

What Really Happened to Jesus on the Cross?

Jesus “breathed his last” (Mark 15:37b, NIV).

These words describe the end of the most painful suffering of any human being in the history of the world. It is not possible for us to know which was greater for Jesus: His physical suffering, which includes the emotional and bodily torture He endured, or the spiritual suffering, when He was taken by surprise over the Father’s rejection when He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34b).

These words also describe the greatest joy of any human being in the history of the world. The joy consisted of the inexpressible relief from His suffering but also the indescribable ecstasy of seeing His Father at that moment. The writer of Hebrews refers to the latter as “the joy set before him” (Heb.12:2b). Looking forward to that joy was partly what kept Him going, giving Him the determined will not to give up before the ordeal was truly over.

What kind of pain did Jesus endure?

Loneliness. Jesus attracted vast audiences, but it was a vacillating following. Five thousand wanted to make Him king (John 6:15), but His teaching resulted in the whole lot deserting Him. Only the 12 disciples stood by Him at that time (John 6:66-69). Jesus had His inner circle—Peter, James and John. He took them with Him on special occasions, including His agonizing time in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37).

Jesus knew in advance that He would suffer death by crucifixion and told this to His disciples (Matt. 20:18-19). He also knew that fulfilling the Law—which no one had ever done but which He promised to do (Matt. 5:17)—meant being

God's sacrificial Lamb. He spoke of finishing the work the Father sent Him to do (John 4:34). As the time of His horrible death drew closer, He said, "For this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (John 12:27b-28a, ESV).

He knew, therefore, that His hardest days were at hand. Judas Iscariot, who became possessed by Satan (John 13:2, 27), betrayed Him. "My soul is very sorrowful," He confided to His inner circle at Gethsemane, showing His emotional pain. "Remain here, and watch with me" (Matt. 26:38). He did not wish for loneliness in this dark hour. But they fell asleep. He said to Peter, "Could you not watch with me for one hour?" (Matt. 26:40b). His loud cries and tears in Gethsemane were directed to His Father, who could save Him from death (Heb. 5:7). He was totally devoted to the Father's will. Succumbing to the fear of man or avoiding the Father's will to avoid suffering was out of the question. However, He did pray that, if at all possible, He might somehow be spared the ordeal that had been destined for Him: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). The "cup" referred to the cross. The cross was God's idea. Jesus did not welcome it. He dreaded it. His agony brought sweat "like great drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44b). He tried once, then twice, to get His inner circle to be there for him. But they kept falling asleep. After a third time when pleading with them to stay awake with Him, He gave up. He concluded that not even one of His closest disciples would be there to comfort Him. "Sleep on now," He said to them, "and take your rest" (Matt. 26:45b, KJV). Sleep on. Any hope of one of them going to the cross with Him was gone.

Moments later, owing to Judas' betrayal, Jesus was arrested by the Jewish authorities. Peter, who tried to prove he was the most faithful of all (John 13:9, 37), denied even knowing Him (John 18:25-27). Indeed, all of His disciples forsook Him and fled (Matt. 26:56).

But the loneliness was suddenly intensified beyond all expectation. As we saw above, even His Father turned His back on Him. Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46b).

Silence. "Like a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth" (Isa. 53:7b). "If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man" (James 3:2b). One of the proofs that Jesus was perfect—that is, without sin—was His self-control with words. Indeed, "he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (1 Pet. 2:22). "He who rules his spirit" is better than "he who takes a city" (Prov. 16:32). He was "tempted" (pepeirasomenon, Gr. "tested") just like us, "yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15c).

One unguarded comment or any retort that showed they succeeded in needling Him would have been a sin. They hoped that Jesus would lose control of His Spirit as a consequence of their mocking Him, blindfolding Him, beating Him and demanding He answer them, "Who is it that struck you?" (Luke 22:63-64), would mean Jesus could not be our perfect substitute or sacrifice. Anything or any word that might cause Jesus to lose His temper was hurled at Him. The apostle Paul lost his temper years later when he called the high priest a "whitewashed wall" (Acts 23:3b). But Jesus never—ever—lost His temper or grieved the Holy Spirit by an angry word. King Herod, hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle, questioned Him "at some length," but he "made no answer" (Luke 23:9).

Jesus was tempted to sin right to the end by what He would say. Satan motivated everybody—from Herod to Pilate, from the priests to the Roman soldiers—to catch Jesus with words. The chief priests together with the scribes and elders mocked Him at the cross, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Matt. 27:41-42). "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross" (Mark 15:29b-30). Had He given the true explanation of His words—that He was referring to the temple

of His body (John 2:21)—He would have sinned because that would have been an attempt to clear His name or vindicate Himself. He was in fact “vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16b).

Jesus’ reply to all that was said to Him and about Him—not to mention what they did to Him—was an utter and brilliant silence. As for the Roman soldiers who literally nailed Him to the cross, Jesus looked to heaven and said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34a). Was that a pretentious show or a genuine prayer? It was a genuine prayer to God for them to be forgiven. When Jesus told us to pray for our enemy, He meant for us to pray that they will be blessed! As G. Campbell Morgan put it, “I expect to see in heaven those very men who nailed the nails into Jesus’ hands.”

There was yet another kind of silence Jesus had to accept. He was not allowed to explain to anyone why He let the Jews arrest Him or the Roman soldiers crucify Him. Since He had raised Lazarus from the dead only a few days before, surely He could have stopped the entire crucifixion. He could have called 10,000 angels to stop the whole plan of the Jews to kill him.

If only Jesus could have said something to Mary Magdalene, one of His converts. She was only a few feet away and no doubt perplexed—possibly even feeling betrayed because of what was happening, not to mention sobbing her heart out. If only Jesus had been allowed to say, “Mary, it’s OK, I’m atoning for the sins of the world; all this is God’s plan.” But no. Part of His pain was feeling her pain and watching her grieve without being allowed to comfort her by explaining things.

Bodily pain. The ancient Roman crucifixion is regarded as the worst kind of pain ever devised in the mind of human beings. It was intended to be a gruesome spectacle, the most painful and humiliating death imaginable. For example, the flesh could be ripped off by the whipping before they even started the

crucifixion. The nails were 5-7 inches long. Nails were driven into the wrists for extra pain in a way that caused little bleeding but severe pain. Nails were driven into the ankles to extend the suffering. The cross itself would continue to tear the skin off the victim's back. Gravity was the real executioner: The body hanging was what killed the person. Exposure and dehydration would cause death if all else failed. As the condemned continually pulled himself up to breathe and then released in exhaustion, the person's back would rub up and down against the raw wood of the cross.

The above is an attempt to envisage—in part—what happened to Jesus on the cross.

“We may not know, we cannot tell/ What pains he had to bear;

But we believe it was for us/ He hung and suffered there.”—C.F. Alexander (1818-1895)

Punishment for sin. “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6b). This literally took place on the day Jesus was crucified sometime between noon and 3 p.m. There was an exact moment when He who knew no sin—never having sinned even once—became sin. It is what God intentionally did to His Son. God punished Jesus for what we did. The Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. Surprising as it may seem, it even took Jesus by surprise. It is when Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46b).

He knew undergoing crucifixion would be hard. He knew it would be painful. It is what He dreaded most when He was agonizing in Gethsemane with those loud cries and tears. But He was not expecting this: for His own Father to turn His back on Him. He even addressed His Father as “God”—the only time we know of that He addressed Him this way.

It was retributive punishment—God getting even. It was not a gracious judgment, as God showed to King David for his adultery and murder (2 Sam.12:13). It was God Almighty—the

most holy God—venting His anger toward sin by putting our sin on Jesus and then punishing Him for our sin.

Yes. That is what happened to Jesus on the cross. God punished Jesus for what you and I did.

You could say: “That’s not fair.” Agreed. It was not fair. Jesus did not deserve it. He is the only human being in history who never sinned. And what was the thanks He got for not sinning and perfectly doing His Father’s will and fulfilling the Law? Punishment. It wasn’t fair.

This explains Jesus’ pathos and bewilderment for being abandoned by the Father on the cross: “For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him [Jesus] we [you and I] might become [by faith] the righteousness of God [in God’s sight] (2 Cor. 5:21).

It was not fair. And yet it was nonetheless pure justice. It is why we have the Bible in a nutshell: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). It took two things to satisfy God’s justice: Jesus’ sinless life plus the shedding of His precious blood. The reason God can be merciful and just at the same time is because Jesus satisfied the justice and wrath of God. God’s wrath was poured out on Jesus. He can now be merciful to us.

At the end of the day, perhaps no one should attempt to grasp fully how awful His spiritual suffering actually was—God’s direct punishment on Jesus. Was it worse than His physical pain? Almost certainly. But we will never know until we get to heaven.

Why did Jesus die? To pay our debt to God—yours and mine. “It is finished”—is the English translation of tetelestai (John 19:30), His words when He “breathed his last” (Luke 23:46b). Tetelestai was also a colloquial expression in the ancient marketplace that meant “paid in full.”

Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36a). It is so easy to forget this. The purpose of Jesus' death was not to bring perfect conditions on earth—whether via politics or gifts of the Spirit; it was to make us fit for heaven. Never forget, too, that we get to heaven only by faith in Jesus' blood. Not by our works. But only by what Jesus did for us on the cross.

"I need no other argument, I need no other plea/ It is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me."—Eliza E. Hewitt (1851-1920) {eoa}

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United in the Storm: Simultaneous Global Revival

I was in intercession a number of years back when the Lord showed me a vision displaying a map of the world on a chess board. As I watched, chess pieces came from heaven and were strategically placed. When the final piece was put in place, the entire board ignited with revival fire. The Lord said, "A time is coming when you will no longer need to run to one country to experience my revival. Rather, I will gather My people through a simultaneous global revival." When I look into the Spirit today, this is exactly what I see happening in the church.

What we are about to experience as a church is what our forefathers prayed and decreed for centuries. In fact, for the first time since the charismatic renewal, we see the church evolving across tribes, nations and tongues. The lockdown restrictions we see in the American church are the same for the South African, Mexican, Canadian and Swiss church! Christians are no longer scattered throughout the nations. Rather, the Lord has united us for the first time in decades to change and stand.

We have indeed finally become a peculiar nation, haven't we? In our losses, persecution and suffering, we have lifted our voices to pray and seek God together for answers man can no longer give us. Gone are the prayers of "more for me, Lord."

No, we are too desperate to pray for more gifts and glory. Rather, we are on our faces crying out to the King of kings to save our nations and our loved ones. Through this, the heart of the church has begun to beat once again.

It is when there is darkness over the earth that the light can shine. So it is time to stop complaining about the darkness. It is time to thank God for the darkness because it positions us to be the source of light that will draw kings to our rising (Isa. 60).

So, yes, church, a storm is coming! A deep darkness will cover the earth. In amongst this though, the Lord is gathering His remnant from all nations. Just as the early church was scattered amongst idol worshippers and immorality, so are we as believers surrounded by darkness. Never before have we had such an opportunity to be the defining difference between darkness and light.

Church will no longer be restricted to Sunday services but will be spread to the workplace, the entertainment industry, political parties and social media.

“For indeed I have closed the doors on you,” says the Lord. “My church, I have closed the doors to the throne rooms where you have gone to worship, so that I might invite you to come and worship at My feet.

“I call upon my bride now to usher in the move that my prophets are birthing. I call all—great and small—to receive a fresh impartation from Me for the times that lie ahead. For you will soon see the value in the treasure that has been placed in your earthen vessel. So do not fear when you see storms and the ground shakes in your life. For this is a call to My presence. It is a call to move in signs and wonders that will reach beyond platforms and church walls.

“So watch as I unite Christians across nations. Watch as I send out men of renown to unfamiliar lands. Watch out for my Peters and Pauls who will do for my present-age church what they did for my New Testament church. Amen!”

My grandparents first experienced the Holy Spirit during the charismatic renewal. As a child, I would listen to their

stories in awe. They spoke of tarrying meetings. They shared with us how every believer would come to know Jesus in His power.

Today, their grandchildren and great-grandchildren see their endless intercessory prayers come to pass. This move of God has been in the making for decades, and we have the honor to participate.

So allow the Lord to position you. Shake off the discomfort of being plucked out of your comfort zone. When we get used to the uncomfortable and embrace the new, we will become part of something our forefathers would have given anything to see!
{eoa}

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Joyce Meyer: How the Holy Spirit Wants to Heal You

It's wonderful to know that, as believers in Christ, we can live in close fellowship with God. Jesus said in John 16:7b (AMP) that when He went away, He would "send Him (the Holy Spirit) to you [to be in close fellowship with you]."

When Jesus walked the earth, He could be in one place at a time, but the Holy Spirit can be everywhere, all the time, and He lives in those who have accepted Christ as their Savior. Being with Jesus is good, but having the Holy Spirit in us is even better. We don't have to go looking for God because He's as close as close can get!

When we receive Christ as our Savior, it literally means that God—through the power of the Holy Spirit—comes to live inside us. He makes us new on the inside, and as He works in us, the fruit of what He's doing is seen in the way we live and does some good for the people in the world around us (see 2 Cor. 5:17, 21; John 14:17, 26; Acts 1:8; Gal. 5:22-23).

John 16:7 tells us that the Holy Spirit is our Helper, Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor, Counselor, Strengthener and Standby. John 14:26b (NIV) says He "will teach you all things." The Holy Spirit is the teacher, and He guides us into all truth.

Think of this from the standpoint of recovering from things in the past that have hurt you. God wants to help us and heal us—spirit, soul and body. He wants to bring restoration to us so we can become whole in Christ and go on to help someone else. Our healing comes as the Holy Spirit leads us to truth one step at a time and gives us His strength to confront

things that are hard to face so we can get victory over them.

In my journey with Christ, He's brought so much healing and restoration to my soul—my mind, will and emotions. My father sexually abused me throughout my childhood. When I left home at 18, I thought, "That's over! I'm putting that problem behind me." But I took the problem with me because the wounds of the abuse were still in my soul.

The pain of my past affected my thinking, how I operated emotionally, all of my relationships and even my will. I was rebellious and stubborn and promised myself no one would ever hurt me or push me around again.

I was born again at this time but didn't know I could have the power of the Holy Spirit working in my life. Years later, after I started seriously studying the Word of God, I realized the Holy Spirit could heal me.

It's so important to understand that we cannot do this on our own, but as we lean on the Holy Spirit for the strength to face our problems, we can overcome them.

If you have hurts from abuse, disappointments, an injustice or any other kind of mistreatment, you will have to face them with the help of the Holy Spirit to be healed of them. Anything you run from has a certain amount of power over you, and until you face it, every time it raises its ugly head, you have to run some more. Thank God, you don't have to do it alone!

In my journey to wholeness in Christ, I had to face some painful things I had been avoiding and at times, running from. I had to face the fact that my parents didn't know how to love me ... that I had been abused ... that there was a lot of pain in my life because of it all ... that my dysfunctional behavior was rooted in the mistreatment I had experienced, and I couldn't blame it on the people in my life now. I had to take responsibility for my wrong attitudes, mindsets and behavior,

and lean on God for the wisdom and strength to change.

Recovery and restoration of our souls takes time, so be patient with yourself in the process. I want to encourage you today to trust God's love for you—He wants to help you and heal you. The truth is, you can't heal yourself, but you can be completely healed and whole in Christ, because all things are possible with God! {eoa}

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times' bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored 130 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and her newest devotional, *Quiet Times With God (FaithWords)*. She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit joycemeyer.org.

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Elijah Muhammad's Great-Granddaughter: How I Escaped the Enemy's Clutches

Marie Muhammad's journey to salvation in Jesus Christ didn't take the normal route. From the moment of her birth, the enemy worked hard to keep her from walking in the truth and serving the true and living God.

As one of the great-granddaughters of Elijah Muhammad—founder of the Nation of Islam—Marie encountered more than a few hurdles in her quest to both find Jesus and maintain a deep personal relationship with Him.

Family animosity notwithstanding, Marie faced many other daunting challenges, including generational curses such as a long bloodline of adultery. But none of that prevented her from fulfilling her destiny—to tell others about Jesus, to see the broken made whole and to let others know that what God has done for her, He can do for them, too.

The host of The Overcomers Podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network, Marie has left her past behind and is helping many discover the same freedom, no matter what they have faced in life. After receiving her biblical, deliverance and spiritual warfare, and prophetic training from Crusaders Ministries in Chicago under Apostle John and Wanda Eckhardt, she now attends All Nations Worship Assembly in the same city and has now launched a ministry of her own. This single mom—who is also the daughter of a single mom—has a passion to help others in this difficult situation.

Moving Toward God

Despite being born into the family of Elijah Muhammad, Marie had one advantage to help her escape becoming a Muslim—and it

also came via her roots. Her famed great-grandfather's mother was Baptist until she converted to Islam to follow her son, as chronicled in a 2003 Charisma cover story. And, of course, there was the strength Marie's mother demonstrated by leaving her husband and continuing to profess Jesus, which had a strong influence in Marie's own salvation.

"Where she [Elijah Muhammad's mother] laid down the baton, God wants me to pick it up because my roots are in him," the Charisma article quotes Marie as saying. "Even though I didn't grow up in a Christian home and we didn't go to church, my mother constantly told us that Jesus Christ is Lord. That was the only mustard seed we had."

"We literally did not go to church when I was growing up, and that's why I believe that anyone can be saved. Like Jesus said, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

But Marie realized early on that the cost of following Jesus was high. Instead of growing up in the religion of Islam—one that included financial comfort and family inclusion—she, her mother and her three siblings chose a path that led to poverty and heartache in the natural for many years. They were no longer welcome around the family and could no longer reap the benefits of their ties to the founder of the Nation of Islam.

