

The Surprising Reason Most Christians Don't Experience God's Restorative Power

Picture a sheep against a dark background, looking at you from a page in the *National Geographic*. He has been sheered down one side, from nose to tail, in an attempt to show a season of wool growth. But the photographers went through several sheep, before they could find one that could stand up long enough to have its picture taken. Seems that removing half their wool made them a little tipsy.

Ah, just how I have felt this last week, I thought. Half sheered and lopsided.

"Makes sense," I told mom. "I published two books this spring and finished another year of school. Wouldn't any person feel a little lost after that kind of intense activity has come to an end?" She thought yes—that made perfect sense.

Now the email is so quiet. No new messages comes up quickly. No notes from the editor. No tasks from the project manager. No papers to sign for the bookkeeper.

So quiet.

11:00 comes, and there's no need to pack a lunch for school. No students to knit my brow over. No lesson plans to create.

There are sometimes spaces in our lives that seem empty and silent. Things grind to a halt for one reason or another. —Elisabeth Elliot, Secure in the Everlasting Arms

The guys were gone fishing all day yesterday, and what was a girl to do? I felt the empty space and kept walking over to the cookie jar to make myself feel better, but then I thought,

“No, go to Jesus. Take your own advice, girl. Go to Jesus.” I avoided the TV and Facebook and sleeping.

I went and sat on the front porch for a time. Smelled the fresh-cut grass and listened to the birds. I prayed and listened.

For this season, there are words from a shepherd—a man who knows a sheep might fall over if you shear half its wool off:

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

he restores my soul.

Psalm 23:2-3a

There were times in the middle of book publishing and school when I sighed and told Matt, “I’m so tired.” Tired of giving, maybe? Tired of being vulnerable in front of people. Tired of lying awake at night, worrying about every name and face in my classroom.

So now the Lord has brought me next to quiet waters, but I don’t do quiet very well. I’m not a sip-lemonade-in-the-sun kind of girl. I need a task in hand or maybe go crazy with boredom.

I suppose, though, that to have your soul restored you have to be still for a time, just still.

How do you respond when activity grinds to a halt?

The Key to Staying Filled With the Spirit

I bent over to fill the red, plastic gas container at the filling station so I could go home and mow the lawn. While the numbers clicked up on the pump, I killed time by reading the instructions on the handle of the hose.

“Why aren’t these in English and Spanish,” I thought, annoyed at the lack of opportunity to practice reading Spanish. Then I noticed one of the instructions said, “Do not top off.” Ha.

Dad always topped off.

Whenever we left his house, the “gas fairy” (Dad’s self-chosen monicker) would come and fill our tank and then tap, tap, tap the gas handle until there was enough gas to get us an hour farther down the road than we should have been able to go.

I thought about Jesus’ declaration that I had read that morning:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me shall never hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst.

My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

(John 6:35 and 6:32b, MEV)

Something to know about God:

He is a Father who tops off.

God fills his people, by way of His Son—tap, tap, tap—completely full.

One thing I am learning to recognize is the empty, soul-hungry feeling I have inside of me at all times, and that if I come

to Jesus, He will fill me.

“He who comes to Me...” Jesus says. But coming is hard. Cookies and remote controls and scrolling Facebook are easier. Coming to Jesus takes work. It requires denial of quick fixes and an effort to pray, to read the Bible, and to wait for the filling.

In Oregon, you know, you legally have to stay in your car and allow a service station person to fill your tank. You just sit there and wait while someone else does the filling.

You just sit there while the gas fairy brings the needle from “E” to “F”.

“He who comes to me...” Jesus says.

Don't stay empty.

Prosperity Has Been Perverted, Here's How God Sees It

The American Dream—family, home in the suburbs, two cars, a good job—requires money and lots of it. Secretly we all hope when the Bible tells us we will prosper and be in good health even as our soul prospers (3 John 1:2), it means we are going to be rich. Truth is, America is one of the wealthiest nations, but are we really prosperous?

What is Prosperity?

What is prosperity? Does it just mean financial success and

wealth? What does it mean for my soul to prosper? I know God's says that He has plans for me to prosper and not come to disaster (Jer. 29:11). So, does that include money and if it does, am I ready for it? Are you?

