

The Supernatural Secret to Overcoming Your Painful Perfectionism

There is a spectacular misbelief that God expects us to be perfect. We are human. He knows we are not going to be perfect. All He asks is that we make it our goal to grow in our faith. Although I know this in my head, it's really hard to get it to sink down into my heart, the seat of my desires. I want to be perfect, and so I strive toward that goal, but pushing hard and trying to be perfect always cause me to fail in some way.

Without God's grace flowing through me, I am weak in my human strength. When I stop trying to get everything perfect and allow God to work through me, that's a different story. Then, "I am strong, truly able, truly powerful, truly drawing from God's strength." (2 Cor. 12:10c AMP)

The Perfectionism Conundrum

The other day, I was jogging laps in the water. I was reeling from my latest blatant attempt to be perfect and beating myself up because of it. Often, I feel if I don't do things perfectly, they are not worth doing. This leads me to procrastinate and do nothing.

I wanted to know the root so I could get rid of it once and for all. I had dug around in that perfectionism pile many times and done a lot of forgiveness, renouncing lies and hearing God's truths, and yet I could still identify perfectionism in my life.

I felt God asked me, "When is the first time you felt you needed to get everything right.?" Then I remembered my grandma would give me \$1 for every E I got and an extra \$5 if I got

all E's. In second grade, I so wanted that reward to buy my first two-wheel bike, and I needed all the money to get it.

I worked hard all semester to get all E's. I was on pins and needles until we got our report cards the last day of school. I was unsure of a couple of categories, but I was hoping and praying I had done everything excellently.

To my great surprise my teacher thought so too and gave me all E's. I was so excited. I had worked hard. I had won my reward. I got the perfect score. My perfection was highly rewarded.

The Root

This was the root of not accepting less than perfect with anything I did. I needed to be perfect in order to get the perfect reward. I would accept nothing less.

To get rid of the root, I knew I should forgive my grandma, even though it seemed ridiculous to me to forgive her for setting up the hard work ethic her rewards gave me. I knew, though, it was the only way for me to get breakthrough.

I forgave her for expecting me to be perfect and then, rewarding my perfection. I renounced the lie that the Holy Spirit expects me to be perfect. Then, I asked God, *What is Your truth?*

This is always my favorite part, but this time' His answer surprised me. He didn't tell me He loved me as I am, although I know He does. He didn't say, "I'll always be with you," though I know He will. He said, "If you were perfect, you wouldn't need Me, because you would be God."

Am I God?

I repeated that over and over in mind. I pondered it. I carried it around before I dealt with it. God was going deep into that mess of perfectionism. There have been times when I felt I knew better than God. I thought I had the "perfect"

answer and if He would just do what I wanted Him to, everything would be fine.

Did I really think I was better than God? In His answer to me, God hit at the core of my issue. If I trust God, I won't try to run His show. His show really is my life. I need to let Him lead me in all things. I need to submit to God completely.

The truth is only God is perfect because only God is holy. He asks us to be imitators of Him. Copy Him and follow His example (see Eph. 5:1).

Jesus said to those gathered for the Sermon on the Mount, "Therefore be perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48, MEV). This is impossible without God.

The Amplified Version defines the word "perfect" in this passage as "growing into spiritual maturity both in mind and character, actively integrating godly values into your daily life" (Matt. 5:48b, AMP).

None of us is perfect on our own. We have all failed in some way. Paul explains it further. "Not that I have already obtained it, this goal of being Christlike, or have already been made perfect, but I actively press on so that I may take hold of that perfection for which Christ Jesus took hold of me *and* made me His own" (Phil 3:12).

Then, he succinctly states that following Jesus completely should be the goal of every Christian: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the heavenly prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14).

God was showing me that I am weakest when I am trying to get everything right and attempting to figure out my problems and everyone else's in my own strength. Only when I lay down self-

effort and rely on His strength will I be able to conquer every difficulty.

“I know what it means to lack, and I know what it means to experience overwhelming abundance. For I’m trained in the secret of overcoming all things, whether in fullness or in hunger. And I find that the strength of Christ’s explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty” (Phil 4:12-13 TPT).

