

6 Calming Truths When You Fear Your Child Is in Danger

Do you mind if I start by saying that I don't know? I don't have the answers to my own questions. I don't understand how God is perfectly sovereign over the lives and safety of my six child-gifts—how He watches over each one of their numbered hairs and gives them each breath they take—and yet I bear a great responsibility in doing what I can to keep them safe.

I don't know.

But I suspect that many of you who have children or who have cared for children in any context have taken a moment for some reflective questioning in light of recent tragic headlines with kids as victim:

Is it the parents' fault?

Is it God's fault?

Would I have done that?

Would it have been my fault?

I might have asked myself those questions, too, and come up with a quick, confident response, gleaned from nearly 16 years of blog-reading, book-studying, Bible-believing kid-raising.

I might have had an easy answer, except that six weeks ago before the drowning of the precious twins, before the death of the little boy at Disney, before the trial of the texting mom

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From Party to Panic

My sweet 2-year-old, with the mischievous sparkle in his chocolate syrup eyes, with the face that gets swallowed up by his enormous smile, fell into a pool and nearly drowned. And so I wade through these news stories not as a blogger with

answers, but as a mother with questions. Some people think to figure out what to write, but like many writers, I write to figure out what I think. This post will not likely be a cure for my (or your) questions, but rather exploratory surgery with, perhaps, a few findings. But first, here's what happened with Russell on the beautiful, breezy day we nearly lost our boy.

My husband is the administrator of our local Christian school, so that Saturday, the day before graduation, we found ourselves attending three open houses—quite literally morning, noon, and night. We had made it through number one, at a park by the river, and number two, in a yard with a pond, without incident. But the end of the day was drawing near, and we were two hot, tired parents with six hot, tired children. Frankly, we were a little burnt out when it came to monitoring who had eaten what and who was going where with whom, and so at this last party, my husband and I found ourselves thankful for seats at a table in the front yard of the large home of the graduate's grandparents.

Our older kids were scattered around the property with friends, and Russell was running about with boundless energy as toddlers do. We knew there was a pool around the back side of the house, so we were careful to keep him in our sight line. Mostly.

Of course there were a few times when he escaped us, so my husband went around the corner, reprimanded him, and brought him back to where we sat. We were careful, but not vigilant. We knew there were a lot of other adults from our church back there with their kids, and a few times, perhaps, we let him linger longer than we should have.

But we weren't worried, until our six-year-old daughter came bounding through the house and out the front door yelling, "Mom! Dad! Russell fell into the pool, and you need to come right away!"

Michael immediately followed Lily to the pool area. I sat still, as if stuck to my metal folding chair by force of the questions whirling about my mind.

Is he okay?

Is he alive?

This couldn't be a real emergency, could it?

When seconds later, I made it back to the pool, I was met by Michael, carrying our fully-clothed, soaking wet, frightened little guy. His glassy eyes reflected the fear in mine as I heard how he had been on the pool deck with his big sister, who was talking to her friend in the pool.

Reaching out toward the water in pursuit of a toy, Russell leaned a little too far and tumbled into the water, to the shock of Lily and her little friend. Somehow, Lily had grabbed him by the thumb as his hand passed by, but after a couple seconds was unable to keep his head out of the water. The pool, which a few minutes before had been swarming with parents and kids, was now populated by just a few children and one parent, who heard the girls begin to yell when Russell went under.

This dad, (our hero!), still recovering from shoulder surgery, ran over, reached in with his one good arm and swept Russell out of the pool in just a couple of seconds.

Russell was safe, and we left the party quickly so as not to make a scene (oh, yeah, and we had a very wet kid). We breathed a sigh of relief and thanked the Lord for His goodness, and then we kind of let it go for the rest of the evening.

Until it was nighttime, and I lay in bed wondering, *What if?* Slowly, I sank into the dark waters of questions, guilt and doubt. Russell's fear was over; mine had just begun.

Reflection on the Water

From that day to this, not one has not gone by where I haven't thanked the Lord for the life of my little boy. But although my husband encourages me not to go there, my mind wanders down the path of "What if?"

What if Hero-Jake hadn't been back by the pool?

What if Lily hadn't grabbed Russell's hand?

What if instead of hearing the cries of my cranky toddler right now, I was hearing the wail of my own sadness, staring down at the still, smileless face of my boy, his soul at rest in the arms of the Father? Would I be to blame?

In the weeks since the other child-tragedies, there has been a lot of shaming of parents followed by the shaming of the shamers. So what's the biblical perspective here? When a child dies in a "preventable" accident, how much blame falls on the shoulders of fallible parents and how much on the sovereign Lord, who has power over all things and could prevent any tragedy with a single word?

My short answer? My wading-through-the-news-as-mom answer? I don't know. But in the course of working through my questions in the last few weeks, I've come to a few conclusions to help me as I move forward. Perhaps they will be of benefit to you as well.

