

God's 5 'Smooth Stones' to Help You Be the Best Mom Ever

I went down on one knee. "Look at me, honey." I turned my 4-year-old Joe's face toward me. "What's in your mouth?"

"Nothin'."

As the youngest of three, he never knew a mom with sight. A retinal disease robbed my sight when he was much younger. And my family's adjustment was painfully inevitable.

I took him by the hand. "Is that chocolate I smell? It's before dinner. C'mon young man, let's spit it out."

Outwardly I seemed in control. But I still questioned my ability as a blind mom. I fretted about their possible lack of confidence or even shame because of my blindness.

Mothering Without Sight Was Daunting

The tasks were challenging. I questioned my ways. Did I do too much? Not enough? Did I fail my sons in the way I corrected them? Was I too strict? Too lenient? Insecurities lay on the pillow beside me at night.

But along came David to save the day. Remember him as a boy? He was scrawny, a bit of a shy kid, the youngest of his brothers. And probably voted the *least likely to succeed* in the senior class of the local Shepherd high school.

And when Goliath showed up, David seemed inadequate, unprepared and way too weak to defeat the giant. But God knew different because He chose him. Skinny David held not a trace of insecurity, doubt or worry. He put on the backpack of courage and gathered five stones. But those stones weren't what would defeat the big guy. But rather, David's secret weapon called bold faith became the weapon to bring him

victory.

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a shield, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have reviled" (1 Sam. 17:44).

That's the same way we come against insecurities in our mothering, in our doubt of our abilities, regret for what we did or failed to do. As we come against all of that in the name of the Lord, we put on our bold faith and gather our five stones. Even in these turbulent times, they are the secrets to succeed and be the best moms ever.

– *The stone of courage* to stand firm and secure enough to know we have Christ's power to silence the lies that whisper doubt and insecurities.

– *The stone of reassurance* that God is with us every moment of every day to defeat fear, worry and anxiety.

– *The stone of wisdom*, God-given wisdom to choose our words, direct our steps and guide our path.

– *The stone of trust* to know God has His eyes on our kids. He will keep them safe, guard their lives and trace their steps.

– *The stone of joy* to erase gloom, sadness or disappointment.

This Mother's Day, let's celebrate not so much the perfect moms, but those who are perfectly devoted to Christ. Not the moms who have all the answers, but those who believe God has them. Not the moms who have it all together, but the moms who admit their weakness so God can make them strong. Not the moms who are raising stars, but those who teach them to rise above hard times. Not the moms who cover her kids with the latest fashion, but those who cover them with prayers.

God chose David. And He chose you, too. He hand-picked you to be the mom to those kiddoes. He didn't leave David to bring

down the giant on his own. He's not leaving you alone either, as He's already handed you the stones, He's already given you the victory—in His power, In His might and in His name.

Let's Pray

Father, may Your Word remind me You are watching over my kids, guiding them when I fail, teaching them when I don't know how and protecting them when I'm not near them. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Which stones will you gather this Mother's Day? {eoa}

Janet Perez Eckles is an international speaker and the author of four books. She has helped thousands conquer fear and bring back joy.

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Make These Attitude Shifts, and See God's Power at Work in the Pandemic

Are you kidding? "The aircraft reached its weight limit," the airline agent said to those of us waiting at the gate. "We cannot board any more passengers."

I knew the plane was small. But I also knew that per ADA

regulations, they should have allowed me to board first (not that I'm special or anything, but blind and handicapped folks usually hop on the plane first). Secondly, a few hundred women expected my keynote message and I'd have to tell them I couldn't arrive in time. Gulp.

Not happening. That was my attitude. I gave a prayer of thanks to the Lord. Thanking Him for seeing this glitch through His eyes. Calmness ruled my heart then. I knew it wasn't about the obstacle, but it was all about God's close observation of the situation. I trusted, I believed and may I say, I dared to praise Him. Praise Him because He knew the other side of the story. He was aware of the outcome, and He held this situation in His hands.

I sat back and watched. And after the agent made several offers for credit toward airline tickets, no one budged. But the final offer of \$1,500 prompted a man to leave his seat. I smiled as I settled in that plane.

See? It's not the pandemic that some claim, not the virus that reaches loved ones, it's not even the threat to the economy. It *is* about the power of God at work.

Attitude Shifts Needed

If we shift our glance and take in the whole picture, our personal world changes, our attitude shifts and our perception takes on a new angle.

That's why when facing the threat to our comfort, to our health, to our finances and our future:

–It's all about recovering our peace by taking one important step—changing our focus.