Let’s stop beating ourselves up for our imperfections, hand them all to Jesus and learn to live walking hand in hand with His Holy Spirit power and strength infused into the very core of our being.

It’s then that we are strong, truly able, truly powerful, truly drawing from God’s strength and can accomplish whatever He has called us to do. {eoa}

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Anne Graham Lotz: Daddy Finished Well

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I

have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown" (2 Tim. 4:7-8a, NIV).

Until 7:30 a.m. on the morning of Feb. 21, when I received the news that Daddy had moved to heaven, I had enjoyed watching the Olympics. Besides being thrilling to me, from time to time I have been able to catch life-lessons from the competition.

One such life-lesson has emerged from the mist of grief over Daddy. It is the memory of the 5000-meter speedskating race that was held the opening weekend. The next to last pair of skaters to compete included a man named Sven Kramer. The announcer described him as a rock star in his native country, the Netherlands. When Sven had been asked how he felt about all of the adulation, he had replied that the people in his country were really good to him, and he loved what he did. He struck me as a genuine athlete who knew he was really good and didn't have to brag.

When his race was called, Sven Kramer walked out on the ice with the confidence of a man who owned it. He dug his skates into the starting position, then held absolutely still. When the starting gun went off, Sven Kramer began his race with smooth, powerful strides. He didn't even look like he was exerting maximum effort. Around and around the track he went as the announcer began to give the times in comparison to other skaters. When Sven crossed the finish line, he made it look easy. Then his time was announced: 6:09:76 minutes! He had set a new Olympic record! Not only had he won the gold medal for his race, but he had set two other Olympic records: one for having won a gold medal in the same event in three successive Olympics, and the other as the speed skater who has won more Olympic medals than any other in history! Without any doubt, there is no one like Sven Kramer.

But the scene that brought tears to my eyes was not on the track, it was up in the stands. Because as Sven Kramer crossed the finish line, the camera panned across the crowd and

focused on one man who was on his feet, wildly applauding. The announcer identified him as the king of the Netherlands.

And this is the life-lesson that came into focus for me. My father ran his race of life with grace and power. There has been no one, there is no one, and there will not ever be anyone like Billy Graham. He was a rock star in the kingdom of God who loved people and loved what he did ... telling them that there is a God in heaven who loves them, who sent Jesus, His own Son, to die for them, and that if they place their faith in Him, they would receive forgiveness for their sin, peace with God now and a heavenly home when they die.

On Wednesday morning, Daddy finished his race. The vision that has come to my mind's eye is that of the King, standing to applaud His runner who finished strong.

Well done, Daddy! Now there is in store for you the crown ...

What It Really Means for the Holy Spirit to Be Your Comforter

Do you need God's comfort in your life now? We all do from time to time. And there are areas in life that we need His comfort and strength even more. If this is where you are now in life, allow me to encourage you to seek His Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter of God for you.

I am coming to the first-year anniversary of my dad's passing from this earth. And his passing was very painful for me. And yet, God blessed my time with him during his last days above

and beyond that which I could have ever asked of my heavenly Father. Our time together was so rich and full; we talked about everything and anything. We prayed together and talked about what it would be like in heaven. And he asked me, "What's going to happen to me when I die?" And he wasn't talking about eternal life, we had already prayed together for forgiveness and making sure he was in right standing with our Lord and Savior. He was asking me about the death process. And I quickly answered him just like I would answer you, "Dad, according to the Bible, God is just going to take your breath away." And I demonstrated it to him at his bedside, I breathed in and I breathed out. And I told him, "Then you will be with the Lord."

We did not see eye-to-eye on everything in life, especially when it came to God's healing power. And I had to forgive him and release him to his own will and belief on all of this. I also had to forgive his pastor and the denomination that took such a hideous stance against the power of the Holy Spirit to heal today. And from my perspective, this was the hardest part of his death. And this is one area I had to call down upon the power and strength of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. My dad would not allow me to override his will in this, and never permitted me to lay hands upon him for his healing. Do you think this was easy for me? I'm a healing evangelist, I have seen more amazing healings than books could ever contain, and yet I was not allowed to pray for my own dad's healing. Like I said, I needed the power and the strength of the Holy Spirit, my Comforter.

