

Will You Use This Powerful Gift From God to Heal or Destroy?

Can we talk? Just you and me, girlfriend?

A woman's beauty is one source of her strength. But everything depends on how you use it.

As a woman, you are powerful, beautiful, strong, smart, vulnerable, intuitive and resilient. When God made you, Earth and heaven smiled, and you completely took Adam's breath away. You are the expression of the part of God Himself that longs to connect, communicate and nurture life, intimacy and so much more. As John Eldredge describes it, every woman has a beauty to unveil.

Partially because of your combined beauty and strength, God's enemy has unleashed his most destructive weapons against you ever since the beginning. You have survived indescribable pain, loss and torment. You've faced the worst that evil can dream up.

And yet you are still here! The assaults on your body, mind and soul have not taken you out. You may feel down, but you're not finished yet!

But the question is: *What will you do now?*

You have two choices.

You can use your beauty and strength to wreak havoc on everyone around you. **You *do* have that power.**

With your cunning, you can manipulate and control. Your snide

remarks and criticism and gossip can tear down, wound and destroy. With your moodiness and dependency, you can frustrate and make miserable those who might want to do you and others good. With a word or a look, you can drive a knife into the tender heart of a child, your husband or another vulnerable human being.

You can use your beauty to elicit the worst and basest instincts of men. You can give the promise of life—to a child, to a relationship, to a cause—and then withdraw your nurturing when it becomes inconvenient. By refusing your womb—physically or emotionally—you guarantee that death will strike again. Your fury, revenge, scorn and selfishness can tear down anything good.

You could feel justified in using your beauty and strength in this way. Yes, you've been hurt, wounded, used and abused. You're only taking back what they tried to take from you. You deserve it!

But do you really want to use your beauty and strength in this way? Isn't the end of that road only more sadness, pain and loneliness?

OR, you can use your beauty and strength to give life.

In some respects, your ability to give life is so close to God's giving of life that it's almost scary. I say this reverently.

Your words and help and encouragement and nurturing can build up, and can provide what's needed in the most desperate of circumstances. Your wisdom and insight can see the truth about other people when they cannot see it for themselves. The instincts you have for protection and your intuition can save yourself, your family and many others from the destruction some may try to bring.

You can display your beauty, inside and out, such that, as Jack Nicholson says to Helen Hunt, "You make me want to be a better man." You can nurture life in your children, in your husband, in your friendships, in your ministry, in your work, in your church. Life— everywhere you go. You can draw others—in your family and beyond—close to Jesus in a way no one else can.

You have the choice in how you use your beauty and strength.

God gives life. But without you to nurture that life in every respect, what God desires to give life to will never come to fruition. It takes you—wounded, unfinished, but resilient—for it all to come to pass. You have it within you to make that kind of difference.

God needs you. Your husband needs you. Your family needs you. I need you. Your church needs you. Your world needs you.

So girlfriend, let's stand up and own the full measure of what God has planted within us. Let's guard it carefully and take care to nurture our own hearts in His presence first.

And then let's offer it, invest in it and display it to those closest to us, and to anyone else God places in our sphere of influence.

And by doing exactly that, we as women will have the best revenge on God's enemy, and find the fulfillment God created us for in the beginning.

God created you with amazing beauty and strength. It's up to you how you use those gifts.

Question: Are you using your womanly beauty and strength to destroy or to give life? How are you doing that? You can leave

a comment by clicking [here](#).

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Early Warning Signs He Isn't God's Man for You

We first started to converse one day in the cafeteria lunch line—Bible college students from the same hometown. It was not a star-struck, “love at first sight,” enamored moment, à la Hollywood style. But over the weeks as we became friends, attraction was in action, and by the end of the semester, we were dating. Now the serious vetting could begin. For me (Mike), the question loomed: Is she the one?

My criterion was a woman with a heart for God who was willing to follow me anywhere. (At that time, I was planning to return to the mission field in Asia where I had just served for two years.) This was a portal through which a potential wife in my world must pass. While for me, this was a very narrow and specific criterion, a wider principle can be stated thusly:

Is the person you are considering as a lifelong partner a person of vision, and is that vision compatible with yours?

Beyond a particular ministry assignment, we are all called to the vision of becoming Christlike—to be “transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). This is “Vision 101” and serves as a foundation for all of life's

aspirations, whether in the home, church or workplace. What you do (assignment specifics and locations) may change over the seasons of a marriage, but who you are (the fruits of inner refinement) will always be at the forefront of God's directives over your life.

It is imperative that you discover and weigh in your heart the spiritual history of your person of interest. Is he a person acquainted with restraint? "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). Does she display the self-discipline necessary to turn from lesser pleasures and follow the supreme path of allegiance to Christ? Now is the time to evaluate before you choose; once married, you forfeit that luxury.

I once heard this illustration: When you stand before the entryway into marriage, there is a banner overhead that says, "Whosoever will." Naturally, we pray, proceed at a moderate pace, get counsel and pray some more; but on this side of the door, we get to choose whether he or she is the right one to marry. Once over the threshold, we turn and see a banner that reads, "Predestined and foreordained from the foundation of the world." God knew who your choice would be, and now it's a covenant pact for life.

In our premarital manual, *Vertical Marriage: A Godward Preparation for Life Together*, we recommend couples consider 15 potential caution flags. The need for caution may not necessarily mean that you shouldn't marry each other, but it may indicate the need to slow down the relationship.

Caution Flags

1. Uneasy gut feeling that something is wrong in our relationship.
2. Frequent arguments.
3. Jealousy or irrational anger when one of us interacts with someone of the opposite sex.

