

Take Responsibility

by Joyce Meyer

Being responsible is something a lot of people don't seem to know much about.

Too many people feel they are somehow entitled to have the right and privilege

of success without doing anything. But we cannot obtain anything in life apart

from our obedience to God.

Being responsible means being intentional, and that means being active in

what you're passionate about. Jesus encouraged people to stay active in things

that would prepare them for their future.

Being active in studying God's Word will help us to become more responsible.

We cannot do what is right if we do not know what is right. If you have been

doing nothing much to help yourself or other people, then get up and get going

because the longer you do nothing the less you will want to do.

The Bible provides some pretty specific instructions for us to follow. Among

them are actions such as praying, reading the Word, being a blessing to one

another, working with our hands, minding our own business, not gossiping,

judging or criticizing. We are encouraged to forgive, refuse to be offended and

reject resentment or bitterness. We are certainly taught to be responsible,

active and to do our part in every way we can. The more active we are in obeying

God, the more our joy and peace increase.

Unfortunately, I observe that many people do not accept responsibility for

what they do or acknowledge that their life's outcome depends on their actions.

I was once somewhat like that. I spent years feeling sorry for myself, but I was

really just avoiding responsibility. Although it is easier to follow our

feelings, it takes spiritual maturity to do what Jesus would do in every

situation. He certainly would not waste His time feeling sorry for Himself.

He didn't feel sorry for Himself when Peter denied Him or when Judas betrayed

Him. He did not feel sorry for Himself when His brothers were ashamed of Him or

when His disciples disappointed Him in His most difficult time. Jesus continued

being responsible for what God had called Him to do, and He kept His eye on

that, even when others walked away.

When life or people disappoint us, we have a responsibility to remain stable

and continue with God's purpose for our lives. We will not be held responsible

for what other people do, but we will be held responsible for ourselves. I

certainly don't want to stand before God and be asked why I wasted my time in

self-pity.

I encourage you to take responsibility for your emotional responses to life.

Even if your emotions want to sink, you can call on God to lift you up. He will

give you the strength to remain stable.

The Bible reminds us that, "Blessed (happy, fortunate, to be envied) is the man whom You discipline and instruct, O Lord, and teach out of Your law, that you may give him power to keep himself calm in the days of adversity, until the [inevitable] pit of corruption is dug for the wicked" (Ps. 94:12-13, The Amplified Bible).

This Scripture does not say that God keeps us calm. It says He gives us power to keep ourselves calm. We are partners with God. His part is to give us ability and our part is to be responsible.

Responsibility means to respond to the ability we have. An irresponsible person wants God to do everything while he does nothing except follow his feelings. You should declare out loud right now, "I have attended my last pity party." I can promise you in the end you will feel much better about yourself if you take responsibility than if you avoid it.

Life isn't always fair, but God is. The reason you must take responsibility for the outcome of your life is that nobody cares about your life like you do.

Of course God cares, but He won't do your part. He enables you to do it, but let me emphasize that He won't do it for you! I dare you to stand firm, take responsibility and begin working with God to have the best

life you can have.

How Sorrow Brings Peace

Have you ever had the pleasure of hibernating under a warm blanket on a cold winter night? I'm sure many of you have. When I was growing up, "Big Mama" (my grandmother on my mother's side) used to make homemade quilts from pieces of fabric and old clothes to keep us warm during the winter.

She could have made fancy, cotton calico quilts like those sold in department stores and at quilt shows. But our favorite quilts were the ones made from Donnie's and Milton's (my brothers) old jeans, my sister Kathy's and my khaki skirts, and wads of cotton. Those comforters were so heavy that after Big Mama had tucked us in at night we couldn't move—but who wanted to come out from underneath such comforting warmth?

I experienced a similar but more deeply satisfying kind of warmth in December 2004 when my sister Rose died. Since her passing, I've come to a better understanding of what the apostle Paul meant when he said believers can receive a level of peace that surpasses comprehension (see Phil. 4:7).

Like many of you, I have read this verse or heard it preached on more occasions than I can count. But it wasn't until my sister's death that I fully understood its meaning.

My sister was a sassy, vibrant woman who had a zest for life and a passion for God and His people. But Rose spent her last days on Earth confined to a hospital bed, wracked with pain from the cancer that ultimately destroyed her body.

Watching her lie there as her life ebbed away was excruciating for me. During those final hours I silently cried out to God, asking Him to either heal Rose or relieve her from the pain by

calling her home.

Between my periods of intercession, my thoughts drifted to my mother, who is in her twilight years and frail, and wondered what effect my sister's passing would have on her. Filled with emotion, I bolted for the door and headed for the hospital chapel.

