

# How to Teach Your Child to Memorize Scripture

Ahh, spring.

Who doesn't love spring?

The soil warms, and all of nature wakes up and comes to life. I can't wait to dig my hands into some rich, dark earth as I plant our fall garden, and I pray for a larger harvest than last year. (Frankly, anything would be an improvement on that, but moving along ... )

I don't know about you, but I find that I often experience these seasons in my soul and spirit. Sometimes when winter hits, the sudden cold literally kills a plant. Some are too sensitive to extreme temperature and cannot survive in cold weather.

One thing I have found that helps me to insulate my heart and keep it from dying in those seasons when it seems like I'm cold and lifeless is Scripture memorization. It is essential that we go beyond knowing about God and about the Bible to really knowing God personally and knowing His Word intimately.

It's time to get the whole family involved in memorizing God's Word.

Even your littles!

Oh, yes, they can memorize God's Word.

*Rosilind Jukic is an American girl married to a Bosnian guy who lives in a small village just outside of Zagreb. They have*

*two crazy boys 3 and under who are as opposite as boys can be. When Rosilind isn't writing, she is dreaming up recipes and searching for ways to organize her home better. You can find her at A Little R & R where she writes about missions, marriage and family, toddler activities and her recipes.*

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## **With One Mind and One Voice**

“So that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:6, NIV).

I'm Anne Graham Lotz. It's my privilege to be the honorary chair for the National Day of Prayer for 2014. The theme has been taken from Romans 15:6—that with one mind and one voice we're to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But how can we glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ if we don't know who He is? And how can we know Him; how can anyone know God except that He would make Himself known? And the Bible says in 1 John 1:5 that God is light.

The primary characteristic of light is that it's made itself visible—and so God, through the pages of our Bible, has made Himself visible. So the very first verse of the Bible tells us who God is: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

“In the beginning”—that's His eternity. And because He's eternal, it means He's not bound by time or space. For you and me, that means that He's gone ahead of us into the year 2014, and if we follow Him, He'll lead us on the right path.

“God”—that's His deity. That means He's greater than His creation; He's separate from it. Just as a potter is greater

than the clay he molds, God is greater than His creation, so that anything that's in your life that's broken, that needs mending, that's hurt, God can fix. And it also means He's separate from creation, so if we blow up this entire planet, nothing of God is destroyed.

“Created the heavens and the earth”—He's actively involved in big things and small things. That's His activity. And God is actively involved in great big things, like creating the heavens, and you may be facing a big debt, a big decision, a big responsibility, a big job, and God, whatever you're facing that's bigger than you are, it's not bigger than He is.

He's actively involved in great big things, actively involved in small things, creating the earth—the little molecules and chemicals that make up our planet. So it doesn't matter what small thing that you're concerned with—it can be a small hope or a small dream, a small insult, a small hurt feeling, a small fear, a small tear—God is actively involved in small things.

So, when we come to the One to whom we pray and we glorify with one mind and voice, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we're coming to someone who is not a god we make up, not just a god that we feel suits us and that we're comfortable with, not one that's just revered by our own religion or tradition. We're coming to the one true living God, the Creator of all things, the One who came down in human form so that you and I might see Him and know Him and hear Him.

The One who went all the way to the cross sacrificed Himself to make atonement for your sin and mine, that when we come to Him by faith, we can have our sin forgiven. We can be reconciled to Him in a right relationship and have the hope of going to heaven when we die. The One who rose up from the dead to give us eternal life—the One who, any day now, is soon to come back as King of kings and Lord of lords to rule and reign

on this earth rightly.

So, I wonder what would happen if all of us gathered together with one mind and one voice and we prayed and glorified the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? I don't think we'll ever know until we gather together with one mind and one voice and we cry out to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving Him glory as who He is, and bringing to Him our needs and our petitions.

*Anne Graham Lotz is a best-selling and award-winning author. Her most recent releases are Wounded by God's People, Fixing My Eyes on Jesus, Expecting to See Jesus and her first children's book, Heaven: God's Promise for Me. She is the president of AnGeL Ministries in Raleigh, N.C.*

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## **Finding Rest in God**

The Twenty-third psalm provides us with a picture of true rest – the peace and security that come from knowing we are in the hands of the good shepherd.

