

When Someone You Love Is on a Different Path

Back when Steve and I were both healthy, I occasionally thought about what it might be like if one of us got sick (**see footnote below). I imagined many of the challenges that might go along with a terminal diagnosis, and I was right about some of it—but I missed a big one completely.

One of the most difficult things about navigating a marriage around ALS (for me, at least—I certainly don't speak for everyone) is that for the first time ever in our relationship, we are heading toward different places. (Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) is better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease.)

Our 29 years together have been filled with ups, downs and a whole lot of middles. We have not done marriage perfectly by a long shot, but the one thing we've always contended for in our relationship is unity of purpose. We have really tried to have the same goals in mind: raise happy, healthy kids, upgrade the car, improve our education, serve with excellence, etc. We are a good team because, while we disagree on plenty of shallow things (he likes oysters. Eww! How can I agree with that?), we always agree on the big things, and we help each other believe that we can get where we're going. We've had to adjust our course through the years, but we've always adjusted together.

But when Steve was given a two- to five-year prognosis, it was like we both heard the word "recalculating" spoken independently to both of us. From my vantage point, Steve's journey is far more difficult than mine, but his destination is much more beautiful. He's moving toward resolution. Toward the ultimate cure. Toward a life that is unknown and yet not—we know it will be beyond all dreams or imaginations. He has no decisions to make about his future life, which I know is both unsettling and comforting. My destination is also a

mystery, but I feel so responsible for it and for the children who trust me to lead them. I feel like I'm entering a world with no map and without my trusty sidekick who's helped me with directions for 30 years. He's also made the journey really fun. So I can't say that where I'm headed looks in any way dreamy.

And yet, I have this assurance that circles through my brain when I start to feel suffocated by thoughts of an unknown reality, and you already know what it is because I say it here all the time: The God I've chosen to follow has already been to every minute of my life. He knows where our respective roads are going, and I do believe He calls them both "good." He has good plans for me and beautiful plans for Steve. He's always known where the road will take us, and He's not wringing His hands in heaven over the fact that the details look murky to me.

So, we walk, Steve and I. We walk together. I help him get where he's going, and he helps me. He talks with me about what to do with the house and the kids. He has father-son talks with Corey about how to help me navigate the road ahead. He generously sows into a future he may only see from the balconies of heaven. And these conversations? They are painful. Yipes, they are painful. They are filled with rolling tears and gaspy sobs (me—all me, Steve doesn't cry about this stuff). They are filled with brutal, raw-edged beauty that I will remember always as the most intimate moments I have ever shared with the love of my life.

I don't have a clever application point to end this with. I can't tie it all together for people who are not steering their way through the Shadowy Valley. I only share it to point to the goodness of God in a world of uncertainty. Also, as a marker I can return to when I wonder where the heck I'm going and where is that map and how do I read this compass anyway?

I hope it gives you hope that you can find your way as well. A verse to end with seems like a good idea:

That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. 2 Timothy 1:12

[Bo Stern](#) is a blogger and author of *Beautiful Battlegrounds* (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 God Can Change Your Life in 1 Day

God hasn't stopped working just because you've stopped believing. He is preparing you to receive what He's promised.

Are you tired of waiting for a prophetic word to be fulfilled in your life? Have you received it, claimed it, believed for it, fought the good fight of faith with it—and still have yet to see it come to pass?

If so, don't give up! Things can change in a day.

Think about the significant events in the lives of our fathers and mothers in the faith. One day Sarah, Abraham's wife, was just an old woman with a barren womb. The next, she was

pregnant with the child of promise. After 24 years of waiting for God's word to come to pass, she was doubtful. But her situation changed—big time—in just a day!

One day David was being forced to live like a gypsy, running from the armies of King Saul. The next, his enemy was dead, and he was not only a free man but the anointed heir to the throne. David, too, had had a word from God—and after 15 years, he too had probably begun to doubt. But God saw to it that he became king on the appointed day.

There are other examples. What about Esther? One day she was a young Israelite woman with an uncertain future. The next she was Ahasueras' queen.

One day Jeremiah was just a kid. The next he was a prophet to the nation of Israel.

One day the Jewish people were lost, wondering why the heavens were silent and God no longer spoke to them. The next they were gazing into the eyes of their long-awaited Messiah.

One day the disciples were hiding in an upper room for fear of persecution. The next they were filled with the power of the promised Holy Spirit and eager to preach, teach and work miracles in Jesus' Name!

