

When God's Presence Is Terrifying

"The man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God" (Gen. 3:8, NIV).

I would imagine that up until this point, whenever God would come into the garden, Adam and Eve would run to meet Him like excited children. But when they harbored unconfessed sin in their hearts, His coming was a dreaded event. The thought of His presence was terrifying.

Adam and Eve were overlooking the single greatest truth in the universe: God loved them! He loved them in their sin so much that He sought them out! He did not leave them quivering in fear, devastated by guilt and saturated in sin. He came. "But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9, NIV).

God knew exactly where Adam and Eve were. He was not calling them to get information but confession. He wanted them to confront what they had done so they could set it right and be restored in fellowship with Himself. And where are you? Instead of hiding from God, would you run to Him? Confess your sin and enjoy reconciliation with Him.

Anne Graham Lotz is the founder of AnGeL Ministries. She is also the author of several books.

Getting Past Your Sin

“‘You must not be dejected and sad!’ And the Levites, too, quieted the people, telling them, ‘That’s right! Don’t weep! For this is a day of holy joy, not of sadness.’ So the people went away to eat a festive meal and to send presents; it was a time of great and joyful celebration because they could hear and understand God’s words” (Neh. 8:10-12, TLB).

The Israelites had returned from 70 years of captivity. They had not heard the law read in many years. When Ezra read the Word of God and other priests interpreted it so the people understood, the effect was so great that the people began to weep over their sins. Confronted with God’s law, their own lawbreaking broke their hearts. But after allowing an appropriate time of mourning over sin, the leaders reminded the people to rejoice and celebrate.

“Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21, NKJV).

God shows us our sin so that we can be freed from it through his grace. His grace rules in our lives.

Are you caught in the awareness of your sin but unable to move on to the wonder of God’s grace? Do you have the notion that it is very spiritual to remain in constant grief over sin? Jesus died and rose again to set you free from your sin so you could enjoy His grace. Acknowledge sin, turn from it and move on. The joy of the Lord is your strength. Lord, I rejoice in the grace You have poured out in my life.

Grace meets the sinner on the spot where he stands; grace approaches him just as he is. Grace does not wait till there is something to attract it nor till a good reason is found in

the sinner for its flowing to him. . . . It was free, sovereign grace when it first thought of the sinner; it was free grace when it found and laid hold of him; and it is free grace when it hands him up into glory.

—Horatius Bonar (1808–1889), Scottish churchman and poet

Jennifer Kennedy Dean is Executive Director of The Praying Life Foundation and a respected author and speaker. She is the author of numerous books, studies and magazine articles specializing in prayer and spiritual formation. Visit her website for more information about her ministry.

Take a Break From the Battle

I found myself face down in the Land of Burnout and that admission led to the chance to get way from home for a night and think and breathe and, most importantly, *sleep*.

I woke up on Saturday morning nearly bursting with excitement about my upcoming adventure, but—as with any big attempt at escape—there were some serious obstacles between me and my front door.

Obstacle #1: It's a lot of work to leave. I made lists and lists for my family who would be caring for Steve. When and how to give meds. When and how to move him from bed to wheelchair to bathroom, etc. How to get through the night. So many lists. Having made the lists, I did a some cleaning and sheet-changing. It's just a lot of work to leave the house and Steve, when someone else is going to be stepping in to my spot (but I'm not complainin'—it was every bit worth it.)

Obstacle #2: This is the big one. The bad one. The one where I

thought for sure my survival getaway was teetering on the brink of disaster. My sewer flooded. Not even kidding. This has happened about a half dozen times in the past 13 years—so it's not a regular occurrence, but it is a wretched one. Think: raw sewage flooding the floor of my laundry room. My heart sank when I realized what had happened. I can ask people to do a lot of things for me, but I cannot ask them to clean up raw sewage. I don't feel I can even ask my kids to do that. It's just ... beyond. Beyond the boundaries of favor-asking. I'm not proud of the text I sent Whit, but I'm going to share it with you so you understand my mental state at the time:

My sewer just backed up again. No breaks. No breaks whatsoever in this dumb life.

