

Are You Afraid to Ask for Help?

Somewhere in the hazy fog of the past crazy week, I came to a realization and it is this: I have become exactly what I planned *never* to become. Well, let me rephrase that: I have become what I *hoped* I would never become. Had I actually created a plan to not become it, I would not be in this pickle now (wherein pickle is defined as: teetering on the ragged edge of burnout and meltdown.)

In the beginning of this ALS battle, countless people warned me: *you have to take care of yourself, too*. And I nodded in agreement – and I mean *real* agreement, not that condescending, falsely humble, “Sure, friend, thanks for sharing that piece of advice that I will never actually use,” agreement. Not, “Yeah, I already know this stuff and have it dialed,” agreement. I knew going in how important self care would be. And the thing is: I do actually like myself. I’m neither martyr nor masochist. I do have some INTJ-related workaholic tendencies, but I can down-time like a champ when I know I need to.

So this is the week I’ve been forced to ask the question: how did I get here? How did I end up in this ditch of discouragement and numbness and frustration? The answer is clear and you’ve probably already guessed it, but the reason behind it is sort of funky. I am in this emptied-out place because I have not asked for enough help.

Bottom line, Steve’s care has grown beyond my ability to handle by myself. I have been away from him six nights in 2014 – all for ministry trips – and in the course of those six days away from home, I have spoken twelve times. The trips have been excellent, but they haven’t been relaxing.

In July, our lives changed dramatically as ALS took center stage and began to eat away at our nights, stealing the precious, replenishing resource: sleep. (Seriously, if you have access to endless nights of uninterrupted sleep, take a minute and thank the Lord for this great gift. We take it for granted so much, but it is an essential foundation piece for every other thing.) (Did I sound like your mom just then? Sorry.)

As the opportunity for sound sleep ebbed away, so did my ability to think clearly, process cohesively and maintain even trace amounts of the me I used to be. Not that the me I used to be is so special, but there is something about pre-ALS Bo that I miss and longed to reconnect with.

The other thing that crept in not-so-subtly was a reluctant resentment toward these responsibilities and ALS and life in general. I'm not proud of this, but it is what it is. Instead of examining the resentment and dealing with it, I would just beat on it with the Guilt stick. I addressed my need for a break to breathe by reminding myself (see mom voice above), "STEVE doesn't get a break from ALS. You're fine. You'll be fine. You're not losing your mind." Except I sort of was.

The main reason caregivers burn out is a reluctance or inability to get the help they need. The reasons for that reason vary wildly. Some cannot trust others with their loved one's care. Some feel guilty, like they're handing off their problems to other people. Some don't think their spouse would be open to anyone else caring for them. And some, quite simply, don't know who they could ask. While these are all at play in my situation, they are not my primary issues.

My issue is this: I am lazy with myself. And I have reached levels of exhaustion where the idea of making another phone call or teaching someone how to take care of Steve feels like way more work than just doing it myself. I have made some

half-hearted attempts to find help at night, but as soon as it doesn't work out I give up and crawl back into my hole of despair. And honestly, I think this is the issue for many ALS spouses (and all others who care for the terminally or chronically ill): they don't *want* to go it alone, but they are too deep in to be able to work their way out. Their community of friends and family watch helplessly, not knowing how to intervene while the caregiver insists she's got it covered. She doesn't. She just doesn't have the first idea about how to plug people into the holes that she has been filling for so long.

So, back to my story: Long night after long night culminated in a meltdown at the breakfast table one morning with my daughter, Tori. I have been reluctant to share how I'm doing with my kids for fear they would be overwhelmed by it and feel like they have no fully functioning parent in their lives. On the contrary, that beautiful girl spoke strength and wisdom into my heart like none other. She preached at me. She comforted me. And after that, Whit called me to let me know that my sisters and brothers-in-law were coming for the weekend so I could get some sleep and do something fun the house.

I'm not ashamed to say: I cried like a silly when I got that news. And that's when I made a crazy decision and sent Whit a text: "Would it be bad if I went away? Like away away?" I knew it would be tough to step back and let this (very capable) crew step in if I was on the premises.

I knew I would not be able to show someone else how to empty the suction machine if I was there and could just do it real quick. I also knew that if my sisters (who are my very dearest friends) were in my house, I would spend all my time talking to them and zero time on the processing I knew I really needed. For several weeks my dearest dream had been to get a hotel room and sleep and think and cry and be. But I was

worried.

I worried about how Steve would feel when I told him I was leaving just to leave. I worried it would look like I was running and, candidly, I care more about what the watching world thinks than I should. I'd love you to think I'm awesome and strong and I would have kept this whole little thing a secret, except for one thing: the other caregiving spouses out there who are breaking beneath the weight of their load. Many of them read this blog and I cannot afford to show them a painted-on, propped-up version of myself. If I pretend that I don't need help, they will feel guilty and weak when they do. *And they do.* We all do.