Now think about your own life. Can you point to times when things changed drastically for you—in just a day? Perhaps you graduated from college or had a major career change or bought your first house or gave birth to a child. One day your circumstances could be defined one way, and the next they were totally different.

I know I have plenty of examples like this. One day I was a sinner, the next a saint. One day I was single and the next a married woman. One day I was unaware of my purpose, and the next I was walking in destiny.

That's the way it is when God takes control of your life. He gives you a word, a promise, a vision and begins to set into motion all the things that are required to bring it into being. But He doesn't cause it to be fulfilled until just the right moment. He allows you to wait—in order to prepare you and teach you to trust in Him.

The waiting does not negate the validity of His word. "God is not a man," the Bible says, "that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Num. 23:19, NKJV).

Sometimes we become impatient because God's timing is not the same as ours. We want Him to do the thing as soon as He speaks it! Or we develop expectations because a particular prophetic word has a time frame attached to it. But we must remember that even the most seasoned prophet "[sees] through a glass darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12, KJV) and may not have God's timing perfectly in view.

There is always a need to test each prophecy you receive. But once you are sure you've heard God's voice, either through someone else or in your own heart, have faith that His promise will be fulfilled—if not today, perhaps tomorrow. Look forward each day to all the good things He has ordained for you (Ps. 84:11).

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How to Get Lost in Worship

Shortly after I was healed from a life-threatening disease and baptized in the Holy Spirit, I was asked to minister in a Pentecostal church. There I was introduced to a dimension of worship that I had never experienced before.

Sitting on the platform in my studied dignity as a former Methodist professor, observing the worship service that was so different from that to which I was accustomed, I was fascinated by all that was going on around me. Though their worship expression seemed disorderly—almost irreverent—in comparison with Methodist tradition, I could tell these people deeply loved the Lord and were expressing their love to Him.

I looked down from my seat on the platform and saw a pretty red-headed woman standing with her hands raised and her eyes closed worshiping God. She was perhaps 35 years old. Her face glowed as if it reflected a thousand-watt lightbulb. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, and I heard her say, “I love You, Jesus.”

As I watched her, it seemed to me that her face got brighter and brighter. I couldn't hear everything she was saying from where I was, and I was curious. So I walked down off the platform and stood in front of her. She ignored me.

I leaned over and said, “You and the Lord are having a good time, aren't you, honey?” Still she didn't pay attention to me. I was insulted. I thought, *Doesn't she know I am the guest evangelist?*

I heard her say, “You are the lily of the valley. I love You. You are the bright and morning star.” I recognized that she was quoting love phrases from the Song of Solomon. She continued, “Thank You for being my husband, my friend.” Somewhat awed, I went back to the platform.

But I could not take my eyes off her. I knew she was experiencing the presence of God in a way that I never had. I watched her awhile then walked back down to stand by her.

She did not know I was there. So I returned to the platform a second time. Still watching her, I thought, *Maybe she doesn't hear well.*

I walked down a third time and stood behind her so I could speak into her ear. Again I said, "You and the Lord are having a good time together, aren't you?"

What I really wanted to say was, "What is going on? I don't understand what it is you are enjoying." I thought she could explain it to me, but still she did not acknowledge my presence.

This time when I returned to the platform, I felt someone punch me. I recognized that it was the Lord trying to get my attention. He spoke to me so sweetly: "Fuchsia, you can have that if you want it." I didn't even know what "that" was, but I assumed He was referring to my fascination with the young worshiper.

I went to my room after the service and got on my knees. I said to the Lord, "All right, what is it? You said I could have the thing that made that girl so 'lost' she didn't know I was there. What is that?"

The Lord answered, "I seek a people who worship Me in spirit and truth."

I asked, "Is that worship? Then what have I been doing all these years?"

"Without this revelation of worship," He replied gently, "you have simply been having religious services."

"How can I have that?" I cried out.

Revelation of Worship

Then the Lord asked me three simple questions. First He inquired, "What would you do if you had just heard the gates of heaven click behind your heels, and you knew you were through with the devil forever?"

I responded, "I would shout, 'Glory!'"

He said, "Shout it." And I did.

I told Him that I would cry, "Hallelujah!"

He said, "Do it." And I did.

Then He asked me what I would do if I looked up and saw Jesus for the first time.