Thoughts for Safe-Keeping

1. We (parents, adults, caregivers) must watch over our children carefully and diligently.

Whether we're entrusted with one child or six or ten, the Lord

has given us a little flock and placed them in our care. With Him as our model shepherd, it is right for us to gather, carry, protect, seek, sacrifice for and gently lead them (Isa. 40:11, John 10:11, Ezek. 34:12, Luke 5:4).

2. But we must do so with the understanding that our children are His and His alone.

I look at my son and think, *I have been so careless! Why is he alive when those other children perished?* I can answer only this: It is not because of any good in me that God spared my child, but that for His glory and for His purposes. "He has mercy on whomever He wills ... " (Rom. 9:18).

3. We cannot be everywhere, all the time.

My husband and I have six children. To think that we can physically protect each one of them all of the time is completely ludicrous. Even if you only have one child, it's ridiculous, although you sure can wear yourself out trying! The truth is, we are only parents, not omnipresent. But God and God alone "watches over all who love him" (Ps. 145:20) all of the time (Ps. 121:3). When tragedy occurs, we must weep with those who weep, refrain from determining parental "fault," and take heart in knowing that God works all things together for good (Rom. 8:28).

4. But we can do better.

Distracted parenting. I am guilty of it. How about you? For some of us, it's not necessarily how much time we spend on our iPhone but how much time we spend on "I." I just want to have some down time. I just need a break. I just want to send one text. I just want to be able to have a conversation at this graduation party without having to be constantly interrupted to look for my child.

It's not that those things are bad, but our tendency is to get a little lax instead of doing the work to be attentive parents. For our large family, that means "taking shifts" of little-kid watching when we're at large events, including our older children. It's okay for us all to sacrifice some freedom to patiently protect the weak among us (1 Thess. 5:14).

5. We must remember that every choice we make creates a ripple effect that touches many lives.

When we chose to let down our guard that day, we didn't consider the effect that our choice would have on others. For example, the owner of the home at which our incident occurred came up to me at church the next day. She was teary and sleepless, having been up all night beside herself after learning on Facebook (my mistake) that our little boy almost drowned in her pool. I can only imagine her sorrow had the situation turned out worse than it did. Our choices are not our own. We must regard one another as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

6. We must beware of the greater, hidden dangers.

The physical dangers of raising children are real, but more important even are the greater, hidden, spiritual dangers—the alligator in the Seven Seas Lagoon, to use a Disney analogy. Entering the gates of "the happiest place on Earth," we willingly suspend our sense of reality. We ride the rides and believe in magic, completely oblivious to the dangers that lie beneath the glitter of pleasure. Too often as parents, we are so distracted by the wonder of showing our children what the world has to offer that we fail to adequately keep watch over their souls (Heb. 13:17).

The Yes Is for You, the Why Is for Him

When my mom was a little girl and questioned my grandpa's decisions, he encouraged her toward immediate obedience by saying, "The 'yes' [her obedience] is for you; the 'why' [his reasoning] is for me." Similarly, the way in which our responsibility works with God's sovereignty is a harmony that is difficult to comprehend. Within the context of salvation, John MacArthur describes them as two roads, "twin truths," that run parallel but never intersect. He says:

The fact that you don't understand how they go together only proves that you're less than you should be. It doesn't say anything about God. Your inability to harmonize those things is a reflection of your fallenness, my fallenness. People ask me all the time, "How do you harmonize those?" And my answer is, "I don't. I can't." They can't be harmonized in the human mind. But realize this, you are a puny mind and so am I, and collectively we are puny compared to the infinite, vast, limitless mind of God. All I can tell you is that in the Word of God, these truths run parallel. And the answer is to believe them both with all your heart. And the one, divine sovereignty, will inform your worship and the other, human responsibility, will motivate your evangelism.

Parents, caregivers, it seems that there is truth here for us as well. It's difficult to navigate the blurred edges of where our responsibility ends and where God's sovereignty begins because that is, in a sense, a false dichotomy. For we know this: He is perfectly Sovereign, and we are certainly responsible. May the very fact that we are confounded by these truths motivate us to worship Him wholly as we do the hard, hard work of doing what we can to keep our children safe.

Parents, how have you worked to reconcile your responsibility

to care for your children with trusting in God as He rules and reigns over all things? Where might you need to remove distractions in order to focus on the physical and spiritual needs of those in your care? And in what areas do you need to relinquish control and place your children firmly in the Father's care?

