

Is Your Poor Self-Image Keeping You From Receiving God's Love?

Fat is not contagious, but I lived like I believed it was when I was super morbidly obese. Recently a missionary friend of mine, Terri Novini, posted some old pictures.

The year was 1999. I was at my highest weight, and although I'm kind of cowering back behind a few people, I know I was at my highest weight because of the sweater I was wearing.



Terri Novini, left, greeting friends in 1999. Teresa Parker, far right, scared of a hug.

I rarely hugged people back then. And if I did, it was a kind of side pat on the shoulder hug. I was afraid to get too close and allow my mountains of flesh to lap over onto someone else.

Anyone who knows me now knows that's not the way I hug these days. You get all of me full on, no holds barred.

Back then, though, I was afraid they would think me disgusting and want to run the other way. After all, I wanted to run away from myself.

I hadn't remembered that feeling until I saw the look on my face in the picture. In reality I almost looked scared, like someone would come and hug me at any moment and realize I was obese and never talk to me again because I had invaded their space with my huge body.

Today, having lost more than 260 pounds, I know I believed a lie the entire time I was obese. People are people whether they are large or small. The value of a hug is in the personal

contact.



Teresa Parker, left, hugging Devin Muller at Sweet Grace study in April 2014.

Everyone needs a hug every now and again.

From March to June, I led a Sweet Grace study at our church. One of the most memorable sessions for me was the session of fears.

The women wrote their fears on a piece of notebook paper and without sharing them with anyone, threw them in the fire.

They did this one at a time as they felt moved to. When the time was right, I went and hugged them.

I didn't do a quick side hug, I grabbed hold and held on even when they were ready to let go.

The moment they were getting uncomfortable with the hug, the tears began to flow. Then I knew we had hit pay dirt. The deep hurts and pains were being released all through the power of a hug prompted by the Holy Spirit, the supreme Comforter.

It came because of personal contact, invasion of space if you will. But mostly because of care and concern for another fellow traveler on this journey.

We lie to ourselves all the time. We think no one wants us to touch us, share with us, care for us.

In reality, everyone needs that whether it is from someone extremely overweight or skinny as a rail.

Fat is not contagious, but caring for another can be and should be contagious.

When I was so obese, I thought more of myself than if another

person might need a hug.

What would they think of me? Would they want me to touch them? Would they be able to tell I'd gained 10 pounds on top of the over 400 I already weighed? Would they judge me? Would they wonder why I didn't take better care of myself?

They wouldn't notice my weight. They would be too concerned about the deep need churning inside. They would be longing for someone, anyone to care.

They would be wishing someone would sit down beside them, give them a hug and tell them it's going to be all right.

As we begin to heal from the negative emotions that hold us captive, the blinders begin to come off. We start to see there are others out there who are hurting.

There are regular-sized people, some I consider to be the "beautiful" people, who have hurts and pains deeper than I could ever in a million years imagine.

I can see them when I look in their eyes instead of gazing at my own belly button. I began to see. Others do not really care how much I weigh. They just want me to love them.

When we came to the church we call home, I was hurting from difficulties in another church. I remember that first Sunday going forward for prayer.

Marilyn Hargis took one look at me as I came forward, grabbed me and held on in a bear hug. She prayed for me and kept holding on even when I wanted to let go. I was super morbidly obese, but she did not see that.

What she saw was a soul in need of being accepted and cared for. Her hug provided the healing touch I needed. I have ever forgotten that hug.

It took me a while until I could hug like that.

I first had to put my own agenda aside and see the hurt inside another. I have since come to not only be able to see the hurt, but feel it and almost touch it, as well.

When I am willing to be used by God in another's life, putting their needs before mine, God is genuinely pleased. Not only that, He gives amazing insights into their needs and meets them through me as His hands and feet here on this Earth.

It may just be a hug, a word, a note, but it is more about them than about me. It is bearing another's burdens,¹ which Paul says is fulfilling what Christ desires. John adds that loving other is a command of Christ.² Peter goes so far as to say we should greet one another with a holy kiss.³

No, fat is not contagious. It can be warm and welcoming when attached to a soul that genuinely cares for another human being.

Along with losing physical weight, we need to lose the emotional weight attached to our size. Embracing ourselves as a human being capable of being of value to another person is one of the first steps toward becoming healthy—body, soul and spirit.

¹ Gal. 6:2, Eph. 4:2

² 1 John 3:23

³ 1 Pet. 5:14

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, .

Widow Finds Second Wind as a Pastor

When her longtime husband and partner in ministry passed away, Carolyn Nichols could have thrown in the towel. Instead she asked God to use her like never before.

When Carolyn Nichols' husband, Ken, passed away in 2000 after the couple had co-pastored for nearly 40 years, Carolyn prayed a bold prayer: She asked God for the same double-anointing Elisha received after watching Elijah depart from this world.

