

3 Biblical Ways You Can Pray During the COVID-19 Crisis

Praying is a good thing. Always! For the believer prayer should be the first thing we go to. And yet we know that some prayers are more effective than others, at least to our human experience. So how should you pray during the COVID-19 crisis?

There are Christian believers who have gotten and will get sick, even die, from this virus. Does that mean God is not hearing prayer? Where is God in the middle of all this? What should we expect as a result of our prayers?

I begin from the perspective that God hears us, He invites our prayers and He responds to our prayers. But prayer is not a heavenly vending machine; put in a certain prayer and get out a certain blessing. God is not under our control. (Would you really want Him to be?) He's too big for that.

So here are a few biblically founded principles and ways to pray during any crisis, and specifically during this season.

Pray for Peace

As serious as the COVID-19 virus is, the impact of fear and anxiety in this season is even greater. Individuals, families, investors, businesses and governments are often taking actions as much from panic as from wisdom. Yes, serious actions have been and will be needed, but this much fear?

In Scripture, God tells His human children to "Fear not!" over and over again because we naturally respond to uncertainty with fear. And that's certainly true today. Experiencing peace in the midst of the very real storm we find ourselves in is not a normal human response. It takes a miracle.

And that's exactly the miracle Jesus offers. His peace is a gift!

“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

“I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Jesus’ gift of peace is not a denial of reality. It’s not based on circumstances or a passive acceptance of doom. It’s based on a resolute knowledge of *who* our God is, of *who* is on our side, regardless of what truths our human senses perceive. Instead, it’s based on the *rest* of the truth.

Jesus, I ask for Your supernatural gift of peace in the midst of this storm. I give everyone and everything to You. I accept Your peace and choose to let that peace guide and transform my mind, my decisions and my life. Amen.

What Would You Have Me to Do?

People bring different styles of coping to big problems, different ways of bringing their faith to bear facing tough stuff. Fascinating research shows that those who see themselves as cooperating *with* God in addressing challenges generally have the best outcomes.

Biblical examples show that usually God has something for *us* to do in working with Him to answer our own prayers. The children of Israel had to fight to take possession of the land of Canaan (the book of Joshua). Hezekiah had to put a lump of figs on the boil in order to get well (Isa. 38:21). The blind man had to go wash in the pool of Siloam in order to receive his sight (John 9:7).)

This does not mean you and I struggle, try harder and expect to figure out things on our own. It does mean we usually have a role to play. And we need God’s wisdom in order to do so.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but so much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the One working in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13).

God works. And we work.

A two-part prayer is certainly appropriate:

Jesus, please come right into the middle of this circumstance. Break the hold of this virus on humanity. By Your mercy bring this to an end quickly!

And Jesus, show me what I am to do here and now. Show me what precautions I am to take, what decisions to make and actions to do, and who of Your children I am to help in this season. Amen.

The Blood of Jesus

I learned many years ago about the power of the blood of Jesus. Most of us have only touched the surface of understanding all that Jesus accomplished in His victory over sin and death, and the ongoing need we have to remain under the power and protection of His blood.

Remember the old gospel song, “There is power, power, wonder-working power/ in the precious blood of the Lamb.” That power accomplishes much more than just forgiveness.

In this age, we apply the blood of Jesus through our words. This has become a *daily* part of my life with God, and I believe it’s more needed now than ever. This does not mean a problem-free life, but it provides a protection that is not available any other way. There’s no magic in specific words. But the power in the blood of Jesus is real.

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of

their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11).

I encourage you to pray something like this each day, as I do:

Jesus, I plead Your blood over my life for today, over my spirit, my soul, my body. I plead Your blood over my family [name them] and over all that concerns me. I place everything that concerns me under the blood of Jesus and let go of everything that cannot remain under Your blood—any habits, material things, thoughts or people.

May nothing come to impact me or my family today that does not first come through Your blood—nothing from the enemy, from other people or from the natural world. I take my stand under the banner of Your blood and choose to remain there for today and always. Amen.

And I pray for you even now, that Jesus' presence bless you, protect you and fill you with His peace.

Your Turn: *How are you praying during this crisis season? Do any of these prayers resonate in your soul today? Leave a message below. {eoa}*

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the fully alive kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

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Spirit-Filled Medical Doctor: Best Ways to Fight Your Coronavirus Fears

Within the past few days, life for those of us living in the U.S. has changed. In some other parts of the world this is nothing new. The current pandemic is a real threat—to the health of humans, and to our local, national and worldwide economy. How do you battle fear over the coronavirus (COVID-19)?

Actions that authorities have taken, along with the 24/7 media coverage, easily breed fear. School closures, widespread cancellations of events and empty store shelves where toilet paper and soap should be make us nervous. Certain groups of people have already had their livelihoods dramatically impacted. Every business is affected in some way.