The sobs came as soon as I reached the door of the chapel. I collapsed on the nearest pew and cried for my dear sister, for my mother, for my other sisters and brothers, and for the children Rose was leaving behind.

As I was crying, something interesting happened. I thought about how Rose loved God. I remembered how much she loved being in the house of the Lord and how she enjoyed ministering to His people.

Then I thought about how much I loved God in spite of the intense pain I was feeling. Those sobs soon gave way to expressions of praise and thanksgiving. It became clear that an overwhelming presence of my Savior was in that chapel. The stinging, bitter tears of sorrow became a refreshing flood of joy, which washed away my anguish.

When I re-entered Rose's hospital room, I had a different outlook. I looked at my sister's face and was overjoyed to discover that she too had had a visitation.

Her frowns of pain had been replaced by calmness. The room that had once seemed damp, uninviting and chilly now seemed warm—because something shifted in the spiritual realm that day.

I reached for my Bible, and that's when the answer became clear: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ

Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7, NASB).

Peace flooded my soul as I experienced an overwhelming sense of the presence and power of God. All of my apprehensions and fears were literally cast down and replaced with the assurance God's grace affords.

Although I felt certain that my sister was going to be with the Lord, my distress over the probability of that happening had ceased. Mother would be able to weather this storm, just as she had weathered other storms. My brothers and sisters would get through this. Rose's children would somehow be able to go on with their lives.

And as for me, I am covered by something much warmer and reassuring than even Big Mama's old quilts. I have the deep peace that only my eternal Comforter can give me.

The Dairy Dilemma

Q. I suspect that I have lactose intolerance. How can I know for sure? Are there any nutritional supplements that can prevent this? I love ice cream and milk and don't want to give them up!

—P.B., Glendale, California

A. If you love ice cream, you're not alone. The dozens of selections available on supermarket dairy aisles or in ice cream parlors suggest that you have plenty of company.

And if your stomach isn't happy about your love of ice cream, you aren't alone, either. "Lactose intolerance"—a source of physical discomfort for many a dairy-food lover—affects a noteworthy segment of the U.S. population. It occurs in

approximately 80 percent of Asian and Native Americans, 75 percent of African Americans, 50 percent of Hispanic Americans and 20 percent of Caucasian Americans.

People who are lactose intolerant lack the enzyme “lactase,” which breaks down milk sugar into glucose and galactose—which are simple sugars called monosaccharides. The absence of lactase in the body allows lactose to remain in the small intestine, causing abdominal bloating or swelling, cramps or diarrhea, and general abdominal discomfort. Usually these symptoms occur 30 minutes to two hours after dairy products have been ingested.

Foods especially high in lactose are cow’s milk—which includes skim milk—ice cream, soft cheeses such as cottage cheese and cream cheese, and frozen yogurt.

Other dairy products with lower levels of lactose include butter, most other cheeses, and regular yogurt. The majority of people who have lactose intolerance can tolerate small amounts of foods from this second group.

If you want to continue drinking milk, then I suggest you use Lactaid drops, which contain the lactase enzyme, and can simply be added to a glass of milk. These drops will eliminate most of the lactose.

Lactaid caplets, taken orally, also will help, or you may want to switch to the Lactaid brand of milk.

If you are not sure whether or not you truly are lactose intolerant, then I suggest that you stop eating or drinking all dairy products for a week—and then drink a glass of milk. If the common symptoms of bloating and abdominal pains occur, then it is very likely you have lactose intolerance.

If so, then the next time you drop by your favorite ice cream shop, you’ll have a better idea of whether to order one scoop ... or two.

Q. My 6-year-old son has autism and rarely speaks. I have taken him to numerous specialists, and he has been on many different medications, but nothing has helped. Can you recommend nutritional aids?

—A.R., Minneapolis, Minnesota

A.Autism is a developmental disability marked by a disorder of language, a failure to develop social relationships or a difficulty in making friends, a significant delay in intellectual development, and ritualistic or compulsive behavior. It affects more than 400,000 people in the United States, and indications are that the number is increasing.

Perhaps most important is that your child should be tested for the presence of “heavy metals” in his body. Many patients with autism have elevated amounts of these toxic metals, such as mercury, lead, cadmium, arsenic and antimony. A stool test can determine this. If you cannot find a doctor in your area who performs a test for this, call Doctor’s Data in Chicago at (800) 323-2784 for more information.

It is important to have your son tested for food allergies. Then avoid all foods that your child is allergic to.

Put him on a high-fiber diet according to his blood type, with plenty of fruits, vegetables and brown rice. Eliminate soft drinks, chocolate, fast or processed foods, and all wheat and dairy products.