*Copyright © 2001-2016 Revive Our Hearts Natives of Michigan's beautiful Upper Peninsula, **Laura Elliott** and her husband, Michael endeavor to serve the Lord with gladness in Minnesota as they raise five sons and one daughter, while ministering at Chisago Lakes Baptist Church and School, where Michael serves as the school's administrator. Laura's passions include words, music, and encouraging women to pursue the God of Scripture in every season of life. In her so-called free time, you might find Laura cooking (or watching Food Network) at home in North Branch.*

Move Your Mountain With These 3 Simple Strategies

We have mountains in our lives that seem impossible to overcome, things that we know we can't possibly accomplish on our own. Such as pay off \$150,000 debt, lose 260 pounds, write a book.

I've been a participant in accomplishing all three of these. All three seemed insurmountable at the beginning.

Mountain Climbing

I'm definitely not a mountain climber, but I remember going to Estes Park, Colorado. Entering the park, it's difficult to

imagine getting to the top of even one of the mountains.

One summer we drove up to the top of one of the larger peaks. I was sure our van would not make it. As a matter of fact it seemed to rebel the higher up the mountain we got.

At the top there was snow and the temperature had dropped around 30 degrees. With the help of our Honda's do-or-die engine, we made it safely. However, without me being a stickler for servicing the van regularly, we might not have made it. If we didn't have proper fluid levels in the engine, gas in the tank and good tires we definitely we not have made it to the top.

In other words, there were things we had to do to make sure our vehicle would carry us to our destination.

Moving Mountains

Recently we accomplished a feat that felt impossible back in 1999, when we bought our home. We paid off our mortgage. The amount seemed astronomical at the time. How did we do it?

The year we bought the house was the same year a cardiac surgeon told me I had five years to live if I didn't do something about my equally astronomical weight issue. I weighed 430 pounds at the time. I've lost 260 pounds now. How did I do it?

In 2013, I wrote a book. This had been a dream of mine since I was a child watching my mother get lost in books. Even though I was a writer, I just couldn't seem to produce a full-length book. The project seemed overwhelming. Now I've also written two more and two study guides. I'm working on my fourth book, or sixth if you count the study guides. (Check them out here.) How did I do it?

There are three ingredients I see common to moving any overwhelming mountain that seems to hover over us, throwing a

black cloud over everything we try to accomplish.

Faith

Jesus healed a demon-possessed boy who the parents brought to the disciples to heal. The disciples tried, but nothing happened. When Jesus prayed, though, the boy was healed. To the boy's parents and those who knew him, this was nothing short of a miracle, a mountain-moving feat!

When the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't do the same, He answered, "Because of your unbelief. For truly I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. And nothing will be impossible for you."¹

This not just saying we believe God has the power to move our mountains, it's a total mindset change. It's more than just knowing the truth will set us free,² it's applying the experiences we've had with God and believing if we walk in obedience with Him, things in our lives will change. They will transform to the point that when we declare actions to take place, they will happen because we are cooperating with God to make them happen.

Time

There is no time frame for mountain moving. Jesus didn't say to tell the mountain, "Move," and it would move in that very instance. How many years had this boy been sick? Probably all his life. How many years had his parents been believing for a cure, looking for a cure? Probably just as long.

How do I know that? They brought him to the disciples and when they couldn't help they just didn't give up. They went to Jesus. They kept trying. They had said, "We will find something to help our son." They didn't let time stand in their way.

Jesus simply agreed with what the parents had been setting the stage for all of this boy's life. It looked like an instant miracle, but much action had gone on behind the scenes, I'm sure.

Action

They took action. They kept doing everything they knew to help their son. They kept trying. They didn't give up.

I imagine these parents were the ones that fed their son the proper food the nutrition experts of the time had told them to feed him, prayed for him, took him to religious leaders, took him to doctors, built up his system with herbal aids. They tried everything possible to find a cure for their son.

All Three

In removing every mountain in my life I had to believe God had the power to direct me in what actions I needed to take to see the issue eradicated. I had to believe that no mountain was too big for God to move by directing a mere mortal like me, even though it might take time.

Most of the time we want miracles to happen right this minute. When I weighed 430 pounds, I wanted to walk through a healing line and have 260 pounds magically fall off of me. I wanted God to gift us with \$150,000 to pay off our debt. I wanted God to drop a book into my heart and mind and have it be written in a few days.

I believe all these things can happen. However, I also believe God uses the trials, the huge mountains in our lives to develop our spiritual muscle. Muscle cannot be developed without training, without day-to-day work, without applying resistance to build our strength.

Hard Work

Mountain-moving is hard work. Remember that Jesus lived 30

years developing His spiritual muscle before being thrust into His destiny time on Earth. He went through temptations.

He was under the authority of both his earthly and heavenly fathers. He learned from Joseph, whom God had given Him as a the human trainer. Most of all, He continued to study and wait for the time for it all to come together.

Whatever mountain is looming in your life today, know this: God has the plan to remove it. Part of that plan is to help build spiritual muscle in our lives while we cooperate with Him.