Installed as senior pastor of Southport Christian Center (National City Foursquare Church) in suburban San Diego four days after Ken's death, Carolyn felt a tangible presence descend on her as she entered the pulpit.

"It was like something dropped from heaven," Carolyn recalls.

In the months following that spiritual anointing, God gave the then 67-year-old pastor a sermon series from Psalm 23 and helped her cope with her longtime husband's death. The couple had discussed everything in ministry and hosted weekly youth-group home meetings during their two sons' teenage years. So, the loss stung.

Yet, when people asked, "What are you going to do?" Carolyn replied: "I have a choice. I can curl up and die or do what God wants me to do. I have endeavored to do the best I can."

She has done well, with the church growing 50 percent during her tenure. Her reputation for mentoring young leaders prompted an onstage interview at Foursquare Connection 2014 in

Dallas.

“I love kids,” says Carolyn, now 81. “I have such a heart for them. I need to hear from them. I’ve learned they want to hear from me.”

Although Ken’s death didn’t change her leadership style, by observing her husband she learned the value of recognizing talent. He wasn’t afraid to use people as volunteers who didn’t yet have a strong walk with God. But he sensed those who were maturing spiritually. Today, Carolyn sees worship leader Rick Meza (whom Ken mentored) doing the same thing by including many young men and women on the worship team.

As Carolyn looks for talent, she relies on the Holy Spirit to direct her. For example, when the church needed a couple to lead the youth group 11 years ago, she sensed God telling her to ask Hector and Jochabed Gonzalez.

“I think leadership grows in a loving environment where people are accepted and affirmed.”

—CAROLYN NICHOLS, SENIOR PASTOR OF SOUTHPORT CHRISTIAN CENTER

Unbeknownst to her at the time, Hector had observed Southport’s youth wandering around during a concert at a Billy Graham festival the week before. After learning they had no leader, the Holy Spirit whispered to him, “I’m calling you to be their shepherd.”

“Every time I need a leader, I pray,” Carolyn says. “I’m constantly amazed at the confirmation when I go to someone and ask, and they say, ‘God has been speaking to me about that.’”

Jochabed says their pastor has been patient with them while serving as a great example and teaching them the deeper meaning of ministry.

“Even though we didn’t know what would work and wouldn’t work, she was always there to lend her support and prayer,” says Jochabed, who also serves as the church’s part-time bookkeeper.

Rick has similar praise, saying that after 27 years at Southport, he and his wife have never wanted to go elsewhere.

“It’s like she’s a magnet,” Rick says of Carolyn’s influence on younger believers. “It’s God working through her.”

In raising up leaders, Carolyn teaches them the importance of loving God and one another, saying that will enable them to love the world and minister to the unsaved. She also believes in the power of small groups, recently conducting an eight-week Sunday night couples marriage seminar. The women’s ministry sponsors small-group discipleship events twice a year.

In addition, with a steady influx of newcomers because of its proximity to the nearby Naval Base San Diego, Southport utilizes the small-group format for Wednesday night Bible studies.

The leadership teams for each ministry are also small groups where Carolyn watches leaders emerge. Although she oversees progress, the pastor leaves the results in God’s hands.

“I think leadership grows in a loving environment where people are accepted and affirmed, and where their leadership is recognized and they are given an opportunity to express themselves,” Carolyn says. “My job is to help them recognize what God has placed inside of them.”

Reprinted with permission from The Foursquare Church. Ken Walker is an award-winning writer in West Virginia. [Click here for the original article.](#)

After 777 Intercession Call, Graham Urges New Prayer Mandate

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6).

Just recently, God laid on my heart a burden to call His people to prayer for our nation. In obedience, I offered “777: An Urgent Call to Prayer for our Nation.” One hundred and twenty thousand of you signed up to receive the prayers that God had given me, distributing them to thousands more, so that we prayed with one heart and one voice. I believe our prayers moved heaven as evidenced by the double rainbow God stretched out over the nation’s capital on July 8.

Since then, I have been wondering if I would have another assignment. Part of me has hoped I would not have one so I could rest. But a bigger part of me has been very fearful that instead of being set apart for ministry, God would set me aside *from* ministry. But He has not. I have received my Next Assignment.

Let me try to explain it. On the first day of 777, I felt God focusing my attention not just on America, but also on Israel. To be honest, I have not cared for Israel any more than I have cared for Uganda, Moldova, the Ukraine, South Korea, the Philippines, Wales, England, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Canada or any of the other countries in which we have held Just Give Me Jesus revivals. I love them all because God loves the whole world. But as we prayed during 777, I felt as though God took my face in His Hands and turned it toward Jerusalem.

