

4 Keys to Success in Relationships

The essential foundation for all good relationships is love. As we learn to walk in it, we can expect to experience the maximum benefit of relating to others.

Everywhere we go, we are in relationship with other people—at home, at work, at church. Being involved in good relationships is one of the things that makes our lives enjoyable. But in order to experience the fullest potential they have to offer, we must build them on a strong foundation.

I have discovered that the strongest foundation for good relations is love. Jesus said, “By this shall all [men] know that you are My disciples, if you love one another [if you keep on showing love among yourselves]” (John 13:35, AMP). As we learn to walk in love in our relationships, we can give up our fight to be right, become a good student of others and discover the best approach in dealing with people in any situation.

The Foundation for Good Relations

I used to feel as if I was fighting the devil from daylight till dark, seven days a week. One morning about 11 years ago I discovered that the primary reason for my struggle was that I wasn’t walking in love.

My husband, Dave, and I had just returned from doing a conference. We went to McDonald’s to have some coffee and read our mail. Both of us were very tired.

When I’m tired, I like to sit in the sun to be revived. But in order to sit in the sun, we needed to sit in one of the booths near the windows, and by the time we arrived, there was only one left. So Dave said, “You go get the booth, and I’ll go get

the coffee.”

As I started walking, I saw out of the corner of my eye a little old man heading for the same booth. I stepped up my pace a bit and beat him to it. Fortunately, he knew the lady who was sitting in the booth right behind us and asked if he could sit with her.

She answered, “Yeah, you can sit here. She beat you to it, huh?”

The worst part of the story is that the man was crippled.

God convicted me right then and there. “Aren’t you cute?” He asked me. “Here you are, a born-again, baptized-in-the-Holy-Ghost preacher, in the middle of teaching an ‘anointed’ series on love, and you’re racing a crippled man for the last seat at McDonald’s!”

This incident helped me realize that I wasn’t walking in love. True love prefers other people and allows them to go first. Love will let somebody else have something, even if it’s the last one available. Love is not self-seeking (1 Cor. 13:5).

In order to truly walk in love, we must get our minds off ourselves and focus on others and their needs. We can have bumper stickers, Jesus pins, teaching tapes and countless Christian books, but if the people we come in contact with can’t see love in our actions, our claim to be “Christian” is of little value.

Colossians 3:12-14 says, “Clothe yourselves therefore, as God’s own chosen ones (His own picked representatives), [who are] purified and holy and well-beloved [by God Himself, by putting on behavior marked by] tenderhearted pity and mercy, kind feeling, a lowly opinion of yourselves, gentle ways, [and] patience. ... And above all these [put on] love.”

The only way that we can put on love is by choice. Just as our

clothes don't jump off the hangers and onto our body, love doesn't just jump out of the Bible and into our character. We must choose to put it on every day; this is our part. But God is the One who gives us the strength to walk it out.

First Thessalonians 5:23-24 tells us it is the God of peace Himself who sanctifies and separates us from profane things—such as the tendency to be selfish and self-centered. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we have the ability to carry out Christ's commandment to love one another.

Don't Fight to Be Right

One way to express our love for others is to be a peacemaker. The Bible says that we are to live in peace with everybody. "Be of the same [agreeable] mind one with another; live in peace, and [then] the God of love [Who is the Source of affection, goodwill, love, and benevolence toward men] and the Author and Promoter of peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

A person who is living in peace is one who has given up the fight to be right. Years ago I found it difficult to be this kind of person. I always had to have the last word, and I always had to be right.

Dave and I would fight over some of the most ridiculous things you can imagine. For example, we would watch a movie on television and fight over who the actors were. It seemed to me that Dave thought half the men on television were Henry Fonda, and it made me so angry I couldn't stand it.

We would go to church every Sunday, rush home and fight over the couch, and then watch movies and argue about who the actors were. One night while we were arguing, I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "Joyce, if Dave lives his whole life and comes to heaven thinking that the person in the movie was Henry Fonda, it really doesn't matter."

Wow! What a revelation.

It's hard to believe I made such a big deal over such insignificant things for so many years! But usually it is the little issues in our relationships that cause the most problems.

The Bible says "the little foxes ... spoil the vineyards [of our love]" (Song 2:15). We need to stop making a big deal out of little things. There are enough big concerns to deal with.

I thank God for the peace Dave and I have in our home and in our relationship now. Every once in a while a conflict will come up. When it does, we confront the issue in love and come to a resolution so we can go on in peace. As you and I commit our relationships to the Lord, He will give us the grace to learn to let go of the little things and experience more of the joy He died to give us.

Seek to Be a Student of Others

Once you and I begin to walk in love and give up the fight to be right, we can be more in tune with the needs of others. Learning to discern others' needs constituted a major breakthrough in my life. Like many people, I had a tendency to give others what I needed instead of what they needed.

A number of years ago, my husband invited me to play a game of golf with him. He was not playing well that day, and after he had hit a couple of bad shots, I put my hand on his back, patted him and said, "It'll be all right."

Dave didn't appreciate my expression of encouragement. He took my hand, moved it and said: "Don't do that. I don't like you doing that. I'll be fine."

I was offended by his response. I got out of the golf cart and stomped down the fairway thinking, *Yeah, you don't need anything, Mr. I've Got It All Together. You can't even take a*

little encouragement because you are too full of pride to admit that you're not doing well.

At this point in our relationship, Dave and I were trying to work through some things. One of the things I was working on was to stop feeling rejected by him. In fact, I was teaching a series on rejection at the time.

So instead of staying mad, I stopped and said to God, "I am not going around this mountain again. I believe You are in charge of my life, and if You allowed this to happen, then there is something You are trying to teach me. What is it?"

God spoke to my spirit and said, "If you were playing bad, you would want Dave to pat you on the back and encourage you. If he didn't, you would think he was cold and unloving. The problem is that you're trying to give Dave what you need, and he doesn't need that."

This comment opened my eyes. God showed me that the reason for many of the problems in our relationships is that we don't take the time to stop and study the other person. If we will follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, He will show us what others need. Once He does, we need to freely give it to them.

The fact that we don't need a particular thing doesn't give us the license to withhold it from somebody else. Proverbs 3:27 says, "Withhold not good from those to whom it is due [its rightful owners], when it is in the power of your hand to do it." If we will slow down and seek to understand others instead of seeking to be understood, we will be able to give them what they need.