“For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable in all things, holding promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

¹Matthew 17:20

²John 8:32

³1 Timothy 4:8

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

One Sure Sign You're Drawing Closer to God

I spent hours on the downstairs bathroom, with a sheetrock mud palette in my left hand and a trowel in the other. I hadn't taped and mudded before, but it didn't seem too complicated. When I was nearly finished with the huge job, a friend stopped by and followed me downstairs to see my project.

He looked. He stood quietly.

"Wow, you should have asked me to help you," he said.

Sooooo ... I didn't quit my day job to go into the drywall business.

I guess the more knowledge and experience you have regarding something, the more in tune you are with the fine details and **more apt you are to see the mistakes**. That doesn't really match the philosophy I borrowed from my friend, which is, "Does it look good to a man riding by on a horse?"

Now listen to my latest C.S. Lewis quote, from *Mere Christianity* (speaking of horses, do you feel dragged along behind this latest book I'm devouring?):

When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him ... You can see mistakes in arithmetic when your mind is working properly: while you are making them you cannot see them.

I cannot tell you how badly I wish someone had taught me this concept a few decades ago. Truly, I thought that I was becoming a more horrible person every day. Hopelessness and despair started to be my companions in the wee hours of the night.

I was such a sinful woman.

It never occurred to me, as I was growing in my relationship with the Lord, studying His Word and memorizing Bible verses, that my new knowledge was going to open my eyes to even finer details of sinfulness tucked away in my own heart. It was a healthy thought pattern, this growing awareness of cracks in my purity that needed to be smoothed over with mud and a trowel, by a steadier hand than mine.

Jesus tells us God's number one commandment:

... love the Lord your God with all your ... mind (Matt. 22:37, MEV).

The more we love God with our minds, the more informed, thoughtful and meticulous we become.

More like experts in the skill of holiness.

So are you walking with God and seeing your shortcomings painfully clearly? Good. You're moving in close to the Lord, and He's pinpointing sinful areas of your life, so you can prepare for Him to perform the finish work needed in your heart.

Don't worry. He's a professional.

The Biblical Weight-Loss Strategy That Beats Dieting

Today I celebrate 63 years of living on this Earth. For the first time in my life, I feel like, with God's help, I really

am on the other side of food addiction. It's that place where even though I am a sugar addict I ask the waiter to bring the free sundae for my husband and son to share and not only do I not want a bite or crave a bite, I am not in the least bit tempted.

I've written three books and two study guides about my 250-pounds-plus weight loss. I coach two different online weight loss groups, but to say I am on the other side just never occurred to me.

Let me be clear, I know full well that at the drop of the hat, something might happen to tempt me and if I fell for the temptation, I could easily go back to the place I was before. I have not arrived and I never will arrive until the day God calls me home, but I am moving forward.

Here's why I feel like I'm finally on the other side, wherever that is.

I Own My Addiction

I have finally faced the monsters hiding in the closet, under the bed, inside the refrigerator and at every restaurant I go to. In other words, I fully admit I am a sugar and flour addict. I am not ashamed of it.

The more I own my addiction, the more I am free of its control over me. I have put perimeters around myself, good boundaries I will not cross. For me to cross those boundaries for a bite of something that might look heavenly would be hell itself. It is not worth it. Not at all.

One reason I have my before picture everywhere, on my website header, Facebook cover photo, Twitter cover photo, Pinterest boards and business cards is that it reminds me from whence I came. I do not hide my biggest failure because I never want to go back there.

Trust

This keeps me close to Jesus. It causes me to rely completely on the power of the Holy Spirit. And it has made me fall madly in love with Father God, who causes all things to work together for good because I love Him.¹

I love the way the Passion Translation says it, but I'm going to personalize it for me: "I am convinced that every detail of my life is continually woven together to fit into God's perfect plan of bringing good into my life, for I am His lover who has been called to fulfill His designed purpose."²

I trust God with everything that is within me. To the best of my ability I listen to His still, small voice directing me, reminding me of what His Word says, instructing me in the way to go whenever I turn to the right or the left³ and stray off the path He has laid out for me.

Crazy Faith

My faith has grown to this crazy, over-the-top kind of trust that allows me to just do what God tells me to do. How do I know what He's telling me? Here's the deal. Ever feel like you should do something, something good and kind, like stop and say, "Hello" to a lonely elderly and very obese woman sitting on a park bench?

What do you do? Do you go sit and talk or do you second guess yourself a million times and argue with yourself that you don't have time, that you wouldn't know what to say, that she would probably be offended if you sat next to her because she might ask where you work and you would say I'm an author. And she might say, "What do you write?" And you would say, "Weight loss books" and she would be offended.

What spirit do you think was whispering in your ear to go talk to that woman? What spirit do you think is trying to keep you

from doing it?

See, I never want to lose the divine encounter moments by overthinking. I have learned to listen with an ear of faith. I have learned to trust His voice because I have had many such divine encounters that ended in long and fruitful discussions.