So, that's the backdrop for what would become one of the most wonderful 18 hours ever. Since I'm already over 1,000 words, I'll save the trip recap for tomorrow, but check back in because it's very cool. And also? I'm writing this post at the breakfast table from my favorite lodge in this whole world and I just wanted to flaunt that information for a second. In two minutes, I will pay my bill, get in my car and drive back to my life and the man I love more than any human on this planet. And I cannot wait to see that wonderful guy.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battlefields and Ruthless: Knowing the God Who Fights For You*. 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.

How Being Fat Saved My Life

I have a confession to make. I didn't start my healthy living journey as a spiritual quest. I felt far away from God. I felt shame and guilt over the fact that I weighed 430 pounds.

I knew God was calling me to make a deeper commitment, but how could I go deeper when I couldn't even resist a piece of candy?

☒ My daughter and others loved me even at my extreme weight. Mother's Day 2002.

I feel a little like Paul when I tell you my religious pedigree (see Phil. 3:4-6). I was a Christian, daughter of a preacher, in church all my life, graduated from a Baptist university with a major in journalism/religion and from an interdenominational college with a master's degree in theology, worked in national and state denominational headquarters, taught adult Sunday School, discipleship classes and seminars, edited and published Christian publications.

I was religious. I had a lot of head knowledge. I wasn't killing every Christian I met, like Paul. No, I was only killing one Christian—myself.

Applying all my religious training to eradicate my deepest failure was beyond me.

God used a story told by a man I respected to change my life. What I had tried for over 57 years to change, God changed in a second using my mentor's story.

His story did not mention God. There was no scripture, but God was everywhere in that story.

At that moment, though, I wasn't thinking about God. I was thinking about what he was saying. He had allowed alcohol to control his life over 25 years ago. Now a successful businessman with a wonderful family that included a dedicated

wife, loving children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, he was admitting all of that would not have been possible had he continued to allow alcohol to rule his life.

Although I'd never heard of sugar addiction when he said, "Sugar is just one molecule away from alcohol—alcohol is liquid sugar," all the pieces fell in place. I just knew that I was a sugar addict, if there even was such a thing.

The story gripped my soul and spirit. It took hold in a way I still can't explain today.

Giving up alcohol was his new beginning. The cravings began to go away.

To stay the course he placed perimeters around himself. He didn't put himself in situations where he would be tempted.

He stopped alcohol, but he started something in its place. He started with small steps until those became ingrained in his lifestyle.

I related it all to giving up sugar. It was understandable and doable, but it wasn't necessarily chapter and verse from the Bible.

Unfortunately, the Bible had become old hat to me. It was a culture, a lifestyle, but so was eating everything with sugar and flour. The Bible and eating ran together in my mind.

God had to go outside my culture to get my attention. He did it with a story because I am and always will be a storyteller.

The truth unfolded before me and I knew. I knew this was the answer I'd been looking for.

I began the journey with an admission. I admitted I was powerless over food and my life had become unmanageable.

You have to know what a monumental admission this was for me.

I was a control freak. I wanted to control everything in my life. Admitting I had something I couldn't control was saying I was weak, and I never wanted to be weak.

I began to realize truths from scriptures I'd known forever; such as, when I am weak then, and only then, is God released to be strong in my life (2 Cor. 12:9). And all things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything (1 Cor. 6:12).

God was in every step of the journey cheering me on even when I didn't recognize it was Him. I look back and see His fingerprints all over the lenses of my life.

I began to feel His grace like the wind at my back urging me on to be more, go further, push myself more.

Admission two was easier. I need a power greater than myself to restore me to sanity.

What I had done to my body was just plain insane. When I looked at where I was and where I wanted to go I knew I needed a Greater Power to help me.

I began to picture Jesus with me everywhere—at the supermarket, the gym, in my office, fixing supper, raiding the kitchen for a late night snack.

Sometimes I didn't like Him being there but He stayed and gently reminded me with the question, "What are you doing?", or sometimes with the reminder of why I had chosen this journey in the first place.

Admission three came when I had been on the journey for a while and had begun understanding the stronghold addiction had on my life.

I made the decision to turn my willful want for foods made with sugar and flour over to the care of God as I understood

Him.

I let God out of my carefully constructed box. I allowed Him to mess with my piety and religiosity. When I did that I allowed Him finally to be God of ALL my life.

What I ate and how I exercised became a focus. The doctors, counselors and trainers I met with took priority in my time schedule.

I realized if I were ever going to fulfill God's call on my life I HAD to focus on getting my body healthy. I am no good to anyone if I am not able to function.

What began as a journey of desperation morphed into one of determination and continues as one of declaration to the strength and power of God in my life. Now, I disciple others on this journey.

The closeness with God I had longed for all my life became more real as I started pressing in closer to Him, talking to Him like a friend, listening for His voice everywhere.