4. Apprehension discussing certain subjects because we are afraid of the reaction.
5. Extreme emotional expressions; unpredictable mood swings.
6. Controlling behavior—I feel like I’m being manipulated.
7. Feeling trapped—not wanting to hurt each other by even suggesting that marriage may not be for us.
8. Lack of respect—I’m constantly being criticized and treated with sarcasm.
9. Lack of personal responsibility—My fiancé struggles to hold down a job and pay bills.
10. Pride—He/she has difficulty admitting when wrong, thus we never fully resolve conflict.
11. Dependent on parents for emotional and financial security.
12. History of failed dating relationships.
13. Addictions—Do either of you struggle with alcohol, drugs or porn? If you struggled in the past, how long have you been free?
14. Selfishness—overly self-centered, always wants their own way, tends towards narcissism.
15. Bad habits—Yes, we all have some, but are there any major trouble spots? Are there any pet peeves that drive you crazy?

If one or more of these caution flags are evident in your current dating relationship, bring those concerns to your pastor or a mature married couple you trust.

God always brings couples together with refinement in mind. The “right” one for you is the one you can do pilgrimage with, holding core values of surrender and transformation central to your union, while you envision a God-glorifying life together.
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10 Creative Tips to Exchange Stress for Success

Jesus told us that we would face all kinds of pressures in life. And He promised to be with us and bring us through every challenge.

We've all heard that it's important to stay focused.

What we don't hear much about is how to protect our focus and make consistent progress in the face of stress and overwhelm.

Stress is one of the giants that shows up to stop us along the path to more of what we want in life and work. There is no detour or side street, but we can courageously choose our response to stress, overcome every challenge and boldly find a way forward with God's peace, perspective and provision.

Seeing Stress Differently

Most of what we hear about stress is negative.

Yes, it's true, stress can wreck our health, relationships and life. But stress can also be a catalyst that sharpens our focus and propels us to higher levels of success.

I like to think of stress as a signal alerting me to a needed

change or important opportunity, challenge, decision or learning.

You see, it's not the stress, pressure or challenge standing in the way that derails us. It's our response to it that matters most.

Everyone experiences some level of stress in life and work.

The difference is that successful people learn to expand their capacity to choose a more resourceful response in stressful situations, adjust their strategy, protect their focus and keep moving forward.

You can too.

What is stress?

Stress is simply our bodies' way of responding to a demand.

It's a signal that says, "Pay attention!"

The feelings of stress we experience, according to medical science, are a result of hormones like Adrenaline, Cortisol and Norepinephrine released inside our bodies. These are very powerful chemicals.

You've probably heard stories about mothers picking up cars to free their children in an emergency. Their superhuman strength is a result of adrenaline and other chemicals rushing through their bodies. There's likely an Angel involved too, and the surge of physical strength these mothers experience is very real. It's just like what happens when a soldier manages to walk three miles to safety after being critically wounded on the battlefield.

These stress hormones can save our lives, but they can also destroy our health in daily life. Imagine getting into your car, slamming down on the gas pedal and holding your foot

there for days. What do you think is going to happen to the engine?

The Mayo Clinic tells us that living in a constant state of stress can disrupt the processes in our bodies and increase the risk of numerous health problems like anxiety, depression, headaches, sleep problems, weight gain and more.

But this is not a science lesson; this is about understanding what stress is and how to choose your response to it in your life and work.

Stress, Focus and Success

Have you ever heard the saying “New levels, new devils”?

It reflects the observation that at each new level of success, there are bigger and bigger problems, pressures, challenges and opportunities.

No doubt there are increased levels of spiritual resistance along the path to God’s best for you. But often the greatest source of resistance, and what holds us back, is our own thinking and patterns of behavior.

One success coach explains it this way:

Every human being develops a series of beliefs, values, rules, mental maps, strategies and habitual patterns for navigating life. We learn how to deal with challenges and problems in a certain way to keep ourselves safe.

Our beliefs filter how we see and respond to life; our values influence what we prioritize, and our patterns of behavior often become our first response to something new or different.

When life happens, we make a decision about what it means. These decisions can work for and against us. If we’re David facing Goliath, we draw courage and strategy from a

victorious reference. We run confidently into battle and win on our terms.

But if we get rejected or fail and decide it's because we're not good enough, we retreat into fear, shut down and become stopped or stuck.

Our decision about what rejection, failure or anything else means can become a limiting belief that negatively influences how we see and respond to daily life and work.

The stress that accompanies any new challenge or opportunity is simply the trigger that brings out what's inside us.

The good news is that we are not robots. We can recondition ourselves to think differently, take charge and choose a better response.

This doesn't eliminate problems or stressful situations, but it can dramatically alter the outcomes we experience.

How?

10 Keys to Less Stress, More Success

Here are 10 keys to help:

1. Win the battle in advance.

Every battle is won or lost before it begins.

It's true in war, and it's true in life.

Jesus gives us a "heads-up" in John 16:33. He tells us in advance that we're going face trouble so that we can confidently choose our response and proceed in the knowledge of His victory and in the peace and power that come from His perspective and wisdom.

Jesus' victory is a spiritual truth that is also very

practical, but His promises don't automatically manifest in daily life. We must consciously choose to believe. Then, we must live a life where our daily choices are evidence of our faith.

Imagine this truth as an invisible garment you can put on each day that gives you superpowers. Then, learn to build with God daily and never surrender to anything less than His purpose, promise, and victory in all of life.

How we see the past influences our future.

One of the exercises we do in Prayer-Plan Your Life is create a timeline of significant experiences and turning points where things changed. The goal is to see whatever happened through God's eyes.

When we see the toughest times of our lives through the lenses of God's redemptive love and faithful provision, we can respond differently when we face challenges in the future. We also make bigger plans.

Building ourselves up in the truth of who Jesus is in all of life helps us to deal confidently with whatever we will face in advance. We see and believe ourselves victorious. And we ultimately win in every situation because He has already won for us and promises to win with us today.