–It's not the sudden virus that shatters our world, but Jesus' power that can overcome it (John 16:33).

–It's not the timing of the cure, but the reassurance He has

heard our request (Ps. 34:17).

–It's not the uncertainty of tomorrow, but the peace He provides for today (Phil. 4:4-7).

–It's not the confusion that sets in, but the clarity we know in Christ (2 Cor. 5:15-19).

–It's not the uncertainty that plagues, but His promises that lift us up (Rom. 8:31).

–It's not the weight of our burden, but what we'll do with it (Matt. 11:25).

–It's not the size of the problem, but the dimension of God's healing hand (Ps. 90).

–It's not about the future too dim to handle, but His presence at every step (Josh. 1:9).

–It's not about our sorrow, but the promise He will turn it to joy (Isa. 61:3)

–It's not about the turmoil in our storms, but His peace that will follow (Mark 4:39).

While our country and the rest of the world border on panic, we breathe in His reassurance. No matter your situation, did you know God knows what you need, what you feel, how you hurt, where you are? Yet He has a different perspective than yours. His view is different and supernatural. His approach ushers victory, brings calmness and puts peace back.

Here's the question: What will you choose? To focus on the gloom of the surroundings or on the glory that His promises bring?

Pray With Me

Father, grant me a new perspective. Show me the path to look beyond what my eyes see, and help me to perceive the truth in

Your Word instead. {eoa}

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When You Have This, Miracles Will Come Your Way

My 10-year-old grandson got up from the dinner table, walked over to me and tapped my shoulder. “Nana, thank you. I love the noodles you made. But next time can you put a little less salt. I’ll still eat them, but I’m just telling you for next time, OK?”

I gave him a tight hug. “So sorry,” I said, “it’s not what you expected.”

His heart of gratitude touched me. He could have complained and refused to eat it, but he chose to thank me anyway and eat salty noodles.

That night, I put my head on the pillow of shame. Unlike my grandson, if I didn’t receive from God what I expected, or not in my own timing, disappointment set in. And a sense of discouragement took the place of contentment.

Sadly, that discontentment is popular today. We have

expectations and wait for God to serve the answer in the way we anticipate. And when that doesn't happen, we wonder why. We question our faith. And our once-complete trust in God isn't complete anymore.

But God sees the full picture, including our sense of disappointment. What He's looking for is our gratitude for even little things. He's expecting praises in everything. And He's more direct in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 when He says, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

Give thanks in all circumstances? Even when we're still in the same sorry situation, with no change for the better or with no solution, either? God says yes. Consider if these prominent folks in the Bible displayed discontentment.

What If ...

What if Abraham became disappointed when God asked him to sacrifice his son? He would have missed his calling to be the father of many nations.

What if Moses allowed his weakness to diminish his trust in God? He would have missed his role to be the instrument to set the Israelites free.

What if David focused only on the punishment for his sin and failed to praise God for His forgiveness and redemptive love? He would have remained a poor-me sinner relegated to obscurity.

And what if Noah would have succumbed to the ridicule of the people and stopped the building of the ark? He and his family would also have drowned.

What if fear and disappointment had filled Paul during the episodes where he was beaten, tossed out and imprisoned? He would not have seen the world around him turn to Jesus.

You and I are no different. God sometimes gives direction for our journey but doesn't reveal the reason for each stop. At times, God provides only small amounts of success to test our character. And sometimes, God brings about an answer contrary to what we asked, to test our trust in Him.

No matter how many plates of salty noodles the world serves you, the test is on. Will you praise Him for what God has done? Will you thank Him for what He's doing? And will you be bold enough to praise Him for what you know He will do?

If the answer is yes, then you'll find how miracles come wrapped in gratitude.

Let's Pray

Father, I thank You for Your patience when I fail to trust in You completely. I praise You for forgiving me when I fail to thank You through all the stages of my journey. In Jesus' name.

What miracles will your gratitude bring? {eoa}

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6 Surefire Steps to Deflect Anxiety's Attack

"The Lord is your guardian; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not harm you during the day, nor the moon during the night" (Ps. 121:4-6).

The sun was hot even before spring arrived in Florida. And the sound of the ocean waves beckoned us.

"C'mon, Nana," my granddaughter said as she pulled my hand. Even at 4 years old, she knew to lead her blind Nana.

"Don't go too far," hubby said as he relaxed on a lounge.