I said that I would bow at His feet, kiss His nail-scarred hands and wash His feet with my tears.

He said, "Do it."

I meditated on the efficacious, vicarious, substitutionary and mediatorial work of Calvary, and suddenly I experienced a fresh glimpse of the Lamb of God. I began to bow before the Lamb who was slain, but He asked me to look up into His face. "When you see Me face to face," He asked, "what will you tell Me?"

When I heard those words, it was as if a dam within my soul broke, allowing torrents of praise to flood my lips. I told Him how wonderful He was. I recited the attributes of God I had learned in Bible college. When I finished, He asked me if these were the only adjectives I had for Him.

With a sense of awe I responded simply, "You are wonderful."

A picture came to my mind, and I saw the face of Jesus before me as if it were framed. Then the frame faded. As I looked

into His face, I told Him how much I loved Him. I had never done that in my life. I told Him how precious He was to me. I went on and on, trying to express my love for Him with my limited vocabulary.

When I was answering His three questions, it seemed as if just a few moments had passed. But it had actually been an hour and a half since I first knelt there. For the first time in my life I had been in the presence of God in such a way that I had lost all consciousness of time. I had begun to experience true worship—my heart responding to the love of God and expressing adoration and love to Him. All my years of Bible training, study and ministry had not evoked the response of worship from my heart that a few moments of divine revelation in His presence had.

As a sincere Methodist professor and pastor, I had thought I understood what worship of an omnipotent God involved, and I regarded our worship services as important expressions of true reverence for God—the creature worshiping his Creator. Though we did honor God sincerely from our hearts, I now understand that we had defined worship very narrowly according to the tradition of our church fathers.

My renewed study of the Scriptures concerning worship has helped me understand the divine destiny each of us has to become worshipers. Much of what is written in my book *Worship Him* (Creation House) is what I have learned as I have allowed my Teacher, the blessed Holy Spirit, to open my spiritual eyes to the purpose of God for our personal fulfillment—to become worshipers of God in spirit and in truth.

When I searched the Scriptures with this purpose in mind, many passages I had read before and thought I understood doctrinally began to live in my heart in a new way. Since that pivotal worship experience in my room, I have enjoyed God's manifest presence in praise and worship many times. I have also experienced the glory of His presence while studying His

precious Word, observing communion and fellowshiping with other believers.

Worshipping God has many facets of reality, as we shall discuss, that make it a central theme of the Scriptures. Understanding true spiritual worship is imperative for all believers who sincerely want to know God more intimately.

Worship Defined

As we learn about different aspects of worship, our definition of *worship* will become more comprehensive. But we can begin with a simple working definition from Webster's Dictionary: "showing honor or reverence to a divine being or supernatural power; to regard with great, even extravagant respect, honor or devotion; to take part in an act of worship."

The Old English spelling of the word is *worthship*, which aptly conveys the idea that the one to whom we show honor has worth. Worship is not an arrogant demand of God toward His creatures; it is rather a natural response from hearts that comprehend the infinite "worthship" of God—hearts that are surrendered, silent, repentant and mature.

1. A surrendered heart. The biblical pattern of worship is based on the surrender of the heart to the lordship of Christ. Without the heart reality of obedience and submission to the Word of God, we will never experience true worship in spirit and truth. Participation in the sacraments as well as in charismatic expressions of worship must reflect a heart that is bowed in gratitude and love for God in order to become true expressions of worship.

This is the fundamental essence of worship: I bow my heart before God Almighty and acknowledge His supreme lordship over my life. It is realized through total surrender of the worshipper to the One worshipped. Only as we choose to acknowledge God in all our ways (Prov. 3:6) and give Him control of our lives and destinies can we become true

worshippers of God.

2. A silent heart. Worship will not always constitute the forming of words or phrases to utter before God. But it will always involve the humble prostration of our souls before God as we revere His greatness in silence and stillness. The psalmist understood this when he wrote of the Lord, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).

Even in human love, affection is not always expressed verbally. Sometimes more is said through eye contact than could ever be expressed in words. Worship involves eye contact with God; it is staring at God! A worshipping heart longs to gaze upon the Beloved and know the fulfillment that comes when that gaze is returned.