For those of us who believe in Jesus, fear is not a viable option. Hundreds of times in Scripture we are told to *fear not*. One of my favorite passages is Jesus' words: “‘I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world'” (John 16:33).

So how do you get to “No fear here”?

Remember God Is In Control

Do you for one moment think this is a surprise to God?

He knows the real truth about how this pandemic started. And He knows how it will end. He knows how many people will get sick (or die), and what the impact on the economy will be. He

knows how governments and other authorities will respond and what our health care resources can and cannot do. And He knows how these events will impact you and your family personally.

And beyond knowing, He cares. About the whole situation, and about you personally.

We Still Face Troubles

Sometimes we think trusting in God's care means He will make everything OK. Remember, Jesus did promise tribulation! (John 16:33). We live in a messed-up world. We are in the mopping-up time in the battle between God's kingdom of light and Satan's kingdom of darkness. It's a gnarly time for humans to be alive in this world.

Jesus hurts when we hurt. He can miraculously bring meaning and good things even out of tragedy. But we will still face troubles. Deep troubles.

Wisdom and Trust

So, what do you do right now, today?

Use wisdom. Wash your hands. Practice social distancing. Calmly talk with your family about what actions you will take during this time. Then prayerfully survey your immediate world for how God would have you help others in need—elderly or sick, your workplace, your church. (And please, don't hoard toilet paper!)

And at the same time, stay on your knees.

Prayer changes things. Prayer is not a heavenly vending machine—put in a prayer and get out the blessing you desire. But prayer makes a difference. In the United States, our National Day of Prayer was heard by God!

Prayer keeps your mind in a healthy place. Especially in difficult times we *must* take our cues first from our heavenly

Father. His shoulders are big enough to handle all your cares, both today and tomorrow. “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isa. 26:3).

No Fear Here

Fear can rear its ugly head in your soul at a moment’s notice. It’s important to fortify your mind during these challenging times.

You can get our 40-day email devotional series, *Freedom from Fear and Anxiety*, by clicking [here](#), or by texting the word “40DAYS” to the number 44222. (If you’ve been through this series in the past, contact me and I’ll restart it for you.)

This email series will put God’s Word in your mind each morning, along with a prayer you can pray out loud.

May you experience a supernatural level of God’s peace and wisdom, knowing that He knows and cares about *you*!

Your Turn: *Have you battled fear over coronavirus (COVID-19) in recent days? How are you going to embrace the peace that Jesus promised even in the midst of trouble? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the “fully alive” kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at [.](#)

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4 Faith-Filled Tips to Help You Learn to Love Well

While learning to love well is a lifelong process, loving well was something I was privileged to deeply experience with my husband. Though by no means perfect, God blessed me with a very loving marriage. That could never have happened unless I learned to love well.

The home I grew up in did not show me how to love well. During my early adult years, I very much wanted to be married, but it seemed there were no good prospects. (Read: I wasn't ready!) It was a complete surprise when God brought my husband Al into my life in my 40s, and we experienced a very loving marriage until he went home to be with the Lord. I miss him every day.

I only realized later that what I was learning was how to love well. If I had gotten married earlier, I am completely certain my marriage would have been very troubled, regardless of who the man might have been. In my case, God waited until He had matured me enough so that I was *able* to love and be loved.

And still, there were aspects of loving well that I didn't learn until I got married.

Manage Your Emotions

One of the first things that surprised me after marriage was how significantly Al was affected by my emotions. He had unusual people-smarts; perhaps that made him more sensitive to my moods than the average husband. By the time we married, I had grown up enough to have a reasonable handle on my feelings, but getting married necessitated I take that to a whole new level.

Life wasn't just about me anymore. If I were tired, upset, frustrated, excited, worried or whatever, it affected him. My feelings were no longer simply my private playground. If I were to have a happy marriage, I had to learn how to acknowledge my emotions, but then work through them as quickly as reasonably possible in order to maintain connection with my husband.

One day during the early weeks of us doing live radio together, I went ahead to our studio to prepare. He had not been feeling well and came later, arriving just as we went on air. I got very upset, feeling as though he didn't care enough about what we were trying to do, and might have left me to do the program alone. That hurt him. At that stage in his career, he had done so much radio that he could be almost as good with little or no preparation. And I learned to manage my emotions better.

Study Your Spouse

The more you know about your spouse before getting married, the better! But regardless of how long and intentional your dating/engagement, it's not the same as living as husband and wife within the covenant of marriage. A good marriage involves ongoing discovery.

For me, that was so much more than knowing how Al liked his slacks hung up or his favorite ice cream flavor. By remaining curious, I could come to understand the responses from other people that either deflated him or lifted him up, the places where his heart was vulnerable and so many areas in which his wisdom continued to amaze me.