Also give him a multivitamin-mineral that contains at least 100 mg (milligrams) of magnesium, 50 mg of B6, 500 mg of vitamin C, and at least 500 mcg (micrograms) of folic acid and B12.

Gospel Artist Ray Boltz Says He's Gay

Ray Boltz says he has battled homosexuality his entire life and has now decided to live as an openly gay Christian.



[] Dove award-winning gospel artist, Ray Boltz, well-known for his 1988 smash-hit "Thank You," which is a narrative about a Christian thanking their Sunday school teacher for leading them to Christ, announced recently that he is living as a homosexual Christian, according to the *Washington Blade*.

Boltz, 55, said that for the duration of his 20-year gospel career, which produced 16 albums and 12 No.1 Christian radio hits, he has struggled with his sexual orientation.

He said he'd tried to fight his feelings in numerous ways, including ex-gay therapy, though he admits that he's never attended an ex-gay formal seminar or camp.

"I'd denied it ever since I was a kid," he told the *Blade*. "I became a Christian, I thought that was the way to deal with this and I prayed hard and tried for 30-some years and then at the end, I was just going, 'I'm still gay. I know I am.' And I just got to the place where I couldn't take it anymore."

In 2005, Boltz separated from his wife, Carol. Their divorce was finalized earlier this year. Boltz told the *Blade* that he and his wife had a mostly happy life but that he felt throughout the marriage he wasn't able to be himself.

"It wasn't something that manifested itself in that we never had sex ... but how can you truly be intimate with someone when you don't know who they are, when they won't reveal themselves to you," he told the *Blade*. "I thought if I can't say this to the people I love, then what kind of life is this?"

He said he clearly remembers the day, Dec. 26, 2004, when he told his wife and four children—three daughters and a son—that he had been struggling with homosexuality.

“It’s hard to say I came out because I didn’t have all the answers. I just admitted what I was struggling with and what I was feeling. It’s hard to go, ‘This is the point where I accepted my sexuality and who I was,’ but I came out to them and shared with them what I’d been going through,” he told *the Blade*.

In 2005 Boltz moved to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., where he had anonymity and could “just be [himself].”

He told the Washington paper that he is now dating men and lives a “normal gay life.”

He occasionally sings at gay-affirming churches, but says he does not want to be a spokesperson for gay Christians.

“I don’t want to be a spokesperson; I don’t want to be a poster boy for gay Christians; I don’t want to be in a little box on TV with three other people in little boxes screaming about what the Bible says; I don’t want to be some kind of teacher or theologian...I’m just an artist and I’m just going to sing about what I feel and write about what I feel and see where it goes.”

Sacrifices of Praise

by Joyce Meyer

My husband always seems happy. Within five minutes of waking,

Dave is humming,
singing or listening to music as he gets ready for the day. He
is definitely a
“morning person.”

But years ago, I didn't want any music on in the morning. I
didn't want
singing or humming or noise of any kind. I wanted silence so I
could think. The
morning was definitely not my favorite time of day.

Back then I didn't realize how important the morning
is—especially those
first moments after we awaken. God is eager for us to wake up
and talk to Him.

The psalmist David talked a lot about mornings, saying, “This
is the day that
the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps.
118:24, paraphrased).
David didn't always feel like rejoicing, but he decided to
rejoice in God's new
day.

It is never good to give in to grumpiness. An irritable
attitude can keep us
from enjoying God's presence. Psalm 100:4 says that we are to
enter His gates
with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Without
thanksgiving, we can't
even get through the gate!

If we want to enter God's presence, we must lay aside all
murmuring and
complaining. We must offer ourselves to Him every day with
joyful hearts and
mouths full of praise, even if we don't feel like it!

Satan tries everything he can to capture our thoughts early in

the morning.

He wants to get us thinking about all the wrong things as soon as we wake up.

His intent is to steal our peace and joy by upsetting us as soon as our alarms go off. That is why it is important to learn how to defeat the devil early each day. Every morning is a new opportunity to start your day right.

The Bible says, "Through Him, therefore, let us constantly and at all times offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that thankfully acknowledge and confess and glorify His name" (Heb. 13:15, The Amplified Bible).

God is greatly pleased with our sacrifices of praise, and our prayers rise before Him as a sweet-smelling fragrance. Nothing makes Him happier than when we bring ourselves to Him each morning and say: "God, here I am. I want to be a living sacrifice to You."

Even in the Old Testament, God's people brought freewill offerings to Him (see Ex. 35:29). They all had various sacrifices such as animals, grains and cereals. The Bible tells us that Moses rose early in the morning, built an altar, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings to God. Then he prayed and read the Book of the Covenant (see Ex. 24:1-7).