3. A repentant heart. Brokenness over our own sin characterizes a worshipping heart. When Mary came into the Pharisee's house to express her love for Jesus, she wept, washed His feet with her tears and anointed them with a costly ointment. The Pharisee condemned her as a sinner and accused Jesus for not knowing what kind of woman she was. But Jesus rebuked the Pharisee for not offering to wash His feet, the customary thing for a host to do. Then He forgave this sinful woman for all her sins (Luke 7:36-50).

Mary's tears were an outward manifestation of a heart that was deeply stirred before her Lord. She was repentant and so overcome with desire to express her love that she rejected the protocol of the day and barged into a private home uninvited. This was not a show. Her tears and her kisses were a sincere expression of her penitent heart.

4. A mature heart. As we grow in our relationship with God, we will grow in our desire and our ability to worship. Spiritual maturity does not exempt one from being a worshiper; it enables one to worship more perfectly and to teach others to worship.

We were made for worship! God created us with a longing to be rightly related to Him in a loving relationship that evokes worship.

Surrender to His lordship in every area of our lives releases us into greater dimensions of worship that bring new revelation of God to our hearts. With each new revelation, we become more satisfied and walk more fully into the divine destiny for which we were created. The priority of worship God purposed will become the dynamic of our lives that brings true fulfillment.

[Read a companion devotional.](#)

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Don't Let Worry Rule You

Have you ever been secretly scared that if you stop worrying, the very thing that you were afraid might happen most definitely will? That somehow the energy generated from your fretting is the force field keeping the dreaded outcome at bay, and if you lower the force field for even one minute ... *blam!* Annihilation. Devastation.

The end of the world as you know it.

If you're like me and the majority of folks, I'll bet you're

picking up exactly what I'm putting down right now.

Yep, worry makes the average woman's world go round. We have watched our mothers and grandmothers worry themselves into a tizzy, and we've learned to do the very same. Fretting and stewing and fussing seem perfectly normal because we're so used to it. We've fooled ourselves into thinking we're doing the responsible thing by agonizing over our dilemmas.

And the scariest thing is that we're passing this legacy of lunacy right on to our children. When will the cycle ever be broken if we don't do something about it?

Worry is a type of fear that loves to masquerade as responsibility. By dwelling on our troubles, we think we'll somehow become enlightened with magical answers that will change outcomes that previously were inevitable.

Is there any other way to intimately care about our family and friends besides obsessing over their problems?

Well, actually there is: "Don't worry about anything. Instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done" (Phil. 4:6, NLT).

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How to Let God Order Every

One of Your Steps

God wants us to submit every moment to Him and to use our time as He directs.

How you spend your time changes with the different seasons of your life, but one principle applies to every moment of time: Don't waste it. Every season has various tasks that God has appointed for you to do, and you will give an account to Him of how you have spent your time. God never wants you to look at any time in your life as purposeless. He doesn't want you to spend your time apart from Him.

The important thing to know is how God wants you to use your time. You will not learn this through hard work or schooling or a keen intellect but by seeking God with a pure and upright heart. You also must put aside the schemes of your self-love just as soon as you notice them. For you do not waste time only by doing nothing or even by doing something you know is wrong; you also waste time when you do a seemingly "good" thing that God has not asked you to do.

You must continually depend on God's Spirit for His direction. If you have a doubt about what He wants, ask Him again. When the course becomes clear, move forward with His strength. Bring your heart back to Him whenever you feel yourself drifting away from God.

You are truly blessed if you leave yourself in your Savior's hands, willing to do whatever He wants. Never tire of asking God what He wants from you.

Meet each responsibility as it comes. God prepares you for them. The only thing you need to do is submit your temper, your opinions, your worries—your natural way of responding to things—completely to Him. Don't let yourself get overwhelmed by external business.

Seek, in everything you do, to glorify God. Do not get so personally involved with your duties that your whole thought-life revolves around them. Don't let your work either excite you or depress you too much.

Time spent socially with others can be dangerous. You must learn to stay in the presence of God while you are with other people. There is a subtle poison often hidden in conversation. Use your time with others to influence them toward God. Remember: Your words can do great good or great harm.

Spare time is pleasant. You can hardly find a better use for it than by renewing your strength through inward fellowship with God. You will learn the secret of spending intimate time with your Lord. Those who know the Lord well cannot resist turning to Him in every available moment.

François de Fenelon, better known simply as "Fenelon," became the archbishop of Cambrai, France, in the late 1600s. His correspondence on the subject of a deeper walk with Christ still influences us today.