The standard dictionary definition of prosperity would lead me to believe it only means being successful financially. In the Hebrew and Greek, prosperous means to have success, more generally as in all areas of my life. In the Aramaic it means to advance.

To be successful in God's kingdom, I must be perpetually advancing in every way, not just collecting a lot of money and sitting on it or squandering it. Money can be used for worthy purposes, but only if I have the rest of my life in order first. Otherwise, it will mean sure disaster.

Prosperous Soul

To be prosperous, I must advance in every area—body, soul and spirit. If my soul, which is my mind, will and emotions, is continuing to advance along with my spirit, I will then advance in other areas, namely a healthy body.

Healthy in mind means having a healthy thought life. Healthy in emotions means not allowing emotions to control me, but understanding their purpose. Healthy in will means to have my primary goal in mind and always asserting my will to be in line with that goal.

The way things are supposed to work is my thoughts control my emotions, which then control my behaviors. Many times, especially when I was battling sugar addiction and my weight was climbing skyward, I found my emotions dictated my thoughts, which then resulted in my behaviors acting totally contrary to my primary desire to be healthy.

The good I wanted to do, I didn't do and the things I didn't want to do, I did (Rom. 7:19). Even when I understood this, it

was hard to bring my emotions in line. When I was able to somewhat control my emotions, then my thoughts would run helter-skelter and throw me off course once again.

Keys to Soul Health

During this conundrum, I learned several key things. 1. I don't have to follow every suggestion my mind throws at me. 2. Emotions have deep roots in my past, which I can with God's help understand and process. 3. I need to guide my will by keeping what I really want to happen at the forefront of my mind.

When I understand these things, my soul will advance and will continue to come into line with what God wants for me. I won't stay stuck in the muck and mire of my past. Through forgiveness of various past scenarios and hurts, I can move forward to the well-being, success and destiny God has planned for me.

Kingdom Success

Another big key, though, is understanding how God measures success. To Him success is when I totally surrender to Him and deny myself (Luke 9:23), which means to focus on Him and not on my fleshly wants and desires.

"Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be very glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in this manner they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12, MEV).

This is true Kingdom success. This is the way I advance in the Kingdom. It's total submission to what God wants for me, trusting Him for the ultimate success. If that is finances, then I need to learn how to submit totally to Him and advance in every other area so that I will be able to correctly handle such an assignment.

Spirit Health

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20, MEV)

My spirit’s health is directly related to how much I allow the Holy Spirit to do His deep work within me. If I am listening to Him, if I am following Him intently, every area of my life will exude His prosperity.

My success in His kingdom is totally related to how well I truly do only the good works He has planned in advance for me to do. Those might be as simple as hanging clothes out on the line, home-schooling my kids or being involved in their education in some way, cooking a healthy dinner for my family, really taking time to love and appreciate my husband, teaching children’s church for 3-year-olds, or taking time to encourage a friend.

These can be some of the good works He has called me to do. When I do even what seem like the simple things, I am His masterpiece, His handiwork, His work of art, His poetry, His workmanship (Eph. 2:10).

Nothing would provide true prosperity for me more than that.

Emotions sometimes feel like a bondage, a weight we drag everywhere with us. They dictate what we will and won’t do. In my new book *Sweet Freedom, Losing Weight and Keeping It Off With God’s Help*, I talk about how to work through these strongholds which keep us bound in addictive patterns. It only happens with His help. *Sweet Freedom* and *Sweet Freedom Study Guide* are available on Amazon. Simply click on the titles to take you there.

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.*

How to Pray When Life Doesn't Make Sense

What do you do when life doesn't make sense? Where do you turn when the pain is overwhelming? There is an answer to life's hurt. Get down on your knees and pray to God. There is strength in prayer during turmoil.

God's instructions are found in 2 Chronicles 7:14, "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Let's examine this verse for further insight.

1. Are you called by God's name? God loves all people, but that doesn't automatically make us a member of His family. Jesus speaks plainly in John 3:3 when He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." How do we become born again, or members of His family? Romans 10:9-10 tells us how: "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved, for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." If you are not yet a member of God's family, then it is time to confess with your mouth that you believe in your heart that Jesus is risen from

the dead.

2. Let's talk about humbling ourselves. Proverbs 22:4 tells us, "Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life." In order to be humble, we must first recognize who He is, and His ultimate supremacy over all. We must willingly take on this attitude from John 3:30, "He must become greater; I must become less."