Scriptures began to come alive with reality as I experienced allowing Him to fully lead me. Sermons made sense. Songs radiated through me. I saw Him in secular books, movies and people. I saw Him in my life and the lives of my friends. I saw Him in the homeless guy on the corner with the sign "Stranded, Broke and Ugly" and wondered how his life would change if he could hold up the sign, "Free, Prosperous and Beautiful."

It happened on the journey. I wasn't there first and then the journey happened. The journey happened so I would begin to get there.

I know just as God used my weakness to start me on this journey, He is using this journey to bring me closer to Him. The closeness to Him is beginning to catapult me to my

destiny.

God will use whatever it takes to reach us—to save us and set us free—body soul and spirit.

It may not seem spiritual at the time, but if you are His child, it will be the most spiritual journey you can ever take.

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, .

Putting the Luke 11:8 Prayer Principle to Work

This is the time of year when dad would start to ask, *So how we doin' for your mom?*

We meant me.

It started years ago when he would ask me to buy a few stocking stuffers for mom. Pretty soon I was buying the whole stocking. Then it was the stocking and a big chunk of the gifts. All with his money.

Because the man lived in a town of 7,000 people in Wyoming, with shopping as scarce as the population.

I got in a habit of shopping all year long, tucking away treasures in the crawl space month after month. In summer I would take dad one large Rubbermaid of gifts when we would go

to visit. Then closer to Christmas I would deliver another.

From a craft fair I would call and say, *So I found some adorable gifts for mom here. How much is okay to spend?*

He would never give me a limit—just would tell me to buy it.

It made me hyperventilate sometimes.

Dad. Give me a limit. Come on, I would say.

If you think she would like it, just buy it, he would say.

I would send him the amount, and he would put a check in the mail the second I told him how much the damage was.

Eventually I got so comfortable with this routine that a lot of times I wouldn't even look at the price of an item. No lie. I would just think, *Mom has got to have this*, and I would go buy it and look at the receipt when I got home.

Lots of times I even bragged to sales people.

I do all my dad's Christmas shopping for my mom, so I don't really care how much it costs. He pays for all of it. We would laugh at my audacity, but do you know what the sales ladies would do?

Sigh.

Because how sweet was it that the man wouldn't put a spending limit on his wife for Christmas, and doubly special that his little girl was part of the fun.

Now just this last week a single mom at church was doing a spaghetti fund raiser. This was to help her daughter get funds to go on a trip so she can share the love of Christ with people overseas for several months.

The mom was overwhelmed by the generosity of our church family at the spaghetti dinner.

Well, that's great, I said. And we'll just trust the Lord to provide the rest. He has unlimited resources that He can move around at will.

My words to her came from a heart that for years has experienced no spending limit, from a father who can't seem to spend enough to show how much he loves.



It changes your perspective when you learn to live on someone else's resources.

And when those resources don't have a cap.

And when there is great expectation to keep using said resources.

What are you praying about today? And I'm not just talking about money needs, although that might be it. What do you need from the Lord?

These are Jesus' very own words about how we should pray to the Father:

...because of your shameless audacity he will surely get up and give you as much as you need (Luke 11:8, NIV)

Ask for what you need like it's not your pocket that holds the supply.

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.*

Who Will Rise Up Against the Wicked?

Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will take a stand for me against evildoers? Psalm 94:16

"...If the church doesn't wake up now and stand and fight there IS no church in America. This is the red line. It has been crossed. When I read about this I immediately thought THIS IS RIGHT OUT OF MY BONHOEFFER BOOK."

So wrote Eric Metaxas on October 18, 2014 in an email exchange that included me. He is the author of the NY Times bestselling biography, Bonhoeffer, which describes the heroic stand of one pastor against the rise of the Third Reich in Nazi Germany. Eric was voicing his outrage over what he had just read concerning the subpoenas issued by the Houston mayor's office to five Houston pastors.

Mayor Parker has demanded that the pastors turn over to her office their private papers in 17 different categories, including sermons, "speeches," phone or private conversations that in any way touch on homosexuality, the mayor herself, and the city ordinance concerning transgender people using public restrooms.

The subpoenas were clearly issued to intimidate not just the five pastors on whom they were served, but every pastor and Christian leader in Houston and beyond. The message was clear. If you oppose the lesbian/bisexual/gay/transgender community or agenda in any way, you will pay.

Eric further urged every Christian leader to send the mayor a Bible. And Governor Mike Huckabee has urged every pastor to send her their own sermons. I have written a note to Mayor Annise Parker, City Hall, 901 Bagby Street, Houston, Texas 77002, telling her that God loves her, that I am praying for

her, and urging her to read the Bible I included with my note. Although I am not a pastor, I also sent her a copy of the “speech” I delivered at the Official Observance of the National Day of Prayer in Washington, DC. , calling on people to repent of their sin, *cry out to the the Day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.* Joel 1:14-15

I agree with Eric Metaxas. The red line has been crossed. Persecution of God’s people has begun. In response to the question the Lord voices in Psalm 94:16, I want to answer clearly, *I will!*

Will you?

