

“Advance” means “to move forward, typically in a purposeful way.” Synonyms for advance are move forward, proceed, press on, push on, push forward, make progress, make headway, gain

ground, approach, come closer, draw nearer and near.

The definition of “shipshape” is “clean, neat, tidy, organized, in good condition.” And this was a confirmation of a word Sid Roth gave to me the other week about getting my website and other means of communication in order before my interview airs to prevent my site from breaking down from the prospective heavy traffic that will come my way. And the Lord was speaking to me tonight about getting everything in shipshape order.

“Expansion” means “the act of growing or increasing, enlargement.” And synonyms for the word expand are to open up (unfold), open out (spread), to increase the extent, number, volume or scope of (enlarge).

So, now I have God’s main direction for me this coming year. And everything I do has to agree with His plans for me.

Now, I will spend these next few days searching the Word for further insight, allowing biblical examples to bring clarity to God’s plans and purposes for me this year.

I fully believe God desires for us to understand His will for our lives. And His Word tells us in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without criticism, and it will be given to him.” {eoa}

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One Major Reason So Many Christians Cave to Sinful Indulgences

Ever feel as though you are free-falling without a parachute and no one to catch you? It's as if at any minute you might plunge into the abyss of nothingness and no one would even notice? Although it's true that we all feel that way sometimes, God has everything under control if we turn it over to Him.

We don't have to worry and fret about what to do next, all we have to do is ask Him (John 16:24). He will direct us if we are willing to listen (John 10:27). And He always catches us when we fall. Free-falling is just a part of taking the journey with Him, enjoying the risks and challenges as well as the security of knowing He's got us (Psalm 18:32).

Destiny-Bound

God has a destiny for each of us. We do not have to flounder our way through this life. We do have meaning, purpose and destiny. It is all found in Him. He desires for us to be His masterpiece, His handiwork, His poetry.

"We have become God's poetry, a recreated people who will fulfill the destiny He has given each of us, for we are joined to Jesus, the Anointed One. Even before we were born He planned in advance our destiny and the good works we would do to fulfill it" (Eph. 2:10, TPT).

I've known this truth for years. I knew God loved me, had a call on my life, something He had designed that only I could do, but I was too busy living for myself. But on the outside, it looked as though I was doing everything for everyone else.

I volunteered. I taught Sunday School. I led small groups. I published a Christian newspaper. I was on boards of directors for Christian organizations. I ran a business. I was a wife and mother doing everything I could for my family. And I was a glutton.

Selfish

I see this same scenario often, and I understand it completely. As Christians, we are taught to take care of everyone around us first. To love others. We forget the last part of that verse, though. It says to love others as we love ourselves.

At 430 pounds, I was not loving myself because I was not taking care of my physical health. Truth be told, my physical health was just the tip of the iceberg. I was carrying tons more emotional baggage that left me believing a lot of lies about myself, others and God.

I ate to reward myself. I ate out of selfish desires to have what I wanted. This was not loving myself. It was doing harm to myself.

Jesus said it this way, ""If anyone wishes to follow Me [as My disciple], he must deny himself [set aside selfish interests], and take up his cross daily [expressing a willingness to endure whatever may come] and follow Me [believing in Me, conforming to My example in living and, if need be, suffering or perhaps dying because of faith in Me]" (Luke 9:23, AMP).

Free Fall

That, my friends, is the definition of free-falling. We don't know the outcome, but we trust at the end everything will be all right. The parachute will deploy. There will be a net to catch us. We will land without injury. And if not, we trust God for the results.

We have to be willing to give all to Jesus. We have to be willing to put ourselves on the line. Truth is, if we are not physically fit to some degree, we will not be able to do that.

Weighing 430 pounds, I was also selfish in that I couldn't answer God's call to do much of anything. If it required any physical stamina at all, I was sunk. I volunteered for other things because if I didn't feel good physically that day, I didn't have to do it.

If we allow God, though, He will help us on this journey. He will help present your whole spirit, soul and body as blameless on that day when Christ comes. "Faithful is He who call you, who also will do it" (1 Thess. 5:24).

Wake Up Call

I know this change doesn't happen without our participation, without it becoming an all-consuming desire in our lives. At some point in time, we have to decide if we want Jesus more than we want a cookie. It really boils down to that simple choice.

Free will is an awesome concept because it puts the ball in our court. No longer can we blame God for our shortcomings. He has given us everything we need for life, and He wants us to live this life full to overflowing with abundance (John 10:10).

We all need a wake-up call. I had several on my journey. You can read about them in my memoir, *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor*. The major one for me came when I was told by a cardiac surgeon I only had five years to live. That was 18 years ago.

It took some time, but with God's help I turned my life around and lost 260 pounds, Today, I live my life helping others turn theirs around as well.

Your Choice

I love coaching people through their weight loss journey and discovery of what they were created by God to do. I've learned, though, I can't be another person's wanter. They have to get their own.

They have to want to go on this journey. I can't make them. However, if a person is wants the journey, desires the journey more than anything else, I can help them get there.

Maybe that's you. Maybe you are finally at the point where you desire this healthy living journey more than anything else. If that's you, I'm willing to work with you. I can help you achieve the success you've always dreamed of, because I know a God who is a giver of dreams greater than you can imagine (Eph. 3:20).

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.

5 Joy-Filled Tactics to Resuscitate Your Marriage

Wouldn't you love a new marriage for 2017?