I learned to hold those bits of knowledge tenderly—not to protect him from consequences of bad behavior (he had stopped his bad behaviors before we got married), but so that I could be a safe and inviting place where he could increasingly be himself.

Speak Your Spouse's Language

Al would regularly make a summary statement about a situation, problem, group of people and more as though it were fact. Early in our relationship, I saw him as jumping to conclusions and making value judgments without adequate thought. But it wasn't long before I came to understand he was actually asking for my input. He wanted me to engage with him, agreeing or disagreeing. And when I presented a different perspective, he would often adjust his conclusions.

The more I learned what was important to him, what his dreams and fears were, the more I was able to both respond and speak in ways that would connect us. I learned to pause before talking about something I cared about and imagine how it would sound to him, how it might affect him. He wanted to know! But that pause allowed me to craft my communication in ways that he could hear.

That might sound like I was walking on eggshells—not at all! I was truly safe and cherished. But the ground between us remained so much cleaner when I could imagine his heart, and care for it at the same time I was communicating something important.

Let God Fill You Up

Looking to another human being to fill you up always results in disappointment. Life drains you. Marriage drains you, even as the best parts of it nourish and satisfy you. You need to come to marriage “batteries included.” Thankfully I married a man who also came “batteries included.” But no one person has enough battery juice for two.

Loving well meant I had to constantly keep getting filled up with God's love so I would have something to give. That became especially critical during my husband's long final illness. Staying close together emotionally meant I had to intentionally get my emotional/spiritual fuel from God Himself

and other healthy lifestyle practices.

While I didn't do it perfectly by any means, I can look back and know I loved him well.

And because of that, I have known what it's like to truly be cherished.

Whatever path God has for you to learn to love well, it will be worth it. Don't give up on the opportunity!

Your Turn: *Have you been learning to love well? Where might God be wanting to lead you through the next "learning to love well" lesson? Leave a comment below. {eoa}*

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3 Lasting Spiritual Benefits of Taking Time to 'Deal With Your Stuff'

Doing something hard becomes a lot easier when you know the awesome result that's coming. Looking under the surface and dealing with your stuff is hard! But the life you have after

dealing with your stuff is truly amazing!

Imagine what it would feel like to no longer lash out and harm others with your self-protective anger, to not lie awake ashamed over your latest excursion into porn or to respond to your spouse with an open heart instead of bitterness. What freedom. What joy!

The wounds that happen to us and the wounds we do to ourselves can be healed. The sting can be gone! And the results are beautiful.

The hurt, dysfunction and mental health diagnoses I experienced as a young woman are in my past. What I describe as my “four years of hell” are so far gone that I never think about them unless I choose to remember. I’m not holding on with clenched fists trying not to fall apart; I function daily with courage and joy.

What your journey will look like only God knows. But I *do* know you’ll never get beyond the mess without dealing with your stuff.

So what does living Fully Alive truly look like? What kind of life is there after you and Jesus together have dealt with your stuff?

Healed, Not Perfect

My dermatologist removed two suspicious spots on my face recently. Everything is fine, and now you’d have to look hard to see any scars. But my skin is still aging and has irregularities and wrinkles.

It’s the same with the wounds in my soul. They are healed! Today I do not respond out of pain or hurt, and my heart can truly be open. But my soul needs regular care, nourishment and cleansing from the stuff it’s exposed to daily in our world.

Healing means your wounds will not define you today or in the

future. The traumas happened to you in the past; they are not happening to you now. There is nothing chaining you to what happened to you or what you did. You are not practicing any addictions. Your heart and mind are clear and able to engage with God and others.

Are there other things you still need to learn? Of course. We will need to continue to grow as long as we are on this earth.

For some people, the journey to experience that kind of healing takes a long time. Don't give up! If you're not there now, make sure you're dealing with your stuff. Keep going until the wounds become healed scars.

Substance to Bless Others

When I tell people that my husband died nearly four years ago, they always say something like, "Oh, I'm sorry." And the journey of grief is hard. Very hard! (If you're walking that journey now, this comforting email series will help you.)

But when someone says that to me, I'm quick to respond, "I'm not thankful my husband died. But I am profoundly thankful for what the journey of grief has done in my own soul, for who I have become as a result."

And what I'm grateful for is not only the fact that I can empathize and support others who are experiencing the death of a loved one. There's also a deeper substance in me that is available in all the things I do.

Whatever your stuff has been, when you unpack, wrestle with and do the hard work necessary to get to the other side, you too will develop a substance within that becomes priceless for both you and others. God can use you in deeper ways. Your perspective on life, yourself, others and the future becomes healthier. And it feels good.