One of man's most basic needs is the need for rest. Although physical rest is important, we possess a much greater need—a need for more than just a break from work or the refreshment of sleep. We search for true rest.

True rest refers to more than physical needs. It embodies a sense of being cared for, of knowing that all our needs will be met by loving hands, and of feeling protected and cherished. True rest involves all we are and all we do. One of the most comforting pictures of this true, total rest appears in Psalm 23, which begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (NKJV).

This song of David reveals the true Shepherd, who was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prefigured, proclaimed, promised and prophesied He would be. In the New Testament, we see Him manifested in person through the gospels in fulfillment of the Old Testament sacred covenant God made that He would send His own Shepherd (see Ezek. 34). Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). Psalm 23 is a prophecy of the coming of this Good Shepherd.

*The Lord is my shepherd.* David expresses total security as he begins his song, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Everything that follows is true because of the fact that the Lord is the Shepherd.

So much of the pressure and despair of modern-day living comes from man's unending struggle to provide for his needs and those of his family. Our acceptance of what God's love has freely offered us brings peace and rest.

When He is watching over His sheep, we lack no good thing. As we commit to the loving care of the Shepherd, we can say, "I shall not want," for He is everything.

*He leads me beside the still waters.* This is more than merely an expression of quietly flowing streams and a peaceful sense of rest and calmness. Throughout the day, as the shepherd leads his flock, he keeps one thing in mind: He must take the sheep to a suitable place to drink. He must find still waters amid the rough, dry hills and plains.

In the region where David lived, living streams were scarce indeed, often far apart and separated by rugged country. Some are called wadis because they are ravines that run dry when the rainy season ends. Frequently the shepherd finds streams in gullies between broken hills where the banks are too dangerous for the sheep and the water flow is too strong.

Sheep are timid and fear a current of water. They might have a hard time finding a place to drink if it were not for the

careful attendance of the shepherd to their needs.

There is yet a further picture of still waters. As the shepherd leads his sheep over the rough slopes of the mountainsides, many times he is able to find only streams that leap and flow noisily down crevices. The sheep need water, but they cannot drink from these streams.

The wise shepherd then finds a suitable nook or turn in the stream's course and walls it up, making a little dam and causing the water to form a quiet pool. Now he is able to lead the sheep beside the waters stilled by his own hand. There the sheep rest and their thirst is quenched.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says of the living water that He provides: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

The shepherd brings the sheep beside the still waters, where they all lie down quietly while he fills the drinking troughs. In Hebrew, this passage says, "He leadeth beside the waters of quietness." In this place, the sheep can drink peacefully, undisturbed by troubling sounds.

*He restores my soul.* There are perilous places for the sheep on all sides. The shepherd must be ever alert, vigilant and watchful to see that the sheep do not leave the pathway and stray into dangerous places or tumble to their doom over a cliff in an unguarded moment.

The shepherd rescues straying sheep from forbidden, even fatal, places. In the same way, our Shepherd restores us when we wander from His side.

*He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.* Not only does David tell us that the Shepherd restores our souls, he goes on to say that He leads us in paths of

righteousness. The shepherd goes ahead of his flock, choosing the right path for the sheep to take. He is always there to lead them, and they can trust him to lead them in the right way. The apostle Paul called Jesus “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2)—the one who has gone before us getting rid of danger and opening a clear way for us to walk in.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.* Some paths that are right paths still lead through places fraught with deadly peril. But our Lord and Shepherd has walked the valley before us, so when we reach it we will not be afraid. He will already be there, preventing the perilous from touching us.

Sheep do not care what their surroundings are or how great the perils and hardships are that they may face. As long as their shepherd is with them, they are content. There is no finer picture of peace and rest in all the world.

*Your rod and Your me.* There is great comfort indeed in the protection and guidance of the Lord’s rod and staff in our lives.