Have you been making some New Year's resolutions? Or perhaps you gave that up long ago, believing that doing so just sets you up for failure and disappointment.

Either way, we're at the beginning of a new year. Remember that God loves to do new things—even in your marriage. “See, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not be aware of it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert” (Is. 43:19).

In addition to losing 20 pounds and being more consistent with reading your Bible, perhaps you've also decided to work on your relationship in this new year. Perhaps you'd like to:

- Be more loving and respectful to your husband
- Stop nagging and complaining so much
- Be the submissive wife the Bible says you should be
- Pray for your husband more regularly

“Woah! Stop right there! You've just hit my red-button issues. You had me for a moment, but I'm not going to read any further!”

I get it! Being “submissive” has often come to mean getting stepped on and abused. “No nagging” sounds like letting him get away with whatever he wants. Praying more feels like spiritualizing something that falls apart the moment your needs aren't getting met.

Take a deep breath, girlfriend. This is not the older “be nice” kind of religious marriage advice. Nor is it the newer “be yourself” message many women have tried and find less than satisfying in the end.

I believe God has a new marriage waiting for you. Remember, He loves creating new things!

You do want a new marriage, don't you? If your marriage is full of misery, wouldn't you welcome a “reset” button and an infusion of love and real intimacy? If your marriage is generally healthy, wouldn't you enjoy a whole new level of security and fulfillment in your relationship?

Let me suggest five steps you can take toward experiencing the kind of marriage you most desire—a marriage that's characterized by love, intimacy, safety and growth.

That's the kind of new marriage that God wants for you too.

5 Steps to a New Marriage

1. Unravel Destructive Patterns in Your Relationship

How do you respond when your husband does something that hurts you? Or when you face problems over money? Or sex? Or parenting?

Do you nag and complain? Talk negatively behind his back? Or bottle it up inside?

To use Dr. Phil's question, "How's that been working for you?"

The patterns that naturally develop in our relationships may or may not be healthy.

The first step in experiencing a new marriage is looking honestly at what is or is not healthy in your current relationship.

Ask yourself these questions:

- How do (or don't) you communicate?
- How do you handle conflict?
- How do you handle money?
- How do you handle intimacy and sex?

Whatever the patterns are, look at them honestly.

And then decide which you would like to be different in 2017.

2. Deal With Anxiety as you Develop New Patterns

Have you imagined a new behavior pattern you'd like to develop

in your marriage?

Your brain is almost certain to complain loudly when you try to behave in a new way. You may feel very uncomfortable as you begin to practice new ways of interacting.

But that's a good thing! In one study, 75 percent of people who made important improvements in their lives experienced significant anxiety in the process. Instead of pulling back, see anxiety as providing the emotional fuel you need to persist in developing new patterns.

Those less-than-helpful patterns didn't develop overnight, and it will take time to develop new ones.

See small failures as an opportunity to learn what works and what doesn't. Sometimes enlisting others to help—such as a “mother in the Lord,” a wise friend or a knowledgeable counselor—can help you work this through.

3. Stay Alert to the Enemy's Attacks on Your Marriage

Your marriage is under attack! And the enemy of your marriage is not your husband, regardless of how irresponsible or inconsiderate he may be.

You may know that intellectually. But when you're facing marriage misery it's easy to see your spouse as the enemy.

I believe Satan attacks marriages with a special hatred because he knows:

- How much pain he can inflict on God's children through disrupting marriages.
- How much damage a healthy marriage can do to his kingdom of darkness.

You can fight for your marriage this year!

You do that by praying for your marriage daily. Pray for

yourself, for your spouse and for your union together.

And then take action on your prayers. Learn what healthy forgiveness is all about. Invest in friendship together. Talk about spiritual things together. Each action you take in fighting for your marriage is demonstrating that you will not allow the enemy to win! That's true spiritual warfare.

4. Bring Your Best Self to Your Relationship

Marriage is not primarily about your happiness. It's about learning to love well.

Loving well opens your heart to joy and intimacy, but it takes a consistent investment of time and energy. Sometimes loving well includes suffering. It always includes becoming increasingly mature.

Learning to love well includes taking care of yourself in a way that allows you to have something to give.

If you want to bring your best self to your marriage, you will need to get filled up again regularly.

Learn to Feed Yourself. Take some time to consider what nourishes your soul, and then find ways to do more of that. That may include time outdoors in God's green earth, reading a good book, time with positive people, playing or creating music or art or time alone simply thinking. God makes nourishment available; it's up to you to find it and take it into your being.

Look to God for what only He can provide. Even in the best marriage, spouses cannot give each other everything they need. Choose to enter God's presence regularly. Invest regularly in your relationship with Jesus, and you will have much more to bring to your marriage.

5. Step Forward Into the New Marriage God Has for You

When God created you, He built into you the ability to nurture life. That goes far beyond giving birth to physical children. It means nurturing life in other people, in His church, in the world—and in your marriage!

And with that ability comes responsibility.

Your husband is always responsible for his own behavior. But it's almost crazy empowering when you realize the degree to which offering or withholding the gift God put within you can minister either life or death to your marriage.

Your marriage has a purpose. As awesome as God's purpose is for you as an individual woman, there is something especially awesome about what He can do through you as a couple.

I encourage you to sit in God's presence for a time and ask Him to show you a piece of His purpose for your marriage.

Then take your husband's hand (physically and spiritually), and joyously step forward into the next dimension of the new marriage God has for you. {eoa}

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