3. God's people are to pray. In fact, we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). And we are to be "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

4. We are to seek His face. We are to do as Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near." And as Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

5. Turn from our wickedness. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul tells us, "Examine yourselves, seeing whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not know that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified." After we examine ourselves, then we are given these words to live by: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). And there are promises of spiritual benefits that come from repentance. It says in Acts 3:19, "Therefore repent and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."

And if we will do these things, His promise to us is that He will hear our prayers, forgive our sins and heal our land. Come on, people of God. It's time to pray. {eoa}

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5 Ways to Get the Prayer Answers You Need

For many, prayer is one of the most illusive of Christian disciplines.

And the idea of praying effectively almost seems unattainable as many Christians fall into one of the following prayer traps:

- Praying a to-do list to God
- Praying mystical prayers
- Praying rote prayers

And yet the Scriptures say that you can pray effective prayers! “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much” (James 5:16, MEV).

There is a way we can approach our prayer time that takes us beyond a “to-do list” prayer—prayers that start with item #1 on our prayer list, continues down the list until we’re done and then “Amen”. “To-do list” prayers never leave room for exalting God, never leave room for God to share *His* heart.

Effective prayer leaves no room for mystical or rote prayers, approaching prayer as this magical formula or this “spiritual zone” that we somehow enter that gives us supernatural power. Prayer isn’t like that.

Christianity has no “spiritual zones” to be entered. Christianity is a lifestyle to be lived and upon salvation we

receive the Holy Spirit who abides in us, giving us *His* power to do all things. There is nothing mystical about it at all. We're an empty vessel that has been filled and enabled to be used for a mighty task.

It's as simple as that!

Prayer is a conversation—a conversation that builds relationship. And when we approach prayer from that perspective, we've already begun to shift our understanding of prayer from a "Santa's Wish List" style of praying, or a mystical magic formula, to effective Biblical praying that avails much.

This relationship we daily build through quality time in prayer is what builds our faith to believe Jesus' words that if we ask anything in His name, He will do it that the Father will be glorified. As we daily share our heart with Him and allow Him to daily share His heart with us, we build an understanding of what His will is and what His desire is, and we're able to pray according to His will and desire.

Through that relationship, our heart begins to break for the things that break His heart. Our heart rejoices over the things that cause Him to rejoice.

Here are five ways we can begin to pray effective prayers:

1. Start small. Don't start the first day with a goal to pray for an hour. Many people believe that praying one hour a day is biblical because Jesus questioned why His disciples couldn't watch and pray with Him for one hour.

There is nothing biblical about praying for one hour, just as it is not somehow a disappointment to God if you only pray for 15 minutes. There are some who can accomplish more through a ten minute prayer than those who drone on and on for a solid hour.

Start small by setting a five minute goal and then slowly increase your prayer time in small increments.

2. Keep a prayer list. Keep a list of needs you have and people you are praying for. While prayer time shouldn't just be an opportunity for us to shoot God a "to-do list", He does want us to take the time to share our needs with Him. James says that we have not because we ask not.

Ask Him for what you need. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Having a prayer list is a great way to organize those prayer needs we have and track others' needs we've promised to pray for.

3. Take time to listen. One of the things many Christians fail to do in their prayer time is pause and listen for God's voice. Yes, He speaks through His Word, but He also speaks through prayer.

So many times we launch into prayer with "Dear God" and don't stop speaking until "Amen", leaving God with no opportunity to speak at all. And chances are He had something to share.

"My sheep hear My voice" is only true if we take time to listen. Begin by taking small blocks of time to sit in silence and listen for God's voice.

4. Pray Scripture. Praying scripture is a powerful tool that not only helps us pray the promises of God, but also helps to center our heart and mind on God's Word.

Praying prayers such as, "God, Your Word says that no weapon formed against me shall prosper and every tongue which rises against me in judgement I shall condemn. You said that this is my heritage from You and that my righteousness comes from You. Now I pray that the weapon the enemy has formed against me will not prosper! Not only that, may that weapon be for his

destruction!”

As we pray scripture, we begin to gain a greater understanding of what the Bible says. In a sense, it’s a form of meditating on God’s Word, something we will examine in a few weeks.