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

What’s Your Excuse?

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:9, **NKJV**

“I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred” (John 5:7, **NIV**). The man beside the pool of Bethesda was focused on what he lacked. He lacked a friend to help him. He lacked the strength to do it on his own. But while he was preoccupied with what he didn’t have, he totally missed what he did have-he had Jesus! Standing right there!

What’s your excuse for continuing to lie down on your responsibilities? What’s your excuse for remaining a spiritual child when you should be mature in your faith? What’s your excuse for sleeping when you should be kneeling in prayer?

What's your excuse?

Is it lack of faith? Lack of willpower? Lack of knowledge? Lack of discipline? Lack of energy? There is no excuse you or I can come up with that is valid because we have Jesus!

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

Why Your Pain Is Not Meaningless

I left the writers retreat so that I could teach Spanish on Friday afternoon. With a few minutes to spare, I decided to swing into the church and get a hug from my husband. The parking lot was full, which was weird for a Friday when usually only my husband is there working on his sermon.

I wonder what's going on, I thought.

Soon I could see what was happening, and I groaned.

Pulling in to park on the side, I sat quietly in my car, as I could see military men with guns drawn. Two other men stood with an American flag spread open and taut, in front of a gathering of people under the front portico.

Oh God, no. No. Not this.

Only eight months ago our family had been on the receiving end of one of those flags, and for one second I thought I was going to crumple in the front seat.

You know what this feels like, the Spirit said quietly to my

heart, and immediately I was calm.

Pray, He said.

So I prayed for the family and friends gathered around, that God would give them the strength for this most painful moment in the day of saying goodbye to their loved one.

I prayed for the widow—or whoever would receive that flag.

Lord, strengthen her heart as she hears the guns fire, watches the slow folding of the flag, hears the click of military heels, and opens her hands to receive the honors due her husband.

Comfort them, Lord. Comfort them in this day.

And then it was over.

I talked to my husband afterward and found out I knew the elderly couple. **Different than giving flowers or a casserole,** God had allowed me to minister quietly to this widow's heart, in a moment in which she most needed it.

All of this in the same weekend in which I am attending a writers conference in a mansion, with the Lord whispering to my heart, *Your dad is with me. He used to live in poverty as a child, with no father to love him, but now he is with me in a beautiful place with his own special room. And someday you will be here with us.*

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Cor. 1:3-4, NIV)

Praise be.



As I write this, it's Sunday morning. I'm still in the cozy library room of the mansion, and I have a message for you:

Pain is not meaningless.

GOD WANTS TO FILL YOU WITH COMFORT—SO MUCH THAT YOU CAN PULL OUT THE FREEZER BAGGIES AND RUBBERMAIDS TO SEND SOME COMFORT HOME WITH SOMEONE ELSE.

In the trials you face this week, will you look to the Father of compassion in expectation of comfort?

And when He comforts you in His own intimate way, will you stand ready to pour out that comfort onto the hurting souls God puts in your path?

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 who resides in Montana. Visit for more information about her ministry.

The Real Reason So Many Christians Are Obese

From my earliest memories, I lived to eat. Today, I eat to live. Ten years ago, I felt I would never be able to say that.

For years my weight-loss journey could be characterized as a quest to discover the easiest, best, quickest way to lose the mountain of flesh that had somehow attached itself to my body.

I tried many diets. Many of them I would have success with until I stopped and went back to the same way I'd always eaten. Then I'd fail again miserably and go back down the road to weight gain.

Each time I did this I gained more weight than I lost, putting me behind in the weight-loss game rather than ahead. Finally I vowed to accept myself as I was—fat and all. I rationalized it would be better than the yo-yo I was putting my body through.

Gain Weight by Just Looking at Food

I knew God had the power to fix me. I just didn't understand why He didn't take my problem away and let me eat normal like everyone else. Why did I have to be the one who seemed to gain weight just by looking at hot rolls, cakes and cookies?

Although that seems ludicrous to think that you gain weight just by looking at food, photos of our favorite foods set up cues that make us want that food. Consider beautiful photos of luscious foods in your favorite magazine.

Obviously, you can't smell the food, but just looking at it makes your mouth water. The saliva rush tells your brain food is coming. When it doesn't come your brain orders your body, go get the food! The next thing you know you're surveying your cabinets for ingredients to make that or something similar.

Going to an event that has some of those foods, even if you've vowed not to indulge will set up an even greater desire to eat them. You can see them, and now you can smell them. You start salivating even more because you not only see them, you smell them which signals your body to eat that food!

Basically, you're toast. You'll probably indulge unless you've

thought ahead and brought an alternative or made a contingency plan.