Adjusting and Adapting Our Approach

Sometimes in relating to others it is necessary to make adjustments in our approach to handling issues that involve them. We determine what these adjustments are by getting to

know them. First Thessalonians 5:12 says, "Get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and appreciate and respect them all]."

Paul is referring here primarily to people who are over us in leadership, but I believe this instruction can be applied to all our relationships. The more time we take to get to know those we are in relationship with, the better we will be able to understand them and make the required adjustments.

When I first began walking with the Lord, I was a very stubborn woman. I felt as if all the problems I was experiencing were the result of other people, and if they would just adapt to me, the majority of my problems would disappear.

Romans 12:16 quickly set me straight. It says, "Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty (snobbish, high-minded, exclusive), but readily adjust yourself to [people, things] and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits." In other words, you and I need to be ready and willing to adjust to others—not wait for them to adapt to us.

I had to apply this verse to my relationship with my general manager many years ago. She has always been very respectful and kind, but we have two very different personalities.

She has a melancholy type of personality, and I have a choleric one. This means that she is very detailed and desires plenty of information and time in order to make a quality decision. I, on the other hand, am less concerned with the details and more interested in making a quick decision.

Before I got to know her as well as I do now, I would talk to her about different issues and expect her to give me a quick evaluation of the situation. As a result, she would become very upset and sometimes even cry.

Her response frustrated me. Finally, one day I asked her, "Why are you crying? I am just asking a question. What is the problem?" She said: "I feel pressured—I feel as if you are forcing me to give you an answer that I don't have yet. I need time to think."

Now, I could have taken the attitude, *I'm the boss, and I don't have to put up with this*. But I certainly wouldn't have been exhibiting the love of Christ: "Love endures long and is patient and kind. ... It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

To walk in the love of Christ, I had to adapt and adjust my way of handling these types of situations with Roxane. I had to give her more time to make a decision.

The fact that I can make a decision faster than she can doesn't mean I'm better—it just means we're different. If I had chosen not to change, I would have missed out on many years of her faithful assistance, which has been a tremendous blessing to both our ministry and me.

People Change From the Inside Out

The bottom line is that all of us are uniquely different, and God created us that way on purpose. I have come to the realization that it is a waste of our time and energy to try to make people what we think they ought to be. We need to learn to make allowances for them—to give them time and space to make mistakes and grow at their own pace.

The Bible says you change, "[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight" (Phil. 2:13). If you and I don't have the power to change the flaws in our own lives, then we certainly don't

have the power to change them in others. Only God can change people, and the changes He brings—which are permanent—come from the inside out.

I encourage you to give up finding fault with others and to instead look for the best in them. Make a decision today that you are going to submit to God and begin walking in love. When you do, your relationships will improve, and you will enjoy all the people God has placed in your life!

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Are You a People-Pleaser Instead of a God-Pleaser?

People-pleasers are everywhere. They can parade as successful pastors or as top-of-the-corporate-ladder executives. The most easily identified are the passive, codependent types.

All pleasers are out to prove they are valuable people—trying to quiet the voice within that says they aren't. People-pleasers play a tape that says, "People will love and accept me if I please them." Their myth says, "You are somebody when you please others."

Pleasers believe that a failure to please will result in rejection and the false assumption that they are not valuable. As a result, they go about trying to make everybody but

themselves happy.

This frequently requires pleasers to keep their own thoughts, desires and needs locked away in their inner selves. They believe their mission on Earth is to drive themselves into an emotional breakdown, if necessary, to make sure others approve of them. When they fail to please someone, they feel guilty or believe (probably unconsciously) that their world is going to end.

The paradoxical dynamic that takes place is that the very individuals to whom people-pleasers try to prove their worth very often use and abuse them. Instead of gaining respect as a pleaser, you often lose it. So trying to please everyone to feel you are “somebody” is a dead-end street. You will eventually find yourself exhausted, disillusioned and feeling less like somebody than ever.

Instead, resolve with God’s help to redirect your life and energy toward becoming a whole and healthy person who does not require the acceptance and affirmation of others to say, “I am valuable.”

Are You a People-Pleaser?

The first step toward freedom from “people pleasing” is to determine if you are a people-pleaser. You can do this by honestly answering the following questions:

- Do you accept responsibility for the happiness of others?
- Do you believe you can make others happy?
- Do you feel guilty when you think of yourself instead of others?
- Do you feel guilty when you tell someone no?
- Do you believe it is un-Christian to think of yourself and your own health and emotional well-being?
- Do you feel better about yourself when you give in to the desires of others rather than pleasing yourself?

- Are you able to set boundaries when it comes to your own health and emotional well-being?
- Do you understand what it means to set boundaries?

A people-pleaser would answer yes to the first six questions and no to the last two. If you conclude that you are a people-pleaser, then what are you to do?

If you are a people-pleaser, you need to redirect your need to please. Your focus needs to change from horizontal to vertical. In other words, you need to become more concerned with what pleases God than with what pleases others. They are not the same thing, as many people believe.

Paul tells us in Romans 12:1 that we are to “present [our] bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God” (NKJV). But if we are going to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice (and people-pleasers literally do this), then it must be to God alone. We are to please Him first, and He is the only one we are to worship.

The flip side of this truth is that when we give our all to please others, we are in fact engaging in a type of worship toward those we want to please. Many pleasers believe this kind of behavior is “virtuous,” but it isn’t—because it is done with the unconscious motive of getting approval and acceptance in return.

Are we to please God hoping to get something from Him? No, we please Him by recognizing what we have already received from Him. When God brings us into relationship with Himself, we become somebody. The full realization of this comes with time as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s efforts to “grow us” into the persons we were meant to be.

Once our minds are renewed by the Holy Spirit, we begin to see and understand that it is God’s will for us to seek to “be somebody” in His sight rather than in the eyes of others. We can also find an answer to the question I am asked so often:

“What am I supposed to do when I am asked to do this or that?”

For the Christian, the answer is simple: Focus on pleasing God by seeking to know His will for each situation as it arises. It is not necessarily God’s will for us to do everything we are asked to do, even in the church! When our heart’s desire is to please God, we will be able to put others’ needs and desires in a healthy perspective.

Weary people-pleaser, ask God to forgive you for trying to please everyone else besides Him. Begin to believe you are now somebody in the kingdom of God because God says so.