5. Write down your prayers. Writing prayers to God is a very intimate form of praying. Because writing is a much slower form of communication than speaking, we tend to be more thoughtful about what we pray. For many, it also enables them to share more deeply and intimately than they would by simply speaking their prayers.

Using a prayer journal in which you daily write out your prayers can be a very effective form of relationship-building in prayer.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray what we call the Lord’s Prayer. I actually believe that this is a misnomer, because it’s not really the Lord’s prayer, it is the disciple’s prayer—it is our prayer.

He never meant it to be an actual prayer to be prayed, but a formula to follow. It is the formula I choose to follow in my own daily prayer life.

I share about that in the journal/workbook I created called *Pray Through the Lord’s Prayer*. It uses some of these tips I shared with you today, and I have found it to be very effective in my own prayer life.

By implementing these five tips, you will quickly see that prayer is not an illusive discipline. It can be far more than sending him a to-do list, and it has nothing to do with being mystical or praying rote prayers.

As you daily spend time with God sharing your heart and listening to His heart, you will see your relationship with Him grow and deepen each day.

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her Bosnian hero. Together they live with their two active boys where she enjoys fruity candles, good coffee and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. Her passion for writing led her to author her best-selling book The Missional Handbook. At A Little R & R she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. You can also find her at Missional Call where she shares her passion for local and global missions. You can follow her on Facebook, Pinterest and Google +.

Are These Excuses Making You Miserable?

I don't have time to cook healthy. I don't have time to go to a health food store and the regular grocery store. I don't have time to exercise. I don't have time to join another group in order to get healthy. I don't even have time to sleep, much less do all that other stuff. I'm busy trying to make my life full of God's abundance.

Too Busy

It just feels like every minute of my day is jam packed full doing what God wants. It stresses me out to think of adding one more "to do" to my list.

Do you ever feel this way? I certainly did. I was trying to do everything I thought a good Christian should do. As a wife,

mom, foster mom, work-at-home business owner, church member, small group leader, volunteer and member of numerous boards for Christian organizations, there was literally no time left for anything else.

I was too busy and all it did was make me feel empty.

Until...

One day, it hit me. If I don't do something about my health, I will for sure have no time left. Period. End of story.

There were many good things I was doing, but I saw clearly that I was not doing anything well or anything out of the proper motive. If someone asked me to be on a board of directors, I'd say yes, just to make them happy.

I didn't stop to ask God if it was my assignment. I just jumped in to add another activity to my list.

Earning His Smile

There was no reason to ask Him because I thought He wanted me to do everything. I thought that was the way to earn His smile.

If one looked at my life they would see my behaviors were screaming, "I'm earning my way to heaven by my good works." Of course, God tells us heaven is not earned. It's a free gift we receive and nothing we can do will ever be enough for us to earn a ticket there (Eph. 2:8-9).

I saw the disconnect in my behaviors and my stated core belief about who God is.

Three Things

So I began asking Him, "What is the most important thing for me to do right now?"

I heard three things. These three have become the guide to how

I live my life today. If it doesn't fit into one of these categories, I don't do it. Just three things, but these three changed my life.

1. Be whole. As a triune being, I am a body, soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). My soul is comprised of my mind, will and emotions. In order to be whole, every part of me must be brought into union. I knew I had a lot of work to do in this area.
2. Be healthy. Every part of me needed a health transformation (Rom. 12:1-2). Although at the time my body seemed the most unhealthy, as I began reworking my priorities I learned I was unhealthy in most every other way as well.
3. Be happy or filled with joy (Ps. 30:11). I had to admit I was not happy. I was very unhappy. Everything I was doing was designed to "earn" God's smile on my life. I didn't realize I already had His smile. He already approved of me even though I felt like a giant pile of manure.

Evaluating My Life

The real work began when I started evaluating everything I was doing in my life in terms of these three overriding priorities. I began slashing my to-do list. Board memberships, volunteer positions and unnecessary busy work went out the window.

I slashed everything off my agenda. I only added it back in if it fit in one of the three priority areas. I filled my days with exercise, learning to eat healthy, getting help from holistic doctors, going to a fitness trainer and attending a group designed to coach me on my wellness journey.

Watching television was replaced with a love and a calling I had shelved. Yes, writing became a primary focus, as well as

spending quality time with Jesus. In the joy area, I began focusing on my primary relationships, starting first with my husband and children.