2. Expect favor and blessing.

What you see, hear and say most is what you believe and do.

Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts because everything we do flows from it. Stop letting negative news, gossip and the noise of life be the dominate your mental diet. Take charge of what you see and hear.

Give yourself the gift of a directed mind, and a heart flowing with love and a positive expectation for good.

Describe in a sentence or two who you know in your heart God is calling you to be. Write it in a letter to God telling Him you want to go for it. Read your letter out loud every morning. Ask God to bless you with more understanding of how to live according to your calling. (I even place mine under my pillow at night keeping these thoughts close.) When stress comes, take a few minutes to refocus, read your letter, and charge ahead!

Here are a few other ideas:

- Begin each day with prayer, meditating on the promises of God.
- Identify at least 10 promise Scriptures for your life. Write them on index cards or sticky notes. Review and proclaim them over your life and work daily. Ask God for insight and understanding. Boldly confront every problem or challenge with the certainty of victory and practical wisdom for success.
- Create a “playlist” of music and teachings available when you commute or have waiting time.
- Politely refuse to engage in gossip and other negative conversations.
- End each day by documenting your progress and what you learned.

3. Ask empowering questions.

Questions are a powerful tool of focus that can defeat stress.

When life happens, most people respond by asking some form of the following question: “Why does this always happen to me?”

Instead, when facing a stressful or challenging situation, ask different questions:

“What if this will work?”

“What’s the way forward?”

“What’s the most important thing I can do or learn right now?”

“What could be great about this?”

4. Learn what you need to know.

There’s a learning curve in anything you want to do.

Building the plane after you’ve already jumped off the cliff can be stressful. But you don’t have to go it alone.

Invest whatever it takes to get the information and coaching you need.

What are your top three personal and professional goals?

What must you know and do to achieve your goals?

Who has successfully done what you want to do?

What are the top 10 questions you want them to answer?

5. Keep you eyes on the prize.

There are so many deadlines staring me in the face as I type this blog post. I’ve got a venue to land for our annual conference and a course to record next week for TrueTribe members.

It feels overwhelming.

And then I pause to think of the people who will be encouraged when I press publish, the hundreds of lives that will be refreshed and practically equipped at the conference, and how my new course will help people make better decisions now that will count for eternity.

Then, I get a surge of determination and energy that makes me invincible to the nagging stress.

It’s important to get clear about what you want and why.

The reason we invest significant time helping you to clarify this in *Find Your Why Forward* is because when you have a compelling why, you're in a better position to handle the stress of how.

6. Strengthen your mental muscle.

The ability to respond resourcefully to stress and stay focused in an avalanche of distraction is a mental muscle you must develop.

One of the ways you can do this is through prayer and meditation.

Beyond the obvious benefits, science tells us that prayer and biblical meditation help to recalibrate our brains and expand our capacity to respond to life in resourceful ways.

Breathing exercises, brain games, getting enough sleep, and proper nutrition and supplementation also help.

7. Eat the frog.

“Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.”—Mark Twain

Your “frog” can be defined as your biggest, most important task.

Too often our response to stress and overcome is to procrastinate.

Ask yourself: “What’s the most important thing to complete right now?” Then get it done. Completion is a powerful energizer.

Invest time to learn productivity hacks and tools to help you get more of the right things done in less time.

8. Protect your focus.

Nothing can stop or defeat you until it breaks your focus.

God created us to dwell with Him and to build with Him. He provides a way for us to be focused and fruitful in the crush of business demands, relationship tension and the everyday challenges of life and work

When you believe this deep in your soul, you will become fierce in the management of your focus and slay the giants of distraction.

The truth is, all distractions are equal. They stop you.

You must decide that no matter what happens, you will find a way to keep moving forward—even if it means waking up an hour earlier in the morning or having hard conversations with others.

One simple question to ask yourself is this: When I'm at my best, what's true? The answer to this question will help you identify insight and understanding about what focus looks like for you.

Focus and the momentum that comes from it are a formidable force that make you extremely productive.

Protecting your focus allows you to navigate confidently through the minefields of past problems, cranky bosses, nutty customers and messy situations, and it allows you to blaze a trail to success that is energizing, rewarding and true to your God-inspired values and vision.

9. Choose and create supportive environments.

What's around you determines what grows inside you.

Every environment has a purpose and a product.

Different environments support different levels of focus, productivity and connection. For example, don't try to do work

that requires high levels of concentration in an environment filled with distractions. And the local coffee shop may be an ideal place for meetings.

Begin with your home and office.

Clean up and clear out the clutter.

Choose a specific place in your home to meet God.

Decide a place to write or do creative work.

Put your mobile phone in airplane mode, turn off notifications.

Have an agreement with others around you to minimize interruptions. You must train people to respect your focus or they never will.

10. Schedule times to rest, relax and renew.

Studies show that taking time off can help you be more productive at work. But more and more people are putting off vacation time.

Why?

Studies show that there are three primary reasons: (a) they don't think they can afford it, (b) the fear of returning to a mountain of work, and (c) they don't think anyone else can do their job.

Don't let these be your excuse.

Get creative. Learn to use points and miles to travel inexpensively. Plan and prepare for time off. Don't let fear or pressure to conform to a workaholic culture rob you of the blessing of rest and renewal.

"I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who

has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back” (Phil. 3:12-14, MSG). {eoa}

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Help Your Teen Have Regular Quiet Times With These 4 Practical Tips

If I was at all intimidated by writing about how to have effective family devotions, I am certainly much more intimidated by writing about how to help your teen have a quiet time!

I don't have teenagers.

Its been years since I've been a teenager.

But as I've pondered, prayed and prepared for this post, I have been reminded of my own teen years, and I think the central needs of teens don't ever really change.

I will say this, though, if I were a parent of a teen poking

around the web to find resources to help my teen develop a quiet time, I'd be very frustrated right now.