We change our beliefs about our personhood by believing the truths of God’s Word rather than by continuing to believe our myths. This is the first step toward positive change. Next come the behavioral changes.

Changing Pleaser Behavior

People-pleasers need to budget their time and energy as they would financial budgets. This means they must prioritize their lives and determine how much time will be allotted for specific people and activities, including themselves. I suggest the following order (in order of importance): relationship with God; family (marriage, children, parents); employment; personal time (time alone with God, time alone with self); self-care; church; community; other.

God asks for the No. 1 position in our lives. We commit to that when we make the decision to become a disciple of Jesus Christ (Luke 14:25-33). The problem is that some people-pleasers wrongly believe that being “a good Christian” means pleasing others. They believe they are putting God first when they say yes to a good cause, especially if it is a church-related activity. They have not confronted this myth with reality.

When God reigns at the top of our list of priorities, we can trust Him to show us where to place other people, ourselves

and all other involvements. When our vertical relationship with God is right, then our horizontal relationships will naturally fall into their rightful places. The same is true of the commitments we make.

So how do we divide or budget our time commitments according to our priorities? First, we must recognize that God wants us to make our families our No. 1 priority under Him. When over-commitment begins to rob us of time that should be given to our families, it is time to say no.

You may notice that after employment I listed "personal time." It makes sense to me that if you don't take some time for yourself, then the time you give to others won't amount to much! If there ever was a person with a vision, a purpose and a consuming passion, it was Jesus the Son of Man. Yet He was not a people-pleaser. Have you noticed that when He needed time for Himself, He took it?

The Gospel of Luke records, "At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place" (Luke 4:42, NIV). Since the Lord had been up all night healing the sick and casting out demons, He was exhausted. Instead of expecting His heavenly Father to give Him supernatural strength to continue, the Lord recognized His need for rest and rejuvenation.

We need to designate time in our busy schedules for us to nurture our relationships with our heavenly Father. We must be fed from the Word of God and energized by the Holy Spirit to be fruit-bearing Christians.

We also need time to minister to ourselves. This means taking time for reflection, time that is used to get in touch with ourselves to find out where we are, where we want to go and (sometimes) where we have been.

These times of reflection should always be under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We must become still and quiet to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit that is so vital to our spiritual

health. The Scriptures tell us He knows all about us, and He knows the mind of God (Rom. 8:27). We need this information to confront our myths with reality.

Quiet times provide the vital opportunities people-pleasers need to get things into perspective. A clear perspective can help pleasers make wise decisions about all the requests and demands put on their time by others. This helps bring order and control to their agitated lives as they sort out their priorities and allocate their time. By spending time with God and with themselves, people-pleasers will be able to put the obligations of home, church, community and other areas in their rightful places in their time budgets.

People-pleasers often experience guilt when it comes to saying "yes" to themselves. But it can prove to be one of the best investments of time you will ever make.

Another vital step needed to break free from people-pleasing is to learn how to set boundaries. Boundaries differentiate us from other people.

People-pleasers have difficulty erecting fences between themselves and others. They lack the ability to set limits that declare what they will or will not do, or what they will or will not tolerate.

People-pleasers can be unaware that certain things belong to them personally, such as the right to say "no" when they want to say no, and "yes" when they want to say yes. They can also be too afraid to build personal fences for fear of hurting others or of somehow displeasing God.

The truth of the matter is that when we allow others to take advantage of us, we are encouraging and assisting them in their disobedience. God is not pleased with anyone who uses and abuses another!

People-pleasers can gain the respect and sense of personhood

they are searching for by setting firm boundaries regarding their involvement in the lives of others. When it is necessary to tell others no to choose what is best for ourselves (according to our God-ordained priorities), or even to submit to our own valid needs or desires, we should do it graciously but steadfastly.

People-pleasers can effectively change their self-defeating behavior once they begin to view themselves as separate from others, sharing equal standing in the kingdom of God with everyone else. Each individual person bears the image of the Creator Himself.

Everyone enters the kingdom “by grace ... through faith” (Eph. 2:8). Grace is “the unmerited favor of God,” and we don’t receive it by our “works” or good deeds (v. 9).

We all enter God’s kingdom through the same gate: Jesus Christ. None of us is good enough to enter on our own merits. Our real value depends solely on our potential in Christ.

You and I have every reason to accept ourselves once we are convinced that we are children of God and that we are loved, forgiven and accepted by Him. When we are self-accepting, we don’t have to seek the approval and acceptance of others to confirm our personhood.

As pleasers accept the truth of their value in Christ and learn to budget their time according to their priorities and limits, they will soon feel positive new feelings about themselves. Their old behavior of looking to others for affirmation will fall away, and they will find themselves seeking out God rather than people for the satisfaction that only He can provide.

Read a companion devotional.

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When You Want to Run Away

I was alone in the car, driving north on Helena Flats Road years ago, when I first entertained the thought of ditching God. I was disenchanted with what He was allowing to happen in my life, and I wasn't too reserved to tell Him so.

I mentally packed my bags. "You don't care about me!" I hollered and slammed the door.

I walked a mental block and then turned around and came back.

There was nowhere else to go.

In one of my favorite movies, the little girl gets mad at her parents and starts packing to leave home. Her mom asks what she's doing.

"I'm leaving."

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that. You're going to need a bigger suitcase, though."

The mom returns with a bag all packed, and her angry daughter heads out down the street.

Soon the suitcase gets too heavy to carry, so the little girl pushes it on its side and unzips the top. Inside is a bowling ball, small dumbbells and a few large textbooks. She smiles and says, "She made the suitcase heavy on purpose."

Soon there is a happy reunion, because the girl felt lost and the mom had followed after her.

Even though I'm all grown up, I still act the petulant child occasionally and say, "Why God? Why aren't You taking better care of me?" Except now, before I go packing bags, I ask myself, "Where else will I go?"

Who else will I find to love me and take care of me the way God always has, even if I'm not feelin' it right this second?

I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me" (Isaiah 45:5, NIV).

Besides, I have strong suspicions that when I get upset at God, He is not above slipping a bowling ball into my suitcase.

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Find Your Treasure in God's Word

Although it is true that the divine life of Christ resides within us, it also is true that we must make ourselves available to His working by filling our minds with the Word of God. If you're seeking fresh revelation from God, you're ready for some very practical guidelines and methods for mining this precious silver (see Prov. 2:1-8).