✘ In obedience to what I felt was His burden, I wrote my monthly Decision Bible study for September on *Pray for Jerusalem*. Shortly after submitting the Bible study, I wrote a blog that I posted entitled *Peace of Jerusalem*. I also shared a devotional with the 40 members of our ministry team at our quarterly meeting on the call to *Pray for Jerusalem*. And then I received a phone call from Dr. Jerry Johnson, president of the National Religious Broadcasters, inviting me to travel to Jerusalem as a member of a delegation of evangelical leaders to show my support for Israel during this time of conflict. I accepted. My Next Assignment seems obvious. It's to gather and rally His people to Pray for Jerusalem. So, I will be inviting you to partner with me for...

911: An Urgent Call to Pray for Jerusalem

“And I will pour out on ... the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great ... each clan by itself ... And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins’” (Zech. 12:10-12, Rom. 11:26-27).

Pray ... in the ninth month, September.

Pray ... on the first day, Sept. 1.

Pray ... and fast for one hour of your choosing.

The Purpose:

- For God to pour out His Spirit of grace and supplication on Jerusalem
- For God to open Jerusalem's eyes to recognize her Messiah...*Yeshua*...Jesus

- For God to break her heart for her sin and rejection of Him
- For God to save her spiritually and physically as she cries out to Him

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The Key to Succeeding During Disruption

Change is not simply a season in our spiritual journeys; it is a process we undergo for the whole of life.

As her labor pains intensified, I watched in amazement as my typically sweet-natured, mild-mannered wife took on the appearance of Sigourney Weaver in *Alien*. In one startling moment her peaceful appearance was replaced by a taut jaw, steely eyes and the bark of a drill sergeant preparing young soldiers for the battle of their lives. The thin line of sweat that had formed on her brow began to pulsate in rhythm with her temples.

I wanted to run for my life, to get as far away from this frightening creature as I could. But the next moment she was back to normal—normal, that is, for a pregnant woman about to give birth.

For a moment I wondered at the amazing transformation I had just witnessed. Was she possessed? Should I call the church intercessors? Was this the time to order the anointing oil I had seen advertised in *Charisma*?

Then I remembered the warning of the wise old doctor who had

done everything within his ability to prepare my wife for this moment: "Transition is unlike anything you have ever felt before." Suddenly, it all became clear to me. This was it—the dreaded stage called "transition."

The lessons I learned on that stormy night 15 years ago have enabled me to keep my sanity during many other transitional experiences in my life, both natural and spiritual. Here's what I've discovered.

Transition Is Unavoidable

The inescapable reality of life in the 21st century is "Change, or you will be changed." If there is anything we've learned from the last few years of experience in doing life, it's that the near future holds anything but the expected. We live in the midst of changing times.

Gone are the days of predictability and routine. Those frameworks that have held firm for generations, providing the basic structure of life, have begun to falter. The concepts that have governed business, science, government and philosophy no longer seem to apply. The traditional formulas for interpersonal relationships cannot guarantee the same results they once did.

And no one has felt the pain of transition any more than women.

As women have begun to take a more visible role in shaping our world, they have experienced the direct effects of transitional living. Fifty years ago, it was unheard of to have women as heads of state, industry and education, yet now they lead us capably and successfully. This social transformation has left women managing the pain of personal transition while also dealing with the pressure of learning new skills.

For years I lived with the idea that we were simply in a

season of change, only to wake up one day and realize that this season was unending. Transition is not simply a period of time in our lives; it is the whole of life. In fact, transition is the lifestyle of Spirit-led men and women.

It is vital for us to embrace this truth because if we perceive transition to be only a “momentary affliction,” then we will be incredibly disappointed when we move from one period of transition headlong into the next. My wife, being the insightful woman that she is, quickly discovered that the transition of labor leads to the transition of motherhood, which leads to more transition in every area of life.

What’s true of life in general is also true of our relationships with the Lord. As one well acquainted with transition, Paul said that in following Christ we are “transformed ... from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). The end result of spiritual transition is total and complete glorification; anything less than that will keep us on the road to change.

Like ancient Israel, God created us to be a spiritually nomadic people who travel light along life’s journey as we pursue the pillar of fire, the cloud of glory and the ark of His presence. We were created for the journey, not just the destination.

Transition Will Redefine You

For this reason, transition can be frightening, especially for those who have defined themselves by what they do rather than by who they are. I have counseled a number of women who fall into this category:

- Working women who quit their jobs to raise children—“I don’t even know who I am anymore without my career.”
- Married women who have just gone through a divorce—“If I’m not his wife, who am I?”
- Mothers whose children are now grown—“With our last

child out of the nest, I don't know what to do with myself."

I recently experienced a similar identity crisis. After pastoring for 15 years, I went through a six-month period during which I wrote, conducted seminars and spoke in conferences but didn't actively pastor. One day during this period, Tyler, my youngest son, came home from third grade with a question.

"Dad, what are you now?" he asked. I groped for an answer, rambling on about what I was doing. His eyes glazed over.