Do you sense a little drama there? I assure you, I felt every inch of that despair. At the same moment of the sewer explosion, Steve had an urgent need and so I went to help him and I could not stop the tears. It was just the worst moment. And I know he felt every bit as bad as I did, but he had no words. He just shook his head sadly. I often forget how hard it would be to feel like you cannot help the people you love—especially for someone like Steve, who has always *lived* to help the people he loves. Truthfully, I don't actually forget; I just try to block those ideas from my mind because I can't even bear to think about all my husband is losing in this process. I went upstairs to change from get-out-of-town clothes into muck-out-the-laundry-room clothes, but Tori followed and sat me down and said this life-changing thing to me: "You need to leave. Right now. You need to grab your suitcase and get in your car and go. This is not your problem, it's OUR problem and we can solve it without you." I protested weakly and she put on her firmest voice and said, "Please don't take this wrong, but we are already losing one parent, we can't lose two. You need to leave and let us deal with this."

And I felt a flood of gratitude and relief so great I cannot

describe it with words. So I did it. I left. I left my disabled husband and children sitting in a house with fundamentally yucky problems and I got the heck out of Dodge. This would not have happened four years ago, or four months ago or even four weeks ago. Until I reached this level of desperation, I would have let the obstacles win. I would have said, "Not gonna work this weekend." I would have felt noble and strong. And I also would have secretly resented all the weight that fell on me and no one else. And that resentment would have led to ... oh, OK—I guess we're caught up now.

I drove to Sunriver in a literal and emotional fog. First I turned on some music, then I turned it off and then on again. When I got there, the skies were pouring rain and it felt just like my heart. I checked into my room, turned on the fireplace and sat staring out at the meadow and mountains for I-don't-even-know-how long.



View with a room.

I fell asleep on the bed at four in the afternoon. I woke up and left long enough to grab some dinner at a wonderful brewery and bring it back to my cozy room. (Interesting: I told Steve as I was leaving that the one thing I didn't feel ready to do on my own was eat dinner at a restaurant. I can do breakfast or lunch. And I can stay in a hotel room alone. But eating by myself at dinner, with all the couples on dates and families on vacation? Nope. Not yet.) I know that pictures of food are boring. And I know my steelhead sandwich means nothing to you. But still ... I have to memorialize the beauty that was THIS SANDWICH.



Because Oregonians love steelhead.

After dinner I did a lot of nothing. I read a little and watched some really silly TV. I mean, QVC at five in the

afternoon? I have no explanation for this except it was something that required no brain activity on my part. Upside: If you're in the market for a VitaMix and need to know the five colors available, I'm your girl! I fell asleep a lot of times for little bits of time and come 9 pm, I decided it was time to do some processing (and this is the paragraph you'll want to skip if you do not share my faith. Or you can read it. Just don't say I didn't warn you.)

I prayed and read and thought and, slowly but surely, I felt some layers falling off. Layers of grief and anxiety and confusion ... just sort of falling there onto the floor of that pretty little room. I believe so strongly that our Good Father showed up to help shine a light into the murky, hurting places of my heart and reveal some ways I'm not seeing straight. I thought about sharing with you what those revelations were, but in the end decided it was enough to say: He came. He spoke. I heard. And it changed me. Really ... it changed me. I woke up the next morning feeling differently about my role in this battle. And I just need you to know that getting away—in and of itself—would not have been that effective for me long-term because my responsibilities are still here when I get back. But getting away and experiencing this intersection between my pain and His purpose was really, *really* important. And it will impact the days and years to come. That's how powerful it is to place our hurting hearts in front of the One who can actually heal them.



This is how crazy things got.

I went to sleep and it would not be an understatement to say: *I love sleep*. Really, really love it. But I kept wondering how Steve was sleeping at home and wishing I could know for sure he was OK. That doesn't make me feel sad or sorry; it just makes me feel married.