Some will undoubtedly prefer to gaze at the beauty of the treasure others have rather than picking up the tools and digging for themselves. But the revelation of another will not

have the same power to redeem our souls that a personal encounter with God's Word has.

At first, these study tools may seem useless. But without these practical instruments to help us, we will not be successful in extracting the precious silver ore of wisdom and revelation.

DIGGING TOOLS My daddy had quite an elaborate workshop in our home. His many expensive and sophisticated tools qualified him to do difficult carpentry, plumbing and electrical home-improvement tasks. But he also had a small toolbox that he carried with him everywhere.

As a little girl, tagging behind my daddy, I learned to identify the tools in that little box. I even learned to use some of them. In a similar way, we do not need an elaborate theologian's library to study God's Word effectively, but we do need to have a toolbox filled with basic items that will help us in our task.

The Scriptures describe the practical work involved in digging for silver when they admonish us to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV). If we aren't willing to apply ourselves to the work of study, we don't want wisdom badly enough. We need to get alone with God and ask Him for a greater hunger for Himself.

A PLACE OF STUDY In this world of electronic noise and distractions, we must prepare a place for study that will afford us the quiet we need to "Be still, and know that [He] is God" (Ps. 46:10). We need a place where we can effectively limit the interruptions of clients, family, pets and phone calls.

Our place of study should include a desk (or table), writing utensils and shelves for storing study books. The necessary tools for mining silver should be conveniently placed so we

don't have to run to the basement or upstairs to locate something we need. We should take care to prepare a comfortable place to seek God and furnish it with all the necessary instruments.

THE BIBLE A prerequisite for Bible study is a good study Bible. It should be one with print that can be easily read and with paper that is suitable for marking.

I find the King James Version unsurpassed for its beauty of expression in the English language. However, in view of language changes, a reading of various modern translations will help to throw light on many Bible passages.

Some translators have allowed their theological bias to enter into their translating work. Therefore, it is wise to anchor our reading in the King James Version and to use other versions as supplements, referring to the original languages, if possible, when questions are raised regarding translation.

Here is a partial listing of other useful translations, each with its own study helps.

The Scofield Reference Bible is a popular resource. The text is prominent in bold type, with comments at the foot and numerous synopses on various subjects. Some of the notes are excellent; to many, others are unacceptable.

In places the comments are strongly Calvinistic. Unlike a number of other Bibles, it is not self-pronouncing. A loose-leaf, wide-margin edition is available for notes.

The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible has a host of notes in the margin and the "Condensed Encyclopedia," which is an excellent section divided into more than 4,000 topics. It also contains information on the canon and the principal English versions, an outlined analysis of each book, a number of maps, a concordance and an index. This Bible also has a good harmony

of the four gospels and several excellent charts.

The New King James Bible is believed by many to be the translation nearest to the original transcripts of the Bible.

The New Jerusalem Bible is esteemed by many, along with several other reference Bibles that are worthy of mention such as *The New Oxford Reference Bible*, *The Holman Study Bible* and *The New American Standard Bible*.

The Worrell New Testament includes notes by the translator, A.S. Worrell. It is footnoted with many helpful alternative renderings and explanatory notes.

The Emphasized Bible by Joseph Bryant Rotherham is useful as a study and reference book, particularly in sections containing Old Testament notes.

The Moffatt Bible translation has many brilliant insights. However, the liberal theology of the author shows on occasion.

The New Testament in Modern Speech by Richard F. Weymouth is a clear, simple, dignified translation. It is sound from a doctrinal viewpoint.

The New Testament: In the Language of the People by Charles B. Williams is valuable, particularly in the translation of the Greek tenses.

The New Testament in Modern English by J.B. Phillips is a paraphrase. Its low-key prose is almost casual. For example, the familiar King James "holy kiss" (see 1 Cor. 16:20) becomes "shake hands all around."

Reading the same verse from different translations can shed light on the passage's true meaning as we ask the Holy Spirit to unveil the divine message it contains. Although it is good to follow a daily reading schedule, it is not necessary to devour large portions of the Scripture at a time.

Many times the Holy Spirit will illuminate one word in a passage, and it becomes beneficial to search out that word in other passages. He will always lead us to unearth the richest veins of silver.

THE CONCORDANCE One of the foremost tools for Bible study, the concordance, provides immediate access to any verse of Scripture, even if one remembers only one word or a few words contained in it.

Three concordances are recognized as leaders in the field: Cruden's Unabridged Concordance, Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance. The latter two are more comprehensive.

Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament and Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament, along with a Greek lexicon and Hebrew lexicon, can be of great value for more advanced Bible students.

BIBLE DICTIONARIES AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS Another very important aid to Bible study is a dictionary of the Bible. It is an alphabetically arranged compilation of words and their definitions, all with biblical significance. Included are proper nouns—the names of persons and places—as well as common nouns with scriptural meanings.

Through the use of a dictionary and an encyclopedia, the student can obtain a clearer understanding of difficult words and unfamiliar names of persons, places and things. For example, the "cubit," a biblical unit of measure, is found to be nearly 18 inches. The word "penny" is discovered to be the translation of the Greek word "denarius," which was the chief Roman silver coin, worth about 15 to 17 cents, or the equivalent of a day's wages in Jesus' time.

A Bible dictionary defines the word "publican" as the collector of Roman revenue. It gives detailed information

regarding this class of Romans, hated among the Jews for their fraudulent extraction under the vicious system of government.

A Bible dictionary and encyclopedia will bring a flood of light to the student when he is looking for the meaning of unfamiliar terms. Among the better-known works are *The Concise Bible Dictionary* by Merrill F. Unger, *The New International Bible Dictionary* and *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, both by J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney.

For those who desire a more exhaustive treatment of subject matter, there is *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* by Geoffrey W. Bromiley in four volumes and *A Dictionary of the Bible* by William Smith in one volume. *The Westminster Concise Bible Dictionary* by Barbara Smith and George Ernest Wright is one of my favorites to use.

BIBLE ATLAS AND BIBLE HISTORY Though of secondary importance to the basic aids already listed, a Bible atlas, along with books on biblical history and customs, can make substantial contributions to the study of the Bible.