Tyler was looking for a noun—pastor, lawyer, doctor, teacher—and all I could give him was a string of action words telling him what I was doing. For a few months I struggled with the way transition was redefining me.

But I finally realized that there was no point in trying to get comfortable because as soon as I did, change would appear on the horizon. Just about the time my wife became comfortable in her role as the mother of an infant, the baby began to walk, and our whole world changed. When we moved the breakables to higher shelves and covered the electrical outlets, we realized our world would never be the same.

Although we were eventually able to return the delicate figurines to their original places, we had to make other adjustments in our home and lives as we went from being the parents of a toddler to being the parents of a grade-schooler to being the parents of a teen-ager. Through the process I learned that the only way to avoid transition is to stop growing.

Transition Takes Time to Assimilate

Science teaches us that light travels through space at a constant speed of 186,281 miles per second. The governing laws

of the universe dictate this speed with absolutely no deviation.

Yet humans travel through life without the benefit of a fixed velocity. We move at a variable rate that fluctuates according to our capacity for assimilating new information and influences. How well we absorb the implications of change dramatically affects the rate at which we successfully manage the challenges we face—both individually and collectively.

Each of us was designed by God to move through life most effectively and efficiently at a unique pace that will allow us to absorb and respond to the major changes we face. When we assimilate less change than our optimum speed allows, we fail to live up to our potential. When we attempt to assimilate more than our optimum speed permits, we become overloaded and stressed out.

Many of the women to whom I minister have recently found themselves in an unprecedented state of disequilibrium. They're not quite sure where the world is going and where they fit in the journey; consequently, they feel "out of balance" emotionally, spiritually and physically. As a result of this upheaval, they often find it difficult to maintain a healthy balance between work, rest, worship and play.

The result is that they are allowing change to manage them rather than managing it. This can cause them to become bitter instead of better.

Futurist and author Alvin Toffler was the first to popularize a term that describes the potentially debilitating effects of transitional living when he coined the term "future shock" in 1965. In a book by the same title, he accurately predicted the devastation that could result if we are unable to properly absorb major changes in society.

"Future shock" occurs when people are asked to tolerate more disruption than they have the capacity to endure, and it

results in high levels of stress and low levels of effectiveness. A few years ago, I learned that a number of pilots were in open revolt against more technology. These pilots were saying, "Please don't increase the technology in my cockpit. If I can't manage everything in here, you're going to kill me."

It seems the pilots were not complaining about inferior technology. In fact, what they were given was very often equipment they had asked for and even helped to design. But they were worried about making a rapid transition to new instruments without proper time for assimilation.

We all need time to assimilate the changes that are necessary for our survival. Learning the principles that will allow us to manage change and increase our spiritual resilience is not just a luxury but a necessity.

Find Something to Focus on During Transition

I believe that the greatest challenge we face in life is the challenge to forget the past, consider the present as transitional and focus on the future. When we camp in one spiritual or emotional location for too long, spiritual rigor mortis sets in. To remain where we are is to remain as we are.

Several years ago, I found myself standing in front of a kiosk in the shopping mall, desperately trying to focus on a three-dimensional mosaic picture. I had walked by the booth a hundred times smirking at the silly people wasting their time trying to discern the unseen. After one of my caustic comments, my wife threw down the gauntlet: "All right, wise guy, if it's so easy, let's see you do it!"

I marched confidently over to the booth, picked up the picture and entered a world of total confusion. No matter how hard I tried, I could not see anything but a thousand unrelated pixels.

After allowing me to wallow in my humiliation for a time, my wife finally revealed the secret: "If you get close to the picture, relax your vision and focus on one spot, it will magically appear before your eyes." I finally did, and the picture became clear.

The key to retaining your sanity during the unexpected moments of transitional living is to stay focused on the big picture. Many people find themselves struggling with arrested emotional and spiritual development because they have lost the power of vision during the process of transition.

What I thought was anger in the delivery room that stormy night in Kansas City was actually the intensity of my wife's focus. When I questioned her attitude, she quickly reminded me of the doctor's advice: "Find something and focus intently on it. It may be a picture, a light bulb or even my bald spot, but whatever you do, don't break your focus."

The same advice can be applied to transitional living. Find one spot on the horizon of your destiny, and focus on it.

Our ability to change determines whether or not we survive. The simple reality is that we have no choice over whether or not we will encounter the force of change in our lifetime. Our power lies in the ability to handle it correctly when we are confronted with it.

If you resist the changes that are necessary to succeed in business, you will eventually file bankruptcy papers. If you refuse to change as your spouse matures, you will eventually file divorce papers. If you resist the changes that are necessary for soul growth, you will eventually face defeat and despair.

In order to survive transitional living, we must make peace with the journey. The challenge to change is not some kind of divine punishment; it is a gracious invitation to rise to a new level of being.