In the morning, I woke up early and read my Bible by the fire

looking out on SNOW! So pretty. Such a fun gift. I took a long time getting ready, had a beautiful breakfast in the lodge and then went to church and worshipped with the people dearest to me.

All in all, my short getaway was beyond what I could have asked or imagined. It both emptied and filled me. It freed me and firmed my stance. It was a game changer. A million thank yous to my kids, my sisters and brothers-in-law and all the friends who have made our lives possible for four long years. We are humbled by your care and determined to some day pay it forward.

If you are a caregiver, can I implore you to take some time away to refuel? It's the best thing you could do for the one you love. And if you know a caregiver, this is a good time to think about ways you could help make a little escape possible for him or her. As the holidays near (yikes!) I'll be sharing lots of practical ways you can bless the people around you who are facing a difficult battle.

Finally, let me say: Your outpouring of love and support yesterday was a marvel to me. And the emails I received from other caregivers—well, they're tender and priceless and I cherish them. Thank you is the smallest and biggest thing I can say. I love you.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battlefields* (NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Oregon.

A Wife's First Ministry

Busy or best?

That's what I've chosen to label my scales lately.

I confess that I am one of the thousands of stay-at-home mommies who tried to cancel out my guilt of "doing nothing all day" with busyness.

Somehow the fact that I was raising two boys, caring for my husband who regularly works 50-55 hours a week and still finds time to renovate our home, and completing the ever-present tasks every wife and mother has to do around the home didn't constitute "something".

In my **head** I knew that this was exactly what I should be doing. In my **head** I knew the value of me staying at home to raise our children. Yet my **heart** had somehow accepted the message of today's society:

That women only have value when they are able to balance family, home and career. That true accomplishment lies not in the daily routine of homemaking and child-rearing, but in measurable results that come from the accomplishments outside the home.

But I have news for you.

I learned that super-mom doesn't exist. She is an image created by the media, a phantom ideal—very much like the airbrushed model—that we are told we should live up to ... and yet, no one truly

can.

Oh—we can try. And in the process, we will burn ourselves out and leave our husbands and children occupying third, fourth and fifth place.

Yep—that's where I was not so long ago.

Dear ones, that is what Titus 2 is all about.

The older women teaching the younger women that all of the careers, volunteer work ... anything that keeps them from being what they are called to be—wives, mothers and homemakers—is not God's **best**.

There are three areas where we allow busyness to steal God's best from us:

1. Work at home. This is an area where delicate balance must be maintained. It isn't wrong to work from home. In fact, for families who need a second income, it is a wonderful option. However, it is also very easy to allow our work to overtake family life. Without strict working hours, we suddenly work all of the time, and soon work becomes more important than what we are instructed to be in Titus 2.

This is particularly true for bloggers. When it comes to blogging, there is always something more: more social media, more comments, more posts, more affiliate opportunities ... more, more, more. And that "more" keeps calling no matter how much we do. God's best demands that once we've done what we can, we turn a deaf ear to the rest so that our families are served with the honor they deserve!

2. Volunteer work. Many stay-at-home moms choose to volunteer as a way to fill up the empty hours. This isn't wrong. In fact, this is a very important way to reach out to the lost and support ministries and organizations that offer aid to

those who are homeless, addicted or have come upon hard times.

Yet, we must be careful that the satisfaction of helping those in need doesn't overtake the satisfaction of placing our families first.

Does this seem selfish to you? It is not. We must reject the temptation to give so much of ourselves selflessly to those in need that we no longer have enough left to properly care for our families. When we have come to the point that we have no time left to cook adequate meals, care for our homes or give quality time to our husbands and children, we are out of balance.

3. Work for God. I can almost hear the collective gasp right now. Yes, even work for God can steal His best from us. Do you know why?

Work for God and time with God are not synonymous. And when we begin to believe they are, we are in a danger zone.