One of the biggest truths I have learned is that God is not a God of confusion. No, I add that part all on my own.

Trust

It's in trusting God that our paths are made straight and our focus is clearer. My path is becoming clearer and through the fog I can see glimpses of my destiny, words whispered around me and echoed from above. What I have been through the last 20 years felt like walking on a tiny edge of a gigantic cavern. If at any moment my foot would slip, I might slip off into the abyss again.

I'm through that part of my journey. I've crossed over. I'm not going back. I'm going forward. There is no spiritual armor for the backside. It is all for the front. I do not make light of the fact that my maiden name is Shields. I have been fitted with the shield of faith passed down to me from my father and mother. It is to be used to extinguish the fiery darts of the enemy.⁴

Destiny

This sense of destiny, of being headed in the right direction and not caring what I encounter on the way, is the final reason I know I've crossed some kind of line drawn in the sand. I will cross many more on my journey. It's always a joy to know I have made it to the next point on the map that I cannot see.

The other day I handed my business card to someone. Pointing to the super-sized version of me, she said, "And is this your

writing partner?" I answered, "Well, that's me before I lost weight, but yes she is my writing partner. She will always be a part of me."

Truth is, as I get farther and farther away from where I left her, she is not calling me back, but urging me on to whatever will happen in my 63rd year.

The best gift I could give you on my birthday would be a gift of health. I announced last week that I would be pulling the FREE version of #KickSugar. To be honest it's one of the most valuable tools I have. I wanted to beef it up and offer it as a paid course, but God said, "No." Leave it as is—free. This course alone can change your trajectory regarding losing weight. So, it's my birthday gift to you and I'm leaving it on the website until God says differently. Download it [HERE](#). In addition, be sure to get on the waitlist for #KickWeight, the low-cost six-month weight loss coaching group. There is no cost to be added to the waitlist. It simply assures you will be notified when the doors open. There will be a limited number of spots available. Just go [HERE](#) for all the information.

¹Romans 8:28

²Romans 8:28

³Isaiah 30:21

⁴Ephesians 6:16

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

or on her Facebook page or Twitter.

Wage War for Your Divine Healing With These Scriptures

1. Study God's healing word.

God's Word tells us in Proverbs 4:20, "My son, attend to My words; incline your ear to My sayings". And Romans 10:17 tells us what happens when we give attention to God's Word. It says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God".

In order for faith to arise for supernatural healing we need to read and study the Bible concerning healing. And not just read it occasionally but on a consistent basis. Consume God's healing promises until His Word becomes more real to us than the symptoms, sickness or negative report.

I've had to take control of my thoughts and fight the flesh to stay in His presence in His healing word to overcome negative thoughts from the enemy, pain and symptoms. And I have found if I will not give up the good fight of faith, His healing power prevails in my body.

Take this even further, and start to pray and fast while you fill yourself with the Word of God. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you His divine revelation of His promise to heal you. He wants us to understand His Word, and is willing to show us how to activate His healing power in our life.

Once our healing manifests, then we need to learn to walk in divine health by the continuation of our study in the healing

message.

2. Focus on God's Word, not on symptoms.

Proverbs 4:21 tells us, "Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart." I find it interesting that we are admonished not to let His words depart from our eyes. We need to purpose in our hearts that we are going to focus our spiritual eyes on His healing promises and not on the ailments. Also, it says that we are to keep His words in the midst of our hearts. Guard His healing promises, don't allow the enemy to steal the Lord's promise to heal as you fight off symptoms with the Word of God.

3. Stand firm on God's healing promises.

Proverbs 4:22 tells us the blessing that comes from standing firm on His words: "For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their body." It also says in Ephesians 6:13, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all to stand."

Life and health are the blessings that come from a lifestyle that is built upon the Word of God. This is God's battle plan for you to heal and to stay healthy. And this is how you can receive your healing through His Word.

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

Arm Your Child With Truth as

'After School Satan' Clubs Open

Recent news has surfaced that the Satanic Temple plans to launch a program they are calling "After School Satan." They are starting the clubs in elementary schools in response to after-school Christian clubs that target young children with the gospel. They want to offer an alternative.

Obviously, this has generated some press as well as a groundswell of noise from the faith community.

While the movement is true and I'm not particularly thrilled about it, I want to suggest that everyone take a deep breath and relax. Read on to find out why.

First some bad news. The clubs are real and the Satanic Temple has already listed some of the schools that they are targeting. One is close to me. You can check if you want, but I assure you, this is a real thing.

The good news is that the purpose of the clubs is probably not what you picture. There will be no animal sacrifices and ritualistic Satan worship. According to their website: *"After School Satan Clubs will focus on free inquiry and rationalism, the scientific basis for which we know what we know about the world around us."* In other words, they are promoting scientific rationalism and individual freedom, not the worship of Satan.