One example, the *Holman Bible Atlas* by Thomas V. Brisco, is a source book of general information on Bible geography, geology and archeology. *Baker's Bible Atlas* by Charles F. Pfeiffer is a good tool for study purposes.

For example, the missionary journeys of Paul as recorded in the book of Acts, along with his epistles to the churches, take on enriched meaning to the student who has a knowledge of the geography of the lands involved. The same could be said for the journeys of Jesus, Abraham and other significant Bible personalities.

A knowledge of Bible manners and traditions can broaden your understanding of the Scriptures. Books such as *The Land and the Book* by Charles R. Page and *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners and Customs* by Howard F. Vos are helpful in this regard.

COMMENTARY A Bible commentary, as the name suggests, interprets the meaning of each Bible passage—verse by verse. For hundreds of years Bible scholars and spiritual leaders have recorded the results of their studies, and much of this has been gathered in various commentaries.

Some commentaries are the work of a single author, while others are a compilation of the efforts of several scholars and range in size from one volume to well over 50 volumes. Three of the better-known versions are *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*; *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's New Commentary on the Whole Bible*; and *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* by Everett F. Harrison and Charles F. Pfeiffer.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES *The Complete WordStudy Dictionary: New Testament* (1992) and *The Complete WordStudy New Testament*, both by Spiros Zodhiates, are wonderful tools for studying the words in the original languages. They give invaluable help in the digging of silver.

Nave's Topical Bible is a kind of concordance with full texts, a digest of 20,000 topics and subtopics and 100,000 references to the Scriptures. Also, another valuable tool for study, and a mine of general Bible information, is *Halley's Bible Handbook*.

My purpose here is to introduce the believer to a variety of effective tools for serious study of the Word. This list is limited, but perhaps it will serve as a help to those who are beginning to develop a Bible study library.

It is important to note that the serious study of the hidden treasure in the Scriptures will not always be convenient. With all of our time-saving devices, we are still the busiest generation that ever lived. It will require sacrifice just to come to a place of study.

Once there, we need to be willing to exert effort in study and prayer in order to uncover the rich veins of silver awaiting

us in the revelation of the Word of God. Whatever sacrifices and efforts are required, it will be worth it all to savor the presence of God in your soul, which is the only source of true satisfaction we can know.

*The late **Fuchsia Pickett** was a noted Bible teacher and author of numerous books, including *Receiving Divine Revelation* and *How to Search the Scriptures*, from which this article is adapted.*

7 Reasons Why Self-Pity Is a Sin

Yesterday morning, I had a good reason to feel sorry for myself. I woke up at 1:30 a.m. in a quiet, comfortable hotel room and could not go back to sleep. I'm used to insomnia as a nightly occurrence, but when 4:00 and then 5:00 rolled around (the alarm set for 6:00), tears of self-pity started to rise. I had a five-hour drive ahead of me, and it seemed unfair that I would have to face that on three hours of sleep.

Unfortunately, I had been listening all day to John Piper's audio book *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, and he listed the particular sins he struggles with. Self-pity was one of them.

Is self-pity a sin? I had never considered this until Piper's words and my lack of sleep collided. After much thought (and I had plenty of time to think about it in the middle of the night—don't you feel sorry for me?), I begrudgingly have to agree.

7 Reasons Why I Think Self-Pity Is a Sin

- Self-pity is a refusal to accept a trial as a test of faith, thus inhibiting my own growth toward maturity and completion in Christ. (“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete” [James 1:2-4, NIV].)
- Self-pity demands that I am entitled to a certain quality of life that has not been promised to me in Scripture. (Jesus says, “In this world you will have trouble” [John 16:33].)
- Self-pity dilutes my compassion for others, as I elevate my own suffering to a place of prominence. (“Be compassionate” [1 Pet. 3:8].)
- Self-pity is married to grumbling and complaining. (“Do everything without grumbling or arguing” [Phil. 2:14].)
- Self-pity ousts gratitude. (“Be thankful” [Col. 3:15].)
- Self-pity fills my time with useless whining and moaning instead of prayers for help and rescue from the almighty God. (“Call upon me in the day of trouble” [Ps. 50:15].)
- Self-pity will only accept joy that comes from reversal of circumstances instead of joy that comes from the Lord. (“Rejoice in the Lord always” [Phil. 4:4].)

So, I accepted the sleepless night as a trial from the Lord and decided I would rejoice in the opportunity to trust Him for my day of travel. I made the trip safely and wide awake (minus one 20-minute snooze at a truck stop). I even came home with enough energy to unpack, do two loads of laundry, and write this blog post.

What do you think—life without self-pity?

Passover, Good Friday and the First Blood Moon

“I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all. ... I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Ex. 12:12-13).

“Then Moses said ... ‘Go ... slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. ... When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down’” (vv. 21-23).

“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

“The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Joel 2:31).

What could Passover, Good Friday and the first lunar eclipse of 2014 have in common? Think about it with me.

Passover began at sundown Monday. It is a time set aside by God’s people to remember their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Other than creation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, there has never been a more dramatic demonstration of God’s power than the event we refer to as the Exodus.

Passover remembers the time when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. When Pharaoh defied God's command to let His people go, his mind had to be changed. So God sent to Egypt a series of plagues one at a time, each giving Pharaoh opportunity to repent of his defiance: the water turned to blood; then frogs, gnats, and flies covered the land, followed by the death of the livestock, boils on men and animals, hail, locusts, and darkness. When Pharaoh hardened his heart against God and refused to let God's people go, the final plague was sent. And it was the worst.

At midnight, God executed His final judgment on Egypt. The angel of death went throughout the land and struck down all the firstborn. From Pharaoh on his throne to the prisoner in the dungeon to the livestock in the barn, the firstborn died. The only ones saved from His judgment were those who placed the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes and remained inside, Israelite and Egyptian alike. As a result, Pharaoh repented of his resistance and let God's people go.

But Passover is not only a remembrance of the power of God to save His people from judgment and to set them free from bondage. It is also a beautiful prophetic picture of another event that will be celebrated this week.

Good Friday is a sacred, holy day that commemorates an event that took place 2,000 years ago when Jesus Christ was not just crucified but was sacrificed as God's Lamb on the actual day of Passover. When you and I apply by faith the blood of Jesus shed on the cross to our own hearts and lives, then the judgment of God for our sin passes over us, and we are not only saved from the penalty of sin but saved from the power of sin. We are set free from spiritual bondage.