I Don't Want Sugar Now

I am far enough along on this journey to not even want sugary, bready foods anymore. I know they will make me feel sick and bloated. However, I still wouldn't knowingly put myself in the way of temptation.

For instance, I wouldn't go to a dessert-cooking class. I wouldn't go to a fun day of cookie baking and packaging homemade cookie to exchange. I wouldn't volunteer to make homemade cookies for any event.

Any situation where I am exposed to temptation for long periods of time would be like hiring an alcoholic to be a bartender. It might last for a while, but eventually the close proximity and easy access to something you've had a struggle with for years would win out.

Today I make choices about what I eat, what I do, what I look at, and where I go based on what's best for me health-wise. I don't apologize for my addiction. I don't shy away from saying no for my health.

Those who knew me when I weighed 430 pounds understand why. Those who don't still appreciate my stand regarding food that fuels me, rather than entertains me.

For most extremely overweight people, food has become their main source of entertainment. Television is something many use as a pastime, but going out to eat, being invited over to a friend's house for supper, going to a big family reunion—even going to a church carry-in dinner is something we look forward to.

It doesn't happen every day, so that's why it's become what we

do to have fun. What should we do tonight? Let's go out for pizza. Let's get ice cream. Let's eat at a nice restaurant and have a full-course dinner, including dessert.

My Only Source of Fun

When I began this journey, I realized eating was my ONLY source of fun. Anything I did for entertainment included food. Dinner and a movie. Popcorn and television. Meeting a friend for dessert. Having a breakfast catch-up time.

Soon, I was living for what, when and where I could eat the most delicious food.

If you wanted me to come to any meeting or event, just have great food. I would put it on my calendar and make sure to show up. Food was the bait.

I admit, it's not easy changing over 50 years of habits. Part of this occurred because my extended family had the world's best cooks. We enjoyed eating together. My grandmother enjoyed cooking for her family and having everyone together around her long dining-room table.

Love became enmeshed with food. Once that happened, I had to have food because I had to have love to survive. And while it's true I must eat to survive, I did not have to eat as much as I did or the types of foods I did.

This also is habit and training. It's the way I've always eaten. It's my culture. What I grew up with, the special touches my grandma put in the food.

If I Can't Have That Cake, I Don't Want to Live

So when I would say, "I can't live without a certain food," it was because without that food I felt I wouldn't want to live.

Although I never consciously said this or wrote it down and looked at it, the truth was I didn't want to live if I could

never again bake and eat Mamaw's oatmeal cake or any sweet and gooey dessert.

Those things had become the reason I was alive.

Family dinners are this great time to catch up and reconnect. However, if the food rather than the people are all we are interested in, we have missed the point.

Eating to Live

Eating to live doesn't mean we don't enjoy our food or our time with friends and family. What it means is we don't center our enjoyment around the types and amounts of food we eat.

It took me a long time to get to the place where I think more about what my body needs to fuel me for the day, rather than what I want to eat.

When I ate processed sugar and gluten, my view of food was skewed to be the reason for living. Without ingesting these types of high-carbohydrate foods, I can make better choices.

I can be in control of what I eat, rather than the food being in control of me. Don't get me wrong: I still enjoy going out to eat. I still enjoy what I'm eating. I just don't make it my reason for living.

At your next family celebration, try to incorporate some fun things to do rather than focusing on what you are eating. Try family game night. Make a craft together. Go to a play, concert or movie. Go to the zoo or park. Run or walk a 5K. Hike. Ride bikes. Swim. Fish. Hunt. Ask questions. Talk about your day. Read a book, and share what you learned.

There is so much more to life than food.

It's about time to find out what that is.

What do you live for?

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 [HERE](#). This story is from her blog, .

Prophetic Fulfillment: Regathering the 'Lost Tribes' of Israel

Since the Assyrians invaded their land and led them into captivity in 722 B.C., the whereabouts of the northern tribes of Israel has remained one of the great mysteries of antiquity. Unlike those in the southern kingdom of Judah, who returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Temple after 70 years in captivity under the Babylonians (586-516 B.C.), there is no record in the Bible of the northern tribes ever returning.

In fact, these "lost tribes of Israel," in a wider sense, include more than just the 10 tribes that vanished from the stage of history after the Assyrians took them captive. Ezra and Nehemiah both relay that only a *remnant* returned to Jerusalem with them from the Babylonian captivity. What happened to the rest of the southern kingdom, members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin? And what of the Jews remaining in Israel following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. and the final revolt against the Romans in 136 A.D.? They were banished from their land, scattered to the nations of the world and became known as the *diaspora*, or dispersion.

Jews wandered from nation to nation throughout Europe during

the Middle Ages as they were expelled from their host nations. Jews living in Italy were banished in 855 A.D. and from England in 1290. During the Spanish Inquisition (1492-97), the Jews of Spain (1492) and later Portugal (1497) were expelled and migrated to the Ottoman Empire, North Africa and the Netherlands. Many also ended up in South and Central America and are known today as Marranos, Conversos or Anusim (translated "retrained ones").