Work for God is important, and I strongly believe that moms—those who stay at home and those who work outside of the home—both can work for God and care for their homes. However, I also believe that we often feel unnecessary condemnation from the enemy to do more because we believe that by doing more, we will somehow satisfy Him more.

I have news for you:

You will not satisfy Him more by doing more. You certainly will not satisfy Him by neglecting your home to serve Him.

God will never call you to sacrifice your family for ministry. That isn't even biblical!

Your first ministry is to your husband. Your second ministry is to your children.

If you truly want to serve your local church in some capacity, find a ministry that will allow you to do both well: ministry to your local church and ministry to your family. There is a way to balance both without allowing them to steal from one another.

Dear sisters—I truly believe that this is an important topic for us. We been brainwashed by feminist voices that lie to us, telling us that satisfaction can and should be found in anything but homemaking. The Bible tells us differently!

“The older women likewise [teach the younger], that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (Titus 2:3-5, NIV, clarification mine).

It is time we stamp out the stay-at-home mommy guilt and live the best that God has for us!

Take a moment to read this study I did on Titus 2 called, *Keepers at Home*:



Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her Bosnian hero. Together they live in the country 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, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +, where she can be

found on a regular basis.

When You Don't Know What to Say

This morning my Facebook newsfeed was filled with updates from people going through such difficult, heartbreaking situations. I spent thirty minutes, writing, rewriting, adjusting and writing again. It was very difficult to think of the appropriate thing to say to my friend who is fighting brain cancer or my friend whose child is in constant pain or my friend who just lost her beloved father to ALS.

I'm so frustrated by this because I really thought that one of the few benefits of our crisis would be knowing what to say to others in theirs. But I find myself at a loss so often. That's when I land in the write-and-erase gridlock which leads to paralysis which leads to no response at all. It's ironic, really, that some sweet sister fighting a fierce battle may be sitting at home thinking none of her friends care enough to respond when, in fact, many of them care *too much* to risk a wrong response. I'm sure many people who assumed I hadn't thought at all about their struggle, would be surprised to learn how *much* I thought and agonized before clicking out of that little box without pushing "post."

I'm sharing this today so that others will know they're not alone in this fear of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. I am a writer and I often feel like I'm in the word weeds. But I'm tired of letting fear silence my compassion, and so I'm learning. I really *hope* I'm learning. And while I don't have an easy formula, here are the guidelines I'm using

when responding to people in pain:

1. The closer you are to the person and the situation, the more latitude you have to speak freely. If you are not a close, personal friend of the one in crisis, keep your comments brief and encouraging. Don't offer advice unless it specifically has been requested. If you feel you have something important to share, like a miracle cure or medical advice or a specialist they should contact, try going through someone who is closer to the person than you are, or send a private message. (And when you offer advice, always add permission for them to contact you for more information OR to disregard the suggestion entirely.)
2. Avoid comparing your situation to theirs, even if your situation seems identical on paper. Honestly, I think it's wise to avoid talking about ourselves at all in these moments ... just focus on encouraging the other person.
3. I don't think you can go wrong with, "I cannot imagine what you are going through. I am so sorry."
4. Say *something*. Because I really do think an imperfect something is better than well-intended nothing. People put stuff out on social media because—well, I guess I don't know all the reasons people do anything—but I assume they put updates out there because they want to know they're not alone. They hope that people will care and pray. That's all we need to do: care, pray and love. We don't need to have all the answers or write the words that heal all their wounds. The comments we say and send to people are, more than anything, a way of telling them: I see you, I acknowledge your pain, and I'm here. We just need to be present. And we can all do that, even though the words we wrap around it may feel risky and awkward—we can all be present.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battliefields*

(NavPress). She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Oregon.

What Brings the Blessing

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24, NIV).

The power in your life and mine that results in blessing is in direct proportion to the extent that you are willing to die to

...

- your own will,
- your own goals,
- your own dreams,
- your own rights.