"Yes, my great-grandfather was the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, and coming from that background, the price was a great one," Marie says. "I had to suffer a lot as a child. My mom was a Christian and my father was a Muslim, of course, coming directly from the bloodline. And with that, we were given the opportunity to come to faith.

"I was the youngest of four, and by the time I was 9 years old, my grandfather had decided to enroll us in Arabic lessons and began to groom us to become Muslims," she says. "By watching me, he knew what I was doing, and I began to

seriously reject the religion. I would be sitting in the car while being taken to the mosque. I would wander off when we were supposed to be training and taking private Arabic lessons in [former heavyweight boxing world champion] Muhammad Ali's mansion. I would just exclude myself from that.

"After that time—I was 9 years old—my grandfather stopped all of the privileges," she says. "The money stopped. And with that, we weren't even allowed to come around the family. My mom was a single mother and my father, unfortunately, wasn't paying child support. So, it was very rough for a long time."

In the 1970s and 1980s, living in Chicago—a city with brutal winter weather—this rejection forced her mother and her children into a life of abject poverty, doing all they could just to survive.

"We even lived without any heat for years," Marie says. "It was so cold, so very cold, there in Chicago. We had it so bad that we didn't even have a refrigerator in the kitchen. The kitchen wasn't even operable. So, when I say we suffered, it was really bad."

Since those hardships helped her understand that the Christian life includes trials and tribulation, Marie says she wouldn't change her past. Instead of Elijah Muhammad, Jesus became the Lord of her life. But it took an abortion at 17—one she didn't want—to turn her eyes and her heart to God forever.

"I told my mom that I wanted to keep my baby," Marie says. "I began to nurture it and take my prenatal vitamins and go to the clinic, everything. I'm nine and a half weeks pregnant, and my mom walks into the apartment one day after work, and she says, 'I decided that you are going to have an abortion, and I made you an appointment.'

"I was devastated," she says. "So I went through the fullness of abortion, not really understanding the whole thing. A few days after the abortion, some Christian paraphernalia came to

the apartment and when I saw it, I was immediately convicted and a spirit of repentance came on me. I wasn't in church, but I was just convicted, and broken. I took a bath that night, and I just cried out to God. Literally, I felt the tangible anointing in my heart and in my hands. I really didn't know what that was until much later."

It was through Eckhardt's television show that Marie began to learn more about Jesus, and He began to melt her heart. She accepted Christ into her life at 17 and received the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

"When God gets ready to draw a person by His Spirit, which is what He does, He sends out angels to minister to those who are going to be heirs of salvation," Marie says. "He does it by His Holy Spirit. And it's supernatural. It's the invisible work. And that's what God was doing with me. It takes God's drawing us to Him."

Eckhardt prophesied over Marie's life on Marie's website, mariemuhammadspeaks.org, "You'll not be an example to people of failure, but you'll be an example of success of what I can do in the midst of incredible odds and in the midst of difficult situations, says the Spirit of the Living God."

Overcoming the Obstacles

Still, the powerful generational curses of the Muhammad family almost consumed through the suffering she endured in her marriage. The roots ran deeper than she could have imagined.

But the Lord revealed to Marie in a prophetic dream how she would overcome her challenges.

"The greatest struggle of my life was tied to my marriage, my faith and my future," Marie says. "God chose to reveal to me and give me a burden for my future. Everything was embedded in the womb of my marriage. That's where I could really see the dream of God. I had been given a lot of prophetic words about

a lot of different things such as being a major voice and dealing with the false religion of my family and how God was going to use me. But it wasn't until God allowed the enemy to come so close to me that it almost destroyed my entire immediate family. I really began to feel plundered, like Job.

"I ended up losing my marriage," she says. "And I thought God was going to give my husband back like God gave Isaac back to Abraham. But it didn't happen like that. It kept me in that place of intercession. And so much was birthed out of that place.

"My husband was committing adultery, and I was screaming about what he was doing," she explains. "At the same time, I had become so bitter and hateful, to the point where I was struggling even with the spirit of murder. I had become so upset that he was treating me the way he was that I began to inquire of the Lord about why I was having to go through what I was going through."

And that's when God revealed something to her, Marie says. He showed her "the ancestral, demonic activity of how the doors had been opened because of Elijah Muhammad. He had 23 illegitimate children outside of my great-grandmother's marriage. There is a very strong curse with adultery in my bloodline. Then, my grandfather had 10 children outside of my grandmother's union. And my father has been married numerous times.

"So I was contending for my marriage and for the promises of God, and it was painful," she says. "But God required me to stay in that place. And in that place, God began to turn my heart and I began to lay my life down for my immediate family and my generations."

Marie chronicles her struggles with these generational curses and other painful life challenges in her memoir, *Overcoming the Shipwrecks of Life on Broken Pieces*, published in 2020.

The title of the book stems from Acts 27, in which the apostle Paul's ship endured a great storm while on its way to Rome. During that time, Paul received a prophetic word that he and the ship's crew would survive.

Marie also received a prophetic word earlier in life that she, through God's grace and mercy—and the redemptive power of the cross—would survive the storms in her life to help bring the gospel to a lost world. Even if they arrive with broken pieces, she wants others to know they can be made whole and receive the promise to reach their destination.

“The shipwrecks that I've had to overcome are so many because of the bloodline doors that were open,” Marie says. “I had to fight a lot of different things in relationships like perversion, childhood trauma, idolatry, a broken marriage as a scorned wife and to be a single mother. I had to overcome a lot of things, but God's prophetic words and promises in my life that I got when I came into the church were literally the very things that caused me not to be destroyed.”

Ministering to Others

With her passion to help single moms with their struggles in life as well as their spiritual lives, Marie initiated the ministry Ruth's Vineyard, a 501(c)(3) organization, in 2016. She says it is a mission to serve young single mothers by providing educational support and resources.

The nonprofit, located on the south side of Chicago, focuses on supporting those who have chosen to give birth instead of having an abortion and helps them become more self-sufficient. The clientele consists of young single mothers from ages 13-24.

“I know for my own self that if I had been provided the support and resources I needed, things would have been different,” Marie says. “I never wanted to be one to carry a baby and give it up for adoption. When I had my abortion, I

never even thought about adoption at that time. I wish I had because it's better than abortion. But a lot of people have that mindset and fall into it. Ruth's Vineyard is all about helping young women in need and to help them realize that abortion is not the way."

Out of her background of being groomed as a child to become a Muslim, Marie says she also has an assignment to expose the myths and misguided truths taught by Elijah Muhammad to the Nation of Islam.

She says it's not her only duty as a believer, but because of her background, God has placed it upon her shoulders.

"I feel like the truth needs to be revealed," Marie says. "Many people don't even know the lies that my great-grandfather taught.

"I believe Elijah had a mighty work to do for Jesus, but he allowed the enemy, through deception, to pervert His message. Elijah would use the Quran to challenge newly saved believers who had not yet received the baptism in the Holy Ghost. And these people were eventually led astray and converted to Islam."

Today she shares her testimony with others of how to trust God through homelessness, abortion aftermath, enduring the pain of a scorned wife, being a single mother and escaping Islam.

"Without the truth, a person cannot grow in the knowledge and the revelation of the inspired Word of God," she says.

Learn more about Marie Muhammad and her ministry at mariemuhammadspeaks.org.

Shawn A. Akers is the online editor for *Charisma Media*.

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Michael Youssef: Why the Church Must Revitalize the Family

Christians often quote the words of Psalm 127:3 (NLT), which says, “Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him.” That is a blessed truth, and every believing parent knows it. But when we quote this verse out of context, we miss out on a deeper truth embedded in these words.

The author of Psalm 127 is King Solomon, the son of David. Before Solomon could say that children are an inheritance from the Lord, he had first to lay the foundation for that statement, which he does in verses 1-2 (NIV): “Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves.”

Before we can say that children are an inheritance from the Lord, the Lord must build the house. It is the Lord who must build our families.

Psalm 127 is beautifully expressive Hebrew poetry. But beneath this psalm’s graceful words is an indictment, a rebuke to the lifestyle of many 21st-century Christians. This psalm condemns our divided allegiances and the lack of wholeness and integration in our lives.

Solomon is saying that if you leave God out of your life and out of your family’s life, it is useless to work hard to provide for the material needs of your family. You might work 80 hours a week so you can afford a huge mansion, the best

food, the finest clothing and the most prestigious schools for your children—and it would all be for nothing if you failed to make God the foundation of your family life.

If you leave God out of your family's life, all the material blessings you provide will ruin your children's lives. Instead of being grateful to God for His provision, they'll grow up feeling arrogant and entitled. If God is not the center of your family life, the inheritance you leave your children will be a curse, not a blessing. "In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat." Solomon says in verse 2, "for he grants sleep to those he loves."