Commerce also played a role in Jewish migration into other nations of the world. Merchants in search of treasures from the Middle East established trade routes into Asia and Africa. One of the most famous of these was the "Silk Road," a 4,000-mile trek that connected silk traders in China with consumers in the Middle East. This route brought Persian Jews and other Jewish merchants into China. By the year 1200, there was a thriving Jewish community in Kaifeng until a flood of the Yellow River in 1850 destroyed their synagogue.

I had the opportunity to travel to Kaifeng on an outreach led by my good friend Sid Roth back in 1995 to scout out the Jewish community remaining there. Although we only met a handful of these Chinese Jews, this trip led me on a journey that has continued to this day—searching out and working to aid and restore the scattered children of Israel. The experience has felt like an Indiana Jones adventure, but instead of searching for the lost *Ark* of the Covenant, I have been in search of the lost *people* of the Covenant. This quest has since taken me to some of the most remote areas of the world.

God warned Israel that if they were not faithful to obey His laws and commandments, He would banish them from their land to wander the nations: "The Lord will scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other" (Deut. 28:64).

Indeed, this came to pass. The descendants of Jacob have been

scattered to almost every nation on earth. But in His mercy and faithfulness, God also promised the day would come when He would bring them back: "When all these things happen to you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you remember them among all the nations, where the Lord your God has driven you, then you must return to the Lord your God and obey His voice according to all that I am commanding you today, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul. Then the Lord your God will overturn your captivity and have compassion on you and will return and gather you from all the nations, where the Lord your God has scattered you" (Deut. 30:1-3).

While these tribes may be lost to the world, God knows who and where each one of them is. I believe we are living in those days of restoration. Indeed, many of these Jewish communities are now coming to light and being recognized by the State of Israel.

The Jews of Ethiopia

Isaiah 11:11 says, "In that day the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, who shall be left, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea."

What's referred to as Cush in the ancient Scriptures is likely modern-day Ethiopia. According to ancient tradition, Ethiopia's Jewish connection goes back to the time of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. A 14th-century document known as the *Kebra Nagast* ("The Glory of the Kings") records that Solomon and Sheba had a son named Menelik I, who later returned to Ethiopia with his family and the Ark of the Covenant.

Others believe that Jews from the exodus made their way up the Nile and eventually settled in Ethiopia. Most historians, however, believe their presence in Ethiopia is post-exilic and

traces back to the Roman dispersion of Jews migrating from Yemen to the horn of Africa. Whatever history is correct, we do have the account of Phillip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39), who was led to faith not from paganism but from Judaism.

Known as the Beta Israel (House of Israel), the Ethiopian Jews were officially recognized by the State of Israel in 1973. In fact, the Israeli government conducted two dangerous operations to bring them to Israel: Operation Moses, which took place over a period of seven weeks in 1984-85, during which 8,000 Ethiopian Jews were brought to Israel. Operation Solomon, a covert airlift, was conducted in 1991 and brought 14,500 Ethiopian Jews to Israel over a 24-hour period. Sadly, thousands of the Beta Israel identified as Falasha Mura (converts to Christianity) were left behind.

Another tribe of Ethiopian Jews, the Beta Avraham, was originally part of the Beta Israel community. But in the 17th century, a false messiah rose up among these people and ultimately led them to join the Orthodox Church. They broke away, becoming their own tribe and eventually settled in the Ethiopian district of Kechene, near the capital city of Addis Ababa. Jewish Voice brings a team of medical doctors and volunteers to help this community every year and operates a full-time medical clinic known as Bete Hibret.

A third offshoot of Ethiopian Jews, the Gefat, lives farther south in the Ethiopian rural countryside of Woliso and Hosanna. A remote community made up of 20,000 to 30,000 people, this tribe has faithfully observed Jewish customs for hundreds of years, including circumcising their male children on the eighth day, applying the blood of a lamb over their doorposts at Passover and keeping biblical dietary laws. In fact, their name, Gefat, means "the blowers"—according to their oral history, they were chosen by the kings of Ethiopia centuries ago to blow the shofar ahead of the Ark of the Covenant in official processions.

I became aware of this community in 2010 when their elders contacted me during one of our medical clinic outreaches in Addis Ababa and asked for our help. The following year we held our first medical outreach in Woliso. Thousands came for treatment, and we've returned regularly ever since.

To date, Jewish Voice has planted and supports a flourishing network of eight Messianic Jewish congregations in Ethiopia, all of which are experiencing rapid growth.

The Bnei Menashe of India

Near the border between eastern India and Myanmar are the two Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram. Within these lives an ancient community called the Bnei Menashe, believed to be descended from the lost tribe of Manasseh. Oral history holds that they were captured by Assyria along with the rest of the northern tribes of Israel and eventually landed in China. Then, in the second century, they migrated to India in the wake of Chinese persecution. Many converted to Christianity in the 19th century through the work of Welsh Presbyterian missionaries.