Thankfully, God no longer asks us to build an altar out of

rocks, slaughter a
bull, drain its blood and build a fire in order to honor Him
with a burnt
sacrifice. But He does want us to offer our lives each day in
dedicated service
and praise to Him.

There are countless opportunities to praise God throughout the
day. If
thankfulness for your many blessings suddenly rises in your
heart, stop right
then and tell the Lord how grateful you are for all He has
given you. Say: "I
worship You, Lord, for You are worthy to be praised. I need
You, and I just want
to tell You that I love You. Thank You, Father, for
everything."

Today I still need a little more quiet than Dave does in the
morning. But we
both have found the way to start our day out right.

Each morning we set our hearts and minds to follow God and
choose to practice
1 Chronicles 16:10-12: "Let the hearts of those rejoice who
seek the Lord! Seek
the Lord and His strength; yearn for and seek His face and to
be in His presence
continually! [Earnestly] remember the marvelous deeds which He
has done, His
miracles, and the judgments He uttered."

God doesn't want a dead sacrifice anymore. He wants us to be
living
sacrifices, full of zeal to seek His face and serve Him every
day. All we have
to do is wake up and say: "Thank You, Lord. I give You a
sacrifice of praise. I
give You myself, a living sacrifice, ready to live for You

today.”

Eat the Best Foods

by Kara Davis, M.D.

Gardening can be a deeply spiritual experience. Many of Jesus' parables centered on plant life and agriculture. I live in the cold Midwest, and I cherish spring and summer because I get to work the soil and enjoy my garden. My greatest fulfillment comes from growing vegetables. Witnessing firsthand how God abundantly meets our needs by providing us with food from nothing more than seeds, water, sunlight and soil fills me with a tremendous sense of humble thanksgiving.

The Bible tells us that in the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth. He told them to fill the earth and subdue it, placing them in authority over all creatures that dwelt in the land, the air and the sea.

He then told them: “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Gen. 1:29, NIV). This gift was for all mankind. The earth—as God ordained—produces foods of all kinds, and the fruit of the land is enough to meet our nutritional needs.

God provides us with food, but He doesn't dictate what we should do with it.

It is up to us to use wisdom in the way we eat. Both what we put into our mouths and what we don't put into them can determine whether we walk in good health or suffer with poor health.

Of the 15 leading causes of death in this country, six are directly related to our diets and seven are associated with excessive alcohol use. So eating and drinking the wrong things (or eating and drinking too much of the right things) can wreak havoc on our bodies. If we become proactive in our health, and make the foods from the land the foundation of our diets, we take a major step in reducing our risks for many diseases.

When you think about diet and disease, you probably think of heart disease, hypertension and diabetes—illnesses that are clearly linked to the way we eat.

But let's consider cancer, the second leading cause of death in this country.

There are some obvious nondietary risk factors for cancer such as cigarette smoking. But what may not be so obvious is the role our diet plays in cancer.

Certain foods contain nutrients that serve to protect us against this disease. These foods come from the earth—the vegetables, fruits, beans (legumes), nuts and whole grains of the harvest are actually able to protect our bodies against cancer.

Plant-based foods contain substances known as phytonutrients. Researchers began studying these substances about 20 years ago and have found clear links between diets rich in phytonutrients and a lower risk for many diseases, including cancer.

Phytonutrients protect our bodies in many ways by repairing damaged cells, killing cancerous cells and enhancing immunity. This is one of the reasons the American Cancer Society, in its Guidelines for Nutrition and Cancer Prevention, recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day, and limiting the amount of meats that are high in fat.

Am I suggesting that we all become vegetarians? No. If you choose to be a vegetarian that's fine, but there is no biblical mandate for such a choice. The Bible tells us that when the flood waters receded and Noah left the ark, God granted permission for mankind to eat meat (see Gen. 9:3).

Christians have liberty, but in all things (including what we put into our mouths), God expects us to use wisdom and discretion. God grants us meat to enjoy, but I don't think He intended for it to become our primary source of nutrition.

Be mindful to give thanks to the Lord for generously providing us with nutritious foods from His bountiful earth. Whether you become a gardener or not, you'd do well to include in your diet the many fruits,

vegetables, nuts, grains
and beans harvested from the land. God has given these foods
of the earth to
satisfy us, sustain us and protect us from all manner of
diseases.