The Old Testament was not written for a Western mindset but an Eastern mindset. The Western mindset divides life into distinct categories. Westerners place "family" in a different category from "work." We maintain separate categories in every aspect of our lives. We separate the spiritual from the temporal, the home from the workplace, Sunday from the other weekdays—and we behave like different people when we are in these other environments.

People who meet us only in the workplace might not recognize us if they saw us at home. People who meet us only at church might not recognize the way we behave at the office. People who know our weekday selves might not recognize our Sunday selves and vice versa.

But the Bible tells us that those who fear God, love God and serve God must live an integrated life. The word "integrated" means "with all parts seamlessly conjoined and coordinated." It comes from the same Latin root word as integrity—the Latin word integer, meaning "whole." If we have integrity, if our lives are fully integrated, then we are whole—there are no compartments in our lives. All aspects of our lives fit together perfectly and seamlessly.

God at the Center

An old African proverb says that it takes a village to raise a child. The modern-day “village” in this proverb is all society, including schools, houses of worship, doctors and businesses, but most of all, government programs. Some have used this idea to advocate for various laws, regulations, welfare state programs and taxpayer support of “family planning” organizations such as Planned Parenthood.

I submit that it does not take a village to raise a child. God already designed the perfect nurturing environment for a child. It’s called a family. It is pointless to talk about caring for the needs of children while we do nothing to strengthen the family. Children don’t need all this meddling by the “village.” Children need the family. We need to teach parents how to be parents and how to build healthy families. That means we need to teach moms and dads how to put God at the center of their families.

The “village” that surrounds our families today is a godless village. Prayer has been banned from schools, so the schools cannot help families put God at the center. Welfare state programs cannot help families put God at the center. Planned Parenthood is certainly not going to help families put God at the center. Doctors and businesses are not equipped to help families put God at the center. So the “village” is essentially godless and useless. A godless village can only produce godless children.

From where do godly children come? Only one place: godly families.

The psalmist tells us that unless God is at the center of the family, the family is adrift. Unless God is at the center of our family life, our children will be unsafe, insecure and in danger. But when we place God at the center of our family, we will see four wonderful results.

Result No. 1: When God is at the center of the family, He will

grow the family.

When God builds the house, when God is at the center of the home, the family will grow in faith, character and maturity. When God's Word fills a home with His wisdom, the insignia of spiritual maturity is imprinted on the souls of each family member. When God's presence permeates the family, there is harmony and peace throughout the household. When the family seeks the mind of God in every important decision, that home becomes a testament to God's grace.

My family could tell you that I have my share of flaws, and I make my fair share of mistakes. I don't say that to appear humble. I am deeply flawed as a Christian, as a husband and as a father. But as God knows my heart, I can tell you that I honestly seek to put Jesus Christ at the center of our home. His grace has overruled so many of my mistakes. His forgiveness has compensated for my times of impatience and overreaction. His wisdom has corrected my moments of foolishness. I can honestly say that it would have been impossible for my family to grow to a place of Christian maturity if my wife and I had not been daily on our knees, pleading with God on behalf of our family.

It is impossible to raise a family for Christ in this corrosive and anti-Christian culture without hours and hours of prayer. It is impossible to raise a family for Christ in our own flawed and sinful flesh. Only complete reliance on God can enable us to raise our children in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

Result No. 2: When God is at the center of the family, He will bless the family.

Across our culture, families are disintegrating. Children are neglected. Parents are raising their children out of guilt, not love. They give them everything in the world except the most important thing of all—time spent together in prayer and

the Word of God.

A well-known Christian leader once told me that before he became a Christian, he viewed his family as a nuisance. They took up his time and got in the way of his ambition for success. He didn't enjoy playing with his kids, talking with his kids or spending time with his kids. He couldn't wait to leave town on a business trip because all he cared about was worldly success. Once he became a Christian, his priorities changed. Suddenly, he wanted to spend time with his kids, talking with them about Jesus and how God had blessed their family, memorizing Scripture with them, praying with them, playing with them, listening to them.

Once this man put God at the center of his life and his family, God blessed his family and blessed his life. Most importantly, this man began to see his children as a blessing and an inheritance from the Lord.

Solomon is saying to us today that children who are blessed—and children who are a blessing—are brought up to know the Lord. Only when we raise children to love God, to honor their father and mother, and to obey God's Word, are they blessed to be a blessing to others.

Result No. 3: When God is at the center of the family, He will guide the family.

Children who observe their parents regularly studying the Word of God for the direction in their lives will grow up seeking guidance from the Word. The habit of seeking direction from the Word is usually caught, not taught. As parents, we impart this habit more by setting an example than by preaching to our children.

How do we find guidance from God's Word? Well, some read God's Word as if it were a fortune cookie. They close their eyes, poke their finger at a random page of the Bible, then read what is written.

I once heard about a man who tried this method of seeking guidance from the Bible. He closed his eyes, poked his finger at a verse and opened his eyes to read Matthew 27:5b, which says, "he went away and hanged himself." Well, that wasn't what he wanted to hear! He tried again, and this time he chanced upon Luke 10:37b, where he read, "Go and do likewise." That was worse! So he tried again and read these words from John 13:27: "What you are about to do, do quickly."

We cannot know the mind of God by randomly selecting bits and pieces of His Word. To find guidance for our daily lives, we need to be daily, regularly, habitually feeding on the Word of God. We need to systematically build God's wisdom into our lives so that, when a crisis comes, when it's time to make a difficult decision, we will already have God's answer waiting for us in our hearts.

One of the ways we become wiser, more godly parents is by studying the way God, our heavenly Father, parents us. One of the most profound experiences of Christian parenthood is learning to appreciate God's fatherly love for us. As we go through various joys and trials with our children, we realize again and again, "Oh, that's how God rejoices with me; that's how God is patient with me; that's how God is loving and forgiving with me!"

How can we become the best parents we can be? It's simple. All we have to do is copy the model of God the Father. Study the fatherhood of God, then do as He does. The story of God's parenting of Israel in the Old Testament and His parenting of the church in the New Testament is the best parenting class you could ever take. Here are some examples.

– In Genesis 28:15, God says, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. ... I will not leave you." A godly parent is always available, protective and involved in the child's life.

– In Deuteronomy 20:4, we read, “For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.” A godly parent is always rooting for the child and giving leadership to the child so that he or she can live victoriously.

– In Psalm 149:4a, God says, “For the Lord takes delight in his people.” A godly parent enjoys being with the child and takes delight in the child. A godly parent lifts up the child and never tears down the child.

– In Jeremiah 31:34b, God says, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” A godly parent forgives and forgets. A godly parent does not bring up past sins against the child but forgives as if they never happened.

– In Psalm 34:15, God says, “The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry.” God listens to us. He doesn’t merely pretend to listen as human parents all too often do. He is attentive to our prayers, our pleadings and our cries. Godly parents are good listeners. Are we as attentive to our children as God is to us?

– In 1 John 3:1a, we read, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” Godly parents lavish love on their children. They are quick to tell their children, “I am so proud of you! I love you so much!”

As we grow in our understanding of God’s parenting of us, we gain parenting wisdom directly from God. We will never achieve God-like perfection as parents, but we will have the best guidance a parent could have. Our children will still have problems and issues; they may question our teaching for a time as they seek their own identity. But they will grow up to love the Lord because we have modeled God’s love to them.

Result No. 4: When God is at the center of the family, He will

protect the family.

We live in a dangerous world with bullying and violence in schools, mind-altering drugs in the streets and predators on the internet and in our neighborhoods. Real dangers are facing our kids and surrounding our families. That's why the psalmist said, "Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain" (Ps. 127:1b). Let's put those words in today's terms: "Unless God is the protector and defender of our families and communities, the police and first responders can do little to save us."

I thank God for police officers and firefighters and emergency medical workers and the military—all the brave protectors of our families and communities. Now and then, we see an officer killed in the line of duty—and I'm not ashamed to say that I weep when I see such stories in the news. I think of the terrible grief and sadness when a family learns that Dad or Mom won't be coming home from pursuing a suspect or fighting a fire.

But I want to tell you that we have an even greater guardian than the police or the fire department. That guardian's name is Jesus. He sends His angels to minister to our families. Unless He is watching over us, all other guardians are in vain.

The psalmist says it is in vain for the guards to watch over the city unless God Himself guards it. The Lord will protect those who place God at the center of their families. Those who place God at the center of their families will find shelter under His wings. Those who place God at the center of their families are engraved on the palms of His hand. You have His word on it.

When God is at the center, God grows the family, God blesses the family, God guides the family, and God protects the family. To revitalize your family, place God at the center of

your life, your marriage and your family. {eoa}

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Michael Youssef, Ph.D., founded *The Church of The Apostles*, which was the launching pad for *Leading The Way's* international ministry. He has written more than 40 books, including *Saving Christianity?* and *When the Crosses Are Gone*.

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Joyce Meyer: Secrets to Answered Prayer

When you pray, do you have a vague feeling that something is lacking, that there isn't any power in your prayers? Do you struggle with doubt or fear, or simply lack confidence that God even hears you at all?