In 2008, a rat infestation completely overtook the rice crops in Mizoram, threatening starvation. This famine drew global media attention to the Bnei Menashe. When I heard of their plight, I felt the Lord strongly prompting me to do something to help. After an advance trip to assess the needs, we provided hundreds of tons of rice and brought a large team of doctors and dentists to provide free medical, dental and eye care to the Bnei Menashe. We've been back every year since. More than 900 members of the Bnei Menashe have prayed with our prayer teams to receive Jesus as their Messiah.

In 2011, the Israeli government decided to allow 7,300 members of the Bnei Menashe to come to Israel. Several hundred more have also recently made *aliyah* (going up to the Holy Land), but thousands still remain and live in a state of deep

poverty.

The Lemba of Zimbabwe

God made good on His promise to scatter the children of Israel to the uttermost parts of the world. Perhaps nowhere is that more evidenced than in the remote bush of Zimbabwe, where we've often had to wait to land our six-seater prop plane until zebras exited the clearing we use as a makeshift runway. Here we've found the Lemba, a tribe numbering over 70,000 and spread throughout Zimbabwe and parts of South Africa.

In a recent DNA study, 70 percent of the Lemba sampled possessed the Cohanim gene (from an ancient Jewish priestly line)—a higher percentage than both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews sampled. This finding has generated significant interest among the Jewish community and strongly supports their 800-year claim to be descendants of Aaron the high priest.

After a whirlwind trip—spent mostly on planes—to meet with the Lemba's elders, we organized our first medical outreach to their community in 2012. Without electricity, hotels or restaurants, we had to truck in the entire clinic on washed-out dirt roads—including tents and the generators needed to power our medical equipment. Since this first outreach two years ago, we now have 30 Messianic Jewish congregations among the Lemba with a weekly attendance of over 3,000. The Lemba are currently the fastest-growing Messianic Jewish community in the world.

The Yibir of Somaliland

Through a dear friend, Gerald Gotzen, I heard about a mystical tribe of people in Somaliland called the Yibir. The Yibir—whose name, some believe, derives from the word *Hebrew*—were forced to convert to Islam many years ago yet have secretly retained their Jewish identity. In 2012, I sent an advance team to Hargeisa, the capital of Somaliland to meet with tribal leaders. They quietly shared about their Jewish

ancestry and their desire to further connect with their Jewish identity and the State of Israel. We've continued to develop our relationship and are seeking ways to help them in this pursuit.

The Pashtun of Afghanistan

Within the borders of Afghanistan, one of the most uniformly Muslim countries in the world, lives an ethnic group called the Pashtun who some believe to be descendants of one of the 10 lost tribes. The Pashtun are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan. Though DNA testing has been inconclusive and scholars have disagreed for centuries as to their true origins, it's indisputable that the Pashtun do observe certain ancient Jewish customs and traditions. Many historic markers in the region are written in Aramaic (the language of first-century Judaism) instead of the traditional Sanskrit usually found in this area.

Many of the family names among the Pashtun are Jewish as well, including Levani (similar to Levi), Daftani (similar to Naphtali) and Jaji (similar to Gad). Some historians, as far back as the 1800s, even referred to the Pashtuns as "Yusefzai," meaning sons of Joseph.

The Igbo of Nigeria

In the central-western African country of Nigeria lives a tribe of the Igbo people who call themselves the Bnei Yisrael. They believe themselves to be descended from the lost tribes of Gad, Zebulun, Manasseh, Dan, Asher and Naphtali. Numbering some 30,000, the Bnei Yisrael observe many biblical feasts and maintain the dietary laws and other commandments of the Torah.

We just completed a scouting trip to meet with the leaders of the Bnei Yisrael and plans are under way to conduct our first outreach in Nigeria next year.

The Jew First

While many rightly view the rebirth of the State of Israel and restoration of Jerusalem as important fulfillments of last days' prophecy, too few Christians are paying attention to other prophetic events taking place before our eyes. Among these are the large numbers of Jewish people coming to faith in Jesus as their Messiah; the rise and growth of the Messianic Jewish movement; and the regathering of these "lost tribes" back to their homeland. In my opinion, these are some of the most significant signs of Messiah's soon return.

In Romans 1:16 we are told that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first" (emphasis mine). While some teach this is simply a fact of history and nothing more, I believe this is a biblical principle that is still in force today. In fact, it may be the missing key to our missiology. Is it possible that reaching the Jewish people opens the door to the salvation of the nations? Perhaps this is the mystery that Paul was revealing to us in Romans 11:15 when he declared, "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?"