Can a Christian Have a Demon?

by John Eckhardt

There was a time when we taught in our church that Christians
could not
have demons. I preached long sermons stating that Christians
could be oppressed,
regressed, digressed, obsessed and suppressed, but never
possessed. We believed
that a demon could be outside a Christian oppressing him but
that it could not
be inside him. The reasoning I used to defend this position
was that Jesus and
the Holy Spirit could not live inside the same body in which
demons reside.
The problem was, our experience did not match our theology.
When we
ministered deliverance, we frequently prayed for people we
knew were born-again,
Spirit-filled believers—and they manifested demons! We had to
face the fact
that either our experience was wrong or our doctrine was
wrong.

We couldn't question our experience because we knew what we
were seeing. So
we began to question our theology.

In our search for truth, we realized that in the Bible, Jesus tells us to cast devils out, not to cast devils off. Obviously, for something to come out, it must be in. We finally came to the conclusion that our interpretation of the Bible had been wrong. Now I am convinced not only that a Christian can have demons but also that there are demons that operate in the realm of theology, encouraging us to argue and debate endlessly over doctrine rather than meeting the needs of people who are hurting. Demons actually help promote the teaching that a Christian cannot have a demon, because they gain strength from staying hidden. They can operate in their destructive ways without being challenged!

Some may argue that a believer cannot be possessed. But the dismaying fact remains that born-again Christians, including leaders, are experiencing difficulties that can find no solution in natural infirmities or the endless conflict between the flesh and the Spirit.

It's time to acknowledge that we are dealing with real people who have real problems and that God did not save and commission us so we could argue over doctrine. He called us into ministry so we can help people who are hurting, wounded and bruised.

When you come into contact with someone who is controlled by demons, the answer is to cast the devils out, not to argue about whether

or not the person
is a Christian. The answer is to bring help to that person.

Possessed or Not Possessed?

I realize I'm not the only believer who has ever had an erroneous idea about Christians being possessed. And the sensationalized picture Hollywood has painted of demon possession has not helped. It has led us to believe that if we say a Christian can be possessed, we are saying he can be fully owned and controlled by the devil and will manifest, Hollywood-style, with head spinning and eyes popping out.

The word "possessed" is an unfortunate translation because it connotes ownership, and we know that the devil cannot own a Christian—that is, have complete control of him. But in the Bible, there is no real distinction between being possessed and being oppressed, digressed, suppressed, obsessed and so forth. All these terms mean that a person is, to some degree, under the influence of a demon.

Personally, I do not have as much of a problem with the word "possessed" as other Christians do. In fact, to me the word "demonized" sounds worse.

When I looked up "possess" in the dictionary, I discovered that one definition of the word is "to occupy." My contention is that if a demon occupies

your big toe, he possesses that part of you. It doesn't mean he possesses your spirit, soul and body. But if he occupies even a small portion, such as a physical organ in your body—as a spirit of infirmity does—then there is possession to some degree.

I often ask those who are skeptical of demon possession whether or not cancer is demonic. Most will agree that sickness is of the devil.

So then, I continue, is cancer inside the body, or is there something on the outside that's the problem? If it isn't on the inside, doctors probably wouldn't cut people open trying to remove it. Evidently, as a Christian, you can have something in you that is possessing a certain organ of your body and is not of God.

Knowing that a Christian can be possessed (or demonized) in some part of his being raises the question: Is any part off-limits to demons? Here is where we can reconcile the issue of Jesus and the Holy Spirit residing simultaneously within someone who needs deliverance.

One thing that has helped us in our understanding is the realization that every person is made up of three parts: spirit, soul and body. When Jesus comes into a believer's life, He comes into that person's spirit. John 3:6 tells us clearly, "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (NKJV). A demon cannot

dwell in a Christian's spirit because that is where Jesus and the Holy Spirit dwell.

It is the other components that make up a human being—the soul (mind, will and emotions) and the body—that are the targets of demonic attack. Demons can dwell in those areas of a Christian's life. So when we say that a Christian is demonized or possessed, we are not saying he has a demon in his spirit but in some part of his soul or body.

To illustrate this truth, the Lord reminded us of the biblical account of Jesus' going into the temple and cleansing it of thieves and moneychangers. The Greek word used for “drove out” in this account is *ekballo*, which means “to expel or drive out.” It is the same word that is used in Mark 16:17: “In My [Jesus'] name they will cast out demons.”

We know that according to the Bible God's children are the temple of the Spirit of God (see 1 Cor. 3:16). In the Old Testament the temple had three parts: the holy of holies, the holy place and the outer court. This picture is a type or representation of who we are as His temple today.

The shekinah glory of God, or God's “presence,” was in the holy of holies. This part of the temple represents our spirits.