Rewards

My stress-level immediately began to lower. I lost weight, but more than anything God began feeding me from His Word. There, I discovered His motivation for living life to the fullest. I found there is no end to His abundance (John 10:10).

It's like the story of the widow filling the jars with oil (2 Kings 4:1-7). As long as she had containers, the oil continued to flow and fill them to their brims.

As long as I am on this earth, as long as I am available to Him, as long as I am seeking Him, His oil will continually flow into me. First and foremost, though, I have to be here.

I've learned a real and abiding truth. As from God's abundance I daily take, the great mystery of God reveals that His abundance forever and always still remains.

Need a group to help you on your health journey? I have two. Check them both out. Get on the wait list for the next session of my entry-level group #KickWeight. Or join the ongoing group, Sweet Change Weight Loss Coaching Group. I coach both groups. I understand where you are. Believe me when I say, I've been there. Click on the titles for more information on starting your transformation journey. {eoa}

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When the Devil Convinces Your Mind You're Going to Fail

We were looking at one week with my brother-in-law, and I knew going in that it was going to test me in all of my weakest areas. So I'll confess that the week before, I re-enacted Chernobyl for my husband.

"This is going to be one big fail," I cried.

Because there would be a puppy, and I'm kind of afraid of dogs. There would be three little kids, and I'm not all that graceful with little kids. There would be meals to cook, and I'm not that disciplined at making meals. And there would be a different bed, and I am such an introverted home body.

But my sister-in-law had earned a trip to Guatemala through her Noonday business, and it was a once-in-a-lifetime trip. And those tickets were purchased the month before my brother-in-law was hit by a drunk driver and ended up with his driving leg in a boot for three months.

So I wanted to help, with all my heart, so that she could still take that trip. But it meant facing all those places where I feel like a regular failure, failure, failure.

Failure.

Now here I am on the other side of that great adventure, and you won't believe what my Bible reading was on the first morning back in my own home.

In John 6, we read that the disciples crossed a lake, and they rowed out about three miles or so. A strong wind was roughing up the waters. At this time, Jesus approached, walking to them

on the water. He told them not to be afraid.

“Then they gladly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going” (John 6:21).

Immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading?

That is a super cool story that reveals the depth of Jesus' power, but it is a unique event. Skipping the wind and the rowing and the choppy waters—and getting us right where we want to go? That is what Jesus can do for us, but it is not His *modus operandi*.

I know this because I just spent a whole week where I needed to feed three little kids (although my mother-in-law and Panda Express helped out a *lot*). I accidentally let the puppy escape and had to chase him down twice. As for handling the kids, one morning I had to apologize to Zane, because I had been crabby and snapped at him about something ridiculous the night before. He was kind enough to forgive me, but it was no instant boat transport to peaceful shores.

But I think I had a few shiny moments of growing while rowing. (I don't know—rhyming?)

I petted the dog several times. (He is cute, with the whole floppy ear thing.) I celebrated a lost tooth and let the boys get in my car through the trunk pass-through. I spent eight nights away from home and did not die. I even made two meals, which seemed like two meals more than I was capable of. (Yeah, I really need to grow in the cooking thing. I'm working on it.) It was a special week, and I'm so glad I did it.

Let's not ask my brother-in-law if he's glad.

Now let's bring all of this to you and whatever challenges stand in front of you right now—maybe things you know you need

to do and want to do but are afraid you'll fail.

There's a strong wind. A boat. Oars. Miles to go before you reach the other shore. Sorry, but Jesus probably isn't going to just immediately get you to the other side. He could, but He probably won't.

It's going to be worth being brave, though. It's going to be worth the struggle and the muscle work to keep moving forward, to do the meaningful activities you really want to do. So keep reaching forward and pulling back on those oars.

Stroke.

Stroke.

Stroke.

3 Keys to Turn Dread on Its Head

Have you ever faced a situation in which dread nearly shut you down? It might have been a looming tough decision, an unpleasant confrontation, or some obligation totally outside of your comfort zone. It could be that you were faced with something you hated to do or for which the passion to do had left you. If you have faced such a situation, you have probably encountered the terrible feeling of dread.

It is so important to identify the onset of dread in its earliest stage. Not only does dread bring on extraordinary physical discomfort, but it also kills momentum, robs you of your joy and blocks productivity and progress. Dread is not your friend. To keep from being paralyzed by dread and

maximize your momentum, you must recognize the dread factor at its onset and deal with it firmly.