But that's actually bad news. Satanists reject the involvement (or existence) of God in our lives and cling to sayings such as, "Do as thou wilt." In other words, they encourage people to choose their own path based on what they want and what they deem is right. So "rational thought" apart from God's activity easily captures the essence of the Satan we find in Scripture. It sounds nice, but it results in very bad things.

The good news is that these clubs are being started in response to organizations like the Good News Club and Rise Up. Satanists see that God is gaining ground in the lives of an entire generation and they don't like it.

The bad news is that "After School Satan" is free to meet just like a Christian club can. You can try to stop it, but you can't. And you probably shouldn't. Why?

The good news is that the United States has made it clear that students have the freedom to exercise their religion outside of school hours. In 2001, the Supreme Court ruled in Good News Club v. Milford Central School that schools cannot discriminate against after school-clubs like this. If Christians want the freedom to meet like this (and most do), then we cannot stop others of different faiths from doing likewise. The minute we deny Satanists access to a public forum, someone will take steps to deny Christians of the same.

So that means **some bad news**: The Satanic Temple might soon have the opportunity to influence impressionable young minds in elementary schools across the nation.

But may we all rejoice in some **REALLY GOOD NEWS**: In the battle between good and evil, our God will win. After School Satan clubs shouldn't freak us out. There has always been a conflict between our God and His enemy and our God has always been victorious.

From Elijah's victorious showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, to Jesus rolling up His sleeves and going toe-to-toe with Satan in the desert, our God is bigger, stronger, and more powerful than anything that could ever stand against Him. A school club doesn't frighten Him and it shouldn't frighten us.

Instead, we must remember that God wants to use His followers to be salt and light in our world and in our circles of influence. We must confidently walk with Him and see a club

like this not as our enemy but as our mission field.

I truly doubt that After School Satan Clubs will show up in schools across the country. Everyone needs to relax. But if they do show up in your child's school, it presents a great opportunity to remind your kids that there are always two ways they can go: on the wide or the narrow path, on the way that leads to life or that leads to self.

We tend to insulate our kids from these two diverging paths. Many of them don't fully realize the difference until they are older teenagers or in college. Sadly, many of them aren't prepared for the choice and settle for what the world has to offer once they gain a little independence. We haven't had the chance to train them.

Ultimately, **the bad news** is that our kids will struggle with the choice between God's way and the world's way all their lives. **The good news** about these clubs is that they might give parents the opportunity to start preparing them for that choice much earlier. They might also give our kids the opportunity to see God show up and be real, powerful and victorious in their schools and in the lives of their friends. And that might not be a bad thing after all.

In fact, it might be exactly what they need.

I know that not everyone is going to agree with me on this. What do you think?

Adapted from , a ministry founded by Barrett and Jenifer Johnson. After serving in the local church for 25 years, Barrett and Jenifer launched INFO for Families as a ministry designed to encourage people through speaking, personal coaching and resource development. Barrett served for 15 years in youth ministry before serving for 8 years as the Family Minister at Johnson Ferry Baptist Church in Atlanta, one of the largest churches in the South. He has degrees from Texas

A&M University and Southwestern Seminary, but he and Jenifer have received their best education through the no-holds-barred nature of everyday family life.

How God Set One Woman Free From Selfishness

In the department store yesterday, I ran into an acquaintance, and we had a long chat—the kind you can have in the summer when you're not in a hurry to go anywhere. She told me about a man who had been an alcoholic for years. The Lord had burdened her heart to help him, and she had been doing so for a long time. Her eyes lit up, as she told me the amazing things God had been doing in his life, like removing the desire for alcohol and making him a sober man in this last year.

“That is a miracle of God,” I said.

“Yes, it is!” she said.

Now let me tell you about another miracle. There was this woman who, for years, had only thought about herself and her own comfort. But yesterday she picked up her husband from work. It was the middle of the afternoon, and she was very hot. He got in the car and turned off the air conditioning. She said nothing.

She didn't even reach for the AC, to turn it back on.

That is a miracle of God.

This same woman is also really enjoying *Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis, and he says:

The real Son of God is at your side. He is beginning to turn you into the same kind of thing as Himself.

A real Person, Christ, here and now, in that very room where you are saying your prayers, is doing things to you ... interfering with your very self; killing the old natural self in you and replacing it with the kind of self He has.

To think about Matt's comfort in the truck instead of my own was a very great and welcome interference with my self. A miracle of change.

But we all, seeing the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18 MEV)

My question for you today is: Are you letting Christ do things to you? Are you cooperating and putting your legs into the transformation on your end of things?

Because we have hope, you know. In Christ, we are being transformed into His image. Just ask the former alcoholic or the woman who kept her hands off the AC.