But when Jesus went into the temple to drive out the thieves and

moneychangers, He did not go into the holy of holies. He went into the outer court, where these evildoers were carrying on their business transactions.

The whole account is a picture of deliverance—of what Jesus wants to do in our temples. There may be demonic thieves in our lives that are operating in our outer courts (bodies or souls). Even though they cannot enter the holy of holies (our spirits), Jesus wants them expelled because the temple of God was never intended to be a place for thieves to operate. It is meant to be a place of worship and a place of prayer.

A Covenant Right

Those who believe that the ministry of deliverance is not for believers need to reconsider their position. The truth is, rather, that deliverance is not for the unbeliever.

What good would it do to cast demons out of an unbeliever, unless he is planning to get saved? Unbelievers cannot maintain their deliverance. In fact, according to Luke 11:24-26, after undergoing deliverance, the unsaved person is subject to receiving seven times as many demons as he had before.

The ministry of deliverance is the covenant right of believers. Like every other blessing from God—healing, prosperity, miracles and so on—it is promised

only to His covenant people, those who believe in Jesus and come to God through Christ's blood. God, in His mercy, will bless people outside the covenant because He is merciful. But primarily, His blessings are based on covenant.

The story of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:25-30 makes this clear. The woman sought out Jesus so He would deliver her daughter from an unclean spirit. But Jesus told her, "'Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs'" (v. 27).

In this verse, the phrase "the children's bread" refers specifically to deliverance, and Jesus is saying it belongs to His covenant people. Those outside the covenant may receive a miracle based on God's mercy, but deliverance is meant for those who have a covenant with God.

Luke 1:71-73 says Jesus came "that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham." He brought salvation from our enemies—devils and demons—based on a promise, of which we are heirs (see Gal. 3:29), that He made to Abraham.

The purpose of this salvation is stated in subsequent verses of Luke 1: "To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our

enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (vv. 74-75). God provides the benefit so that we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and in righteousness all the days of our lives. It is very difficult to live this way without being delivered. In fact, it is practically impossible.

One of the reasons it is so difficult is that demons are not always a result of sin in a person's life. There are many different kinds of evil spirits, and not all of them are what I refer to as "spirits of sin."

That is not to say that sin is not a huge entry point for demonic influence.

For every sin in the Bible there is a corresponding demon. I maintain that if a Christian is living in sin or living in the flesh, there's no way he can escape demons.

However, it is also possible for a Christian to be demonized as a result of someone else's sin. For instance, a spirit of rejection or trauma can come upon a person because he is abused. Or demons may be inherited from a previous generation through a person's bloodline.

We have come a long way in our church since the early days when we believed Christians could not have demons. Now whenever a person gets saved, we automatically assume he needs some level of deliverance, and

we lead him through
the process. We don't question if the new believer has a
demon, only how many he
has.

That may sound hard. But remember, demonization is not always
the person's
own fault. Generational issues are a major entry point.

If we can be subjected to the consequences of sin to the
fourth generation,
as Exodus 20:5 says, and a biblical generation is 40 years,
then we are subject
to the demonic influence of what people in our family lines
were doing 160 years
before us. This means that, taking the year 2000 as a starting
point, we are
affected by what those in our bloodlines were doing as far
back as the year
1840.

Think about it. Even if a person has a great genealogy, he
can't know
everything his ancestors were doing in secret that long ago.
And if, in addition
to generational sin, he has committed personal sin or has been
traumatized or
victimized in any way, by the time he comes to the Lord, he is
going to need
deliverance on some level. There is just too much defilement
and contamination
on Earth to escape it.

We must accept the reality that we have been commissioned to
minister to
God's covenant people, and part of our responsibility is to
provide them with
their covenant right of deliverance. If we deprive them of it

based on some
erroneous theological doctrine, then we are denying them what
is rightfully
theirs, and we cannot call ourselves able ministers of the New
Covenant. Let's
do as Jesus did, and serve the children's bread to those who
need it!

Adapted from Ministering Freedom from Demonic Oppression,
Doris Wagner, general
editor, copyright 2002. Published by Wagner Publications. Used
by permission.

Good Habits

by Joyce Meyer

As Christians we are to live in ways that cause other people to hunger for a relationship with Jesus Christ. When we do this, we are being effective believers who bear fruit in God's kingdom, and we enjoy our lives. We need to break our bad habits and develop good ones, so I want to focus on nine habits of highly effective Christians.