So how are we applying this missiological view and reaching the "lost tribes" of Israel with an end-times perspective in mind? Since our first medical clinic in Gondar, Ethiopia, in 1999, hundreds of dedicated volunteers from church communities around the world have worked with Jewish Voice in more than 20 medical-clinic outreaches to help impoverished Jewish communities. By God's grace, we've provided free medical care and medicines to more than 211,000 patients. We've distributed 37,000 pairs of eyeglasses, performed nearly 700 eye surgeries and provided dental treatment to 13,000 patients.

While these statistics are wonderful, it's the spiritual message and outcome that is most important. Everything we do to physically help these people is with the end goal of

earning the right to share our faith and demonstrating that we care. I often repeat the adage to the volunteers who work with us that “people don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”

Each of our outreaches features a prayer tent, where patients can pray with members of our team and hear about a God who loves them and sent His Son to die for them. We don’t force anyone to enter these tents—our medical help is truly free—but we rejoice when they do. And the practical aid has paid off. Our teams have prayed with 38,644 to receive Yeshua as their Messiah and Savior. Jews, Muslims, Hindus, people of all walks of life have responded. We’ve also witnessed thousands supernaturally healed, delivered and filled with the Spirit of God. We’ve seen patients enter the prayer tent on their knees and walk out on their feet. We’ve seen the deaf hear, the blind see and the lame carried in and walk out!

Lost No More

God’s preservation and regathering of the dispersed of Israel is a testimony of His faithfulness. As Jeremiah 31:35-36 declares, “Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for a light by day and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirs up the sea so that the waves roar, the Lord of Hosts is His name: ‘If those ordinances depart from before Me,’ says the Lord, ‘then the seed of Israel also will cease from being a nation before Me forever.’”

He has sustained His people through famine, dispersion, persecution and attempted genocide. While they may be “lost” to the world, God knows where they are ... and He is actively regathering them before our watching eyes. He is not only restoring them physically to their land, He is restoring them spiritually through His Son.

Jonathan Bernis *is president and CEO of Jewish Voice*

Ministries International, host of the TV show Jewish Voice with Jonathan Bernis and author of A Rabbi Looks at Jesus of Nazareth. See .

Jonathan Bernis shares how one of Israel's lost tribes has been discovered and ministered to in Ethiopia at .

3 Ways to Minister as a Family

Why do we exist? What is our purpose for being on earth? Why doesn't God just save us and immediately "take us home"?

We were born to glorify God. Our purpose is to extend His kingdom here on earth. *"Let Your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Our calling is to do all we can to take as many people as possible with us to heaven when we go. How this plays out in each individual life varies; but the foundational purpose for all of our lives is the same – advance the kingdom of God. Or as my dad says:

Plunder hell to populate heaven!

And there is nothing more beautiful, more inspiring or more powerful than a family that evangelizes together as a unit.

Here are 3 creative ways you can

evangelize together as a family.

1. Make a prayer wall

The key to intentionally fulfilling a priority is to keep it in front of your face. It is so easy to let priorities slip when we get caught up in day-to-day routines of shopping, laundry, dishes, meals, and busing our kids from band practice to sports games. A prayer wall can be simple. Designate an area where you pin verses about the great commission, quotes about evangelism, and even possibly list those you are praying for. You can get very creative with this!

Ideas include:

Painting a chalkboard

Using a bulletin board

Make a ribbon memo board

2. Make picture Bible bookmarks

As a family, you can make picture Bible bookmarks. Using pictures of those you are praying for, make a bookmark for your Bible that will be a daily reminder to pray for their salvation.

Materials needed for this are: card stock, clear contact paper, glue, markers, ribbon, and any other craft supplies needed to decorate the bookmark.

3. Hold a weekly huddle

Purpose to meet together once a week to share testimonies, struggles or ways that you can use more opportunities to evangelize as a family. Weekly huddles are great ways to hold each other accountable and to remember to *look for* open doors to share the gospel with those you meet.

As life cycles around with the dishes, diapers and laundry, may we be more intentional about seizing every opportunity possible to spread the good news that Jesus has defeated death, mankind can live free from condemnation, and that eternal life with Jesus is possible **now!**

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 2 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 +.

Why You Need God in Your Marriage

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord. Proverbs 18:22, **NKJV**

My father once received a handsome Swiss watch from some good friends. After he had worn it for a while, the watch stopped working. When my mother took it to the local jewelry store, the repairman said he was very sorry, but he could not fix it. So Mother took it to another repairman and another. They all said it was beyond mending.

Not too long after that, my mother happened to be going to Switzerland, so she tucked the broken watch into her bag. When she arrived, she arranged for the watch to be sent to the company that had made it, explaining that it had broken and no one could fix it.

Within a short period of time, she received the watch in the mail, running like new. The company that had crafted it had no trouble at all in making it work again.

Marriage is God's idea. He "crafted" it. If your marriage is broken, all the "repairmen" or counselors you take it to will be unable to fix it. Take it to the Creator Who made it in the first place. He can make it work again.

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