With her small hand tight in mine, our feet sunk in the hot sand as we drew closer to the water. We jumped over the waves, giggled, collected shells and giggled some more.

After a long while, I realized I had no idea where we were—too far from hubby. Was he still watching us?

I got on one knee and held my granddaughter's wet cheeks between my hands. "Sweet baby, look at me, do you see Papa anywhere?"

"Nope. C'mon, Nana, let's jump."

Suppressing the panic that cramped my stomach, I said silent prayers, the kind that blurt out from the heart. The kind you want to word just right so God would be quick to answer. And my silent pleas were those that bordered on self-pity. "Oh, if I could only see a little bit, this wouldn't happen."

With all traces of patience tossed into the sea, I quickly drew closer to a group of folks talking. "Excuse me," I waved in the direction of their voices. "Would you have a cellphone?" I said. "I think I lost my husband."

As I gave the first few numbers for them to dial, I heard a familiar voice, "Honey, what's wrong?"

"Oh, there you are," I grinned with relief at my hubby.

"I was watching you both the whole time," he said.

A little shame swept over me. Not because of the beach scenario, but because of how often I doubted, panicked and feared that God took His eyes off me. I worried I had drifted too far from His love, His provision and His care.

We all do that sometimes, don't we? While in seemingly fervent prayer, that doubt turns to anxious moments. And we question His ability to rescue us when we're walking on the hot sand of problems, tough times and bad news.

6 Surefire Steps to Deflect Anxiety's Attack

So once again, we get on our knees as we were taught and begin to plead, beg, and ask over and over again. And when no answers come, His silence digs more anguish rather than peace. But all changes, all has more clarity and doubt is replaced by reassurance when we follow these six steps:

- 1. Readjust our priorities.** If we seek the answer to our prayer with more passion than we seek God Himself, His patience rather than answers is what will be at work. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you" (Matt. 6:33).
- 2. Resist the temptation to recite memorized, perfect prayers, with lovely words and deep insight.** God simply wants the genuine expression of our heart. And most of all, "But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7).
- 3. Recognize that sometimes we don't know how to pray or what our requests should be.** So we can freely ask Him to

show us what to pray for. Confident that He's listening attentively, we can whisper, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my concerns, and see if there is any rebellious way in me, and lead me in the ancient way" (Ps. 139:23-24).

4. **Remember that His answer is always in His timing, not ours.** A thousand years in God's sight are like a day that has just gone by (Ps. 90:4).
5. **Relish in the fact that while we wait, He's working in us, in our heart and in our situation.** "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).
6. **Remove anxious thoughts.** In the silence of the moment and in the power of His presence, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with gratitude, make your requests known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

Why follow these steps? Because "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. So if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have whatever we asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Let's Pray

Father, thank You for showing me how to pray with the certainty that You are, indeed, watching, listening and observing each step I take. Grant me the wisdom to recognize You are vigilant of my every move. In Jesus' name.

As you read this, how certain are you that God does have His eyes upon you and on your situation? {eoa}

Janet Perez Eckles is an international speaker and the author of four books. She has helped thousands conquer fear and bring back joy.

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12 Steps Toward Your Total-Life Transformation

I almost fell for the trap. You gals know what I'm talking about, the new look that's popular today—false eyelashes.

My friend sat across the table from me, her cosmetic bag jammed with makeup items. "You have to put them on," she said. "You'll see how different you look. It's easy and your look will be transformed."

Transformed? Sounded inviting, until a woman shared her experience. After a few weeks, one by one, the lashes began to fall off. One eyelid was filled with lush eyelashes, and the other looked half-bald. See? Transformation in our physical appearance isn't always the best.

How about if we try a deeper, more profound kind of transformation? What brings beautiful results is choosing the right attitude when we express our needs to the Lord.

And before we tell God what we need, we submit to a makeover of our attitude. We remove old ways of asking. We put aside praying habits we held since we were kids.

12 Important Steps

Instead, we follow these 12 steps of preparation that transform our thinking, reevaluate our attitude and bring a new kind of connection with God.

1. Instead of worrying about tomorrow, we walk in His Word today.
2. We don't ask God to remove our fear but remove our doubt that He will.

3. We don't succumb to self-pity; we surrender it all to God.
4. We don't fret about the success of our business; we make it our business to thank Him for what He's doing.
5. Instead of asking Him to heal our loneliness, we heed the truth that God alone is enough.
6. We don't lament yesterday's mistakes but are content with today's blessings.
7. Instead of trembling when our boat is sinking, we make Him the anchor of our soul.
8. When answers don't come, we go to the foot of the cross and leave our problems there.
9. Rather than wish for the abundance of our bank account, we take into account the riches He poured out.
10. We don't choose our battles; we give them all to the Lord.
11. Instead of asking for success, we succeed first in trusting God.
12. And finally, when God seems silent, we silence the distractions in order to hear the whisper of His voice.