It's what Jesus meant when He challenged His disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” However, before you get too hung up on the cross, don't forget—after the cross comes the resurrection and the power and the glory and the crown! Jesus kept His focus on the joy of abundant blessing as He “endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2, NIV). Because Jesus was willing to die, He was blessed by God with a position of power and authority at His right hand.

If blessing is in direct proportion to a willingness to die to self, how blessed are you?

Anne Graham Lotz is the founder of AnGeL Ministries. She is also the author of several books.

When You Don't Get Your Way

It is an annual agreement with my mother-in-law. She will feed me if I will hand out candy to the over 100 children who will trick-or-treat at her door.

Will work for food.

So the doorbell rang, and I grabbed the metal bowl filled with everything chocolate. A herd of children was at the door, and I filled plastic sacks, cute little pumpkin buckets, and pillowcases. (I think those kids with pillowcases are highly optimistic.)

That group of kids turned to leave, and two little girls made their way to the door.

The face of the girl on the right crumpled.

"The door's already open," she said.

With my great experience as a mother, I read the situation and quickly said, "Were you hoping to ring the doorbell?"

"Yes," she said. Lips turned down.

"Okay, wait a second. I'll close the door, and you can ring the bell."

I closed the door. The bell rang. I opened the door. And all was chaos.

Her friend had beat her to the bell.

"I wanted to ring it!" she screamed. And screamed. And cried.

Her dad approached with a horrified expression.

"That didn't go the way I was thinking," I said to him.

He knelt down in front of his distraught child and said firmly, "We do not throw fits on other people's front porches!" Because parenting books prepare you for all such events, so you know what to say.

I quietly closed the door, went inside the house, and tried to contain one of those I-know-this-shouldn't-be-funny laughs.

Tantrums are so entertaining when they're happening on someone else's kid.

All I can think of right now is that **we all tend to wail when we expect something and don't get it**. We throw adult-flavored tantrums and scream with decorum on the inside.

James talks about it:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. ... (James 4:1-2, NIV).

It's really cute when it's a little girl screaming on my front porch. Not cute when it's me.

Wanting something from my husband but not getting it.

Wanting something at work and not getting it.

Wanting a friend to be something and not getting it.

Wanting my child to act a certain way and not getting it.

... You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your

pleasures (James 4:2-3, NIV).

This is a Monday morning motive check (and I do not take lightly alliteration).

What do we want?

And do we seek our own pleasure, without regard to what God wants for us?

Motto for the week: We do not throw fits on other people's front porches.

Christy Fitzwater *is the author of A Study of Psalm 25: Seven Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard. She is a blogger, pastor's wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana. Visit for more information about her ministry.*

The Key That Broke a Death Sentence

Lasting weight loss begins with changing your mindset. No mindset change, no lasting weight loss. You give God your mindset about food and He gives you weight loss. It's a beautiful exchange that only gets better as time goes on.

☒ It was hard to deny I had an issue with weight when I was super morbidly obese or even just obese. However, I was the queen of denial.

It's really a conundrum. I knew I needed to lose weight, but I wanted to lose it and be done with it and then go back to the way I'd always eaten. I couldn't picture my life without

eating all the things I grew up eating that I equated with living.

However, eating all those things was severely limiting my life. The real truth of this hit home when I heard a 25-year sober alcoholic tell his story of giving up alcohol. One phrase changed my mindset. "Alcohol is one molecule away from sugar."

The light bulb went on. I'm like an alcoholic only with sugar. To lose the weight and keep it off I have to stop eating processed sugar.

To do that I had to change my mindset about what I ate. I had to see food as fuel for living, not food as my reason for living.

Before then, I would go on a diet and lose weight. I'm a really good dieter. I can deny myself for a short time and lose weight.

Always in the back of my mind was, when I lose this weight I will treat myself with my great grandma's oatmeal cake. This is a rich, thick, highly sugar-laden cake with a luscious icing. Really, it was the one thing I thought I could never live without.