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How God Answers Your Prayers by Changing You

Editor's Note: Bo Stern's husband is fighting a rare disease called ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Years ago, the book *Prayer of Jabez* took the world by storm.

It was built on an obscure scripture from 1 Chronicles—a beautiful prayer spoken to the heavens by a man with a strange name and a difficult life. The book got people praying again and one line from that small bit of biblical text quickly took center stage in the Christian lexicon: *enlarge my territory*.

I was thinking about that line this morning, as I've run to my Bible and my coffee for refuge after a string of long, hard ALS nights. (One thing I'll say for living at extreme levels of exhaustion: it pretty much eliminates pretense. There's no posing in my prayer life anymore. I don't have the time or energy for it.) I mostly mumbled gibberish through my murky mental fog until one line rose to the surface and became something of an inhale/exhale:

“Strengthen my resolve, increase my reserves, fill my storehouse.”

I breathed that prayer in and out, in and out, in and out, and it reminded me of a therapy Steve does called breath-stacking. Because the muscles in his chest are beginning to atrophy, he uses a weird device to force air into his lungs, causing them to expand and fill. So in spite of his muscles' inability to do that work on their own, his lungs are still being enlarged and maintaining more of their functional capacity.

Here's how I think all this comes together: External pressure exhausts internal capacity. I could ask God to lessen the external pressure, or I can ask Him to step in and sovereignly fill my lungs with life. Maybe this is what “expand my territory” is all (or partially) about. Maybe it's not so much that God is here to give me new and exciting adventures or increased authority or notoriety or whatever it is we think of when we think “expansion.” Instead, I think it might mean that He is here to grow my *internal ability* to draw the strength I need from Him, to endure hardship with hope, to run a long race without losing joy, to care for Steve well, to do

tasks I've never imagined I could do before (medical stuff freaks me out a little—but I'm learning). Maybe the territory that He is longing to enlarge for me is actually the ground *inside of me*—where the threat of atrophy is always lurking. Because it seems that any long-term external expansion will hinge on our internal capacity to maintain it.

So today, this is my prayer over myself and the ALS wives that are so dear to me and over everyone who feels at the end of their rope and last of their resources:

Strengthen our resolve (to do Your will when it's hard), increase our reserves (to endure this "expansion" with joy) and fill our storehouses (with all the resources we need to become the bigger, stronger people You have designed us to be.) Amen.

With hope for strength, increase and abundance.

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

When Blessings Bring You Battles

...With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me... Ephesians 6:18-19

For six days, once a day, it was my privilege to be joined with you as we earnestly humbled ourselves, sought God's face, prayed and repented of our sin. On the seventh day, we prayed and fasted for seven hours. What's striking is that this is the same pattern for victory over enemy strongholds that God gave to Joshua over 3000 years ago.

Joshua and the children of Israel had crossed the Jordan and were ready to claim all that God had promised to give them in the land of Canaan. But their progress was blocked by Jericho, an enemy fortress that had never been taken. As Joshua plotted his military tactics, God showed him a better way. He commanded Joshua to have the Israelites march around Jericho once a day for six days in absolute silence. On the seventh day, they were to march around it seven times. When the priests gave a loud trumpet blast at the end of the 7th lap, the people were to give a great shout, and the walls would collapse.

So the people did as the Lord commanded. When the trumpet was blown at the end of the 7th lap on the 7th day, just as God had directed, the people shouted, the walls of Jericho collapsed, the enemy fortress was taken, and the way was cleared for the Israelites to proceed into the Promised Land. (Joshua 6)

The marching around Jericho is a powerful picture of utter dependency upon God, as we wrap someone or something in prayer. And it vividly describes our efforts throughout *777: An Urgent Call to Prayer*. As a result, in the invisible spirit

realm, I believe walls have crumbled, the enemy fortresses have been taken, and God's people have had incredible victory! We will not know the extent of what our prayers have accomplished until we get to Heaven, but I am confident that God has heard and He is even now moving in response to our heartfelt cries to Him.

BUT there is also a warning in the story of Jericho. Because after this mighty victory, the Israelites were so confident in what they thought they had accomplished, they almost casually went to battle against the next small village, Ai. This time they were defeated! The result was devastating. The reason for the defeat? There was sin in the camp. One man had taken something God said he couldn't have and hidden it deep down under his tent. As a result, all of God's people were plunged into defeat. (Joshua 7)

The warning? After great blessing can come another battle. After victory can come defeat. The time to search the hidden depths of my heart where sometimes sin is buried out of sight, the time to be sober-minded and alert, the time to remain vigilant in prayer, the time to guard my heart, mind, and lips against temptation and sin, the time to stay in tune with His Spirit at the foot of His Cross, is *after* victory.