I used to have feelings like this and would think, "Maybe I didn't say the right thing, or pray long enough, or my words weren't eloquent enough." It was so frustrating because I

didn't want to waste time wondering if my prayers were doing any good. After I pray, I want to know that God is working, and my prayers make a difference.

It's easy to complicate our relationship with God, thinking we have to do certain things a certain way for them to be effective. But I've discovered that powerful, life-changing, dynamic prayer is amazingly simple!

It's vitally important for us to have faith in God when we pray. Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Ask yourself, "Do I believe God hears me, that He cares about me and wants to be involved in every area of my life?" If we don't really believe God loves us and wants to help us, we will struggle to have faith in Him. That's why knowing and experiencing the love of God is critical to developing a powerful prayer life.

It's also important to approach God with sincere hearts. James 5:16b (AMPC) says, "The earnest (heartfelt, continued) prayer of a righteous man makes tremendous power available [dynamic in its working]." A sincere heart is focused on God, trusting that He hears you and will answer; it's all about the attitude of your heart toward Him.

It's exciting to get the revelation that God loves us, cares for us and wants to help us. But we have a part to play in getting the things God has for us—we have to ask (see James 4:2).

Now, we have to ask for God's will to be done, not just for the things we think we want or should have apart from Him. James 4:1a (AMPC) tells us that striving to get what we want based on our carnal or fleshly desires leads to "strife (discord and feuds) ... conflicts (quarrels and fightings)."

This causes us to be jealous, covet what others have and become angry when we can't "obtain [the gratification, the contentment, and the happiness]" we are seeking (James 4:2b).

Many times our problems are caused by thinking we're unhappy because we don't have all the stuff we want. But the reality is only God can give us what we're longing for in our hearts. He alone is the source of righteousness, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17). And we will never enjoy life until we learn to abide in Him and trust Him to do what's best for us.

If you're not sure whether you're asking for God's will in your life (and we all go through times like this), then you need to take time to just abide in Christ. In John 15:7 (AMPC), Jesus says, "If you live in Me [abide vitally united to Me] and My words remain in you and continue to live in your hearts, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you."

To abide means to live, dwell and remain; it's not just spending time with God on Sunday morning and then going through your week doing what you want apart from Him. God wants to do life with us Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday too! As we spend time studying His Word, meditating on the Word, communicating with Him through prayer and asking Him to fulfill His plans for us, we will know His will in our hearts.

It's an amazing privilege to be able to talk to God! I want to encourage you to come to Him with humility and ask Him for the desires that are in your heart. Tell Him, "Lord, I don't want anything You don't want me to have. If I'm asking for anything that's not in Your plan for me, don't give it to me. I'm trusting You and want You to be in control of my life." Pray about everything that's on your heart and keep it simple. Remember, prayer is simply talking to God, and you can pray anytime, anywhere, all day long ... and He will answer.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times' bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries Inc. She has authored 130 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and her newest devotional, *Quiet Times With God (FaithWords)*. She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit joycemeyer.org.

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Dr. Steve Greene's 5 Things I Heard Last Week

1. I had the privilege of interviewing Pastor Bill Johnson of Bethel Church in Redding, California. I read his new book, *Born for Significance*, twice and found his insight on promotion critical to understanding the blessings of God.

“Well, He’s called us to disciple nations,” Johnson said. “And it’s a very large task. And we can’t do it until we know how to master the realms of personal promotion—watch over our own hearts—so that we step into promotion well. We need to be able to do what David did, for example, to step in that role and maintain godliness and maintain priorities. And it’s a big challenge because people tend to get promoted out of their own maturity. They tend to get promoted out of their own strength of their own heart, their own character. It’s happened through revivals, you know, revivals bring an increase of blessing and conflict. Some people can’t handle the conflict; they become embittered. Some can’t handle the blessing; they become materialistic or self-centered.”

He went on to tell me in the interview, “We must be successful in discipling nations that we truly can raise up disciples, of kings, of leaders around the world, and at the same time, maintain true humility and accountability in community. That’s my passion.”

Download my interview with Pastor Bill Johnson, [here](#).

2. I heard more about the toxicity of drinking water from plastic bottles. To oversimplify it, most of the water we drink from plastic has ridden in the back of a hot truck. Plastic breaks down in heat and toxins are released. “Forever toxins” remain in the water.

Dr. Mark Sherwood is a frequent guest on the Greenelines Podcast and warns us about what toxins do to our immune system.

“It’s the persistency of it.” he said. “And we need to be more persistent about an antitoxic lifestyle, and really focus on it.”

For an in-depth discussion of toxicity, please listen to the interview with Dr. Sherwood, [here](#).

3. I heard a [reminder](#) from Rabbi Curt Landry that “we need to be able to protect God’s kingdom. I think sometimes people forget Patrick Henry. He was in St. John’s Church in Richmond, Virginia, on March the 23rd, 1775. And this is powerful, this is all about the Spirit. He said, ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’ Second Corinthians 3:17 says, ‘Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.’ And we have to have religious liberty, to be able to minister and to preach the gospel. And our Constitution, right now is being tested.

4. I heard about the power of three during my interview with Robb Hiller. You can hear the interview by clicking on this [link](#):

“Well, the power of three is a simple method that is easy for anybody to implement. And it’s about learning to first ask the right questions. And then the next part of it is to activate your God-given gifts and talents. Because when you do that things change. And the third part is to advocate and develop advocates who connect with your faith with your family, and your friends. And when you do all three of those— something powerful happens. Consider a triangle and you’ll see that from a geometric standpoint—in trigonometry—it’s the strongest shape known to man. And the most important principle of three was 2000 years ago, when the concept of the Trinity, came through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” Hiller said.

5. I heard a new worship video that premiered on January 22, 2021 on YouTube from River Valley Worship. I listened to it again several times this morning and felt such a powerful anointing as I wrote and worshipped. It’s the perfect accompaniment to devotion time with one well-played piano and a circle of fresh harmony throughout. [Listen](#) to the end and be blessed.

Sound the Alarm

A millennial revivalist who operates in the apostolic and prophetic, Caleb Cooper believes he's been called to "sound the alarm" to this generation that Jesus is coming—and coming very soon.

The senior pastor of New Hope Revival Church in Truth or Consequences, New Mexico, since 2013 and founder of Caleb Cooper Ministries, the 37-year-old Cooper believes that this generation will not only see a great outpouring in this nation and the world in the near future, but it will also be the generation to see the Second Coming of Jesus.

And, Cooper says, it's his job to help challenge people to get ready for that wonderful and historic event, and teach them there is little time to waste in that preparation.

"I know I've been called, and one of the messages that I believe burns in me is calling people to an absolute place of urgency," says Cooper, who also serves as the director of affiliate schools at FountainGate School of Revival in Mesa, Arizona. "You obviously have many different theological backgrounds out there concerning pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation and post-tribulation [about the Second Coming]. I try to live my life like Jesus Christ is going to come before lunch today.

"So, as long as we live with that level of urgency, regardless of what camp you fall into, you definitely can be ready. You will have confidence on that day when the trumpet sounds. And so, every message I preach, everything I write, is birthed out of a place of urgency—like this might be the last moment, the last thing I ever get to do on this earth. That trumpet could

blast at any moment. And so I would call a generation and tell them you've got to live a life of urgency, to steward well every second, every minute of our day, which will translate into hours and weeks and years. That's how we steward a lifetime—a lifetime yielded to Jesus Christ."

For Cooper, urgency is not only the key for himself, his family and his church, but also for every believer—because every Christ-follower has a kingdom calling. Many believers, he says, have fallen into a state of apathy and stagnancy where they have become hearers only of God's Word and not doers, deceiving themselves, as it says in James 1:22.

"The reality of stewarding seconds during your day, I know that's very hard to do because seconds happen so fast over a lifetime," says Cooper, who holds a doctorate in biblical studies from FountainGate. "But we realize it is those moments where we choose to do something or choose to do nothing, obviously, over time, they translate into either something or nothing.

"As for me, I want a crown. I want a crown to lay at the feet of King Jesus because, when we get there, there are no do-overs. There is no makeup test, and we can't come back to earth and decide, 'Well, OK, I'll do that ministry You asked me to do.' We get one shot at doing exploits for the kingdom of God. And so my heartbeat is this, not only preaching the uncompromised Word of God but also preparing a generation for the return of Jesus. And so I believe it begins in that place of urgency."

A Used-Up Life

In a crazy, chaotic year seemingly ruled by the COVID-19 pandemic, Cooper has obeyed God's command to be a doer of His Word. Not only did he write several books in 2020, but he has also launched a new podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network, Uncompromised Revival Fire. Through his podcast, he challenges

believers to take their place in sustainable revival and to transform awakening in the earth in these last days.