Once you stop resenting the process you can engage in the exciting journey of encountering the unexpected. I challenge you to settle these issues once and for all and get on with the business of being “transformed ... from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

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How God's Heart Breaks

How do we break God's heart?¹ The Message version of the Bible interprets Ephesians 5:30, this way. “Don't grieve God. Don't break His heart.”

Reading the whole of the verses and chapters that come before this one leads me to believe the main we we break His heart is by not following what He's told us to do. It breaks His heart when we go our own way and do our own thing instead of listening to Him.

His Holy Spirit has given us life but we squander it. We make our temple a garbage dump for unhealthy food, unhealthy attitudes, unhealthy outlook, unhealthy demeanor. We don't take care of ourselves

Truth here: We don't even like ourselves much. And yet, Jesus gave His very life for us. We cannot wrap our brains around the magnitude of that unfathomable gift. If we can begin to do that, even in part, we will want to redeem the time, change, transform, morph into this amazing creation that He has designed us to be.²

Transformation, being made new, created in the image of Christ, born to fly is not something we make ourselves do. It is something He creates in us when we submit to His grace completely.

I don't know about you, but I take God's gift of grace as something that just is, not something that is as deep as the ocean, as wide as the heavens and as vast as all seven billion people on the earth today and the billions who have lived on the earth.

He loves each and every person, knows them, completely, inside out. I have over 15,000 combined "likes" and "friends" on my two Facebook pages. There is no way I can know every one of these people.

Only a handful do I know well and fewer than that can I call by name when I meet them on the street. And yet if we were to meet God on the street, He would know our deepest secret, our darkest fears, our most embarrassing moment; the dream that resides inside of us that hasn't even passed our cognitive brain yet.

He knows us and if we will submit to Him, He will lead us a step at a time. We quote Ephesians 2:8-9 a lot, the fact we are not the ones who save ourselves but it is God giving us a free gift by His grace. Available to us if we exercise faith to receive it.

But we many times leave out verse 10. In The Message it says: "We neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing."

He created me and you to do something specific. I am understanding that I don't really have to know the specifics of what I am to do. I only need to know who I am in Him. I only need to follow His each and every leading in my life.

A friend of mine has struggled with knowing the specific thing she is to do. She's talented, gifted, inspired and all of that leads her to want to do so many things in the Kingdom. She's learning, as we all must learn, to just listen to what God is telling her to do next.

It's really that risky step of faith. Why am I getting my degree, God? He may not show you why. He may just affirm to you it's your next step.

Planning these days is difficult for me. I try not to plan too far in advance lest the Lord interrupt my plans. I still plan. I have a full calendar. But God knows He's my calendar keeper. Any time He wants to interrupt my calendar and add a new date, I'm game.

This living not knowing is not scary, but it is an adventure and a new way of life for me. I no longer have to know why. I leave the whys up to God. I leave the hows up to Him as well.

Because I know beyond a shadow of a doubt, that it is God's power energizing me to do anything I do. "God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us."³

I realize this life I am living is really about God developing His character in me. He wants me moldable and ready to be a soldier in His army, ready to be placed wherever He needs me. That means I have some work to do to be ready, to be fit, to be moldable.

"We do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct

as God accurately reproduces his character in you.”⁴

What Paul is telling the Ephesian church rings true to me. The truth of the matter is we all have certain things we don't want to give up and yet we want to be useful to the Kingdom.

Usefulness only comes when we allow God to transform us from the inside out. Having God produce His character in me means, I must take off a lot of me-ness (you do notice how the word sounds like meanness when you say it) and put on Him-ness (which if you say it with proper enunciation would be humility, plain and simple.) OK, so it doesn't sound like it but it should look like it.

We are to be like bricks in His wall, building a kingdom, standing in place, remaining strong and true. We are not necessarily called to be the prettiest brick, the most adoring brick, the brick that can preach the best or sing the best.

We are called to be content with holding place, cooperating with those around us, becoming strong and stable until our character has become strong and secure. Then He may call us to be the foundational brick for some other project. It's all in how adaptable we are willing to be.

All I have ever dreamed of being is an author. I knew God had gifted me with the ability to write, so some day I would write a book, maybe lots of books. I couldn't see past that one thing. It was my focus.

So, He used that to bring me to the place where I now am content with being placed in whatever position He needs be to be in. I've spoken many places to many groups, been on television, radio and in articles. Led workshops. And lead an online coaching group.

What happens next? I don't know. He only ever gives me the next step. That's all. The next step. What's the one after that? Where's it all leading?

God only knows. And that's just fine with me.

Living not knowing means I don't have to have it all figured out. It's a freeing feeling. It's God working in me.

That, my friends, is the best feeling this side of heaven.