How This Stronghold Can Sabotage Your Weight-Loss Efforts

It comes in all shapes and sizes. It's hidden in small incidents that trigger flashbacks. It grabs hold of you and

doesn't seem to want to let go. It stymies any healthy living journey. It's the main tool Satan uses to take you out of the game of life. It's called fear.

Fear Leads to Destruction

I know all about fear. The evil one used it to keep me in line, headed on the path to total destruction. At 430 pounds that's exactly where I was destined.

I could lose weight pretty easily. The problem was I would put it back on plus more. I'm an educated person with a bachelor's and a master's degree. I felt I should have been able to figure out how to do this. Try as I might, I couldn't get a handle on it.

Fear gripped me when I passed the 300-pound mark. After losing 100 pounds, I once again celebrated with Mamaw's oatmeal cake and put back on the weight plus about 25 more pounds.

It was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back, meaning it was the last action in a long line of cumulative actions. I wanted to break this lose-gain roller coaster because I was afraid of the results of gaining even more weight.

Doing Nothing

It was this fear that drove me to decide to do "nothing". Everything I did seemed to backfire on me, so I decided doing nothing was better than failing. With this definition I continued to gain weight.

Fear is just false evidence appearing real. The evil one is good at making us believe the "evidence" is a solid reason to just give up and surrender to the fear. I didn't have a fear of gaining weight because in some way I felt the weight protected me from men like the one who molested me when I was 11.

For years I muddled through until my fears seemed to come true. What we dwell on, think about and turn over and over in our minds will come true whether that be fears or dreams. It's just one of the reasons we should guard our thoughts.

Fears Become Realities

When I reached 430 pounds and had to be hospitalized with congestive heart failure, a rude cardiac surgeon told me that I needed to lose at least 100 pounds and keep it off or I'd be dead in five years.

This jump-started my desire to find a solution. You can read all about how I began to be a loser in *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds*. Suffice it to say, I had to take a risky step of faith.

I had to overcome my fear of doing the wrong thing. For years I wouldn't even weigh when I went to the doctor's office. I didn't have a scale at home that went high enough to weigh me plus I just didn't want to know the truth.

I will admit that I was even afraid of the scale. I wanted to smash it to smithereens because surely it was against me. Getting over that fear was one of the first steps. I began to see the scale as a tool to help me determine if how I was eating and moving was helping me or not.

If the scale showed a weight gain that said to me that I needed to adjust something. If it showed a loss, I noted what I had done differently the day before or the day before that. I didn't let it intimidate me or rule my life. It's nothing more than a piece of machinery which gives me information I can use to help me on my journey.

Just Do It

I joined a weight loss group called "Just do it". Following this motto helped break my "do-nothing-and-no-harm-will-come-

to-me" philosophy. I began doing something about my problem, taking small steps towards my goal.

I learned to take steps that would change my habits for good. I changed my mindset from dieting to creating lasting lifestyle changes. Each thing I incorporated I realized this is for the rest of my life, not just until I get to a goal weight. I'm cooperating with God to transform my entire life—body, soul and spirit.

I surrendered my ability or inability to do figure out how to do this weight loss journey. on His altar. I told Him I was weak and that I would do things His way. My watchword became what God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."¹

Shattering Fears

When I allowed God to direct me on this journey, things began to change. There is so much more to my story, but the truth is nothing happened until I took a step towards changing my life from the inside out.²

Fear began to shatter when I came out of my self-imposed exile and submitted totally to God in this process.

I realized God only directs moving targets. Sitting and trying to decide what to do doesn't work. I have to be trying things, throwing out what doesn't work and keeping what does.

When I do that, God is right beside me telling me, "No, this is the way, walk here."³ He directs me when I stray off His path. When I'm listening for His still, small voice, I will never go wrong and if I do, I get right back on the path He has for me.

Yes, the evil one will try to convince me I need to do nothing again, but it's difficult for him to do when I'm moving

forward. Forward motion dispels fear every time. Forward motion delights God to no end. Forward motion is the only way God can direct us on this path.

What is one step you can take today to move you forward?

¹ 2 Corinthians 12:9

² Romans 12:1-2

³ Isaiah 30:21

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

4 Ways You Can War Spiritually for Our Nation

If the foundations are broken, what can the righteous do? (Ps. 11:3, MEV)

It's been said that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. The encroaching evil in our land is almost breathtaking. Heart-stopping. As it pours into every nook and cranny of our culture, it is also going to be life-altering and life-shattering.

As I've read reports of shootings in Louisiana and Minnesota ... as I've shared the agony of a nation that is reeling from the cold-blooded, deliberate, pre-planned murder of police officers ... as I've watched the eruption of anarchy in the streets ... as I've wept with grief almost deeper than words but expressed by a silent scream in my heart ... I've asked the Lord: *What are we to do? Is there anything ordinary, good people can do?* As I waited in prayer, four things came to my mind:

First, we can **pray**. Paul challenges us in Ephesians 6:18 (NIV): *With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying...* It's time for you and me to establish a set-aside time of consistent, daily prayer.