- **Spend time with God.** Moments with God can include praying, studying the Bible and singing. Playing worship music while quietly listening for His voice is another way to experience His presence. David, who was “a man after [God's] own heart” (Acts 13:22, The Amplified Bible), prayed and communed with God every morning, noon and night. Fellowshiping with the Father should be a habit in our lives.
- **Keep your conscience clear.** Nothing will keep us from enjoying life as much as guilt can. In Acts 24:16, Paul

said, "Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men." Walking in the confidence of a clear conscience will keep us free and happy.

- **Live by faith, one day at a time.** Faith is extremely practical and an invaluable habit to cultivate in our everyday lives. Faith is a positive view of God and His ability and willingness to help us; it always expects something good to happen (see Ps. 27:13-14). Faith believes God's Word is superior to human reasoning, no matter what. And when we live by this principle, we take life one day at a time, trusting God in everything.
- **Do your best.** We must be motivated to do our very best in whatever we set out to accomplish. God is excellent. As His representatives, we should be too. Paul urges us to "learn to ... prize what is excellent and of real value" (Phil. 1:10). As we make excellence a way of life, we will sense God's joy and be good examples to the world. We must sow excellence in order to reap an excellent harvest.
- **Handle criticism in a godly way.** Everyone who is truly successful in life has to deal with criticism. It can be painful, but a godly response is always a great testimony to those around us. Trust God with your reputation. Respond to criticism in a way that honors Him. The Bible says only a fool hates correction.
- **Practice peace.** One quality that sets believers apart from the world is inner peace. In John 14:27, Jesus makes it clear that peace is available to us: "Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you." When we make and keep peace, people know we belong to God.

- **Finish what you start.** When we begin projects or activities and then leave them undone, we end up with a sense of failure and cause others to feel they cannot depend on us. The Bible teaches diligence, steadfastness and determination—all of which have to do with finishing what we start.
 - **Live by discernment.** Simply defined, “discernment” is spiritual understanding, and developing it takes practice. Discernment involves paying attention to our hearts. We have to know that when we do not feel right about something in our hearts we should not do it. As we grow in our understanding of God’s Word and in our relationships with Him, we also grow in our ability to discern.
 - **Be generous.** Second Corinthians 9:7 tells us, “God loves (He takes pleasure in, prizes above other things, and is unwilling to abandon or to do without) a cheerful (joyous, ‘prompt to do it’) giver [whose heart is in his giving].” We should give whatever we can: help, encouragement, money, time, talents and forgiveness. And remember, giving makes the devil mad. But those who give cheerfully are happy, fulfilled and highly effective.
-

What Makes You Happy?

by Linda S. Mintle, Ph.D.

I had to laugh when I read this USA Today newspaper headline: “Psychologists now know what makes people happy.” I didn't know happiness was a secret to be discovered by my noble profession! Curious, I kept reading. What were these exciting new findings?

If you are a student of the Bible, you won't be surprised. Research only validates God's way of doing things.

1. The happiest people are those who spend the least time alone and pursue intimacy and personal growth. When I read this, I immediately thought of Jesus. He was proactive when it came to community. He poured His life into a faithful band of followers and developed an intimate circle of 12 men. And through those men, He established the church. The early church was all about community, intimacy and personal growth.

2. Happy people don't judge themselves by what others do or have. That is, they don't compare themselves with others. The Bible is clear that we are not to measure ourselves by the yardstick of others, only by the Word of God. As we obey God's Word and choose to please Him, blessing and contentment follow.

3. Materialism is toxic for happiness. The parable of the rich young ruler in Matthew bears this out. Despite this man's riches, he wanted something more—eternal life. Jesus stressed the importance of keeping the commandments but told him something more was required—he must sell his possessions and follow Him. Sadly, the young man chose material possessions over Christ and walked away feeling “sorrowful.”

4. Optimism is important, even in dark times. Because of Christ, hope abounds. Jeremiah 32:17 proclaims: “'Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You'” (NKJV). In the last chapter of Job, after Job suffers much and has been tested, he cries out, “'I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You'” (Job 42:2).

Over and over, we are given biblical examples of people who refused to be downtrodden because of circumstances or events. Their hope was in the Lord. The end result is rest and peace.

5. Actions matter. It's not just what you believe or your

outlook on life that contributes to happiness. People who give to others and aren't self-absorbed are more satisfied with life. No surprise here. God gave His only begotten Son, the ultimate sacrificial gift. Giving is a biblical principle whether it involves finances, service, food, shelter, time or talent. The result of giving is blessing.

6. Happy people know their strengths and use them. We are stewards of God's gifts and are to use them for His glory. When you move in those gifts and do what God has equipped you to do, you are happy. Psychologists call this moving in the "flow." People of faith "flow" in the Spirit.

7. People who feel gratitude are happy. We are eternally grateful for Jesus and His sacrifice and for all God has done in our lives. Out of that genuine gratitude flows happiness.