There are not many resources (*by people I know and trust, that I feel like I can recommend to my readers*) or even articles on the subject.

I came up empty.

And now I know why so many moms have written to me with desperate cries for help!

In the end I concluded that maybe it is better this way. Maybe it is better that parents and teens use the same resources and learn side-by-side, because at the end of the day, our teens will learn better when we model for them how to have a consistent and effective quiet time.

4 Ways to Help Your Teen Have a Quiet Time

1. Be real. If there is anything I've witnessed about this generation, it's that they are done being sold to. They can smell an advertisement in a New York minute.

They don't want their quiet times to be "cool" with geometric shapes and neon colors, they just want it to be real. If your teen truly has an encounter with Jesus Christ, you won't need to nag them to have a quiet time because they will have taken a bite out of filet mignon, and you won't have to convince them to eat that cheap, microwave dinner some advertiser wants to sell them in the way of a "cool teen devotional" that only talks about locker rooms, hormones and the opposite sex.

Because real life for them goes beyond what our generation watched on *Saved by the Bell*. Teens today are faced with a level of fear and pressure that our generation never had to face. Short, one-page devotional nicely packaged in succinct words and alliterations won't come close to meeting their

needs. They want the hard truth, uncensored and unabridged because that's what they face everyday—a world that is hard, uncensored, R-rated and unabridged.

How will they cope with what they are faced with on a daily basis in public school if they are fed a pabulum gospel?

2. Model it for them. I know it seems like your teen thinks you're a Neanderthal. The real truth that they wouldn't ever dare utter to another living soul is that they really do want to be like you and they're watching you out of the corner of their eye.

I once heard someone say, "What parents do in moderation their children will do in excess." I know he was talking about alcohol on that occasion, but the same is true about our daily, personal relationship with Almighty God.

I remember as a child waking up on occasion very early in the morning, or sometimes even in the middle of the night, and seeing my dad in the living room with his head buried deep in his brown easy chair weeping and praying. I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I'd see him like that every morning and, more often than not, in the middle of the night. His relationship with God was front and center, No. 1. His quiet time happened on Saturdays, during vacations—he never took a break from it.

That consistency played a huge role in my life as a teen, because I knew that when *my* prayers were bouncing off the brass ceiling of heaven, his were somehow reaching God.

Maybe that wasn't theologically correct, but as a teen, it gave me the encouragement I needed to keep trying.

My mom was just as consistent. Before she came out of her bedroom, she had been awake for a couple of hours, having spent time in God's Word and prayer. Their consistency in quiet time spoke to me loud and clear that devotions were an

essential part of daily life. I haven't always been consistent with them like they are, but in those inconsistent times, I felt a weight of conviction because I knew I needed to be.

How did I know that? It wasn't because my youth group leader told me, but because it was modeled for me Monday-Sunday without fail.

3. Mentor them. I'd venture to guess that most parents of teens feel like I did leading my kids in quiet time: all thumbs, two left feet and clumsy. Am I right?

It's a little intimidating, honestly. But what they really want is for you to mentor them.

I don't know for a fact, but I'd bet that a lot of parents have tried this already and given up when they felt their teen push back.

You know what? My kids did too at first.

My 4-year-old and 6-year-old didn't want to sing, sit still or listen to me read from the Bible. And had I given up right then, I'd be missing out on their sweet prayers rehearsing their day and thanking God for Thomas the Train, Percy and Captain.

Mentorship is never easy, because the one being mentored doesn't always like what the mentor wants them to do, but don't give up because when you give up, you say to your teen that this isn't worth it for you to keep pushing through the hard times, and if it's not worth it for you, it won't be worth it for them and they'll look for the meaning in life someplace else than at the cross of Jesus.

Here are some resources you can use with your teen to help mentor them:

- Good Morning Girls & Good Morning Guys – Get your teens

into God's Word on a daily basis with this amazing online Bible study where they simply read through the Bible one chapter at a time. Its not complicated at all. Have them fill out their journals and then go through them each day, read them, and leave them encouraging notes in the margins.

- Foundational – This is my dad's blog! He has amazing discipleship resources that I have used with teen groups before. They are still available in their old format, but in November will be relaunched with new covers and a new format. He is also getting ready to launch an Online Institute where he will provide leadership, biblical and discipleship classes.
- Time Warp Wife – Here is another great website that has great Bible studies you can buy and do with your teen girls. She already has the following Bible studies up on her blog and just started a new study called The Amazing Power of Grace.
- Provide them a Bible – I'd suggest ditching the teen Bibles and just go for a normal study Bible that they'll be able to use for many years. Then give them great Bible study resources like gel pens to help them color code their Bibles.
- Get them a notebook and pen to take to church with them so they can take sermon notes, then teach them how to review their notes throughout the week by looking up the Scripture references and finding ways to apply the sermon to their own lives.

4. Don't nag them. If your teen simply shows no interest in a relationship with God, nagging them, preaching to them and punishing them wont help them get there. The best thing you can do for them is to just to get on your knees and pray and speak your words in your prayer closet.

Actually, whether or not your teen is in the Word on a consistent basis or not, you need to pray.

While my parents successfully raised three kids in a pastor's home and watched all three go into full-time ministry, it wasn't always very easy. All three of us went through our rough patches, and I know that during those times my dad got very little sleep. He spent many nights pacing the floor and interceding for us.

No matter if your teen is a bonfire for Jesus or as cold as ice, bathe them in prayer.

I highly recommend the book *Power of a Praying Parent* to every parent, as it is an essential resource to teach us how to pray effectively for our children.

Does your teen have a favorite quiet time journal or Bible study? Tell me about it in the comments below and perhaps I'll add it to my list! {eoa}

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This One Thing Can Make Your

Bones 'Vibrate With Life'

I love the feeling of being utterly alive, of feeling health and well-being flowing through every part of me, of that bones vibrating thing.¹ It didn't used to be that way. As a matter of fact, I felt dead for many years.