¹ Ephesians 5:30 MSG

² 2 Corinthians 5:17

³ Ephesians 3:20 MSG

⁴ Ephesians 5:19 MSG

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, .

When You See No Relief For Your Pain

I was just on Facebook and a friend had posted that people should have to pass drug tests in order to receive welfare.

Then I sat down on the floor to fold underwear and was thinking about people doing drugs. (Us girls, we do tend to think on a round-about.)

My thoughts went back a few months to April and May, when I would wake up in the night with intense grief and stress. (You

could read more here about my goings on this last year.)

And how all of a sudden I had compassion for people who turn to alcohol when life gets hard.

Because sometimes your heart hurts so much it makes you feel wild and desperate for relief.

In those heart-pressing moments of grief I longed for anesthesia. But in reasoning through this, I concluded that **followers of Christ do not anesthetize themselves.**

We don't mask the pain.

When our hearts are at a level 10 on the pain scale, we scream out for comfort. We run to arms –to Someone.

How do you know God is real? many people ask.

I will answer –because on the blackest nights of my life I have had someone with me. I have found comfort in the tenderness, strength, and hope of the living God.

I've tried different treatments to escape pain in the past –like eating chocolate or going shopping. (“Retail therapy” my sister-in-law calls it.) I've tried putting in a chick flick to watch love and happiness. That's just the truth. But the chocolate gets swallowed. I shrink the new shirt I just bought in the dryer. The movie ends. All of these anesthetics wear off quickly, and then there is the stab of pain again.

But God's presence in suffering does not wear off. In fact, I am convinced that **the Lord is a gifted artist in the way he comforts his people** –surprising us individually with a balm of encouragement so intimate and well-timed that it feels like chocolate and a new shirt and a chick flick all at once.

It feels like being loved and cared for.

This is what waits for the raw heart that seeks God.

So I ask you –what pain are you experiencing today, and are you trying to soothe it with anything inferior to the comfort God offers?

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.

WATCH: Lisa Bevere – How a Wise Woman Builds Her House

John Bevere was a tennis-playing engineering student and Lisa was in a sorority when they met in college. John introduced Lisa to Christ and after they got married, Lisa built her marriage on this key principle.

A.W. Tozer: How God Defines Your Life

Many of us claim that God is first in our lives. But do we live out this reality in our everyday existence—or have we made something else preeminent?

Order, both in nature and in human life, depends upon right relationships; to achieve harmony each thing must be in its proper position relative to each other thing. That's why it is

so essential for God to have His proper place in our lives. When He does not, everything is out of order.

We are right when, and only when, we stand in a right position relative to God, and we are wrong so far and so long as we stand in any other position.

So let us begin with God. Back of all, above all, before all is God; first in sequential order, above in rank and station, exalted in dignity and honor. As the self-existent One He gave being to all things, and all things exist out of Him and for Him. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11, KJV).

Every soul belongs to God and exists by His pleasure. God being who and what He is, and we being who and what we are, the only thinkable relation between us is one of full lordship on His part and complete submission on ours. We owe Him every honor that is in our power to give Him. Our everlasting grief lies in giving Him anything less.

The pursuit of God will embrace the labor of bringing our total personality into conformity to His. I do not here refer to the act of justification by faith in Christ. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to His proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of worshipful submission that the Creator creature circumstance makes proper.

The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all, we step out of the world's parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its upsurgings and its outgoings.

Our break with the world will be the direct outcome of our

changed relation to God. For the world of fallen men does not honor God. Millions call themselves by His name, it is true, and pay some token respect to Him, but a simple test will show how little He is really honored among them.

Let the average man be put to the proof on the question of who or what is above, and his true position will be exposed. Let him be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and man, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However the man may protest, the proof is in the choices he makes day after day throughout his life.

“Be exalted, O Lord” (Ps. 21:13, NKJV) is the language of victorious spiritual experience. It is a little key to unlock the door to great treasures of grace. It is central in the life of God in the soul.

Let the seeking man reach a place where life and lips join to say continually “Be exalted, O Lord,” and a thousand minor problems will be solved at once. His Christian life ceases to be the complicated thing it had been before and becomes the very essence of simplicity. By the exercise of his will he has set his course, and on that course he will stay as if guided by an automatic pilot.

Let no one imagine that he will lose anything of human dignity by this voluntary sell-out of his all to God. His deep disgrace lay in his unnatural usurpation of the place of God. His honor will be proved by restoring again that stolen throne. In exalting God over all he finds his own highest honor upheld.

Anyone who might feel reluctant to surrender his will to the will of another should remember Jesus' words, “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34). We must of necessity be servant to someone, either to God or to sin.

The sinner prides himself on his independence, completely overlooking the fact that he is the weak slave of the sins that rule his members. The man who surrenders to Christ exchanges a cruel slave driver for a kind and gentle Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

I hope it is clear that there is a logic behind God's claim to preeminence. That place is His by every right in earth or heaven. While we take to ourselves the place that is His, the whole course of our lives is out of joint. Nothing will or can restore order till our hearts make the great decision: God shall be exalted above.