Shepherds carry a crook, or rod, for guiding the sheep and a weapon—a staff—suitable for defending them. One is an aid along peaceful ways; the other defends in times of peril. The crook gently but firmly corrects a sheep’s course or brings him back when he strays or lifts him safely from a place of danger. The staff comes down against that which would harm him.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.* This causes us to think again of Jesus’ declaration that He came to give us abundant life (see John 10:10). For even as there is one whose purpose is to steal, kill and destroy, there is a Shepherd who spreads a table before us and invites us to partake of His life.

Just as he leads the sheep to still water, the shepherd must

seek out a safe feeding place for his flock. He traverses each square yard of ground, carefully inspecting for hidden dangers. He searches for poisonous plants that an unsuspecting sheep might eat along with a mouthful of grass. If he finds any, he uproots and removes them from the feeding area before the sheep begin to graze.

To further insure the welfare of the sheep while they eat, the shepherd makes a point to inspect the ground as well as the vegetation, for in some places he finds holes where snakes may lie. He knows how to drive the snakes away as he goes along ahead of the sheep. He is also mindful of holes in the hillsides where jackals or wolves may be lurking, hoping to find a lone sheep upon which to pounce. The shepherd prevails over the enemies of the flock.

When all this has been done, and the shepherd has truly prepared a table (eating place) for the sheep in the presence of that which would do them harm, the flock is then led into the pasture to safely eat their fill. In Revelation 5, John describes Jesus as the "Lion of Judah" who has conquered every enemy and crushed every foe that would maim or destroy the flock He loves. In the presence of our enemies, we partake of His precious life.

*You anoint my head with oil.* We have seen the whole realm of the day's wandering, all the needs of the sheep, all the care of the shepherd. Now at the door of the sheepfold, the flock is gathering for the night. Here the shepherd awaits them, rod in hand, standing with his body turned to let them enter the fold one by one.

As each sheep comes to the door, the shepherd holds him back with the rod while he inspects him, looking him over for any ill effects of the day. Close at hand is a horn filled with olive oil. When the shepherd notes an injury, no matter how slight, he gently anoints it with the soothing oil.

Even the sheep that bear no wounds but are simply worn out and exhausted from the long day's journey are cared for. Tenderly, the shepherd cleanses their faces with the oil and then gives them water so the weary sheep may drink.

God's care is not for the wounded only; it is offered equally to those who are simply worn and weary. We are soothed by the oil from His hand, and our thirst is satisfied.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.* Now that the day is done and the sheep are snug within the fold, there is great contentment and true rest. Goodness and mercy have been with us through all the wanderings of the day, and they will stay with us during the days to come. As the song dies away, the heart that God has watched and tended breathes His thoughts of peace before the roaming of the day is forgotten in sleep.

*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* This statement concludes the shepherd's song. The sheep are now at rest, safe in the fold of the good shepherd. Since the beginning of time this same declaration has been made both in prophecy through the psalmist and in the person of Jesus Christ. "I am the good shepherd," Jesus told us (John 10:11)—and He is everything He promised He would be!

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." I have need of nothing, for He is everything. We follow Him on from victory to victory, from light to light, for the light shines "ever brighter unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

One day He will lead us to that perfect place where we will breathe new air and have a new pasture in which to graze and see Him face to face. Then we will know that our true Shepherd has brought us triumphantly through and that we are safe, secure and succored.

We will be at rest with our Lord throughout the ceaseless ages, safe from all harm, and never again will we fear the

enemies who would seek to harm or destroy us. We will worship throughout all eternity the slain Lamb who is worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power, and the True Shepherd who led us safely home!

Read a companion devotional.

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The late **Fuchsia Pickett** is the author of numerous books, including *How to Search the Scriptures (Creation House)*. She has earned doctorates in both theology and divinity and teaches at churches and conferences throughout the United States.

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## **Keeping Your Footing When Life Takes a Drop**

She never even stopped her movements when the turbulence rocked the little plane. She just kept taking inventory of the soda and little liquors. My hands were gripping the seat handles as we descended toward Denver International Airport, but her legs appeared to be well practiced at moving with the plane.

I feel the same way, except on the inside.

This Saturday night, Feb. 15, I got a call from my brother and mom. My dad was snowmobiling when he possibly threw a blood clot and died immediately.