On this year's Passover, in a unique way, God seems to be putting a sign of His blood on the doorposts of the heavens. Because on that very day, the moon was to turn to "blood" as it entered into a total lunar eclipse. Could God be warning

Planet Earth that judgment is coming and giving us opportunity to repent before it does? Could God be reminding you and me that the only salvation from His judgment is to take refuge under the blood of the Lamb?

I can't answer those questions, but I do know one thing. I want to make sure that I have been to the cross, repented of my sin and rebellion against God, and claimed the blood of Jesus as my covering. I want to make sure I am safe—saved from God's judgment whenever it does come, whether it comes this year on earth or at death, when I step into eternity and face a holy God.

This Good Friday, would you thank God for the blood of Jesus by making sure you have applied it to the doorposts of your heart and life?

Anne Graham Lotz, founder of AnGeL ministries, has proclaimed God's Word worldwide for more than 30 years. Her newest book, Wounded by God's People, is available at .

5 Life-Changing Truths You Should Know About the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the bedrock of the Christian faith. That is why it has been the target of the most vicious attacks by those who oppose the Christian faith. If the physical resurrection of Jesus can be disproven, then the entire Christian faith comes crashing down. But if the resurrection is true and Jesus Christ is alive today, then at the end of the day, nothing else really matters and He and His

cause are worthy of our absolute devotion and faith.

Here are five life-changing truths you should know about the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

1. The Resurrection Is a Historical Fact

A few nights ago, Bill O'Reilly stated that his book *Killing Jesus* does not contain the word *Christ* because, he said, "It [his book] is based on history, not faith." His statement revealed a certain mindset, based in liberal theology, that has divorced the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history. Beginning in the 19th century, and driven by modern skepticism, the propagators of this thinking theorized that the Gospels were written not by contemporary eyewitnesses but by later followers of Jesus who embellished His life with all kinds of mythical stories of miracles and a resurrection.

There thus emerged a false dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith and a quest by many to find the Jesus of history hidden behind the supposed unreliable stories of the Christ of faith in the Gospels. But let's be clear: There is no dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. They are one and the same! The Gospels contain reliable eyewitness accounts of Jesus, His life and His resurrection.

This was the general belief for 1,700 years in the Western world, until the recent advent of modern rationalism and skepticism. Modern rationalistic professors may sit in their stuffy offices indulging in all sorts of speculation about the historicity of the Gospels, but those who have been willing to do the real work of empirical investigation have, again and again, been convinced of the historicity and truthfulness of the gospel account of Jesus and His resurrection.

A Harvard Law Professor Is Convinced

Dr. Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853) was the Royal Professor of Law

at Harvard University and one of the principal founders of Harvard Law School. He authored the famous three-volume work *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*, which is still considered one of the greatest single authorities on judicial legal procedure. Greenleaf, a nonbeliever, originally set out to disprove the biblical testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, believing that a careful examination of the internal witness of the Gospels would reveal the myth at the heart of Christianity.

But after months of carefully examining and cross-examining the testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, this legal scholar came to the conclusion that the witnesses were reliable and that the Resurrection did, in fact, happen. As a result, he became a believer and wrote a book entitled *An Examination of the Testimony of the Four Evangelists by the Rules of Evidence Administered in the Courts of Justice*. Greenleaf concluded that, according to the jurisdiction of legal evidence, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the best-supported event in all of ancient history.

A Skeptical Professor and Archaeologist Is Convinced

Sir William Ramsay believed and taught that the New Testament is a second-century document filled with myths and embellishments and not a reliable source of history. He set out to prove this theory by retracing Luke's account of Paul's travels in the book of Acts. He assumed that by carefully examining the places, people, laws and histories mentioned in Acts, he would be able to show all the mistakes and demonstrate with finality that the New Testament does not contain reliable history.

However, after years of archaeological digs and excavations in the cities and locations along Paul's route as recorded in Acts, Ramsay's view of the New Testament was completely changed and he acquired a very high regard for Luke as a historian. He wrote, "Luke is a historian of the first rank;

not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense; in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian's and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment."

If Luke was this careful to get his facts right about names, places and dates, can we not be confident that he was also careful to get his facts right concerning the more important things about which he reported, such as the resurrection of Jesus? At the beginning of his Gospel, Luke says that he has thoroughly investigated the matter at hand, including interviews with those who were eyewitnesses of the events about which he is writing. We can be confident that if there had been any smell of conspiracy or hallucination from these eyewitness accounts, Dr. Luke would have detected it.

2. The Resurrection Removes the Fear of Death

"Don't be afraid of death, because I am the Resurrection" were the words I heard at one of the most devastating times of my life. The ministry my wife, Sue, and I had begun shortly after our marriage had died, and we had lost everything, including a place to have our meetings and a place to live. In spite of the loss, I continued meetings with a small group of people in homes because I knew the vision for a congregation and teaching center were from God.

Then I received word from Oklahoma that my brother had been killed in an accident and I had to depart to attend the funeral. Everyone was discouraged, and no one had the motivation to continue the meetings and they ceased. Chris, my mother-in-law, later said, "That was when it all died."

Thank God for the Holy Spirit, for one evening, while in prayer, I sensed the Holy Spirit rising up out of my innermost being, and I began to pray in other tongues. All the time I

was praying in the Spirit, I was hearing those words: "Don't be afraid of death, because I am the Resurrection."

I was reminded that this was the word of Jesus to Martha as they stood before the tomb of her brother, Lazarus, and she had stated her theological belief that her brother would live again at the resurrection. Jesus had replied, "I am the Resurrection." I also, at that moment, realized that the resurrection is not just a future event but is personified in the Person of Jesus Christ, and is a present reality in the life of the believer

As Paul said in Philippians 3:10, "[For my determined purpose] is that I may know Him ... and that I may in that same way come to know the power out flowing from His resurrection" (AMP).

A resurrection did occur in our lives and in that ministry. A yielding to God, a determination not to quit, a step of obedience and resurrection power flowed forth. The ministry that came forth was not the same as before, for it came forth in His resurrection power and in ways we could never have planned or strategized.

Perhaps there is some area of your life that you feel has died—a relationship, a dream, a career, a project. Maybe you have suffered the loss of a spouse in death or in divorce. On the eve of this Good Friday, I felt to share with you those words the Lord spoke to me years ago in the midst of death. He said, "Don't be afraid of death, because I am the Resurrection."