I'm going to heed the warning. Will you?

Anne Graham Lotz is the founder of [AnGeL Ministries](#). She is also the author of several books.

6 Keys to Showing Your

Husband Respect

Let's face it: Who doesn't want to be adored? Men especially crave that potent combination of respect and admiration; it's just the way they're wired. And when your husband feels your adoration, he'll want to be around you and please you more.

Even if you don't feel like adoring your husband, try some of these six ways below and see if your adoration doesn't inspire him to adore you a little bit more too.

1. Adore Him as He is

Don't wait to adore him until he's nicer, makes more money or is more affectionate with you. The key is to love him as he is right now. Even if he's not 100 percent adorable, accept him as he is and adore him.

2. Adore Him for What He Accomplishes

Sure, you may love and appreciate your husband, but he won't know unless you tell him. So tell him in specifics: "It's amazing the way you handle all of your responsibilities. How do you do it?" "You really are such a great dad. Our kids just love you." "You did an awesome job fixing the garage door. I didn't even know you knew how to do that!"

3. Adore Him by Listening

The next time you're around a husband and wife, listen. Does she finish his sentences? Does she interrupt him while he's telling a story? Does she give him order after order before he can even get a word in? Men process communication differently. It usually takes them more time to formulate their thoughts and get them out. When they do, they take more pauses and speak more slowly. So adore him by listening to him instead of interrupting.

4. Adore Him by Putting Him First

When your kids need you, they need you. You can't tell your 3-year-old to wait while you give your husband a back massage. But you can make the effort to let your husband know he's still a priority. For example, one husband I know told his wife about an upcoming business trip he had in New England. He was excited to take her because he knew how much she loved that area. But instead of zeroing in on her husband's intent, she started thinking of things they could do if they brought the kids on the trip. He later told her he was crushed.

5. Adore Him by Not Giving Advice

When your husband opens up to you about challenges he's having with his business, with his co-workers or with anything else, try not to jump in and give advice. You know how we do; we jump in with a solution just to help. Unfortunately, what you intend as advice, he hears as "She doesn't think I can handle it."

6. Adore Him So Others Can See It and Hear It

A compliment given at home is one thing; a compliment given in front of others is magnified big time. So the next time you're out with your husband with friends or family, or even when you're at the hardware store together, let him hear you complimenting him to others. He'll try even harder to live up to your adoration of him.

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Read This If You Are Confused About Your Calling

Above every duty, our first obligation to God is worship.

We use the term “calling of God” in the church to describe our burdens to preach or teach, give our lives to missions or to children’s work or follow other worthwhile pursuits that will help people come into the kingdom of God. We have been taught that as we fulfill the calling of God on our lives, we will find fulfillment and be successful in life. However, this narrow definition of calling does not encompass the scriptural understanding of personal destiny that results in living a dynamic life.

Have you ever considered why you were called to be a child of God? Was it to become a powerful preacher of the gospel, to be a missionary in a far-off country or to be a good husband and father or wife and mother?

Is your calling to be a successful businessperson? Although these may be valid pursuits in life in obedience to the calling of God, we need to look more closely into the Scriptures to identify our true calling.

In my study of the Scriptures, I have discovered at least 41 calls that apply to the lives of believers. Consider, for example, that we are called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9) or that we are called to be saints (Rom. 1:7).

But not one of these 41 calls is our primary call.

When God created Adam, there were no churches to pastor, no heathen to preach the gospel to and no businesses or offices to manage. The primary reason God created Adam was to fulfill God’s desire for a family with whom He could enjoy sweet

communion. His first priority is the same today as then: to enjoy His children in a love relationship.

Jesus declared, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23). Our primary calling is our destiny to enjoy relationship with God, not to work for Him. The work God gave Adam to do was to have dominion over the earth. He was in charge of taking care of the place where he would live with his descendants and where God would come to walk with him and commune with him.

God's desire for believers is to cultivate a love relationship with each of us. In the context of that relationship He will then give us specific tasks to do. Yet the tasks should never diminish the priority of relationship with Him.