I could never eat one piece of that cake or anything made with processed sugar and flour. One piece led to more and more and more. Sound familiar? What alcoholic can take one drink and leave it alone? I was like that only with sugar, and it was slowly killing me.

I had diabetes, congestive heart failure, high blood pressure and a doctor's proclamation if I didn't lose weight I'd be dead in five years.

I was living like I thought I could beat the odds. In reality, the odds were beating me.

I knew in one second of hearing the words about the connection between alcohol and sugar that my freedom lay in giving up sugar.

Many of you have read my book, *Sweet Grace*, where I chronicle my weight loss of 250 pounds. Suffice it to say it's not easy giving up what has become your go-to source for comfort; for relief of pain, despair, loneliness and frustration; and for celebration, enjoyment, entertainment and life itself.

I had to come to the realization that is life is more than processed sugar and flour.

Did I want to live my life solely for the indulgences I had come to love or was there more to my destiny than being the largest woman anywhere I went.

The problem with being a sugar addict is there is no end in sight to the amount of weight you will gain. If you are always taking in mainly items made with processed sugar and flour, you will gain weight. It is a fact.

It's like a freight train speeding down the track. Once it gets up to speed it's difficult to stop. It takes intentional effort to do it.

In order to stop, I implemented a basic plan of stop-start. Because the universe cannot tolerate a void, I couldn't do what I'd done before which was just stop. My body was always wanting something to fill the void of what I had stopped.

So, I needed to start something in the place of what I stopped. I put firm boundaries around what I stopped, and I focused on what I started. My first stop-start didn't make a whole lot of sense to me, but my gut or God, whichever way you look at it, told me it was the right action.

I stopped eating candy, which had become a BIG issue in my life, and I started exercising three times a week for 30

minutes. It didn't seem like it went together, but it did.

I was eating candy to fill any emotional need in my life. Exercising is a much better way to get the feel-good endorphins working in your life. I started looking forward to my daily water exercise time.

The key that made this time different from every other time is I am very cognizant that every step I take on this journey is with the intentional mindset of whatever I start now is for the rest of my life.

I know if I slack or go back to the way I was eating and not moving before, it will mean going back to where I was. I never want to go back to the hell I was living before.

It was a prison of my own making. I had the key to get myself out. God had paid for that key with His Son's death. I just didn't know how to use it.

Now I'm living in the place that grace built. It's a place of abundance, beauty, power, love, victory and freedom. In this place, there is no room for the lies I used to tell myself.

Only truth lives here. Only truth spoken in love (Eph. 4:15, NIV) because He wants more than anything that I have life, overflowing (John 10:10, AMP) and filled with all the goodness He can pack into it.

For so many years I pushed it away by my wanting, my lustful desire (James 4:1-7, NIV) for my lover sugar. So ridiculous that I would trade God for sugar.

So like God that when I gave Him sugar, He gave me Himself.

Now that's a beautiful exchange.

Go [HERE](#) to read the poem, "The Place That Grace Built."

Teresa Shields Parker is an author, blogger, editor, business

owner, wife and mother. Her book, *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor* is available on Amazon in print, Kindle and Audible. This story is from her blog, .

Why Your Vote Should Reflect Your Faith

I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. Jude 3

I desire to reach people of every and conservative, Democrat and Republican, churched and the message of God's love extended to us through His Son, Jesus Christ. I avoid speaking out on political issues because God's love extends to people of every political persuasion. But there are times when a political issue is also a moral and spiritual issue. And I am compelled to take a stand.

Gay marriage is a political issue, but there is no question that it is also a moral and spiritual issue. In 2012 my home state of North Carolina passed a marriage ammendment to our constitution that defined marriage exclusively as the union between a man and a woman. I supported this amendment for the following reasons:

Biblically: Marriage is not a "right." It is the very first institution ordained by God, and applies to all humanity, not just Jews and Christians. It was emphatically reconfirmed by Jesus in the New Testament. It is not up for redefinition from God's perspective.