Cooper's first book, *Pioneering Prophetic Patterns of Purpose: When Encountering God Leads to Another Encounter*, was birthed out of a prophetic word the Lord gave him in 2016, a word that instructed him to travel to both Washington, D.C., and to Azusa Street in Los Angeles, the site of the 1906-1909 Pentecostal revival William Seymour led.

A few months later, Cooper's obedience to God's prophetic prompting found him at 312 Azusa Street, the exact location of the famous revival. And that led to God sending him across New Mexico in a 5,300-mile round trip to spread the good news and the message of the urgency about Jesus' imminent return.

"The Spirit of the Lord spoke to me and said, 'I'm sending a synergetic revival to New Mexico, and it is going to be marked by a united people. Awakened by the past, empowered by the present and mobilized by the future,'" Cooper says. "There's a lot to that word."

While at Azusa Street, the Lord gave Cooper a vision.

"I had no clue at all why I was going to both Washington and Azusa Street, so I asked the Lord, 'Why?' He said, 'I am about to converge revival fire and governmental authority. ... I literally sat down on the footprint of Azusa Street, and I immediately had a black-and-white vision of 1906 to 1909, where that revival broke out in which 700 million Christians today draw their connection to. I began to see limbs grow back. For people who had stubs for arms, they grew out. It was just an open vision where I began to see the signs, wonders and miracles of that generation.

"Immediately, Holy Spirit began to burn on the top of my head and went through my body and began to burn through my feet. And I heard the Spirit of the Lord say to me, 'Son, go back to New Mexico and release the first. There is only one flame, and

it's the same flame of Pentecost. I want you to call for the state and not just the state but the nations to contend for the same flame that birthed Pentecost on American soil."

In Cooper's second book, *Jesus Focused: Awakening Endtime Prophetic Strategy*, he utilizes the prophetic aspect of his ministry, releasing insight about the return of the Lord. He asks a poignant question of the Christ-follower: Are you ready to be found among a people that recognizes the signs of the times, knowing that you were born for prophetic destiny?

With the upheaval in the U.S. government and political division in the country along with the blatant attacks on the Constitution, Cooper says God is raising up a spiritual army—a remnant—that He has challenged to take their eyes off themselves and become Jesus-focused. This remnant, he says, must not be blinded by the enemy as many in the church have.

In essence, Cooper, who has been labeled as a "firebrand preacher," says, believers must practice true Christianity with boldness and fearlessness in the face of a pandemic, racism, political division, persecution and hatred from those who refuse to accept Christ as their Savior.

"Sometimes I think we can fall in love with the idea of a move of God, whether it's worship or holiness, but at the end of the day, we lose sight of what's really important," he says. "What this is really all about is seeing Jesus face to face. I've shared with our church so many times that we have to get out there and preach the gospel, cast out devils and heal the sick. We've got to believe in the supernatural, regardless of the atmosphere that is around us.

"At the end of the day, what's the worst that can happen to us? We die and we graduate and go to heaven, and we get a mansion and walk the streets of gold. And so, once again, it stems from that urgency to say that the only fear is the fear of the Lord. That's what fires me up to say, 'You know what?

If I live, I'm going to live for Christ. If I die, I'm going to die for Christ. If I live or die, I'm going to do it unto the Lord, but I want Him to use me up in every part of my life.'"

The Revival Generation

The FountainGate School of Revival helps fuel the urgency to raise up "firebrand" ministers like Cooper. FountainGate is a ministry school that allows a student to earn their degree in biblical studies online. It also allows for churches or ministries to partner as an affiliate school as they host their own affiliate school from their location.

In hopes of sparking another Great Awakening, FountainGate offers associate's, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees in biblical studies with an emphasis on revival history, revival components, revival activation, developing spiritual gifts, ministry experience, evangelism, prophetic impartation and international missions.

FountainGate's vision is "to see an earth-shaking, ground-breaking, heaven-rending, gate-opening, glory-revealing revival generation raised up to ignite and spread the fire of God's presence and His power."

The school's ministry partners include Cooper and his wife, Erica; Jody and LaNora Morin of FountainGate Ministries International; Pastor John Kilpatrick and the Church of His Presence in Alabama; Pastors Tim and Kari Thompson of Fountain of Life Christian Fellowship in Arizona; Daniel and Melanie Ross; Barbara Boyd; and Zane and Jan Anderson. The school also includes a staff of 16 instructors ready to pass their prophetic and apostolic knowledge on to the next generation.

"I believe that the future of this nation really hinges on how the church is going to respond," Cooper says. "Many think it's already mapped out in God's control and we're not to do anything. That's not biblical at all. Every generation has

done something.

“We can change the course of things. I do believe that an antichrist agenda is being presented to this nation and the globe like never before, and we have an absolute responsibility to contend against it. As long as we are breathing air on this planet, we’ve got a responsibility to deal with the powers of darkness and the accuracy of God’s ruling government authority in the earth.”

That’s where, Cooper says, students must be equipped to help halt the ungodly attacks on the U.S. Constitution with the authority of God’s Word.

“With what’s happening with the unconstitutional mandates that are being released in this nation, I believe God is looking into the heart of His church and saying, ‘Do you believe that I made a covenant with America called the United States Constitution?’” Cooper says. “‘And if you believe it, will you believe it regardless of the atmosphere around you? Will you execute it when mandates are being released?’

“The church is going to steward the freedom in this great nation in the face of conflict, in the face of governmental overreach. ... We took an unbelievable stance against shutting our church down, any of those things we felt like violated a covenant with God.”

With everything that has happened in 2020 and the world facing an incredible state of uncertainty, Cooper reiterates that now is the time to get on God’s side.

“I want to encourage anyone today to recognize that we are in the last of the last days,” Cooper says. “We’ve got a moral obligation—a spiritual responsibility—to take the strongest stand we’ve ever taken in any generation to preach the glorious aspect of Jesus Christ across the earth. We must be unrestricted and willing to lay down our lives.

“The most powerful message, I still believe, is that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to those that believe. I want to challenge everyone, regardless of the atmosphere around you, do not let the atmosphere change you. You change the atmosphere around you. God has anointed His church. He’s given us power and authority to get the job done.”

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Your Divine Prescription for Hope for the New Year

If someone had told us in advance that 2020 would look as devastating as it has, we wouldn’t have believed them. At least, we would have had serious questions. The events of the past year sound like a wish list for the Grim Reaper.

The impeachment trial of the president of the United States took place in the U.S. Senate.

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average plunged by 1,190.95 points, or 4.4%, to close at 25,766.64, triggered by fears of the spread of COVID-19.

The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 passed 47 million

worldwide.

Many small business owners lost their companies and thousands throughout the country were laid off or lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

Protests and violence caused by the killing of George Floyd broke out across cities in the U.S. and around the world.

Churches were forced to close and when reopened, had to meet a strict criteria of social interaction mandates from the state.

And if this weren't enough, we endured the most divisive and hotly contentious presidential election since the Civil War, one that split the nation in half.

When you stop and think about it, the hour seems to closely resemble Habakkuk's cry to God in the first chapter of his Old Testament book.

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Or cry to You, 'Violence!' and You will not save? Why do You make me see wickedness, and cause me to see trouble? Plundering and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore injustice proceeds" (Hab. 1:2-4).

Talk about anxiety, fear and discouragement! Habakkuk was a man on the edge with God. He complained about society falling apart around him and God seemed to not listen to his prayer. If this is what Habakkuk was feeling, I can only wonder what some others around him must have been going through. They must have thought the sky was falling and God had taken a vacation!

The fact is, what Habakkuk witnessed and what we see today in real time are very similar. The United States, though the greatest, most industrial and most powerful nation on the planet, is not without its blemishes or its propensity toward

sin. What appears to be the silence of God as the country flails in self-destruction mode is, in reality, the patient timing of a fifth Great Awakening about to break forth.

God said in Chapters 1 and 2 of the book (and I'm taking liberty here): "'You wouldn't believe it if I told you.' I'm going to use the ungodly Babylonians to do my bidding. Write this truth down, Habakkuk, so others can read it, because this truth waits for an appointed time. It talks about the end of all of this you're witnessing; you'll see. The enemy is rotten, sinful and puffed up. But you have to get this, Habakkuk—the righteous person will live by his faithfulness!"

We need to grasp what God is saying to Habakkuk here. If not, we'll miss the real power and strength we need to be victorious in this crazy world. God said, "the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" (Hab. 2:4b, NIV). That means through consistency, commitment and steadfastness, we'll see God's goodness happen before our very eyes because of our loyalty to Him. The world may become unhinged, but believers in Jesus will feast off their faithfulness to God, and God Himself will prove faithful. It's then that Habakkuk gets it, and in Chapter 3, begins to cry out for revival. He ends the chapter in verse 19 by coming alive: "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights."

Habakkuk finally caught what God was saying. As a result, God did great things—and so will He do for you as well.

Real-Life Issues

The mental health toll from the coronavirus on individuals, couples, families, employment, businesses, pastors, churches, missionaries, schools and medical workers has been nothing short of devastating, to say the least. Here's some clinical information to add perspective.