Recognize it as a common reaction. You may feel unique, but you are not alone. You are no worse than anyone else simply because you feel it. Even though it is common, you don't have to become a victim of it.

Recognize that dread begins with either an external groan or internal groan, or it could even begin with both. Identify it at its early stages and deal with it quickly.

Recognize that dread is an entry point for fear. Fear, left unchecked, paralyzes; you will lose productivity and momentum. Dread steals resources from you; it robs you of your good feeling, it will rob you of dollars you could have earned, and productivity declines, never to be recovered. It is extremely difficult to think clearly or to be creative when under the influence of dread. You cannot afford dread on the bottom line for your business—what you do in the next hour or the next time dread comes knocking will impact how much money is added to your business bank account.

The next time dread knocks on the door of your day, try these three steps:

- Recognize the opportunity. You don't have to spin out of control. You can decide whether to be dread's victim or to be a victor over it. Once you decide not to agree with the dread, voice that decision aloud. Do not allow your voice in any way to agree with dread. Instead of proclaiming fear and loss, proclaim productivity and gain.
- Redirect your energy into productive activity. Just like a star basketball player, pivot from the block of fear and dread to focus; move from distraction to productivity. Choose and take actions that agree with your proclamation of productivity.

- Maximize your momentum in the right direction. Dread is the fork in the road at which you must choose wisely. Do so and you will maximize your momentum in the right direction and dread will not be allowed to derail you.

This is for you today! Are you going to apply these simple principles for yourself to gain momentum forward? Great leaders are often faced with dread and discouragement. Daily they must decide to conquer rather than to be conquered. Join the ranks of great leaders today and decide not to fall prey to the profit drain of dread.

Job identified the normal outcome of dread and its power as a self-fulfilling prophecy:

“For the thing which I greatly feared has happened to me, and that which I dreaded has come to me” (Job 3:25).

Dread and fear are real. You still have difficult people and situations in your life. This can't be ignored. The power you have is to refuse to let the added weight of dread and fear to take root in your spirit and rob you of momentum when these situations arise. Deal with dread powerfully and, as I have witnessed many times, you will gain momentum.

Here is a simple example from my experience of dealing with a difficult situation that had the potential for derailing my momentum. Recently I had to have an interesting discussion over a marketing issue that had the potential to be somewhat awkward. To avoid losing momentum to dread, I followed the advice I am giving to you.

As I felt dread rise in me, I immediately reframed the issue. Instead of framing it as a confrontation to avoid, I framed it as a productive conversation from which momentum was to be gained. I did all of this in a short three-minute conversation.

First, I took a moment and identified with the other

individual in her own struggles. I acknowledged the magnitude of the job she had to do. I expressed confidence in the things I had observed where she did a good job.

Then, I expressed a common need for both us: the need to serve our customers well. I planted the seed of a suggestion or two for her to think through over the next week. To follow that up I said, "I'd love to know how I can help you serve our customers better. Think about it. Let's do coffee in a week and figure this out."

What at first was a defensive posture turned into a smile and agreement. Instead of giving dread the opportunity to put the breaks on our momentum, together, we found a productive way forward.

At times of dread and fear, we are not left on our own. The psalmist reminds us we can turn to the Lord at times of fear.

"I sought the Lord, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears" (Ps. 34:4).

Paul encourages to take on a thought transplant: to replace thoughts of dread and fear with:

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

The way you use your mind will determine your productivity. You can receive incredible results with these simple steps. Turn the momentum of the dread into productivity. Seek to understand before being understood.

How are you going to confront dread the next time it knocks on your door?

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4 Keys to Finding Supernatural Peace

Jesus' words are clear, *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33, NASB). He speaks this way so that we can prepare for difficult times that will come to all of us.

Now, let's be clear on one thing, God isn't the author of difficult times, but because we live in a fallen world He gives us spiritual advice on how to overcome when we pass through these challenges.

First of all, He says, *"In Me you may have peace."* And again in John 14:27 He reassures us with these words, *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* Jesus offers us peace that is not of this world, in fact it is found outside of this world. It is found within the bounds of an intimate relationship with Him.

How can you enter into this peace with Him?