Slowly Dying

Truth be told, I was dead or slowly dying in many areas of my life. I am comprised of a body, soul and spirit. No part was healthy. All was lacking. I was breathing. I was working. I was going through the motions of daily living. I was trying to control my emotions and keep them quiet. I was going to church, teaching Sunday School, leading groups and going to church every Sunday, but it still was not sinking in where the rubber meets the road.

I knew my body was dying and I was hastening its demise by feeding it all the wrong kinds of foods and allowing fat to pile up everywhere.

I knew my emotions were in sad array. There were so many things I had shove to what I felt was the cellar of my soul where nothing could harm me. In doing that, I had only allowed them to take over at odd times, mainly when I was trying to do the right thing.

My mind had a lot of information, but most of it was not usable because as soon as I would try to put it into practice, my emotions would veto it and cravings would take over.

When that happened my mind followed my emotions and resulted in behaviors I did not want, but I did anyway. It was that old conundrum: "The good I desire to do, I do not do, but the evil I do not want is what I do."²

Then, there was my spirit. I said for years I was spirit-led.

The problem was, I was led by *my* spirit, my human spirit that is always on the side of self. I was letting *me* lead instead of tuning my spirit with God's Spirit and allowing His Spirit to completely lead me.

Hypocrite

On the outside I was a mess. I weighed 430 pounds. I could put on the Christian hat really well, though. I knew a lot of stuff. I knew how to apply it on most every level, except one. For me that one level was what mattered. Not being obedient in that one area made me feel like a hypocrite.

I rationalized that I was doing well in my Christian walk because I followed God in almost everything. However, almost doesn't cut it. With God I must follow completely or fellowship doesn't mean anything.

When my behaviors line up with what God tells me, that shows Him that I love Him. When I trust Him enough to do what He tells me to do that is obedience, born not out of obligation, but love, pure and simple.

God's Love Lesson

I needed a lesson in love. From the very beginning of my life, God was there, loving me, wooing me to Himself. I accepted Him into my life at age 7, but in reality I didn't grow in my love of Him much. In knowledge of Him, yes.

"And this is love: that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it."³ Love is shown in obedience. Don't get me wrong, I followed the rules I knew to follow, but no pastor ever told me they related also to what I ate, how often I ate or how much I ate.

When I finally got up the courage to pray about my one area of despair, I didn't like God's answer. I didn't want to

surrender certain foods that had become my go-to source for comfort, protection and companionship. So I rebelled and for the next 30 years I struggled with what was not so hidden a sin.

Not So Hidden Sin

It's funny that we think it is hidden. No one wants to tell us it's a sin because, let's face it, two-thirds of Americans are in the same boat as we are—overweight or obese and beyond. So of course, we're all going to pretend all is well.

What I learned on my journey is all is not well if I have put something above God. I put my love for sweets, cakes, cookies, pastries, breads and starches above my love for God. I was not hungry for God. I was hungry for those things.

Chrysalis

I wish I could say changing was easy. It's not easy. Changing from the inside out is akin to going through the chrysalis, a dark place where everything, and I do mean everything melts. Only one thing remains—the original design of the Creator.

It was in that place that my transformation happened. It was there that I was made new.⁴ It was because of going through that process that I lost over 250 pounds and have kept it off for almost four years. Thank God, I can say today my body glows with health and my very bones are vibrating with life.¹

Jesus daily invades my life with His presence. It's not unintentional, though. I have invited Him to do that. I've invited Him to lead me and I have told Him I will listen. I have also given Him permission to tell me when I turn to the right or to the left and step off the path.⁵ He will do it for you as well.

If you want spiritual activation to get on the transformation

journey of your life and stay on it, check out my coaching class #KickWeight. We talk about all the natural how-tos, but more than that the program is designed to jumpstart your change from the inside out.⁶ And it works! For the first six months of #KickWeight, the total reported weight loss was 387 pounds. In the natural it almost seems impossible, but with God nothing is impossible.⁷

Those who really did the work in the course are now spiritually activated to keep going. If you're ready to do what God tells you do about your health issues, run, don't walk, to #KickWeight and signup today. The group is open for registration, introductions and initial homework. Go HERE NOW!

¹Proverbs 3:8, MSG

²Romans 7:19, MEV

³John 1:6, MEV

⁴2 Cor. 5:17, MEV

⁵Isaiah 30:21, MEV

⁶Romans 12:2, MEV

⁷Luke 1:37, MEV

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The Secret Weapon You May Not Know You Have

Jesus promises to equip us with signs and wonders. “In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17-19).

After He rises from the dead, He commands them in Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you: And you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Peter brings clarity to who this gift of the Holy Spirit is for in Acts 2:39: “For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call.” The Word of God is clear: He gives to us the power of His Spirit to work miracles to win the lost.

The Holy Spirit is intentionally seeking people (2 Chron. 16:9a) like ourselves through whom can flow a display of His mighty, supernatural wonders to the world, so they may know that Jesus Christ is Lord. Knowing this, we ought to make ourselves highly visible to the Holy Spirit and ask Him to move through us with miraculous signs and wonders for His glory.

He realizes the limits in our natural strength, but He never intends for us to do His bidding in our own strength. In fact, He says in Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.” We read in Luke 5:1-11 how Jesus teaches Simon this very lesson. Jesus says to Simon in verse 4, “Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” And in

verse 5 we see how Simon replies to the Lord's bidding: "Master, we have worked all night and have caught nothing. But at Your word I will let down the net." By the power of their natural strength their nets are empty. But this time Jesus goes with them and He instructs them to go out into the deep waters and cast their nets.