Research from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey

from May 2020 to July 2020 indicates symptoms of anxiety disorder and/or depressive disorder shot up from 34.5% in May to 40.1% in July. The survey was conducted on adults ages 18 and older.

The Census Bureau survey said that more than one-third of Americans are displaying clinical signs of anxiety, depression or both since the coronavirus pandemic began. A Pew Research Center survey said this figure was as high as 55%. Loneliness from pandemic-related isolation and lockdowns also plays a part in depression.

The economy is now a significant source of stress for 70% of Americans, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). This is up from 46% in the APA's 2019 Stress in America survey.

And this comes on top of the uptick in marital issues and divorce from the pandemic. Marriage therapists, both secular and Christian, have been busier counseling couples than they ever have been.

And this doesn't include depleted savings accounts, homeowners falling behind in mortgage payments and churches experiencing decreased giving.

These are all real-life issues that face every one of us irrespective of our faith, socioeconomic status, physical and emotional well-being or political persuasion. There is also no doubt that "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12b, MEV) are trying their best to disrupt our lives and rob us of our promises and authority in Christ. In other words, this stuff is affecting all of us!

So yes, when you spell it all out, things do look rather dismal on the surface—or do they?

Divine Favor

When we read the story of Noah and the flood, we often read it one-dimensionally. In reality, this story has another fascinating, life-giving side—a bigger, more meaningful side.

The flood story in Genesis 6-8 gives us a pretty clear-cut message. Sin and depravity had gone wild, to the extent that God says in Genesis 6:7, “I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the birds of the sky, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

When Dad wishes he'd never had you, that's a pretty bad thing. Yet that's how crazy wicked the human race had become. But look, here's the best part of the story: “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6:8, NIV).

If we don't take a deliberate look at this, we'll miss what's really going on here. With all of the ugly and destructive things happening around Noah, he found favor, grace and acceptance with God. That's important for us to see. If we miss that—the favor, grace and acceptance part of how God feels about us—then all we end up seeing is the bad stuff around us and not the good and redemptive plans He is preparing in the background.

As God is getting ready to flood everything around Noah, He spares Noah and his entire family because of favor. But when we read this, our minds are caught up more in the devastating flood than the story's main theme: rescue.

Through difficult and trying times, whether physiologically, psychologically, occupationally, politically, relationally or spiritually, God's intention, plan, purpose and desire is to show favor to you through the battle. His ultimate goal is to bring rescue, and from that, new life!

Without faith in God's favor and rescue in our lives, marriages, finances, jobs and mental stability, all we have is the destruction around us and not the goodness of the Lord

working on our behalf. Trust me, God isn't in heaven wringing His hands saying, "Whoops! Sorry, I missed that one!" We need to know something important at the outset of 2021: God is in control. Let me say that again: God is totally in control. Nothing has escaped God's eyes, and everything is in perfect order for His plan.

"Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him" (Ps. 91:14-15, ESV).

Moses wrote this psalm the day he completed building the tabernacle in the desert (Ex. 39). He was awestruck as he entered the holy place, reflecting on everything God had brought the Israelites through under extreme and even impossible conditions. In the end, Yahweh brought Moses favor and rescued him and all of Israel from certain death. This goes to show that it's never over until God says it's over, and God never says it's over!

"I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5b, MEV).

The enemy wants us to think God just isn't going to come through for us, our families, our economic condition or even our country. He tells us somehow COVID-19, political unrest, an unstable economy, job loss, a contentious presidential election and worries over where our country is headed will prevail in the end. No, they won't! We must move our eyes from the wreckage around us to the rescue God is planning. If we don't, our adversary will try to imprison us in fear while God has lavished us in favor. Because of Christ and His work of redemption in our lives, we are a righteous and blameless people who have received grace as a result of Christ's shed blood on the cross.

It's interesting to note that those three descriptions of Noah—receiving grace (favor), being righteous and being

blameless—appear for the first time in Genesis 6. Verse 9c says, “Noah walked with God,” and so do we. Not unlike Noah, each Christian walks with God in the midst of immorality and political devastation. And we must lock into our hearts that even though all these things go on around us, God’s favor and grace are on His people. Even though it may look like things won’t work out, hold on. They will, and God will make sure of it.

Remember, things didn’t look good for Abraham, and in particular, Isaac. It was sacrifice time, and Isaac was the sacrifice! The whole experience was breaking Abraham’s heart. and no doubt Isaac was a little anxious too. But when the time was right—and with God, the right time always comes—Yahweh showed Abraham favor, grace and rescue by providing a ram in the thicket as an alternative sacrifice for his beloved son. God came through! Perhaps with tears in Abraham’s eyes, hoping but not 100% sure things would turn out well for him, he believed. As a result, he saw the goodness of Yahweh’s favor in his life and the life of his son. God is never without options, so we are never without hope.

Viable Alternatives

God provided a shelter, a rescue from the storm for Noah and his family. He is going to do the same thing for you and your family. Depression and anxiety are real and affect many people both inside and outside of the body of Christ.

As a licensed mental health professional, I’ve gotten in trouble with some evangelical charismatics in the past, but I believe firmly in what I’m about to say. I’ve seen it work and work well. If you find you just can’t shake your depression, anxiety or both, you need to know there are viable alternatives to help you emotionally maintain and in many cases, maintain well through the storm.

Pray first, of course. Include your spouse, family member,

friend and pastor on your prayer team. If you still find you are struggling, I suggest you talk to a licensed clinical Christian counselor who can help walk you through the rough spots. They may suggest you talk with your primary doctor to consider other options that could prove very helpful.

Depression and anxiety come in two types: situational and genetic. Either the onset was brought about by a particular situation such as the loss of a job, marital issues or pressures at home, or the onset came through heredity. Perhaps your mom had depression/anxiety problems and so did your grandmother on your mom's side and Uncle Charlie and Aunt Bertha as well. Either way, viable and helpful options are available. Remember, Jesus chose a physician, Luke, as both an apostle and an evangelist. Also, it was Jesus who said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Luke 5:31b, NIV).

If you suffer from mental illness, do not allow anyone to place you under guilt or shame as you seek help. There are options that can assist you, and you are not unspiritual in seeking them out. As a matter of fact, you're demonstrating wisdom. The outcome could prove very beneficial. There are also some all-natural products that may help you as well.

David put it best in Psalm 30:5: "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." In this verse, "his favor" refers to God's grace and acceptance, which will work in you for a "lifetime"! Though the darkness of the night comes at times, stay encouraged because with God, there's always the promise of the dawn. Be expectant—divine rescue is on the way!

READ MORE: For additional information about a Christ-centered approach to mental health, check out anxiety.charismamag.com.

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Keep This Part of Your Body Healthy and Keep Your Overall Health Excellent

How many patients who have come through my doors would have seen immediate relief of their symptoms or diseases had they jumped into the Healthy Gut Zone diet? The answer is thousands upon thousands!

Naturally, though many of them needed to take action, not all

of them did. But I will say this: Every patient I have had who took action to improve his or her gut health always had multiple health benefits come as a direct result. When you heal your gut, your entire body wins! And a happy gut is the foundation for a healthy body!

Now, you know I am not promising that every disease, sickness, ailment or symptom will go away by following the Healthy Gut Zone diet.

However, I have seen so much good happen with my patients, so many healthy prognoses after seemingly dead-end reports from doctors, that I encourage everyone to at least try it. What harm can it do to focus on your gut's health?

One of my recent patients was an 80-year-old woman with kidney failure. How is that for a serious condition? She was on kidney dialysis, but within six months of starting the Healthy Gut Zone diet, she no longer had to go in for dialysis, and her doctors couldn't believe it. Her creatinine dropped from 2.6 to 1.6 in just a few months and stayed there.

Now, not everyone is faced with extreme health challenges like she was, but the simple act of getting her gut healthy again had amazing side effects on everything else in her body. She said she would stay on the Healthy Gut Zone diet for the rest of her life. The last time we spoke, she expressed her thanks for being healthy. Young or old, that is what everyone wants.

Patients with serious diseases, autoimmune diseases and neurodegenerative diseases (Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and dementia) will need to stay on the Healthy Gut Zone diet and avoid most lectins. But the majority of patients with gut issues will eventually be able to eat most foods, as long as they limit or avoid sugar and wheat and rotate every three to four days any foods that may inflame their gut.

With that said, it is crucial to understand what is at the core of the Healthy Gut Zone diet. Here it is in

straightforward terms:

Feed the good. The Healthy Gut Zone diet feeds the good bacteria in your gut the things that they need (probiotics, prebiotics, polyphenols, fiber and resistant starches).

Starve the bad. The Healthy Gut Zone diet avoids, minimizes or eliminates sugars, most starches and carbs, saturated fats and foods that cause pain, inflammation, leaky gut, bloating or irritation.