3. Resurrection Power Is at Work in You as a Believer

The power that God works in the life of the believer is the very same power by which He raised Jesus from the dead. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 1:15-23, where he prays that the Ephesian believers will be enlightened to know what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. The English word *toward* is a translation of the Greek preposition

eis, which means “into” or “in.” This mighty power that Paul wants them to know about is directed “into” the believer; or we could say it is at work “in” the believer. But what kind of power is this?

Paul then makes clear the nature of this power. He says this power is according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:19-20). This resurrection power that is at work in you will make you an overcomer and will strengthen and heal your physical body, as Paul says in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

My friends, you do not need to run here and there looking for some special anointing. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is already at work in you. Believe that, and act like it is true.

4. The Resurrection Ushered in a New Era of Freedom for Women

The Gospel writers are very explicit in noting that it was Mary Magdalene to whom Jesus appeared first after His resurrection. The importance the evangelists attach to this fact indicates it was no accidental occurrence but that Jesus purposely appeared first to Mary Magdalene in order to make an important statement to His followers.

When Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, He gave her certain, specific instructions. Matthew 28:10 records His words to Mary to “Go and tell my brethren.” In other words, He sent her on a specific mission defined by the words “Go and tell.” The Greek word *apostolos*, from which we get the English *apostle* simply means “one who is sent” or “one sent on assignment.” Mary, therefore, was a “sent one” and as such received the first apostolic commission from the risen Lord. It is for this

reason that, throughout Christian history, Mary has often been referred to as “the apostle to the apostles.”

This commissioning of Mary by Jesus was revolutionary since the Jewish male of this time normally began his day with a prayer that included thanks to God that he was not born a Gentile, a slave or a woman. Women were barred from studying Scripture, and a rabbi considered it beneath his dignity to speak to a woman in public. Neither Jewish nor Roman courts of law would allow the testimony of women.

Jesus challenged this deeply ingrained religious and cultural bias by appearing first to Mary and sending her forth as the first apostolic witness of His resurrection. By appearing first to Mary and giving her the first apostolic commission after His resurrection, Jesus made a clear statement that women would be included in leadership and ministry in His church.

5. The Resurrection Guarantees That Everything Jesus Taught Is True

Jesus taught many things about heaven, hell, eternity, God, the future of the human race and the fact that He would always be with us. He also predicted that He would die and rise again from the dead on the third day. Now, if He did not rise from the dead as predicted, then everything else He said is cast into doubt and question. But if He did rise again on the third day as predicted, then it stands to reason that everything else He taught is true and will come to pass.

He did rise again on the third day, and His resurrection guarantees that everything He promised is true. He will return to this earth again. He will raise from the dead all those who have put their faith in Him. There is a place called heaven prepared for those who love Him and look for His appearing. There is a glorious future for this planet and for all those who trust in Him. His promise to be continually with us and

never leave us is validated by His glorious resurrection and expressed so well in the following old hymn:

He lives, He lives,
Christ Jesus lives today
He walks with me and talks with me,
Along the narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart;
You ask me how I know He lives,
He lives within my heart.

Dr. Eddie L. Hyatt is the co-founder and president of Hyatt Int'l Ministries, and his passion is to see the contemporary church return to the New Testament pattern of simplicity, humility and a radical dependence on the Holy Spirit. He is an author and his latest book, *Pursuing Power: How the Quest for Apostolic Authority & Control Has Divided and Damaged the Church*, is available from Amazon (including Kindle) and from his website at

Resist the Crave

It was almost 1 a.m. I finally finished my day's work of writing, answering emails and doing bookkeeping and other tasks.

I was tired. I needed to go to bed, but my body said, "Feed me. Feed me something sweet and gooey. I need fuel."

In the past, before losing 250 pounds, I would have given my body what it wanted, no questions asked. It would have been easy to give in because I would have had an array of available gooey sweet things on the very top shelf behind the mixer in my kitchen or under my bed or in my desk drawer or in the top

of my closet or hidden in my sock drawer. You know, all the normal places one would go to find such things.

Some would be out for all to see, but the things I craved constantly, the things I wanted to be sure I had on hand for “such a time as this,” would be hidden in places only I knew existed.

This hiding we do is a characteristic of an addict, but I didn’t think of it that way at the time. I just thought my body needed these things to survive. As a matter of fact, it told me that all the time, and I listened to it.

These days I’ve learned several things about my body and, well, about myself.

1. I am a triune being—spirit, soul and body. I am not just a body. My body, left to its own devices, will have me going down all sorts of paths that aren’t healthy, helpful or advisable, no matter what spiritual inclination I have.

2. My body is only in charge of me if I let it be. Many people allow their body to be in charge. If their body wants sex, they have sex with whomever is available. If their body craves getting drunk, they party all night and drive home, risking their life and the lives of anyone else who happens to be on the road.

If their body craves sugary sweets, they will consume vast quantities for long periods of time, greatly endangering their lives.

Why? Because their physical desires are in charge.

3. My thoughts govern my soul, but my thoughts are also not reliable. My thoughts and emotions many times argue over what is best for me. For instance, if I want to stop a bad habit of eating sugary foods, my emotions try to talk me out of it, even if I have thoughts that say I want to be healthy.

My emotions want to eat the food that gives my body a short-term high, and so they try to talk me into eating it. My brain is saying no but isn't really solidly against it. So a tug-of-war ensues.

The real problem is that neither my soul, thoughts, emotions or body is in charge. They don't know what is best. I feel exhausted trying to make myself do the right thing.

4. My spirit, connected to God's Spirit, controls me. For me, weight loss is a very spiritual thing. I know God wants my body healthy so I can function and be involved in kingdom work.

Scripture talks about my body being God's temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20). My spirit and His are one (v. 17). Those verses are talking about sexual sin, but I believe it can mean anything that causes my body to be unhealthy in any way.

When I align my spirit with God's, His truth will control my body. His truth will guide my every thought and decision. It starts there, but I still must be aware of what is going on in my body and soul or I will get sidetracked quickly.

God made me and knows what I need. He also knows what I want. Many times what I want is not what I need.

Finding the truth of what I really need is not trial and error. It happens when I connect with the Truthgiver.

5. God's truth is supreme. "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Only God has the truth. Only God is the truth.