Of course, God has ordained that the church, the body of Christ in the earth, serve one another as we serve God. But we must be careful to prioritize our calling the way God does and not according to man's perspective.

God intends that our service to the body of Christ and to lost humanity proceed out of relationship with Himself. That relationship of worship—the creature to the Creator, the redeemed to the Redeemer—will motivate us to serve out of a heart of love for God.

I am convinced that whatever God does to advance His purpose on the earth is born out of a worshiping people. When the woman at the well asked Jesus questions about worship, He responded, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him" (John 4:23).

It was the woman's question and Jesus' answer that led me to seek God and search the Scriptures in order to understand what Jesus meant by worship in "spirit and truth." God seeks worshipers who will cultivate a love relationship with Him. He

values our relationship with Him more than anything we can or will ever do for Him. We can show Him that we value it as well by laying hold of our primary calling to enjoy and worship Him.

*The late **Fuchsia Pickett** is the author of *Worship Him*, from which this article is adapted.*

Standing Strong When Circumstances Shake Your Faith

As he sat in his prison cell, surely he must have reflected back on the incredible ministry he had once had. He had been called by God from the time he was still in his mother's womb, to preach repentance from sins – to prepare the way of the Lord. There was nothing at all average about him. He had a clear and strong destiny, and as a young man, he set out to fulfill it.

Crowds of people gathered by the river where he preached a strong message of repentance. One by one people repented and were baptized. Day after day he preached, baptized, and even criticized those who thought they had no need to repent.

He stood strong and fast against sin – and that was what eventually grated on the political leaders until they arrested him and threw him in prison.

And there he sat in the cold, dank cell filled with rats and insects of all sorts – dirt, filth, maggots, lice and stuff no one even wants to talk about.

As time went by, doubts began to plague his thoughts. Perhaps he was just another radical in a long line of radicals that had excited and moved the masses, who were here today and tomorrow forgotten. Surely, just as he had disappeared from the scene, another one would rise up in his place. Who was he to think he was actually a prophet of God? Who was he to think that **he** was called by God to prepare the way for the Messiah? The very Messiah his ancestors had hoped to see in their lifetimes. The very Messiah that King David himself had spoke of.

How presumptuous of him to think that *he* would be called to such an honor.

And yet – there was his cousin Jesus.

Jesus.

Was he **really** the Messiah?

He had been so sure. In fact, he had never been more certain of anything...at the time.

There was the baptism and the dove.

But was that just a figment of his imagination?

Oh to be sure again! Oh to know that all that had happened wasn't just another show of radicals with eloquent words void of substance.

And it was in this time of weakness, despair, and doubt that John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus to ask Him if He really was the Messiah, the Christ, God incarnate.

And just when you think that Jesus might have criticized John for his doubts – after all, John was his cousin. He had been the first to declare Him the Messiah. Jesus' response is not at all what you would expect.

He turns to John's disciples and simply tells them to relay to John what they had seen: miracles and deliverance. No criticism, no condemnation.

Then He turns to the multitudes and starts to talk about John: about his strength of character and prophetic call to prepare the way for the Messiah. He even goes so far to say that there was no greater prophet ever born.

No greater prophet. Greater than Isaiah and Jeremiah, Elijah and Elisha and Samuel.

And while I read this and pondered on its message, I began to see God's love and mercy in a whole new dimension.

There is not a Christian in all of history who hasn't faced times when their faith was weak.

If there is anything this story reaffirms for us, it is that God is more merciful and loving than we have ever imagined. I have known – known very well – the side of God that is righteous and holy. And He *is* righteous and holy. But He is also merciful and loving. His mercy and love perfectly balance His righteousness and holiness in a way that is hard for us to comprehend. Actually – we can't understand it with our minds. We have to experience it.

Perhaps you feel distanced from God right now.

Maybe you have lost your passion for Him and His word.

Maybe you are walking through a time of great pain.

Perhaps all you have ever thought and known is being tested.

Do not be afraid to come to Jesus with your doubts and questions. He won't turn you away. He won't rebuke you, criticize you or reject you. He will lovingly show you His power and might.

And just as later on, John had the strength He needed to stand strong in face of the greatest test he would ever face – martyrdom – and He gave his very life for Christ, so you will find that as you come out on the other side you will have greater strength than ever before!

It is in those times of great weakness that He becomes our strength!

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