"Those who honor Me I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30), God said once to a priest of Israel, and that ancient law of the kingdom stands today unchanged by the passing of time or the changes of dispensation. The whole Bible and every page of history proclaim the perpetuation of that law.

"If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor," (John 12:26), Jesus said, tying in the old with the new and revealing the essential unity of His ways with men.

Sometimes the best way to see a thing is to look at its opposite. Eli and his sons are placed in the priesthood with the stipulation that they honor God in their lives and ministrations. They fail to do this, and God sends Samuel to announce the consequences.

Unknown to Eli, this law of reciprocal honor has been all the while secretly working, and now the time has come for judgment to fall. Hophni and Phineas, the degenerate priests, fall in battle; the wife of Hophni dies in childbirth; Israel flees before her enemies; the ark of God is captured by the Philistines; and the old man Eli falls backward and dies of a broken neck. Thus stark, utter tragedy followed upon Eli's failure to honor God.

Now over against this set almost any Bible character who honestly tried to glorify God in his earthly walk. See how God winked at weakness and overlooked failures as He poured upon His servants grace and blessing untold. Let it be Abraham, Jacob, David, Daniel, Elijah or whom you will; honor followed honor as harvest the seed.

The man of God set his heart to exalt God above all; God accepted his intention as fact and acted accordingly. Not perfection, but holy intention made the difference.

In our Lord Jesus Christ this law was seen in simple perfection. In His lowly manhood He humbled Himself and gladly gave all glory to His Father in heaven. He sought not His own honor but the honor of God who sent Him.

“If I honor Myself,” He said on one occasion, “My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me” (John 8:54). So far had the Pharisees departed from this law that they could not understand one who honored God at his own expense. “I honor My Father,” Jesus said to them, “and you dishonor Me” (v. 49).

Another saying of Jesus, and a most disturbing one, was put in the form of a question. “How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?” (John 5:44). If I understand this correctly, Christ taught here the alarming doctrine that the desire for honor among men made belief impossible.

Is this sin at the root of religious unbelief? I believe it may be. The whole course of life is upset by failure to put God where He belongs. We exalt ourselves instead of God, and the curse follows.

In our desire after God let us keep always in mind that God also has desire, and His desire is toward the sons of men, and more particularly toward those sons of men who will make the once-for-all decision to exalt Him over all. Such as these are precious to God above all treasures of earth or sea.

In them God finds a theater where He can display His exceeding kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. With them God can walk unhindered; toward them He can act like the God He is.

In speaking thus I have one fear: that I may convince the mind before God can win the heart. For this God-above-all position is one not easy to take. The mind may approve it while not having the consent of the will to put it into effect.

Though the imagination races ahead to honor God, the will may lag behind, and the man must make the decision before the heart can know any real satisfaction. God wants the whole person, and He will not rest till He gets us in entirety.

Let us pray over this in detail, throwing ourselves at God's feet and meaning everything we say. Let's ask God today to be exalted over our possessions, our friendships, our comforts, our reputations. Let's ask Him to take His proper place of honor above our ambitions, our likes and dislikes, our family, our health and even life itself.

No one who prays thus in sincerity need wait long for tokens of divine acceptance. God will unveil His glory before His servant's eyes, and He will place all His treasures at the disposal of such a one, for He knows that His honor is safe in consecrated hands.

A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) was pastor of Southside Alliance Church in Chicago for 31 years. He also was the author of more than 40 books, including *Faith Beyond Reason*; *Man: The Dwelling Place of God* and *The Knowledge of the Holy*.

A Christian Leader Whose Husband Has ALS Sounds Off on the Ice Bucket Challenge

Well, we are on week two of the very-viral very-everywhere ALS ice bucket challenge. I know, I know, I can hear the groans; it started out cute and now it's out-of-control. Played. Clogging up social-media sites everywhere.

I even read this charming article in which the author called the challenge (that has raised an unprecedented amount of money for one of the most outrageously underfunded diseases) a waste of fresh water. Another headline whined, "Is the Ice Bucket Challenge Going to Cure ALS?" Um, no (and, by the way, that's a stupid bar to set for any fund raiser.)

Critics complain that the challenge is really about feeding our American narcissism and does nothing for ALS awareness or funding. They assert that people should just quietly donate their money and move on with their lives.

I get that they're cranky, but I think maybe they don't realize what it's like to face this insidious disease and then realize that it's nearly invisible to the rest of the world. As I watch my husband become entombed inside his own body, I feel desperate for people to understand that this sort of inhumane condition exists. But for some reason, while everyone acknowledges it's one of the worst fates imaginable, funding for research and patient care is nearly nil.