I know that, and yet my body will pull me one way and my thoughts and emotions will verify it. Before I know it, I'm in the kitchen at 1 a.m. looking for something unhealthy to eat.

These days, though, it is really something that won't happen. This is why:

1. There's nothing remotely unhealthy in my house because I've made that decision at a time when I was totally connected with God's truth and strong in spirit.

2. When I ask God what I need, He tells me the truth: "You need a drink of water."

3. My mind has learned to come in line with what my spirit understands through God's Spirit. Thoughts and emotions calm down and come under authority of my spirit.

This is a truth God established in Scripture: I bring my thoughts, reasonings, arguments, emotions and anything else that exalts itself against God captive to the obedience of what I know Christ has already said in my life (2 Cor. 10:5). My spirit aligns with His.

Finally, instead of anything to eat, I get a cold bottle of water out of the refrigerator and go to bed.

My body rests because it has come to understand I finally really am taking care of my needs—body, soul and spirit.

Teresa Shields Parker is a wife, mother, business owner, life group leader, speaker and author of *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor* and *Sweet Grace Study Guide: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Overcome Sugar Addiction*. Get a free chapter of her memoir on her blog at www.tereshieldsparker.com.

Is Peace Possible?

Understanding the Current Middle East Crisis

One of Israel's greatest Prime Ministers, Golda Meir, once said, "Peace will come when the Arabs love their children more than they hate us."

Since Israel's statehood in 1948, Israel has endured repeated wars and attacks. They have constantly faced the threat of a hostile Arab world that wants it gone. Thousands of their young soldiers have been killed in this struggle for their survival and thousands more citizens have perished in terrorist attacks and suicide bombings.

The rise to power of radical Islamic groups like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, particularly given their historic ties to Hamas and their hatred of Israel, coupled with continued terrorist activity from Hamas and Hezbollah, and the looming specter of Iran's nuclear weapons program have created the greatest threat to Israel's continued existence they have faced since the Yom Kippur war of 1973.

Long-time allies such as Great Britain and the United States have recently shifted position and have taken a more adversarial role toward Israel, pressing for concessions of land for peace. Keep in mind that all of the concessions made to date have only been met with demands for more, and have resulted not in peace but in continued hostility.

The lessons of the last century should have taught us that appeasement never works, but it appears that our generation is intent on learning that lesson at Israel's expense. Truth be told, it is highly unlikely if not impossible that any plan for peace engineered or imposed by man will succeed.

The only viable plan for peace that WILL succeed is God's peace plan, and that plan is through the Prince of Peace,

Yeshua – Jesus the Messiah. Only when He is invited in and hearts are changed can Arab and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian live in true peace with one another.

For more on this fascinating topic, order your FREE BOOK “Is Peace Possible” now – [CLICK HERE](#).

About “Is Peace Possible”: Author, television host, and Messianic Rabbi Jonathan Bernis provides a fascinating insider’s snapshot into the rapidly changing Middle East conflict, analyzing the brewing undercurrents of impending doom from a historical, biblical, and prophetic perspective. Using Scripture, Rabbi Bernis illustrates that this conflict is largely spiritual rather than merely political in nature, with God as the only solution that can succeed.

Order your FREE BOOK “Is Peace Possible” now – [CLICK HERE](#).

How to Change Your Life Today

Well, shoot. The great thing about blogging my way through Seven is that it’s kept me motivated and accountable. The bad thing is that I’ve been stuck—absolutely, unquestionably stuck—in two little chapters in Isaiah. Which has been life-changing for me as a human, but as a writer has me circling the same ground every day which I fear might seem redundant. And yet—this is the ground.

The ground. This is the ground where ethereal principle messes with Bo’s to-do list. For me, there is nothing worth more than these 14 light bulb verses in Isaiah 58. So, here’s today:

“If you are generous with the hungry and start giving yourselves to the down-and-out, your lives will begin to glow

in the darkness, your shadowed lives will be bathed in sunlight. ... You'll use the old rubble of past lives to build anew, rebuild the foundations from out of your past. You'll be known as those who can fix anything, restore old ruins, rebuild and renovate, make the community livable again" (Is. 58:9-12, MSG).

This passage makes me want to cry tears of happy gratitude because it's chock-full of the thing I love most: answers. When our lives feel faded and dim, these words tell us exactly how to flip the switch. Exactly. It's not a bit fuzzy or deep. We don't need a master's in Hebrew to get it. It's brilliantly clear.

Feeling in the dark? On the sidelines? Out of touch with the purposes and heart of God? Here you go:

- Treat people like people instead of like profit.
- Stop pointing fingers at other people's problems.
- Be very generous with the hungry and hurting.
- Care deeply about those who are discouraged.
- Be available to your own family.

Then, says Isaiah (translated masterfully by Eugene Peterson), the lights will turn on. Then you'll start to see what you've never seen before and feel what you've never felt before—and these things will be good, like He is good.

I know. It seems a lot is missing from this list, doesn't it? No tithing. No quiet time. No attendance charts. But I suspect when we start by doing the right things in the right way, the rest of the doing becomes clear as well. Because this list? Is discipleship. It describes a person who is growing the very heart of the very God inside His chest. It paints the picture of a person ignited by a supernatural spark for the purpose of warming a stone-cold world.

I firmly believe that the more we begin to think and act and love like God the more we think, love and act like God.

Profound, no? The more we give, the more we discover we have to give. The more we love, the more we find worth loving. The more we do life His way, the more we understand His way.

Maybe it's the hunger talking, but I'm feeling simple enough to believe in this list today. And the only problem I see with it—the only teeny, tiny problem—is that every single bullet point is easier to memorize than it is to, you know, do. I'd rather read the whole book of James than do James 1:27.

I'd rather plunk 10 percent in the offering plate than open up a room in my home to someone who has nowhere to go. I'd rather speak at conference than put my computer away at the dinner table. So, this is me on day seven of *Seven* saying, "Mercy, I have a long way to go! A long, long way."

But I'm so thankful for these days of going without, because they have helped me see the places in my soul that were already starving and I didn't even know it. And I am determined to weave fasting into my life in a more systemic way. I hate it and I need it. Not for divine arm-twisting, but for personal soul-shifting.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly released *Beautiful Battliefields*. She was on the last day of a week-long fast with her church. 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, Ore.