Take time out. The Healthy Gut Zone diet gives your gut time to catch its breath and heal itself.

That is all your gastrointestinal tract needs. Your body is amazing in its ability to heal and recharge itself. And because the entire body is connected to the gut, we must get your gut healthy first. Everything else will follow.

With the Healthy Gut Zone diet, all three pieces (feed the gut, starve the bad, take time out) come together at the same time. The 1-2-3 tandem action is required by the gut, and it makes the whole process that much easier to implement.

Feeding the Good

With the gut, the underlying foundation is always that of making it healthy again. When the gut is healthy, you are usually happy. That is always the focus, no matter what.

“Feeding the good” means feeding the good bacteria in your gut what they need to be happy, healthy and effective. You will be looking at food in that light, which means you will want to eat gut-friendly foods, such as the following.

Salads and vegetables: You want about one-half to two-thirds of each lunch and dinner to be raw or cooked veggies.

The core or base of the Healthy Gut Zone diet is the veggies because that is what your gut needs the most. Thankfully there

are endless recipe options, ways to prepare salads, soups, vegetables and toppings. This diet also brings in healthy gut-friendly food options from different countries around the world.

For lunch almost every day, I have a large salad with lots of veggies and a small amount of grilled chicken breast with grilled onions and a lot of high-phenolic extra-virgin olive oil (about four tablespoons). I don't put vinegar on it since vinegar decreases many of the polyphenols. But it is so tasty, and my wife and I have this almost every day. When your gut environment shifts from mostly Firmicutes to Bacteroidetes, your cravings usually shift from sugars, carbs and starches to healthy foods. Now I actually crave salads with high-phenolic olive oil.

Proteins: You need protein from a variety of sources with almost every meal or snack. About one-fourth to one-third of each lunch and dinner should be protein.

Everything else: In addition to the veggies and proteins are the fruits, fats, flours, resistant starches and other things that accompany the Healthy Gut Zone diet.

It's everything else that goes along with your veggies and proteins. These are important and healthy additions.

As you know, veggies are the base of the Healthy Gut Zone diet. Protein is a side but vitally important. Everything else is a complementary but necessary addition to the Healthy Gut Zone diet. All combined, your gut bacteria thrive on this mix of ingredients.

Starving the Bad

As you focus on foods that support the growth of good gut bacteria, you simultaneously starve the bad bacteria. This is the other half of the equation, and it simply means that you avoid, minimize or eliminate foods that cause pain,

inflammation, leaky gut, bloating or irritation.

If it hurts your gut, you don't eat it.

This concept of feeding the good and starving the bad is what your gut wants and needs. It is the perfect recipe for healing the gastrointestinal tract.

How do you know what to avoid, minimize or eliminate? You remember the seven causes of a leaky gut (increased intestinal permeability):

- Antibiotics.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs).
- Acid-blocking meds.
- Genetically modified organism (GMO) foods.
- Chlorine in drinking water.
- Pesticides.
- Intestinal infections.

Starving the bad means not putting any more of items one through six into your body if you can help it. The biggest hurdle for many will be the fact that they are taking medications (items one through three), whether doctor prescribed or over the counter. Abruptly stopping may not be advisable, and you may need to wean off meds such as antibiotics, acid blockers, NSAIDs and aspirin under your doctor's care or under the care of a functional medicine doctor, but your gut needs a break.

So what should you do? I don't recommend stopping medications right away. Focus on healing the gut and let the body respond. The end goal is to add nothing to your gut that hurts it in any way. If it takes a few weeks before you can do that, then so be it. But the sooner, the better.

Most of the problems in the gut come from the seven causes of a leaky gut and the 10 common enemies of the gut, which are mainly foods, including gluten. Though quitting something harmful for your gut will be a wise move, it is also essential to plant the good bacteria in your gut.

When the good bacteria are in control of your gut and the gut wall has healed, that is when the inflammation usually subsides. Many times, symptoms disappear, food sensitivities decrease, and sicknesses, even diseases, usually fade away. The psyllium husk powder also feeds the good bacteria and acts similar to a broom, sweeping out the bad bacteria and yeast.

To get to that point, starving the bad is required. These first seven common enemies must first be removed from your daily diet:

- Gluten.
- High-sugar, high-carb, high-processed foods.
- Dairy.
- Lectins.
- Artificial sweeteners.
- Emulsifiers.
- Saturated fats.

The shift away from these common enemies of the gut is more dramatic for some people than others, but it needs to happen nonetheless. The quicker, the better, but if it takes you a while, that is fine as well. When it comes to these first seven enemies of your gut, plan your escape this way:

Go less, then go low and finally, go none at all.

For example, going gluten-free or lectin-free or sugar-free will not be a simple flip of a switch. It will take time to

replace one food with another. Relax; don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself. Some changes may be immediate (e.g., not using artificial sweeteners), but others may take a little longer (such as going without dairy).

What is most important is that you are making lifelong habits of starving the bad bacteria while feeding the good bacteria. This is an ideal lifestyle, and your gut will be happy!

Taking a Timeout

Looking at the big picture of your overall health and lifestyle going forward, you recognize that the change may need to be gradual. But you do need to start somewhere. There needs to be a break with the past and a rollout of the new. This is why the new year is such a popular time to try to make healthy changes. If you can't start at the beginning of a new year, I suggest that you embark on the Healthy Gut Zone diet as one season ends and another one begins.

When you begin, give yourself the expectation that you are jumping in completely and doing this for at least eight to 12 weeks (two to three months). You can do anything for just eight to 12 weeks, right? Naturally your body may love it so much that you wish to continue, but it is important that you mentally assign a window of time for your Healthy Gut Zone diet.

Usually the gut begins to heal within one to four weeks. I've had some patients feel the benefits immediately, but most start to feel the effects about four to seven days into it. That means symptoms often begin to fade away around the end of your first week!

While you are busy starving the bad bacteria and feeding the good bacteria, you will also be busy creating new habits that will further benefit your gut. Five complementary habits go in perfect tandem with the food-eating/food-avoiding habits you have already started. You already know these habits:

Psyllium husk fiber: Take fiber (1/4 to 1 teaspoon) one to two times daily, after breakfast and dinner, in 4 to 8 ounces of water.

Probiotics: Take one to four probiotics per day or eat probiotic-rich foods. (Add supplements if needed.)

Prebiotics: Take 12 grams of prebiotic supplements (add prebiotic-rich foods if you can) a day. Start with much less if you have bloating or gas. Use caution if you have small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), small intestinal fungal overgrowth (SIFO), Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis; hold off, or start low and go slow.

Polyphenols: Add as many polyphenols to your daily routine as you can.

Resistant starches: These add options to your diet as they feed your good gut bacteria. Use caution if you have bloating, gas, SIBO, SIFO, Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis; hold off, or start low and go slow.

After eight weeks, you can begin to add back into your diet certain foods you might want to avoid completely at first. For example, I recommend that you stay off cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplant and peppers during the initial part of your Healthy Gut Zone diet. This minimizes lectins. After a couple of months, by peeling and deseeding these vegetables, you may be able to eat them with only a slight increase in lectin exposure (since lectins are more concentrated in the seeds and skins).

With beans, which are excellent sources of protein, pressure-cooking them for 7 1/2 minutes or longer after 24 hours of soaking (discard the water they are soaked in) will break down and remove virtually all the lectins, making them safe to eat. But during the first one to two months, I would recommend not eating beans at all.

In addition to watching lectins, you always have to be aware of sugars (such as fructose in fruits), carbohydrates (such as in legumes), grains, saturated fats (such as in dairy products) and fatty cuts of meat. For your gut, while it is healing, the longer you can stay low sugar, low carb and low saturated fats, the better. As for gluten, I recommend that most people pretty much stay off gluten, though an occasional small amount of food containing gluten will usually not hurt.

When you begin to slowly increase your food options, such as adding a new food each week, keep in mind that you will want to stay within the overall Healthy Gut Zone framework of starving the bad and feeding the good. That means continually avoiding the seven causes of a leaky gut and the first seven common enemies of your gut. You know what those are.

When you add dairy back, start with sheep or goat milk products or A2 dairy. For example, I enjoy some feta cheese in my Greek salad. Choose low-fat, low-sugar goat milk that is fermented, such as goat milk yogurt or kefir. Eventually you can add small amounts of A2 milk or 2 to 4 ounces of low-fat cheese and rotate it every three to four days.

Usually within three months you can add back in foods you love, such as Indian basmati white rice (limit to 1/2 cup per serving) or potatoes without the skin (where the most lectins are found). Rotate this food as well as other high-lectin foods every two to four days, and avoid any high-lectin food that causes abdominal pain, excessive bloating, gas or other symptoms of leaky gut. Rotating foods that are inflammatory for you or high in lectins is a great way to still enjoy them yet limit them so they are less likely to harm the gut. But do not add in sugar foods, gluten, GMO foods or excessive foods high in saturated fats.

Stay with it. Most people will find that their gut is healed within three months.

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