Free to Soar

When the weights of the past have been dealt with, the freedom allows you to soar in ways you have never imagined. Stuff that's undealt with is like tethers holding a balloon to the ground. When those tethers are released, the balloon can catch the air currents and fly high and far.

After listing so many faith heroes in Hebrews 11, the writer says, "Therefore, since we are encompassed with such a great cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Heb. 12:1).

God created you to soar. Sure, living in our sinful world we will continue to experience troubles. Big troubles. But you can still soar. When you deal with your stuff, not even the very real troubles you experience can keep you stuck.

Lightness in your soul is truly amazing. And the way you "lay aside every weight" is by dealing with your stuff. We too often think of laying aside sin as trying harder to be good. That doesn't work! Yes, we must have God's forgiveness, repent and determine to live according to God's ways. But once you make that decision, the only way you can follow through is by dealing with your stuff.

And once you do, your soul can soar. You are now able to function in the purpose for which God created you without tethers holding you down.

Is It Worth It?

Without question, the answer is yes, it is!

When you're in the middle of a mess it can seem too hard to push forward in dealing with your stuff. It seems doing so will cost too much.

But from one who has "been there, done that," and from many

others, I can tell you it's worth it.

Don't quit! The view from the sky as your balloon soars will make you glad you didn't quit.

Your Turn: *Has it seemed too difficult to continue dealing with your stuff? Have you taken time to imagine what kind of future could be available if you keep going? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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If You Want a Healthy Marriage, Love's Not All You Need

If you're over a certain age, perhaps you can hear it in your head even now: "All you need is love. Love. Love is all you need."

But love is *not* all you need. At least if by "love" you mean that butterflies-and-rainbows, all-engrossing feeling in your stomach when you imagine being with a certain person. Or that "I'm OK, you're OK" all-inclusive tolerance some segments of

society advocate. Erotic attraction or complete tolerance may be good in their proper place, but that kind of “love” is not enough to grow a successful marriage between two sinners.

On the other hand, if by love you mean the relentless, covenantal, action-taking, God-kind of love, then perhaps love is all you need. That kind of love hates what hurts the beloved. It’s fierce, sacrificial, unselfish and enduring, for starters.

So if love is not all you need, what else is there? What do you need besides what we usually think of as love to make a healthy marriage? Here’s a partial list.

1. Skills

You come to marriage with certain ways of dealing with conflict, communicating, handling feelings and doing intimacy. How have those habits worked out for you? Has the baggage you brought to marriage been helpful—or not?

The good news is that skills are learnable. Just as you learned skills necessary to do your job, you can learn skills necessary for a healthier marriage. You can learn to communicate more effectively. You can learn to handle conflict in a way that leads to solutions. And you can learn to pursue intimacy, to set healthy boundaries and to forgive.

Skills take practice. Your marriage won’t change overnight. About the time we got married, I said to my husband, “There are many of these dance steps I don’t know how to do. But I’m willing to learn.” Determining to learn relationship skills will pay off in many ways.

2. Mindset

What many people mean by “I love you” is actually, “I love how I feel when I’m with you.” That feeling doesn’t last. And it’s not love. If you go into marriage expecting to live happily

ever after, you'll be disappointed every time. No human being, not even an "ideal" spouse, can meet all your needs.

Your mindset makes a huge difference. At its root, marriage is not about sex, good feelings, procreation or security, as good as those things may be. Marriage is a reflection of the intimacy and love God has within Himself, and that He wants with us. And as such a reflection, marriage is about learning to love well.

I don't know of any better question to ask, any better prayer, than this: "God, who do You need me to be to my spouse in this season?"

Sometimes that means taking your hands off so God can do His work. Sometimes it means setting healthy boundaries. Sometimes it means changing your own attitudes and behavior. And sometimes it means suffering long.

And a second part to that prayer would be, "God, what is Your perspective on my marriage?" Seeing things from His perspective can change your mindset.

3. Outside Fuel

Your marriage does not exist in a vacuum. You will largely become—in your marriage—the average of the five couples or individuals you spend the most time with. You will almost without realizing it pick up ideas and attitudes about respect, communication, handling conflict, intimacy and spiritual connection from the couples around you.

Look at the marriages you know who are a little further down the road than you are. Do you like what you see? If your marriage looks like that in five or 10 years, would that be a good thing? If not, it's time to find some healthier role models, some healthier outside people to provide some people-fuel for your marriage.

But wherever you look for such outside fuel, do so intentionally. Find couples who are displaying the kind of marriage you would like to have and find out how they do it. There are no perfect marriages! But reading about, talking with or rubbing shoulders with those who have learned to love well will make a huge difference in your own relationship.

Your Turn: Have you fallen into the trap of believing love is all you need? Which of these other factors seems most critical to your own relationship right now? Leave a comment below.
{eoa}

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3 Surprising Ways God Is Not All You Need

God can and does work any way He chooses. But God did not create you to need only Him. That may sound dangerous to say, but hear me out. God does not work alone. There are at least three ways in which God is *not* all you need.