Spiritually: Because we live in such perilous, unstable times

economically, environmentally, politically, globally, racially and even religiously, we need the security that comes from God's protection and blessing. This is not the time to defy Him by flaunting an institution He has clearly ordained, thus provoking His displeasure.

Practically: Marriage is the cornerstone of a civil and just society, and the bedrock of any healthy civilization. It creates a framework within which people can grow and prosper, and it provides the only natural means of procreation. It is in the vital best interests of any society to preserve it for the overall health, stability, and prosperity of its people.

Personally: My understanding of marriage was shaped by the tender relationship I witnessed between my Father and Mother, who were happily married for 64 years. One of the most precious things to me is that at the end of Mother's life, when she was struggling day by day, Daddy's love for her seemed to grow stronger. Their legacy of love includes five children, 19 grandchildren and over forty great-grandchildren – all who look to their relationship as a flesh and blood example of what marriage was designed by God to be.

✘ The majority of North Carolinians supported this amendment and voted for it to become part of our state's constitution. Yet on Friday, October 10, 2014, one judge, U.S. District Judge Max Cogburn, overturned the will of the people, and decided the amendment was "unconstitutional." This ruling opened the door for homosexuals to legally marry in North Carolina. Every day the state newspapers are filled with pictures of homosexual couples kissing, saying their wedding vows, and lining up at adoption agencies.

How do Christians respond? We pray. We share God's love for all. But we also have the privilege to respond The American Way. Go to the polls now during early voting or on November 4th and vote your Biblical values. I voted on the first day of early voting. And with the help of knowledgeable friends, I

voted with confidence and conviction for those I believe have similar values to mine. Make it your priority to know the candidates you are voting for, from the Senate to the House of Representatives to the judicial races to every other contest on the ballot. Nothing less than God's at stake in North Carolina and beyond.

Anne Graham Lotz is the founder of AnGeL Ministries. She is also the author of several books.

The Only Way to Live a Spiritually Fruitful Life

I will be the first to admit that I know very little about gardening. However, that hasn't stopped this city girl from trying to cultivate a bit of country into those black thumbs I have.

I stood out in what I refer to as my garden—what my neighbors likely refer to as a jungle—tenderly planting each starter I had purchased at the open market. That is when my precious 2 1/2-year-old decided that his mommy needed some help. In his eagerness he managed to trample a few of the sprouts I had just planted.

This distressed me because I had carefully planned out how many plants I felt we needed to feed the family lovely home-grown goodness.

A stem that is not connected to the main stalk will die, and that is exactly what happened to these trampled plants whose stalks and stems were mashed and battered.

They died.

They didn't have a source of life to keep them nourished and growing.

In John 15 Jesus uses this analogy to refer the source of our spiritual nourishment. He says:

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15: 4-5).

Did you see that right there?

"For without Me you can do nothing."

When I threw those broken stems in my compost pile, they did not grow. They did not give me tomatoes and peppers. They simply wilted and died.

It is the same with our spiritual lives.

How often have we supposed we can go days and weeks without picking up our Bibles or spending quality time in prayer, not just throwing out requests, but listening for the Master's voice?

How often have we made decisions, or just reacted, before we spent time in the Vine-dresser's presence, allowing Him to prune our hearts of envy, covetousness, bitterness, anger or pride so we can bear the fruit of the Spirit?

While our lives bear varied kinds of fruit, the end result is the same—the Father is glorified.

He is glorified in our obedience to keep His commands.

He is glorified in the fullness of joy we have when we are connected to the life source of the Holy Spirit who surges

through us, giving us life so we can go and bear much fruit.

He is glorified in the love we share because we abide in Him and do what He commands.

And, when the Father is glorified, we are satisfied because we are accomplishing the purpose for which He created us.

Dear friends, love, joy, fulfillment, satisfaction and contentment are not found in any other source than in the glorification of the Father! We glorify the Father when we remain connected to the Vine—to the only One who gives us life.

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