I find myself in the middle of turbulent grief, but I am steady. In the middle of all the pain, the legs of my soul are well practiced. Yes, leaning away from the stomach-dropping

thoughts and into faith. God is here. I know how to lean on Him.

Because I've leaned on Him before.

I've leaned on the Lord on the days when I've been irritated with a wet towel on the floor and on the days when I've opened the shocking office bill from a recent doctor visit.

We can't know how to stand strong in the Lord after the horrible "Your dad died" phone call unless we've learned how to stand strong in the Lord in the plain ol' weekday.

The Spirit has brought this verse to my mind today, and I've said it over and over to myself. Maybe you need to hear it too:

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. 20:7, NIV).

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

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## **When Faith Fades Away, Love Abides**

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

When all is said and done, the message of 1 Corinthians 13 can be reduced to three attributes: faith, hope, love.

Faith in our brothers and sisters in Christ, the ones God gave

us to walk this narrow path by our side.

Hope in their future and the finishing work God is doing in their lives.

Love for the body of Christ that never gives up but chooses to believe the best, hope for the best and do the best to help them be better today than they were yesterday.

But lets take these three elements to the next level.

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).

Faith is what enables us to believe that what we merely hope for and what we cannot yet see will one day be reality.

Hope is looking to our future with expectancy and anticipation.

Yet one day faith will fade away as we are finally able to clearly see. And all that we hoped for and anticipated will become reality. And all that is left is love.

Love.

***Rosilind Jukic** is an American girl married to a Bosnian guy who lives in a small village just outside of Zagreb. They have two crazy boys 3 and under who are as opposite as boys can be. When Rosilind isn't writing, she is dreaming up recipes and searching for ways to organize her home better. You can find her at A Little R & R where she writes about missions, marriage and family, toddler activities, and her recipes.*

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# God's Peace During a Snowstorm

"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned" (Is. 43:2, NIV).

On Wednesday, Feb. 12, I drove from home to our church office for a meeting. The drive took me 15 minutes. I arrived at 12:25 p.m., knowing that the weather forecasters were calling for a significant storm to hit our area around 1 or 2 p.m. that afternoon. When I entered the office building, the air outside was icy cold and the sky was heavily overcast, but no ice or snow was falling.

Without giving the weather another thought, I attended the meeting for 30 minutes, then left. But when I walked out the door, I was dismayed to discover that snow was pouring down and everything, including the roads, was already solid white.

I pulled out of the parking lot, onto the street, and sensed I might be in trouble. I was very grateful I had left when I had and was sure I would be able to get home before the full brunt of the storm hit. I was wrong.

When I turned onto the main highway that goes past the area where our church is located, the 10 lanes were in gridlock. Until the road turned into four lanes, I moved so slowly it took me one full hour to go less than one-half mile. The rest of the journey home was a nightmare of pouring snow, hundreds of abandoned and wrecked cars, jack-knifed trucks, accidents happening in front of my eyes at a dizzying pace, and dozens of people giving up and walking beside the road. Again and again, the line of cars I was in had to wait until stalled or wrecked vehicles could be pushed aside to clear a path for the

cars still able to move in the deepening snow and ice. I stayed in that line.

With my car at a standstill for 30 minutes or more at a time, I almost panicked at first. But then I became very aware of God's presence in the car with me. Peace flooded my heart. I knew God was going to get me through all the wrecks, stranded cars, snow and ice. Safely. Home. With my car intact. So I began to praise Him for His faithfulness to see me through ... and He did! Almost four hours after leaving the church office, I pulled safely into my garage, shaking like a leaf but with great joy in what I knew was His deliverance.

And then He seemed to whisper, "Anne, sometimes life is mayhem. Disaster City. Problems, pain, crises, obstacles, diseases, disappointments, battles and brokenness can litter your path. But if you put your trust in Me, I will lead you through all of the mess. Safely. Home. With your faith and relationship with Me intact. I love you!"

So I am praising Him for His faithfulness to see me through.