I know what it's like to look for validation and fulfillment from other people, trying to please them in order to be OK

myself and believing what they said about me. And my life didn't become better until I went to God for what only He can provide.

But that's only part of the equation. We get in trouble when we look for things in the wrong place. If you look to people for what only God can give, you'll always be disappointed. But you'll be just as disappointed if you expect God to magically douse you with what He has designed you to get from human relationships.

When God said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18b, NKJV), He spoke a principle that goes much deeper than marriage. You get *life* from Jesus Himself. But much of the fuel you need to live that life comes through other humans.

Why does God not work alone? Here are three reasons you absolutely need people—areas where God designed human relationships to provide you things vital to your well-being.

1. You can't see.

The complicated stuff in your life makes it hard to see what's really going on. You don't know what you don't know. The hurtful ways you learned to respond to people, the little addictions you developed in order to feel better, the lies you came to believe—it's hard to see those things on your own.

Prayer is important: "God, help me see what's really going on here." And God's answers to those prayers frequently come through other people. A Christian counselor, life coach or godly friend can provide a life-changing perspective.

"Lightbulb moments" are just that; you can suddenly see! Another human being can't make you see. But if your heart is at least somewhat open to the need to change, listening to someone who has been there and discovered the way out can be priceless. I can't imagine, in my own life, developing mental wholeness, healthy relationships, godly leadership or anything

else of value without learning from people who have “been there, done that.”

2. You are relational.

God is relational within Himself: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Being created in His image, we are relational as well. We only thrive when we are connected to other human beings as well as to God Himself.

Those human connections are messy. There are no perfect people available to be in relationship with. And even professionals are limited and human. But that very messiness is part of what can provide you hope. You’re not the only one with your problem. And you are stronger—much stronger—when connected with others.

You need at least three kinds of relationships:

–People who are a little further along in their journey, to provide perspective and guidance.

–People who are journeying with you, to lock arms with and journey together with you.

–People who are a little behind you. You become stronger when you offer strength to someone needing help.

This video unpacks those three kinds of people a bit more.

Needing people is just the way you were made. God knew it would be messy—and wonderful.

3. You’re leaky.

Life happens. The things you learn, you tend to forget. The strengths you develop gradually lessen without continued practice. The junk of the world saps your energy, belief and courage. Your spiritual life gets contaminated with the foul environment around you. You’re like a bucket with holes; stuff

just leaks out.

Just as your physical body needs physical food daily, the emotional and spiritual parts of you need food daily as well. Yes, you need God Himself! But God built you to need people as part of that nourishment.

Introvert or extrovert, you cannot supply everything you need to yourself. It's not that other people provide *everything* you need; they can't! But you cannot plug all the holes in your bucket. You cannot be who God created you to be by staying isolated.

So like a car, you need regular fill-ups with fuel to keep you going. Your created-in-the-image-of-God internal system is built to need people fuel. Other people cannot do your work *for* you, but you *must* be connected in order to run.

In order to stay connected to healthy people, I have to invest intentional effort. Perhaps that's the case for you too. But it will definitely be worth it.

Your turn: *Who are the people in your life who provide perspective, strength or inner fuel to you? Who might you need to invest effort in connecting with more intentionally? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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'Is My Relationship Codependent?' These 4 Questions Will Help You Decide

Unhealthy people draw other people into their dysfunction. Anyone trying to be married to, parent, care for or love someone who is harming themselves and others struggles with knowing what to do. How can you tell the difference between codependency and love?

Your person may be an alcoholic or abusing drugs. But he/she may also be emotionally unavailable; addicted to food, gambling, rage or porn; or have any other persistently destructive behavior. Who is your person? What is their struggle?

It's been said that codependency is when you are about to die and someone else's life flashes before your eyes. That's not love.

Jesus always, *always*, embraced anyone truly wanting help. He believed in them. But remaining in sin was never an option if someone wanted to be in relationship with Jesus. He called them up to a higher standard of living and made it possible for them to become a different person.

You and I are not Jesus, but we are called to be His representatives—His hands, feet, arms and voice to those we love. We are *always* called to love. Love makes change possible. We are never called to enable destructive behavior.

Though that may sound straightforward to someone looking on from the outside, it's often very difficult for someone in the middle of such a relationship to know the difference between codependency and love. And it's even harder to consistently act out of love and not codependency. Honestly and prayerfully contemplating these questions will help you come closer to understanding the difference, and what God is calling *you* to do.

1. What is true?

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). As with many of Jesus' sayings, this applies on several levels.