In this portion of Scriptures Jesus teaches us how to effectively win the lost. First, He tells us to try it again. Let's go out into the world again. And this time with Him on board we are to launch out into the deep things of the Spirit, cast our spiritual nets and activate the supernatural power of His Spirit. When we evangelize the lost His way, according to the Great Commission, we will supernaturally draw in an abundant catch. Our nets will be so full they will bulge and be on the brink of breaking with souls for Jesus. Isaiah 60:5 says that the abundance of the sea will be turned to us. This is the inheritance that we are promised in Psalm 2:8, the nations.

Time and time again, I have seen the eternal results of supernatural signs and wonders. I have seen how just one person's miracle can win countless others to the Lord Jesus Christ. I ministered divine healing to a young boy in Tanzania who could not walk, and he was miraculously delivered and healed. Because of this amazing wonder, the people in his village and surrounding villages came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They said they saw the finger of God.

Moving in the power of the Holy Spirit is the smart way to evangelize. And apparently from the point of the Scriptures, it is God's way.

Becky Dvorak is a prophetic healing evangelist and the *Destiny Image* author of *DARE to Believe*, *Greater Than Magic* and, soon to be released, *The Healing Creed*. Visit her at .

2 Reasons You May Want to Change the Way You Pray

There's something powerful about relishing the enough-ness of where you are and what you have right now. It's more than gratitude, although that is important. Some call it the abundance mindset, or the glass-half-full mentality. I call it trusting God to be *enough*.

Think about your prayers. How many of them are requests?

- Please heal me of my sickness.
- Please bring me the money that I need.
- Please bring me a spouse.
- Please fix my spouse so that we are happy together.
- Please bring more people to my church.
- Please give me more opportunities to expand my ministry.

It's right to bring our requests to God; we are told to do that in Scripture. But if your relationship with God is based primarily on asking Him for things when you need or want help, you've made God into a heavenly vending machine: put in a prayer, get out a blessing.

How long would your relationship with your spouse or a good friend last if most of your conversations with them sounded like your prayers – you're always asking for things and never listening?

If you're a parent, you know what it means to want to give good gifts to your children. Jesus said our Heavenly Father feels that way about us (Matt. 7:11). But you also know that if your children are always focused on asking for – and receiving – things, they are not likely to mature into happy,

productive, responsible adults.

Even If Not ...

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were facing death in the fiery furnace their response to Nebuchadnezzar was full of faith: "We believe God will deliver us! But even if He doesn't, we will still worship only Him" (Dan. 3:16-18).

Job said the same thing: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

What if our prayers came from that same place of faith? What if we trusted God as a loving heavenly parent, and relished the things He has already done? What if we truly believed that He has already given us everything we need (2 Pet. 1:3)?

Our prayers might look more like this:

- Yes, Lord, I want You to heal me. But Your presence right now is *enough*. You work out everything for my good.
- I ask You for the material things I need to care for my family, Lord. But whatever I do have now or in the future I pledge to use with gratitude and good stewardship.
- Lord, I want to get married. But even if I never find a spouse, Your presence is *enough*. I know You will fill my heart and life with meaning, fulfillment and satisfaction.
- I believe You can heal my marriage, Lord. But even if my relationship with my spouse remains as troubled as it is now, I know You will be my lover, healer, protector and friend now and forever.
- Lord, You've planted a dream for something big in my heart. But even if my ministry never grows any bigger than it is right now, I trust you to minister through me to the people You *have* placed within my sphere of

influence.

That kind of mindset, that kind of prayer, changes everything!

When you see God that way, it changes your life now in these ways.

1. You live with integrity now.

You'll never take better care of your body once you get well if you don't take care of your body right now even as you struggle with illness. You'll never be faithful with lots of money if you don't learn good stewardship with a little. You'll never be happy married if you never learn to be happy single. You'll never guard, protect and enjoy a healthy marriage if you don't nurture and take responsibility for what you can do in a difficult marriage. You'll never successfully handle a larger ministry if you can't minister faithfully to the people God has placed within your care now.

Where you are right now is your laboratory, the garden where God is growing the *you* He needs you to be in the future. If you cannot take responsibility for and do not take full advantage of every opportunity around you now, you'll never be ready for something bigger or better.

2. You learn to work together with God.

There is no such thing as an overnight success.

Anything worth anything takes regular investment over a long period of time. That includes a healthy body, financial success, a happy marriage, a successful ministry or anything else. Completely embracing where you are right now and the gifts God has already blessed you with, and giving your whole energy to making the most of the present, is the only way you will ever have an opportunity for more.

Coming to the point of fully trusting that God has given you what you need right now allows a level of joy and success you

cannot know any other way.

More Than Gratitude

This kind of mindset is more than showing half-hearted gratitude for what you have. You can force yourself to express thanks while still being greedy for more.

But this kind of *enough* mindset allows you to invest your whole self in the place God has you right now, holding nothing back, while still holding on to the dreams and desires He has placed within your heart. You are content in your soul, though still working to maximize what God has given you. **It's trusting God to truly be your *enough*.**

Finally, bloom where you're planted! And who knows – your fragrance may spread far beyond anything you could have imagined. That's biblical too! See 2 Corinthians 2:15-16.

Question: Is there something you've been asking God for that you need to reframe into a prayer of trust? An *enough* mentality? You can leave a comment by clicking [here](#).

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The First Step to Receive an 'Impossible' Miracle

Your situation may seem too difficult for a miracle, perhaps

there is no medical cure, or it has been a lifelong condition that you have grown accustomed to. Your five senses, human reasoning and medical reports shout this is impossible. Even though you know the Scriptures say that with God all things are possible, you still struggle with doubt and unbelief.