8. The strongest link to happiness is a willingness to forgive others. The benefits of forgiveness are well-documented psychologically. For the believer, forgiveness is not an option; it is a command from Jesus. We forgive others because He forgave us.

After revealing these secrets to happiness, the article concluded with the following comment: "We should have more trust in our own resilience and less confidence in our predictions about how we'll feel. We should be a bit more humble and a bit more brave."

The researcher got it half right. We will never find happiness when we trust in our own resilience. Instead, we must trust in God and His promises.

The search for happiness will fall short if it doesn't lead to the One in whom contentment can be found. As the Scriptures declare: "Happy are the people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 144:15).

If you want to find happiness, trust in God's sovereignty and

omniscience. Obey Him and believe that He works all things for your good. It's not about you or your resilience. It's all about Him.

The Art of Waiting

by Judy Jacobs

Waiting rooms are not my favorite places. I get impatient. I sit there and jiggle my feet. I sigh. I have so many other things to do. Besides, those magazines are so old.

Waiting for God to show up can be a lot harder than waiting for a doctor's appointment. Even on the doctor's slowest day, I know I will get out of that waiting room after a few hours. Waiting for God is a little different. Waiting for Him can take an entire lifetime, and the magazines are optional.

You can make a whole career of waiting for God.

So, although it seems contradictory to say so, waiting is part of pursuing God's moments in your life. Waiting—and being willing to wait—is a very important and practical part of any divine appointment.

It's not a passive thing at all. Oh, no. When you are waiting, you are quite active. On the negative side, you are busy fending off all of your impatient fretfulness. On the positive side, you are busy growing in your faith and trust. You are getting rid of distractions and refining your focus on Jesus. You are listening—waiting for your name to be called.

The Bible says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10, NKJV). If you want to know God better, then you have to get still, get quiet. When you have hushed your soul and spirit and body, you will start to put down roots and draw up strength.

The Bible also says, "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. 30:15). You have to get to a special place, alone with God. If you are really serious about laying

hold of your destiny, you have to realize that it will be a process, one handhold at a time, and a lot of it will happen when you're closeted with God, waiting, pondering, soaking up His presence. It's part introspection, part prayer, part sitting at His feet where you learn and grow and get transformed so that you reflect His image.

It is not something you can achieve in your own strength. You know already what will happen if you think your own strength is sufficient. (You will fall flat on your nose—in public probably.) God wants to provide for you, but to do that He needs you to be aware of your insufficiency. You need Him.

Waiting is an expression of your desire for more of Him. God is stronger than any obstacle or any human being, and He wants to have an opportunity to show you how strong He is. That can't happen if you're noisily charging around full-steam ahead, acting like you have everything you need already. Sure, once in a while He will knock you off your high horse as He did with Paul on the road to Damascus, but normally, that's just not the way God works.

The humble English preacher Smith Wigglesworth (who was known for saying, "Only believe!") explained how God works with us:

"Sometimes we are tested on the lines of faith. For twenty-five years Abraham believed God. God said to him: 'Thy wife shall have a son.' Every year his wife grew weaker. He saw the wrinkles and her puny, weak condition. Did he look at it? No—he looked at the promise. For twenty-five years God tested him; but he gave glory to God, and considered neither Sarah's body nor his own. And as he did so, God said, 'Yes, Abraham.'

Listen to what the Word of God says: 'Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification' (Romans 4: 23–25).

All who believe are blessed along with faithful Abraham. God wants to show us that nothing is impossible to those who believe."

Waiting is also an acknowledgement of God's times and seasons.

Very often, we wait simply because it's not time yet. The prophet Habakkuk said: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. 2:3).

Sometimes you have to do like church folks did in the old days—you "tarry" until He gives you what you need. You wait patiently, faithful to the vision He has already given you even as you seek for more vision. The apostle James wrote, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:8). Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

This waiting/seeking thing seems to be one of the most basic principles in the kingdom of heaven. You may feel like you're doing nothing. You may feel like you're in kindergarten. But hey, there's nothing wrong with kindergarten! The Bible says, "Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin" (Zech. 4:10, NLT).

You will grow. And the person who has already gone on up to a higher "grade" needs to wait and seek some more in order to grow too. The thing about God is that He keeps beckoning you to go higher. That's all well and good, but the glorious problem is this: just when you think you are about to get to that point where you have finally reached your place in God, He moves on you and takes you higher still.

All you need to start with is your mustard seed of faith. Just get away to your place with God and plant that seed. It will start growing steadily. Take care of it and keep waiting for it to grow to full maturity.