Jesus *is* truth, and He does set us free! In addition, coming to understand the truth about ourselves, another person and the related circumstances also sets us free in critical ways. Denying or ignoring your spouse's porn use or, your child's use of drugs or any other bad behavior only enables further destruction.

The truth about your own heart is one of the most important truths of all. Are you trying to control your person? Are you acting out of fear? Fear and control are always danger signs. Have you dealt with, or are you dealing with, your own traumas and past history?

Looking honestly at such truths can feel painful. Do it anyway.

2. What is kind?

Niceness is not kindness. Denying the truth is not kindness. Enabling a person to continue to destroy themselves is not kindness.

There's been a lot of debate about tough love, and there are times the concept has been used in harsh and harmful ways. Dr.

Henry Cloud uses the helpful example of going to the dentist in understanding the difference between hurt and harm; getting a root canal may hurt, but it does not harm. Setting healthy boundaries with your person may hurt, but it will not harm.

What's the difference? It's unique to each relationship. For example, talking with your child's school counselor about their withdrawal and bad behavior at home is kind; sharing all the details on social media is just complaining or vindictive gossip. Removing yourself and your children when your spouse is acting out in rage is kind; raging back is harmful.

Kindness is not weakness. Kindness takes courage.

3. Who is responsible?

You probably know well the scripture, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). But many are less familiar with what Paul says just a couple verses later: "For each one shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:5).

God designed us to need each other. Your person needs you! But they also are responsible for themselves. It dishonors them when you try to do the work *for* them. You cannot get over your child's drug addiction. You cannot stop using porn for your spouse. You cannot heal for your person who is acting destructively out of their trauma. You can only grow and heal for yourself.

Believing in your person? Yes, that's just like Jesus does. Supporting them? Yes. Walking alongside them? Yes. Being responsible *to* them? Yes.

Providing money to continue their bad behavior? No. Having sex with your spouse when they're engaging sexually elsewhere? No. Taking responsibility *for* them? No.

And remember, this means you're responsible for your *own*

journey—for your own growing and healing and becoming who God created *you* to be.

4. Who is suffering?

If you are doing the suffering *for* your person, it's likely codependency. If you are doling out suffering, making your person suffer, that's cruel and anti-love. If you are suffering *with* them, it's likely love.

Love often means suffering. But it does not mean living someone else's life *for* them. This may often take prayer to discern what your person is able to do and what they cannot do.

Godly suffering is when you shoulder some of the load your person is not able to carry, and when you provide support and care as they are doing the hard work of changing, healing and growing. Codependency is when you try to do for your person what they could do for themselves.

Learning to Love Well

God's purpose for the relationships we have in this life is that you and I learn to love well. God is love, and we need a laboratory in which to learn to love as He does. That's the purpose of marriage and all good relationships. It's a foundation of parenting, friendship and much more.

You can only learn to love well by doing it, and by staying on your knees. Love comes from God; we can't generate it ourselves. And we need a constant fresh supply.

Perhaps the best prayer when it comes to wrestling with the difference between codependency and love is, "God, who do You need me to be to this person in this season?" Ask Him to show you His perspective on your own heart, on their heart and on the relationship. Remember, He loves them even more than you do, and He is after their heart as well as yours.

In the final analysis, codependency is really about you. Love is truly about the other person.

May you continue learning to love well!

Your Turn: *Do you wonder if you are in a codependent relationship? What do you know to be true in this situation? Where's your biggest challenge? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the “fully alive” kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

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3 Kinds of Godly Goals That Will Bless Your Marriage Relationship

Whether you're a New Year's resolutions person or not, the science is clear that defining clear goals makes it more likely you will reach them. Have you considered some relationship goals for your marriage for 2020?

As one year ends and another begins, I take some time to look at the year that has been, and consider some goals for the new year. I look at several areas of my life—physical well-being, emotional health, material/financial, ministry strategy and my

own spiritual life. I look at what's working and what's not working, and what I want to change in the new year.

The details of that process can vary, but prayerfully reviewing where you are is healthy. Are you heading in the direction you want to go when it comes to your marriage? Where do you need to adjust your actions today so you can reach your desired destination tomorrow? What is God's opinion on the direction of your marriage?

Your relationship goals will vary depending on where you are right now, and what stage your marriage is in. But let me suggest three categories of goals to prayerfully consider.

How You Show Up to Your Spouse

What's it like to be married to you? Are you bringing your best self to your marriage? If you were your spouse, would you want to come home to you?

This is not about magnifying any area where you may be less than your best; it's about taking an honest look and owning responsibility for what *is* within your ability to control. That's primarily your own thoughts, words, actions, behavior, responses and more.

Where might you want to step up the way you show up to your spouse? Do you need to choose a more positive attitude? Forgive more generously? Speak the truth in love more consistently? Take care of yourself more wisely so you have more to bring to the marriage? Deal with some old baggage so you are freer to love well?