Lifetime transformation happens when we don't tiptoe in the pain of our problem. We tap into the power of God instead. His power to perform miracles. To bring down barriers. To keep us from falling. To hear our cries and to ease our sorrow.

That's why God's Word says, "Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall" (Ps. 55:22, NLT).

"For he has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hid His face from him; but when he cried to Him, He heard" (Ps. 22:24, MEV).

Maybe you're the one crying for that help right now. We all do at one time or another. But here is the good news. When we count on His promises, we make God bigger than our trials. When we speak His truth, we tear down the lies of the enemy.

When we declare what He will do, we're already walking in the victory. And when we focus on His never-ending love, our anguish ends.

Let's Pray

Lord, thank You for the wisdom to embrace each of Your promises. Thank You for the courage to believe what you say. To believe what You can do and what You will do. In Jesus' name.

How will you prepare your heart for prayer? {eoa}

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For Peace in Your Relationships, Try This Supernatural Secret

As you know, my life begins this year as a new bride. And adjustment to married life has challenges.

Some of them are silly, others need work. For example, I don't eat red meat and prefer free-range chicken or fish and veggies. My new husband, as amazing as he is, prefers meat and

potatoes and doesn't eat chicken.

Goodness gracious, how do we prepare meals? Well, in our first meal we served a huge helping of compromise. I fixed him a big salad with all kinds of fresh veggies, dried cranberries, organic grapes, fresh greens, tomatoes, pickled beets, Shiitake mushrooms, fresh cucumber and used my homemade avocado dressing. And guess what? He loved it.

We often have that for dinner. He also learned to drink kombucha (I applaud him for that). And we both love nuts of any kind as long as they're raw.

And my side of compromise? I ate the taco salad he made. Yes, with ground beef ... sigh! At least it was from grass-fed cows. And I'm learning to eat chili with meat.

It's a process, but the journey is exciting just because we learned one super important thing: It's not about us individually, it's about us.

Similar to our relationship with Jesus. It's all about give and take. We give Him our cares, and He receives them. We give Him our fear, and He pours His comfort. We lift our prayers, and He sends answers. We share our secrets, and He stores them in His love. We hand Him our worries, and He whispers reassurance. We give Him our anxiety, and He gives us peace in return.

How blessed we are to have Jesus dwell under the same roof of our heart. We live together in a relationship wrapped in love.
{eoa}

Janet Perez Eckles *is an international speaker and the author of four books. She has helped thousands conquer fear and bring back joy. This article originally appeared at .*

How You Can Receive Your Miracle—Even When You Can't See It

This isn't the first time someone has asked me this question. When I write about the power of God's miracles and when I speak on the faith we must have in His miraculous healing, why then do I still have no sight?

The question seems logical and obvious. My answer: God has healed me. And no, it's not manifested yet. It may not be until I enter heaven.

But while here on earth, the issue is that we as flawed, limited-minded folks have expectations that mirror our human notion of what a miracle should be.

How God Heals

Luke 4 details Jesus' healing of many, instantly and completely. He healed them from physical and mental disorders. He healed the blind. And I am among them. Though my physical vision didn't come back, what God allowed me to see reaches far beyond the physical.

What I see is His grace that covers me when life turns dark. What I see is His hand at work when I run into walls of opposition. What I see clearly is His compassion when I fall into the ditch of my mistakes. And He gave me 20/20 vision to see His forgiving nature when I don't deserve it. And what I can't help but see is His promise for a future, rich with His everlasting love.

So, has God healed me? A resounding yes. But we, human minded,

with limited vision, only see the miracle according to our limited expectations.

I admit it; initially, that was my expectation, too. I prepared for one day to wake up and have full sight. Had that happened, I would have danced with gratitude, and from the rooftops proclaimed the miracle. But that euphoria would have waned in time. And I might have gone back to being the same young woman, looking for fulfillment, searching for a way to feel whole and seeking the richness of life.

God Knows Best

God knew; that's why He restored my spiritual vision. And now nearly 30 years later, I still see the abundance is not found in possessing physical sight, enjoying the ability to walk, living in a cancer-free body or enjoying a sharp mind. The richness of life is found in spite of our limited abilities, recognizing the limitless power of God at work.