*Anne Graham Lotz is a best-selling and award-winning author. Her most recent releases are Wounded by God's People, Fixing My Eyes on Jesus, Expecting to See Jesus and her first children's book, Heaven: God's Promise for Me. She is the president of AnGeL Ministries in Raleigh, N.C.*

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## **Jesus Is Always There, Even in Midst of Darkness**

We lived in Colorado, where the skies seemed to change every two minutes. One day, my husband, Terry, and I were out doing

our errands. Terry was driving with his eyes intently focused on heavy traffic, and I was riding with my eyes drawn to the expansive sky. A cloud above us was forming into a most unusual shape. "Whoa!" I exclaimed.

Terry heard my cry and reacted, suddenly applying the brakes. Through my side-view mirror, I saw a line of cars reacting to our car, screeching to a sudden halt.

"Oh dear!"

"Don't tell me," Terry mustered a smile, still ashen from the false alarm. "You were on one of your Nellie cloud missions."

My 80-something-year-old Aunt Nellie was recovering from surgery following a bad fall. Her days of recovery were spent reading and cloud watching through her front window. When I called to pray for her each week, she would update me on the week's latest amazing cloud formations. The night before she had exclaimed, "My dear Sandra, guess what cloud I saw today? A dancing hippopotamus!"

Nellie always ended our weekly phone call by challenging me to see if I could top her unusual cloud sighting for the week. My discovery just moments ago in the car—two dolphins leaping and swimming across the sky—would surely bring a smile to my aunt's face.

As Terry's face regained its color, he resumed his safe driving, and I resumed my dolphin watch—only to discover an ominous cloud growing darker and larger than life by the second. In front of the rampaging cloud were two smaller clouds, mere remnants of my dolphins. By this time my imagination was in full throttle, as my little clouds appeared to sprout legs, running to escape being swallowed alive. *OK Sandra, I thought, you are definitely projecting you and Terry and the past months on those little clouds.* So I firmly declared out loud: "Now stop that!"

Before Terry could slam on the brakes again, I quickly shared with him the grim picture in the sky and how my cloud scenario reminded me of some financial challenges we had been facing the last few months. We of course knew we were not the only people facing economic challenges. The television news programs and newspaper headlines made it difficult to escape the topic.

As we drove on in somber—and I must admit, *tense*—silence, a shaft of the sun’s light broke through the clouds, flooding our car with vibrant warmth. In that moment I heard from somewhere in and around me that still small voice of the Lord: “Be at peace, the Son has always been here, even in the darkest of moments.”

I was reassured suddenly of the power of the triune God Almighty—forever faithful (see Heb. 10:23; 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:9), reigning as the head above all His creation (see Col. 2:10), with Christ our hope of glory (see Col. 1:27; 1 Tim. 1:1), giving us always victorious outcomes and the abundant life, despite what the enemy threatens to steal, to kill, or to destroy (see John 10:10). If you or someone you know feels overwhelmed by grim financial forecasts, I invite and challenge you to turn to the power of God’s Word and His pathway—to true and lasting peace and strength for your day.

Press on. “Walk by faith, not by sight” (see 2 Cor. 5:7). Turn to your great, loving and faithful Lord. After all, His heart knows the load your shoulders are carrying. If you turn to Him, His hand will take that load and carry it so you won’t have to.

#### **PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 2/10/2014**

This week thank the Lord that no matter how grim or dark our circumstances may be, He never leaves or forsakes us and “He is always there.”—Pray for those experiencing great financial loss through unemployment and homelessness. Remember those

affected by the winter storms. Thank Him that His mercies are new every morning and that there is hope for each new day. Ask God how you can partner with others in prayer to see His hand move on their behalf, and be part of their solution. Pray for the safety of those participating in the Winter Olympics. Continue to pray for the persecuted church and the peace of Jerusalem as commanded by God. Pray that our leaders would seek God for wisdom when making decisions affecting the nation and the world. Eph. 3:20; Matt. 7:7.

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## How to Keep Your Dream Alive

***Editor's Note:** Bo Stern's husband, Steve, has been diagnosed with ALS, an incurable degenerative disease.*

It's been a tough couple of weeks on the ALS front lines, and last night was especially hard, filled with breathing mask difficulties and some scary choking episodes into the wee hours. I'm sure every serious illness comes with problems for which there are no solutions, but ALS seems to specialize in them. I often feel helpless and useless, sitting beside Steve while he chokes and tries to find his way back to regular breathing (and then apologizes for keeping me awake).