Now, what action are you going to take to change how you show up to your spouse?

How You Understand Your Spouse

In every relationship, and most importantly in marriage, it's important to seek to understand before seeking to be

understood. How well do you understand your spouse? Are you actively seeking to understand him/her better?

Your own emotional buttons get pushed so easily that it's often difficult to step back and fully appreciate your spouse's perspective. This does not mean accepting bad behavior! But it does mean intentionally seeking to understand their heart, fears, desires, past experiences and so on.

Take some time to pray about this. Make the effort to get outside of your own emotional turmoil and look at the world through your spouse's eyes. God will use your efforts to increase your compassion, understanding and ability to communicate wisely.

When are you going to take some time to prayerfully seek to understand your spouse? What reminder will you create to do this regularly?

How You Pursue Intimacy

God continually pursues intimacy with us, even when we don't respond well. God created you and your spouse in His image, with the need, desire and capacity for intimacy. And intimacy doesn't just happen; it takes pursuing.

Don't fall into the trap of saying "My wife won't have sex" or "My husband just won't talk," and therefore intimacy is impossible. Those *can be* specific expressions of intimacy, but intimacy is about much more. And there is plenty of sex and plenty of communication where no intimacy exists. Remember that you cannot change your spouse; you can only invite. And you and God can work together to change *you*.

The better you understand your spouse, the better you will know how to pursue intimacy with him/her. A few thoughts especially for husbands and especially for wives may be helpful. Look at the world through your spouse's eyes and imagine what would make them want to come closer to you.

So whether it's physical, emotional or spiritual intimacy, what are you going to do next in creating the space for your spouse to *want* to come closer?

Relationship Goals

What kind of spouse do you want to be? These three categories of goals don't require anything specific from your spouse; they focus only on things *you* can do something about. But as you change, your relationship will change!

Once you've looked at your own heart, many couples will want to communicate about their goals with each other, and craft some shared goals for their relationship. When your spouse is willing, that can be powerful! And I pray you and your spouse are able to do that.

May God show you His goals for your relationship this year and empower you in walking toward them.

Your Turn: *What kind of spouse you want to be in your marriage? What next action are you going to take in becoming that kind of spouse? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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How You Can Shift to a More Godly Focus in the New Year

Happy 2020! Welcome to a new year and a new decade!

And if you want this year to be better than last year, the most important place to begin is choosing your focus.

Research demonstrates that what you focus on becomes larger in your mind. Regardless of your circumstances, you get to choose what takes up most of the space and energy in your brain. For example, when people suffering with chronic illness or chronic pain focus on something funny, positive or even simply distracting, their sense of physical well-being increases and their pain decreases. Even prisoners of war were able to make it through with better resilience by choosing their focus.

That's a very biblical principle as well. You know about the Scripture where David "encouraged himself in the Lord" (1 Sam. 30:6b)? And Paul encourages us to think about things that are good and pure and lovely (Phil. 4:8, ESV), and to choose gratitude in all circumstances (1 Thess. 5:18).

This does not mean ignoring difficult circumstances! It does mean owning what is true, and then choosing where to put your focus next.

It's easy to find negative things to focus on; your lack of money or friends, your illness, the political or social divisions in our world or what other people are doing. If you struggle with this, let me suggest three helpful things to focus on as you begin this new year.

What You Can Do

And there is *always* something you can do.

You can't change what you weigh today. But you can change what

you weigh next month, and next year. You can change your behavior that results in a healthier body.

You can't change your spouse's behavior. But you can change your own thoughts, words, actions and responses. You can change the dance.

You can't change the kinds of people who have been in your life in the past. But you can change the community you connect with tomorrow.

Focusing on what you *can* do is empowering. You can handle much more stress than you ever imagined if you learn to focus on what you *can* do. The two-part prayer is powerful here; invite Jesus right into the middle of your stuff. And then ask Him to help you see what next step *you* are to take.

Things That Are Good

This is not mind over matter. Our minds are not all-powerful. But they are much more powerful than most of us realize. Positive thinking doesn't mean ignoring problems; it means continually bringing your focus back to what *is* good.

You will become like what you focus on. If the media you take in and the people you hang out with are miserable, ungodly and critical you'll become more like them. If the media you take in and the people you hang out with are growing, focused, healthy Jesus-followers, you'll become more and more like them also.

Like Paul said, choose to take into your mind things that are good, true, lovely and uplifting. (Phil. 4:8).

The Future

Sometimes you have to deal with your past before you can look to the future. That's important. But do it! Deal with your stuff and move forward.

Living in the past is like looking in the rear view mirror; you have to check it now and then, but don't focus there. The majority of your focus needs to be on the future.