He's at work in your life right now, too. He may be preparing a miracle, not in the way you expect, but beyond. He may have the answer, but different and better than you hoped.

And as we wait, here are five truths to consider:

1. Our expectations have a limited realm; His delivery has a profound result.
2. Jesus didn't come to heal only physical ailments, but to uphold His promise to renew our soul.
3. When we're afraid, Jesus was born so our fear could die.
4. Our worry vanishes in the wonder of His promises.
5. If we seek God first, we don't have to look for miracles; they're all before us.

Knowing these truths, we don't need New Year's resolutions. God gave the solutions: faith in what He does, trust in what He says and hope in what we yet don't see.

Let's Pray

Father, I praise You for knowing what I long for more than I do. You see what I need more than I do, and when I think I'm asking for something good, You give me the best. In Jesus' name.

What miracle have you overlooked lately? {eoa}

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3 Ways Satan Tries to Trap You in So-Called Impossibilities

Whoever said life is not easy was wrong, totally wrong. Life is sometimes extremely hard, painful and impossible to endure.

And we mistakenly look for this time of year to change that. Christmas was meant to be the *most wonderful time of the year*. If that's so, why is the suicide rate at its highest during this season?

Maybe the reason is because while most are singing, shopping and decorating, others are in a different place. They're

sinking in heartache. The season's festivities intensify their grief, while they believe they're the only ones suffering, lonely or lost.

And those sentiments, like a brick wall, build up, creating a barrier impossible to overcome.

Have You Been There?

We all have. When adversity of any kind barges in, our focus goes to the circumstance, the challenge and the obstacle.

And when this happens, we throw on our let-me-solve-this cape. Then with flawed determination, we charge to fix what is in the way. But rather than success, we often come crushing down in defeat.

The reason is because this is not God's way. His way might be to allow things to fall apart in such a way that we have no option but to trust in Him. To come to Him for help. And to seek His answers.

It Was Impossible—or Was It?

That's why God chose an impossible situation to tell us, no, change that, to *show* us that with Him, impossibilities are no barriers at all. For example, an older woman, barren for many years, is now pregnant? Impossible. And a girl, pure and a virgin, pregnant? Impossible.

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you. Therefore the Holy One who will be born will be called the Son of God. Listen, your cousin Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age. And this is the sixth month with her who was declared barren. For with God nothing will be impossible" (Luke 1:34-37).

That “nothing is impossible” includes your own situation, your struggle and your pain. And like Mary, you see that scenario as impossible. Mary couldn’t see the logic. We don’t either. Mary saw the circumstance instead. We see our own, too. Mary questioned how it could be. And so do we.

But then Christmas happened. God Himself came to earth in the flesh so we would not have a doubt that He’s here for our impossibilities. He’s here for those moments of anguish when life is too much. He’s here, alive to shield us from our destructive anxiety.

But to allow Him to work that into our circumstance, we must avoid these three traps:

1. **Crying, “Poor me.”** We have the King of kings, the Creator of the universe, to lift us to the mountain of victory. How will He manage that? We don’t need to know the *how*; we only need to declare that He will.
2. **Looking at the circumstance.** Instead, focus on the certainty of His promise. His Word says that with Him, all will turn around and miracles will happen.
3. **Giving up.** Perseverance is the secret to reaching the finish line, winning the prize and receiving the medal of triumph.

Let’s Pray

Father, I confess my failure to believe in the miracles You promise. Thank You for Your patience with me as I wait to see my impossible situation turn to an immense miracle. In Jesus’ name.

What impossibility will God make possible for you today? {eoa}

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5 Powerful Steps to Finding Your Perfect Peace at Christmas

Could someone forget their disabilities or limitations? I did. After living without sight for decades, I often forget I can't see.

And dismissing that very thing, sometimes I rush to get ready to go out. I admit it, I'm a wait-to-the-last-minute kind of gal. I rush around like a crazy woman. I hop in the shower, slip on my robe and dash into my walk-in closet. Frantically, I slide hangers, looking for any outfit to wear.

How do I do this with no sight? It's pretty simple. When I purchase an item, I store in my memory its characteristics—the texture, the shape of the neckline, buttons or length of sleeve.

One light touch tells me what the item is. But when I'm in a hurry, trying to find the right outfit gets a bit tough. Not because I can't see, but because I just have too many clothes. Way more than any blind gal should be allowed to have. The bar holding all those hangers is probably sagging from the weight.