Secondly, we need to **pick up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God**, according to Ephesians 6:17 (MEV). This is a time to daily, consistently spend time in God's Word, strengthening the foundation of our faith as we listen to what God has to say. But don't just read it. Apply it. Obey it. Live it out.

Thirdly, 2 Timothy 2:22-24 instructs us: **pursue righteousness...** pursue the right thing, not necessarily the popular or the politically correct thing. Stand up for justice, truth, kindness and our own example.

Fourthly, **proclaim** Jesus. He explains in John 10:10: *The thief does not come, except to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* Be ready at a moment's notice to share the Gospel and give a reason for the hope that is within you.

Please. Don't do nothing. Do something! Pray. Pick up your sword. Pursue righteousness. And proclaim Jesus until He comes.

Anne Graham Lotz, founder of AnGeL ministries, has proclaimed God's Word worldwide for more than 30 years. Her newest book,

The Lie I Believed When I Was 430 Pounds

"I'm not an emotional eater," I adamantly stated. It was a lie I believed with my whole heart, even when I weighed 430 pounds, even when I could lose 100 pounds and put 125 back on in the blink of an eye. I didn't believe I was an emotional eater because I didn't sit around moping and eating bon-bons.

Truth is really hard to take sometimes. Understanding that emotional eating was one of the main roots of my addictions was difficult, actually nearly impossible, for me to admit.

Emotions Out of Control

When I was growing up, my mother was ... emotional, so much so that she had an emotional illness. Doctors gave it numerous names, but all I knew was she had high highs and low lows. This continued until I was 19 and God touched her and set her on a course of healing.

I didn't want my emotions to be out of control. I wanted no part of the emotional roller coaster I observed as I was growing up. More than that, I didn't want my children to observe me having those emotional highs and lows.

Can Food Manage Emotions?

Somewhere along the way I figured out eating high carbohydrate content foods would calm my emotions, at least for a short time. Of course, then I'd crash and need more sugary or bready treats to get that same effect the next time. It became an

endless cycle in my life.

Although I was very aware that being super morbidly obese was shortening my life, I didn't want to live life acting like what I thought a crazy person acted like. The only way I knew to fix this was to eat and continue eating. That's what I did for years. Ask me if I was an emotional eater and I would look at you with fire in my eyes and vehemently deny it.

Like almost every obese person I know, I tried every diet in the book and they all worked until I faced another emotional challenge. Then I'd go back to what I thought was the only thing that "worked" for me.

The Hardest Step

At the end of my very long rope, I went to a harmful life patterns group, which included those with weight issues and other addictions. One of the things we did was begin to discuss the famous 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. I was good with steps one and three, but step two stopped me.

It says, "I came to believe that a Power greater than myself could restore me to sanity." It was that word "insanity" that I balked at. See, I could admit step one, which says essentially that "I am powerless over food and that my life was unmanageable." That was a solid truth.

Step three was also easy for me. "I make a decision to turn my life and will over to the care of God as I understand Him." Step two, though, involved admitting that what I was doing with food was insane. My intent with eating large amounts of carbohydrate-laden foods was to keep myself from being insane.

Why Do We Have Emotions?

Realizing that what I was doing was insane threw me for a loop. However, eating because I was overwhelmed, angry, frustrated, lonely, tired, depressed, sad, think I am hungry

but I'm not, afraid, bored, need energy, feel rejected, feel ugly and unwanted, or even because I was happy and wanted to celebrate or reward myself was not a good way to handle my emotions.

God gave us emotions for a reason. Emotions help us enjoy life, but they also warn us. To ignore our emotions is to not live life to its fullest. Sadness is part of life. We don't like being sad, but sometimes loving full-out brings sadness. We learn to feel it, embrace it and allow it to cleanse our life. Being angry may help us right a wrong. It may point out to us an area we need to be careful with and submit to God.

Think about what life would be like to never feel the exhilaration of joy and to empathize with another over the hurts and pains that come with life. I was most definitely insane in using a substance to try to control my emotions.

What Is Emotional Eating?

Emotional eating is turning to food for comfort, stress relief or as a reward, rather than to satisfy hunger. With that definition I realized I was for sure an emotional eater and that is just plain crazy.

Food will not help me control my emotions. If anything it only escalates the fear and anxiety that go with watching the scale climb even higher. There are, though, things we can do to control our emotions besides eating.

In the next few weeks and months I will be developing a program to help those who suffer from this issue. I'll share some of things that have helped me as I begin to face my emotions head on.

Emotional Eating Survey

Right now, though, I need to know how this affects you and what kind of assistance would help you most. Would you take a

few minutes to fill out this survey? When I've gathered enough answers, I'll share the results with you. Just go to this link:

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