There was a woman named Sarai, (her name was later changed to Sarah) and she faced an impossible situation. She was barren and even though she was given a promise by God that she would birth a son, she could not see herself ever having a child. Like her husband, Abram (his name was later changed to Abraham), she had no hope to have a child of her own. Instead of seeing God as her hope, she blamed Him for her barrenness. Sizing up the situation in the natural and using her five senses and human understanding as her guide, she came up with a plan of her own. Abram agreed and conceived a child with her maidservant, Hagar (Gen. 16). This meddling plan she schemed up was not God's plan; it was conceived of the flesh, not by faith, and it gave no glory to God. Sarai had a hard lesson to learn too, for now she was despised in the eyes of her maidservant. She made a mess of the situation, and God's promise did not come to pass in that season.

In order to have a miracle, you must first have an impossible situation. And it is important to remember that God's promise for a miracle cannot be brought to fruition via your human plan or reasoning. You need to submit to God's supernatural means, faith. And faith is how to obtain your miracle.

Like I said, this woman of God, Sarai made a mess out of the situation and made matters worse because she chose not to trust God by faith and came up with a reasonable solution to a supernatural promise. But God is merciful, and 13 years later, He visited her and her husband again and said that if they would listen and this time do it His way, she would bear a son within one year.

Sarah had a decision to make in order for this miraculous

promise to come to pass. Would she believe or not? When she first heard the prophetic message from God's messengers that she would bear a child, she laughed with doubt and unbelief. After all, she was 89 years of age, passed the age of child bearing, and she had been barren all her life. When the messengers asked why she laughed at God's promise, she lied and denied that she had laughed, but they corrected her. And just as it was with Sarah, God knows what's in your heart, and your heart needs to be cleansed of all doubt and unbelief for your miracle to come to pass.

Hebrews 11:11 tells us what Sarah had decided. *"By faith Sarah herself also received the ability to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised."*

This was a tough decision to make since all human reasoning and her five senses screamed this was impossible, but because she judged God faithful to keep His promise, she received strength to conceive and bear Abraham's son, Isaac, at the age of 90. What an amazing woman of faith she became. Will you be like her and judge our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ faithful to keep His promise and conceive the strength to receive your healing and miracle? {eoa}

Becky Dvorak is a prophetic healing evangelist and the *Destiny Image* author of *DARE to Believe*, *Greater Than Magic* and, soon to be released, *The Healing Creed*. Visit her at .

What Billy Graham's Daughter

Did to Save Her Marriage

The night I met my late husband, Danny Lotz, I was 17 years old and had just graduated from high school. Danny had been raised in a strong Christian home by a father who was a pastor of a small church in New York City.

Danny had received Jesus Christ as a young boy at his dad's church and had taken a strong, uncompromising stand for his faith since then. He was a young girl's dream, and 15 months later we were married in the same mountain chapel where my parents had married 23 years earlier.

We moved into a small house, and at 18 years of age, when my friends were well into their college studies and planning their careers, I was grocery shopping, cooking, mopping and decorating, as well as working part time. It was wonderful!

Ten years later, we moved to a city where Danny practiced dentistry full time. By then, we had three children, and I did volunteer work and taught a weekly Bible class that was attended by 500 women.

Without my noticing it, the busyness had overtaken me, and I awoke one morning to the realization that I was in a marriage in which the love had run out! I will never forget the panicked, trapped feeling I had as I knelt in prayer, desperately pleading with the Lord for help.

If you feel trapped in a marriage where the love has run out, praise God! There is hope for you just as there was hope for me. The first step in starting over is to invite Jesus into your marriage.

Jesus Was Invited to a Wedding

John has given us glorious eyewitness testimony of the identity of Jesus Christ. Yet that identity was limited by

Jesus' humanity, which was like a house of curtains, veiling His deity. However, when He performed miracles or taught the truth, it was as though the curtains parted and the glory streamed through.

What a simple yet profound blessing it is to know that the first time the "curtains" parted and Jesus' glory was revealed was in a home as He celebrated a wedding! At the very start of His public ministry, the One who formed man and breathed His own life into him, the Son of God, was invited to a wedding. And He accepted the invitation! (See John 2:1-2.)

If you need a miracle in your marriage, invite Jesus into the relationship. You will be blessed by the knowledge that He is there when unexpected problems and crises arise.

Jesus Was Informed of the Crisis

During the first century, when Israel was under Roman occupation, there was little cause for celebration. A wedding created an exception in that oppressive atmosphere.

It was to such a celebration in Cana of Galilee that Jesus, His disciples and His mother were invited. And it was during such a festive occasion that a crisis occurred—the wine ran out (see John 2:3).

In that culture and time, running out of wine would cause the newlyweds such humiliation that they would never be able to lift their heads in public again. This was a marriage in trouble almost from the moment it began.

Has the "wine"—that spirited, sparkling liquid that symbolizes passionate, affectionate love—run out of your marriage? The loss of love can occur gradually, similar to the way I expect that the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana—one glass at a time until it was gone.

When Mary learned of the crisis, she immediately informed

Jesus, " 'They have no more wine'" (John 2:3, NIV). The crisis was stated simply, without explanations or suggestions about how He might fix the problem.

Although kind and respectful, Jesus' response to Mary gives the impression that He doesn't intend to do anything about the problem (see John 2:4). Sometimes Jesus' answer addresses not only the specific need we have brought to His attention but also something deeper.

Apparently Mary wanted to solve the problem for the young couple, but she also had a hidden agenda (see John 2:4). She thought this wedding celebration would be a wonderful place for Jesus to begin letting people know who He was.

Are there hidden agendas in your prayers? Are you praying for God to save your marriage to avoid being humiliated or rendered financially devastated by divorce, instead of striving to glorify Him? Jesus understands the feelings associated with our trials, but glorifying God should be our bottom-line agenda.

Mary may not have known and understood everything, but she knew Jesus cared. And she knew that in order for Him to have the freedom to make a difference, she would have to place total control of the situation in His hands.