1. The first step to having this peace is to be born again. He says to Nicodemus in John 3:3, *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”* (KJV). This man was a ruler of the Jews, a man of the Pharisees. he was a highly respected individual in his community, yet something was missing in his life. A relationship with religion cannot bring true joy or peace, this can only come from intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ. Without being born again you cannot find God, you cannot enter into His ways either. His way is peace. And you can't find His way through the world.
2. Be baptized with the Holy Spirit, pray in tongues so that we can edify, build up our spiritual being. See 1 Corinthians 14:4.
3. You can exchange your negative thoughts for His positive ones when you renew your mind with the Word of God. *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God”* (Rom. 12:2, NKJV).
4. Let's take this a step further, He tells us to be of good cheer and not to let our heart be troubled or full of fear. How can we accomplish this? The main way is to choose what we think about. He says in Philippians 4:8, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”*

When we honestly make an effort to do these things, He promises us in Philippians 4:9, *“The things which you learned*

and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

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How Christians Can Solve the Obesity Crisis

We are eating ourselves to death. Over 70 percent of Americans over age 20 are in the category of overweight, obese and beyond, according to the Associated Press.

It's an issue that has not left the church untouched. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised to find that Christians top the list. Yet, Christians have the answer right in their heart.

If something doesn't happen to turn the tide, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention projects 42 percent of adults will be obese by 2030. It reported 12 states currently have an adult obesity rate of over 30 percent. My state happens to be one of them.

Hard Facts

The hard facts should be sobering. They should make us stop and think about what we are doing to ourselves and what we are teaching our children. Statistics, though, can change. It starts by first changing our own relationship with food.

As one of the wealthy nations, food is readily available. Fast food is on every corner. Statistics say Americans eat out over

four times a week. Not only is that more expensive, but when we eat out, we don't know how the food is prepared or what has been added. In other words, we have little control over what we eat unless we ask questions before we order or check the meal on one of several fitness apps available.

What's in It?

When I began checking before ordering, I found abnormally high calorie content foods that should be healthy like a lean steak or grilled chicken breast. When I asked each was grilled with, the answer was a glaze or a sauce with high sugar content.

There is something in the food industry called the "bliss" factor. That's the point at which sugar can be added to a food making it taste better, but not so sweet that the average person can taste that it's there. It makes us want more without asking questions.

Sugar-Free Benefits

Since I've cut processed sugar and high-carbohydrate-content foods from my life, I can tell with the first bite I take of anything if sugar has been added. I wasn't mindful of it when I weighed 430 pounds and was guzzling sugar like water. My senses had definitely been dulled by years of enormous intake.

Today, though, I can tell. Without the added sugar or sauces, I can also taste the delicious flavor of real food. I have more energy, my mind is clearer and more focused, and I've lost over 260 pounds.

With the weight loss, my co-morbidities of high blood pressure, congestive heart failure and diabetes are a thing of the past. I am no longer afraid to get involved with people in a real way. I am willing to risk feeling my emotions instead of stuffing them with food.

I Give Up!

It all started when I gave up sugar. So how do we do that? There are a lot of answers running around out there. I've even got a free resource on my website to help you. However, the best answer is found in Paul's words.

"For the good I desire to do, I do not do, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who does it, but sin that lives in me. ... O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. ... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 7:19-20, 24-25; Rom. 8:2).

Jesus has the answer for us. It is found in His freedom. We want diets, plans and rules. Yet, in this passage, Jesus tells us plainly that the harsh taskmaster of the law doesn't work. We must get our marching orders straight from Him.

Personal Plan

Back in 1977 when I started gaining weight and cried out to Him about it, He impressed upon me, "Stop eating sugar. Eat more meat, fruits and vegetables and stop eating so much bread."

It took me 30 years to understand that when He said, "Stop," He meant "Stop." It's a plan I have embraced fully. It may not be your plan, but then again, it may be. You have to ask Him, "What do You want me to do to make sure my body is in good health?" (3 John 2).

The next step is probably the hardest. You have to do what He says (John 10:27). {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is a wife, mother, business owner, life group leader, speaker and author of *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor* and *Sweet Grace Study Guide: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Overcome*

Sugar Addiction and Sweet Freedom. Get a free chapter of her memoir on her blog at . Connect with her there or on her Facebook page or Twitter.