The theology of hope is a helpful way of looking at the future. Because God lives outside of time, He knows exactly what your tomorrow holds. In fact, He's already there—in your tomorrow. It's as if He is standing there, reaching back to you and saying, "I'm already here in your tomorrow. I've checked it out, and it's OK. You can step into tomorrow knowing I'm here, waiting for you."

And then there's the ultimate tomorrow. As good as this life gets, it can never be enough, because God created you and me for eternity. Even Jesus had to keep His eyes on His future in order to make it: "who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2b, MEV).

You and I will have to keep our eyes on the future as well, both the future for 2020 and for eternity.

May you experience God's intervention powerfully this new year. And may 2020 be your best year ever!

Your turn: Where does your focus tend to naturally go? Now, what are you going to do in choosing your focus for 2020? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the "fully alive" kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

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3 Key Truths to Keep Your Spiritual Warfare Healthy

Bring up the topic of spiritual warfare, and some people shout hallelujah and begin praising God. Other people respond to the idea of warfare with anxiety or fear. When it comes to the practical everyday Christian life, can spiritual warfare be healthy?

I've seen what might be called "the good, the bad and the ugly" when it comes to spiritual warfare. Some people have made fighting against the devil the primary focus of their life and ministry. Some people have made spiritual warfare into a technique, developing an elaborate demonology or teaching that one must use specific words and specific prayers. And some see every problem as a demonic power that must be specifically fought and prayed against.

Part of the research I did for my doctoral program addressed this question. Through surveying a significant number of believers, among other things I discovered that those who thought about the devil and demons more frequently had significantly more emotional/psychiatric distress. What's going on here?

A Biblical Summary

For all those distortions, one cannot read Scripture without frequently coming up against the reality of evil and warfare. God's people in both the Old and New Testaments viewed evil as real and personal, with a real devil and his demonic, unseen forces at work in this world. They viewed God's angelic forces and Satan's demonic forces as being at war.

The New Testament writers and the early church clearly believed that through His death and resurrection Jesus defeated the devil and inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth. And today, there is much in our world that doesn't make much sense unless you take into account the reality of evil and Satan's kingdom of darkness.

This brief summary is not meant as a complete theology of spiritual warfare. Let's simply begin with the premise that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness are in conflict, Jesus won the ultimate battle against evil and yet today we still get caught in the crossfire.

How can spiritual warfare be a healthy part of the Christian life? What does that look like?

3 Key Truths to Keep Your Spiritual Warfare Healthy

1. Spiritual warfare is only one aspect of the Christian life.

I've seen people who have practiced spiritual warfare for decades, but who become increasingly prickly, isolated, stressed out and unhappy in the process. That's not experiencing the life Jesus came to bring!

You and I are *not* brought into the body of Christ for the purpose of being expendable soldiers on the frontlines. The purpose of our Christian life is to become like Jesus (Rom. 8:29). The resistance we encounter is not the point.

What can you do? Keep the main thing the main thing. Focus on your relationship with Jesus. Are you spending time with Him daily? Are you allowing the Holy Spirit to increasingly transform you into His image? When He says something, do you believe Him? When He asks you to do something, do you say yes?

2. The primary issue in spiritual warfare is the heart.

When I learned to recognize when I was under spiritual attack, so much in my life changed. Pleading the blood of Jesus daily has

been part of my daily walk with God for over 20 years. Because these elements were so dramatic in my own growth I fell into making them the “main thing” for a time.

With greater maturity, I’ve come to understand that spiritual warfare is not about power or territory. The God we worship is greater than all. If this were about who is stronger, evil would have been eliminated a long time ago.

Instead, this is a matter of who you and I will believe, follow, honor, obey, love and worship. It’s your heart that both God and the enemy are after.

What can you do? Check in with the Holy Spirit regularly. Is your heart clear before God? Have your affections been divided? Whose voice are you paying attention to? Who are you truly worshipping?

3. News flash: Jesus won! You and I don’t have to go out swashbuckling, trying to find and defeat the devil. It doesn’t matter how strong we become physically, emotionally or spiritually, you and I will never be strong enough to defeat the devil on our own.

But we don’t have to. News flash: Jesus already did that—and won!

While we are still in this mopping-up operation in this conflict between God’s kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, we will experience skirmishes and opposition. We may well get wounded in the crossfire. But the end is assured. In the meantime, you and I are to stand. That’s the primary verb used when Paul talks about the weapons of our spiritual warfare.

Friends, you and I have read the end of the story. Spoiler alert: Jesus wins!

So, no fear here. And no arrogant boasting. I’m simply walking

today and tomorrow and the next day in the firm assurance of those who know the end of the story.

Your turn: *What has the topic of spiritual warfare meant to you? How are you standing firm? Leave a comment below.* {eoa}

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