I recently mentioned to a doctor that my husband has ALS, and she first looked confused and then said, "Oh, that's Lou Gehrig's Disease, right?" *Right*. Why does she—a doctor of medicine—still only know it by Lou Gehrig's Disease? Because we humans need to associate things with people. It's easier that way. That's why the celebrity faces and personal

challenges happening in the ice-bucket challenge are so effective at bringing in money. And if someone gets to look good while plunking their \$50 into the ALS tip jar, *I have zero problem with that.*

Because here's the deal: We are in for the fight of our lives with this monster, and the very LAST thing I want is for people to give quietly, anonymously, and then slink away. Raise the roof! Raise a ruckus! Call all sorts of attention to yourself! I will be happy for you and every Facebook Like you receive, as you nudge ALS an inch or two closer to the collective public consciousness.

So, fear not, dear reader, this too shall pass, and your Facebook news feed will go back to cat videos and kids singing "Let It Go." Until that happens, here's a little reminder about what it's like to live with ALS and why this level of awareness is like gold to families such as mine.

A Mile in ALS Shoes

People ask me often what it's like to live with ALS. It's a brave question because the answers are not very pleasant. But it's also such a worthy question because understanding how this disease impacts those who suffer from it creates empathy, which is so valuable; it carries us into another person's world and allows us to understand what they're feeling and how they're hurting. As I watch my strong husband struggle with things that used to be easy and automatic, I sometimes wish that everyone could see life from his perspective.

If you would like to experience just a tiny corner of an ALS life, I have a list of Empathetic Experiences for you. These are things you can do to walk for just a mile in ALS shoes. If you try one, take a little time at the end to consider that people actually living with the disease have a million miles more to go.

1. Pick up a 10-pound weight. Now imagine it's your fork and move it from your plate to your mouth repeatedly without shaking.
2. Sit in a chair for just 15 minutes moving nothing but your eyes. Nothing. No speaking, no scratching your nose, no shifting your weight, no changing the channel on the television, no computer work. Only your eyes. As you sit, imagine: This is your life. Your only life.
3. Borrow a wheelchair or power scooter and try to maneuver quickly through the aisles at Walmart, without speaking. Note the way people react to you.
4. Strap 25 pounds to your forearm. Now, adjust your car's rear-view mirror.
5. Using none of your own muscles, have your spouse or child or friend get you dressed and brush your teeth. Write down some of the feelings you have being cared for in this way.
6. Before you eat your next meal, take a good, long look at the food. Inhale deeply and appreciate the aroma. Now, imagine never being able to taste that—or any other food—for the rest of your life.
7. Put two large marshmallows in your mouth and have a conversation with your friends. How many times must you repeat yourself? How does this make you feel?
8. Go to bed and stay in one position for as long as you possibly can, moving nothing.
9. Strap weights to your ankles and climb a flight of stairs, taking two at a time. That's the kind of strength it takes for someone with ALS to tackle the stairs on a good day.
10. Install a text-to-speech app on your phone or iPad and use it exclusively to communicate for one day.

And to my friends living with ALS: Please give us more ideas

and help us move into your world for a bit. We want to help make your lives rich and full, and I'm not sure we can do that without at least a basic understanding of what you are facing. I think I speak for many when I say: You are superheroes, and we are in awe.

With unending hope for a million-mile cure.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of Beautiful Battlifields (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.

How to Survive the Strong-Willed Child

Children who make decisions with intensity tend to be labeled "strong-willed." At the end of the day, their parents feel as if they've been engaged in hand-to-hand combat—and that the child often wins at the parents' expense! Most parents consider a strong will a negative personality trait because it often creates resistance and frustration in family life. Yet, in reality, it's the strong-willed kids who often are better equipped to succeed, be creative and face adversity.

Children with strong wills have the potential to become the next generation of leaders. They have their own ideas and plans. They know what they want. They're persistent, confident, passionate and determined to succeed at whatever they choose to do.

Leaders have an agenda, look for ways to incorporate others into their plans, and have a high need for control in life. Balanced with graciousness, leaders become a treasure because they make things happen, create organization out of chaos, and motivate people to action.

Unfortunately, it's hard to raise a leader. These kids tend to have their own ways of doing things and like to tell other people (including their parents) what to do. A strong will keeps a child moving in a certain direction in spite of obstacles. Often these children need bigger barriers or tighter limits to teach them that those boundaries are firm.

Don't be discouraged by the effort it takes to teach a strong-willed child which limits not to push. The strong-willed child accomplishes things in life, because the roadblocks that might hold others back are no match for this kid's determination. Your job is to help him know the difference between obstacles to overcome and limits to live within.

A strong will can be an asset ... as long as the heart is in the right place.

Have you developed some tools to teach boundaries to a strong-willed child in your family while still enjoying the child's determination?

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