This morning, my Facebook news feed is filled with tributes to another friend lost to this battle. We are expecting to say farewell to several more within the next few weeks. And sometimes it seems we're no closer to finding a cure than we are to achieving Lou Gehrig's batting average (.343!).

But the other day I was home from work because it was Martin Luther King Jr. Day. And though I know we still have far to go in achieving true racial reconciliation and equality, I wonder if, in his lifetime, he could ever have imagined that his name

would be attached to a national holiday. As he fought on the front lines of racism and segregation, how could he have known how significantly he would help to alter the course of history? He just did the work. And he believed. And I'm guessing sometimes it felt like he was believing his way through quicksand, because he said this:

"If you can't fly, then run; if you can't run, then walk; if you can't walk, then crawl; but whatever you do, you have to keep moving forward."

I am working at believing. Believing for a day when breakthroughs will come. When science will crack the mysterious code that keeps so many suffering. I am believing that, even if there's never a national holiday to celebrate the eradication of this relentlessly brutal disease, that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren will gather for dinner somewhere and the same time every year. And they will raise their glasses to their strong, valiant soldier of a granddad who never stopped fighting.

I wonder: What are you believing for today? What seems impossible? I am wishing you the strength to stand in the trenches and the strategy to make inroads that generations will thank you for. I am wishing you life and joy and peace in the battle, though sometimes those things seem impossibly incongruent. I am wishing you the bravery of Abraham Lincoln and Amelia Earhart and Malala Youfsazai. Because we all have a story, and we all have a storm. May we have the faith to believe with Martin Luther King Jr. that "unearned suffering is redemptive."

So, I guess, I am not wishing you a quick way out of your battle, but I am believing for you and for me that every square inch of our battleground will be redeemed. And on that ground, beauty will grow, wild and free.

Let freedom ring.

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

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## You Need the One Who Knows Your Struggle

I may lose all credibility when I tell you this, but my son has talked me into watching a few *Dr. Who* episodes. It's mostly ridiculous science fiction, which is why I scoffed for a long time, but the Doctor is quirky and appealing. Then I found out he he had secret pain, having lost his entire race, including his family. Now I see him as a rich character and try to ignore the other elements of the story, like a phone booth spaceship and giant alien wasps.

So I was sitting on the couch between my two menfolk, and I said, "I'm going to ask you a serious question, and you have to respond because it's my birthday. Why is it that all of the best characters have experienced deep suffering?"

At that point, Caleb thought he should call his AP English teacher, who would actually care about such things.

So I'll ask you, because I can't see your eyes roll if you think I'm goofy.

Really, don't we love the character who, every once in a while, has eyes that cloud over with a memory hard to

bear? The character who can say, “I know”?

We need someone who gets what we’re going through.

It’s why we love Jesus.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15, NIV).

Jesus knows about struggle.

He knows.

It’s the best of every story, the hero who acts as much out of his knowledge of pain and struggle as he does out of any quality of character he might have. He can help because he’s been there.

Trust your story to the One with the shadow of suffering in his eyes.

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

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## **Woman Who Lost 250 Pounds Shares Why Diets Don’t Work**

“Meet a woman who lost 250 pounds by giving up all the **diets**,” read the promo for my first television interview centered around my memoir, *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying To Earn God’s Favor*.

It’s true. I don’t consider what I do as dieting. **Diets** never

work. The way we use the term diet in our culture means it is a short-term, highly restricted way of eating. It's not something we intend to continue for the rest of our lives.

It'll just be until we lose 20 or 40 or 100 pounds and then we will go back to the way we've always been eating.

I know this all too well. I once weighed 430 pounds, but I was a really successful dieter. I lost 100s of pounds through the years going on every diet imaginable. And they all worked until I started eating foods containing processed sugar and flour again. Then I'd gain the weight back plus more.

I had an idea of what I needed to do to lose weight. When I'd pray about it and ask God to help me with this "mountain of flesh," He'd always give me the same plan. Stop eating sugar. Eat more lean meat, fruits and vegetables and eat less bread.