Jesus Was Invested With Full Authority

After speaking with Jesus, Mary called the servants and instructed them: " 'Do whatever He tells you'" (John 2:5). She was confident Jesus could make a difference in the crisis.

Have you placed your marriage and your situation under His authority? Maybe one reason He has allowed you to be in your present crisis is to bring you to the point of complete submission to His will.

I believe that's what happened in my life. I remember getting up early one morning, slipping down on my knees and tearfully asking God once more how I could fix my relationship with Danny.

I opened my Bible to 1 John 4. As I meditated, God began to give me specific instructions on what to do.

His words to me were: "You are to love Danny because I first loved you. If you say 'I love God,' yet you don't love Danny, you are a liar. Because if you don't love your husband, whom you have seen, you cannot love Me, whom you have not seen. So I give you this command: If you love Me, you must—it's not an option—also love Danny.

"Dear Anne, love one another, for love comes from Me. Everyone who loves has been born of Me and knows Me."

Through His gentle words, God laid out three very basic principles about my love for Danny:

- Love comes from God.
- Those who are able to love others, including their spouses, are those who have been born of God.
- Those who are able to love others, even when the love runs out, are those who not only are born of God but also know God.

Although God lives within me, His love for Danny is available to me only in proportion to my knowledge of Him. God made this clear to me by saying, "If you are not able to love Danny, it's because you do not know Me, because I am love."

I realized that knowing God is more than just being born again, just as knowing my husband is more than saying marriage vows at the wedding altar. Knowing God involves an intimate, personal relationship that is developed over time through prayer, Bible study, obedience and being filled by the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment.

I knew God had given me the key for changing my marriage—for turning water into wine. The key was not to focus on my relationship with Danny but to focus on my relationship with God!

As I spent time with God, He would fill my life. And because God is love, His love would also fill me. Therefore, since God loved Danny, love for Danny would fill my life and overflow from Him, through me, to my husband.

It would be weeks before I could say honestly that the water had been turned into wine, but I was no longer frustrated, tense or worried. God gave me peace and joy within as I trusted Him to infuse my life and my marriage with His love.

When the shortage of wine first became known at the wedding feast in Cana, it seemed that Jesus would do nothing. But Mary knew He would act in His own time and in His own way.

I wonder what the servants were thinking as they obediently filled those jars with water. What did they think when He told them, " 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet'" (John 2:8)?

What made them risk their reputation and their jobs to carry out His instructions? It must have been something about Jesus Himself that thrust them out on the limb of risk-taking obedience.

I can imagine all the servants, jostling for position to get an unobstructed view of their co-worker as he made his way to the master of the banquet with the pitcher of water. I wonder, as he began to pour, if his hand jerked, spilling a few drops, when he saw that although he had put water into the pitcher, wine came out?

The water had been turned into wine! And the new wine was the best (see John 2:9-10).

It was a miracle! But it was such a quiet miracle—nothing flashy that would have drawn attention to Jesus or announced that the Messiah had come. Just a quiet change that saved a young bridegroom's honor and a newlywed couple's marriage—and answered a mother's prayer.

Can you imagine the thrill those servants experienced? It's the same thrill I've experienced again and again as I have climbed down from a pulpit to a standing ovation, acutely conscious of the water I had put into the message—the interrupted prayer time, the scattered thoughts and the weak delivery. Yet wine had flowed out.

No one in the audience knew that water had gone in but wine had come out. And as I outwardly lift my hand in praise to God, inwardly I acknowledge that a quiet miracle has occurred.

And it's the same thrill I get daily when I look at my beloved husband and remember the water—and the wine! Though my marriage is far from perfect, God's love in me and through me for Danny is much deeper, stronger and steadier than the love I had on my own.

Are you desperate for a quiet miracle in your marriage or your ministry that would turn the water into wine? Then invite Jesus to come in, inform Him of the problem, and invest Him with full authority.

Jesus makes change possible even when the love has run out. He invites you to taste and enjoy the "new wine" as you thank God from your heart for giving you Jesus!

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Turn Monotony Into Extraordinary With These 3 Inspiring Tips

"How has your day been?" he asked her, while she stuck a price on his fried chicken box at the deli counter.

"Oh, you know. Just another day," she answered.

A sad answer, don't you think? *Just another day.*

Later that night, we were on the way home from a friend's house. I was staring out the window, trying to stay awake. Matt was chatting on the phone with his mom.

"Are you counting tomorrow?" he asked her.

A strange question, unless you know it is literal. His mom goes to the church and helps count the offering on Tuesdays.

But I heard the question and saw the girl with the blonde ponytail at the grocery store deli.

Are you counting tomorrow? Or will it be just another day?

I went to bed last night thinking about what makes a day special instead of another monotonous X on the calendar, and I thought of some things that add value to every single day we're alive.

Three Ways to Find Meaning in This Day

Talk to God about everything. Having His attention and getting His perspective, instruction, feedback, comfort and truth about every detail of our day creates for us a unique life.

Pray without ceasing. (1 Thess. 5:17, MEV)

Walk around loved. People who know they are loved carry a secret smile.

I have loved you with an everlasting love. (Jer. 31:3, MEV)

Deny yourself more than once. I would write more about this, but I'm just starting to get a taste of what it means to go against what I naturally want in a situation and do what is good and right instead. I'm finding there is a hidden life on the other side of self-denial, but I am too much of a novice to tell you more except that I have found something strangely valuable in doing this.

Jesus says:

"If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

Most people do not go around in their homes and jobs and cars experiencing the three things I've listed above. Few people know what it means to talk to the Creator all day long and to experience His response. Few open their hearts to the profound love of God. And even fewer discover the unexpected rewards of giving up self in order to gain satisfaction in the will of the Father.

Which of these do you need most, to infuse meaning into your day?