A Jam-Packed Life

Oh, how my jammed closet resembled my life—full of tasks of all kinds and sizes.

Have you been there? Some of us are programmed that way. And with no hesitation, we joined the people-pleasers club. We have been members ever since we were young. We tried to perform to win our parents' and teachers' approval. Later on, we wanted to please our family, employer and friends. Phew! We're deceived into thinking the only way to please ourselves is by pleasing others.

What an unpleasant and often hard place to be. And to make it worse, the pleasing craze explodes during holiday season. We rush through life eager to make someone happy and win their approval. That's when the level of stress and tension rises like the thermometer in Orlando's summer.

Time to change. How about if we vow to cool off? God never meant for us to live in the heat of tension. He gave one refreshing directive: "'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind'" (Matt. 22:36-37).

When God becomes our focus, when loving Him above all and longing to please Him alone rises to the top of priorities, and when seeking His approval fuels our thoughts and actions, peace reigns.

Five Steps to Peace

And while the rest of the world sinks in stress, we celebrate by following these five steps:

1. Invite God into our day.
2. Use wisdom to arrange our priorities.
3. Commit our tasks to Him.
4. Thank Him ahead of time for resolving the challenges of

the day.

5. Relish in moments of rest.

Obedying His greatest commandment ushers in wisdom to avoid stress, to press forth when fatigued, to bring clarity when confused, to be calm when overwhelmed and to know the warmth of His love when we know we please Him above all.

That's why God says in Psalm 127:2b (MSG), "It's useless to rise early and go to bed late, and work your worried fingers to the bone. Don't you know He enjoys giving rest to those He loves?"

Let's Pray

Father, I know You love me. You offer rest for my soul and calmness for my heart. I commit this truth to sing in my heart, not only for this season, but always. In Jesus' name, amen.

Whom will you aim to please this Christmas? {eoa}

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How the Morning Star Healed This Woman's Christmas Grief

Like fog in the morning, the spirit of Christmas was gone that year. Still, I shuffled in the garage. One by one, I pulled off the shelves the bins I'd stored the previous Christmas.

While the aroma of sugar cookies wafted through the air and "Silent Night" played in the background, I began the decorating.

By then, the task was challenging because all I had left of my eyesight was the ability to see lights.

With the nativity scene at the center, I placed the items I had memorized through the years—red and green candles, musical boxes with winter scenes and bright red poinsettias with green garland.

Next, I lifted three stockings from a box and hung them on marked places above the fireplace. Each was embroidered with the name of one of our sons. I ran my fingers over the letters. One read "Jason," the other, "Jeff," and the least number of letters spelled "Joe."

Once Jason's and Jeff's were hung, with tears burning my eyes, I clutched Joe's against my chest.

The empty stocking seared my heart. It had been five years since the Lord called Joe home. Five years that Joe's absence had left an emptiness we could almost touch. And five years that God's grace wiped away portions of the grief that ached in our broken hearts.

But the healing came like the warm steam from mint tea—soft and sweet.

It came in a memory: Years ago, when our three sons, including

Joe, were still young, I rushed around, getting everything ready; I fretted until I became crabby. As a result, little things tended to make me crazy.

One night, while everyone was in bed, I stayed up with important stuff like trying to fix a light strand that refused to shine. One burned-out bulb was the culprit. Annoyed at the glitch, I fussed. I rearranged, and then plugged and unplugged until I was so frustrated, I plopped on the couch. I looked up and glanced at the star atop the tree, shining, glowing, lighting the room.

I sighed with slight shame. I'd done the same with light bulbs that burned out in my life—from broken relationships, disappointments, setbacks, failed plans and even deep heartache. But in all that mess, I missed the one who lights the way through the darkest moments.

Trying to fix the strands of my life's issues, I missed the star—Christ the Lord, who gave significance to my life and joy for my days.

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star'" (Rev. 22:16).

When that void in our heart aches to be filled, it's the star of comfort that makes it whole. When bitter sorrow robs the spirit of Christmas, it's the star of love that whispers joy. When a health diagnosis shakes our world, it's the star of reassurance that shines the certainty of new tomorrows. It's the same star that never loses the brilliance of hope, one we can only embrace when all strands of life burn out.

I embraced it as I, with eyes focused on the star, hung Joe's stocking along with his brothers'. It's not empty anymore. Rather, it's filled with sweet memories—his wit and laughter, his hugs and kisses.

The star changed all that. Jesus, the Morning Star, dispels our darkness, dries our tears and repairs strands we cannot fix. {eoa}

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