I never thought I could do the first step and stop eating bread so I'd search for the latest weight loss pill or supplement or go on another diet. I'd vow this time to make it work. However, they were just words.

A goal was always motivational for me because the reward after losing 100 pounds was to go back to eating whatever I wanted. It took no time at all to regain the weight plus more.

After being told I would die in five years if I didn't lose weight, I eventually had a gastric bypass. I lost weight but I was angry that I couldn't eat what I wanted. After a little over a year I found I could eat sugar again and so I started gaining weight again. Once again I found myself in morbid obesity headed back towards my highest weight.

This was more distressing now. I'm greatly altered my body. I'd tried the last magic known to man. I did not want to live this way and yet I couldn't seem to stop eating.

The aha moment came when it hit me after hearing a 25-year

sober alcoholic talk about how to get free of alcohol he had to stop drinking alcohol. "Alcohol is essentially liquid sugar," he said. This may seem like a duh moment to you, but for me it was monumental.

I never drank alcohol and never wanted to be an alcoholic. Now if what I was hearing was true, I was the same as an alcoholic only I was a sugar-holic. Since the meeting was a harmful life patterns group, open to those with all addictions, I asked the question, "Could a person be addicted to sugar."

The presenter said he wasn't sure of the mechanics of it, but a person could be addicted to anything they feel they can't live without. I always said, "I could never live without sugar." I knew in my heart I was addicted to sugar.

I began the journey by stopping my trigger food, which was candy, and then making the switch to giving up processed sugar. I substituted fruit in it's place. Yet fruit has fructose, but it is much healthier than processed sugar because of the water and fiber content.

After giving up processed sugar, I learned how items made with processed wheat flour turn into sugar in the body. I gave up white and then wheat flour and finally all items with gluten.

It's been a journey for sure. Altogether I've lost over 250 pounds from my highest weight.

Giving up what you crave sounds difficult at first, but when you set your mind to do what's right for your life for the rest of your life, you will find God's power is available to help you through. He won't do it for you, but He will provide power to propel you forward.

The difference about the way I eat now is I've switched the way I look at food. I will continue to eat this way for the rest of my life. I am eating for my health, not just for weight loss. If I never lose another pound I will continue to

eat this way. I feel better than I ever have.

I'm hearing more about the addictive qualities of processed sugar and flour these days. I'm glad.

However, I hate to hear supposed weight loss experts tell people they can eat whatever they want and lose weight. This may be true of people who have small amounts of weight to lose.

After being morbidly obese most of my life and knowing many who have not been able to kick this problem, even with gastric bypass surgery, I'm sure the majority of the obesity issue has to do with processed sugar.

Making that lifestyle change and sticking to it will make a major difference in anyone's health.

How to make a lifestyle change.

1. Know Your Why: Why do you want to be healthy? Why do you want to live? It has to be more important than eating your favorite dessert.

2. Know Your Dreams: What are the things you dream of doing that you can't do now.

3. Know your trigger foods: What are the things you crave and want constantly. Clean your house of these things and tell yourself what you can eat instead. Drink more water. Many times you are hungry instead of thirsty. Have some go-to snack foods, fruits, vegetables and protein that are easy to take with you and easy to snack on. Make sure you have plenty of lean protein throughout your day.

4. Know your emotions: When do you eat? Is it when you are happy, sad, bored, lonely, depressed, overwhelmed, tired? Write out solutions to what you can do to address each of these instead of eating.

5. Know your mindset: Your mindset is health. Know what takes you away from health. Know what you need to do to stay on track. Write out solutions to those things. Keep them handy. Refer to them often.

6. Know your temptations: What situations are most tempting? Is it parties at work, holidays, watching TV? Think through each of these. If you mess up, get right back on track.

7. Know your Higher Power: I make no bones about saying my Higher Power is God. Connect with Him. Ask Him to remind you of your goals, to encourage you and support you. Know that He wants you healthy to complete your assignment on the earth today.

That's it in a nutshell. Now go out and change your life.

What part of changing your life do you think will be most difficult?

**Teresa Shields Parker** is an author, blogger, editor, business owner, wife and mother. Her book, *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor* is available on Amazon in print, Kindle and Audible [HERE](#). This story is from her blog, .