My dad grew up with the belief that you never questioned the doctor's advice. You did exactly as he or she said. But in the end, my dad confided in me that he regrets having done everything his doctor said. He wished he hadn't. At least he was honest with me in this.

My last visit with my dad was precious to me and painful at the same time. I had to return to Guatemala, and my brother

brought me to see him before dropping me off at the airport. I woke him up and just chatted and hugged him as I tended to his needs.

It wasn't until later that I had realized that I was ministering to my dad at his feet, similar to what I share about in *Greater Than Magic* about how my dad, without knowing it, taught me how to minister to the Lord and to worship Him.

When my dad would come home from a hard day's work, I would kneel at his feet, untie his boots and take them off for him. And as I was ministering to my dad's needs, he would pick up his little girl and love on her. And it was by this daily time spent with my dad as a young girl that I learned how to sit at the feet of my Lord Jesus and spend time with Him and minister to Him and worship Him.

My dad's last words to me when it came time to say our final goodbyes was, "Becky, no matter what happens, remember that I will always love you." I went home to Guatemala and within three days, he had passed on to his home in glory with the Lord. And I was told that when my dad passed, he went quickly, just as he and I had discussed.

I returned to the States for my dad's funeral and after that weekend's service, and my husband, children and grandchildren left, and my brothers and their families had left, I was alone in my parent's home. I was feeling very sad at that moment and asked the Comforter to show me my dad. And he did in a vision, not once but twice since then. My dad was not in his late 80s anymore. He was not a teenager, but was more like in his early 30s. He was walking in the woods, which was an everyday event for him, as my parents owned quite a bit of wooded property. It was a summer day, and the light was golden and warm and there he was, standing and looking at me with a gentle smile.

Before leaving my parents' house for the last time after my dad's funeral, while waiting for my brother to pick me up to

bring me to the airport, I knelt down on the floor in what was once my bedroom (and still was, all these years later) and cried out to the Comforter, the Holy Spirit for His grace to get up from my knees and walk forward in His grace. And He was faithful to me in this, and still is.

We all lose people we love at one time or another in this life. And it's not easy to say goodbye to those you love. But I want you to know you do not have to walk this alone. Call out to the Comforter for His grace to help you through this great loss in your life.

“But the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor, Strengthener, Standby), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name [in My place, to represent Me and act on My behalf], He will teach you all things. And He will help you remember everything that I have told you” (John 14:26, AMP).
{eo}

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Billy Graham: The Incredible Impact of One Surrendered Life

“Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone

into the presence of God.” –Rev. Billy Graham

I clearly remember my friends wheeling me in to the stadium the first night of the crusade in Portland in 1992.

I was in a wheelchair, having had knee surgery only weeks before; and while I wasn't able to be a counselor as I'd hoped, I was at least able to sing in the choir.

Each afternoon we'd arrive early and watch the different guest singers do sound checks. I clearly remember George Beverly Shea with Cliff Barrows, Sandi Patty and Johnny and June Cash being there; singers I'd admired for many, many years—and still admire to this day.

There was an air of excitement that grew with each night.

A year beforehand, a team from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association had come to Portland to hold training meetings for those who wanted to volunteer in various aspects of the crusade.

Even at that time, there was a sense that this was going to be something incredibly special. The first night of training so many people volunteered that they ran out of materials and had to have more materials rushed to them.

I also remember that for the crusade they had a remote location where they had set up a jumbotron for those who couldn't get into the live crusade.

Each night both locations were maxed out, and people were turned away. (VIDEO)

I will never forget the crowds pouring to the altar at the end of each message.

To this day, tears fill my eyes when I remember how many lives were touched that week. One of those lives is my dear friend Jennifer.

Jennifer worked with my sister at Taco Bell.

My sister invited her to the crusade that week, and that is where I met Jennifer for the very first time. She went forward that week to receive Christ and immediately began attending our church.

It was during that time that God touched her life in a way that would impact her forever.

She shares about that impact in a post she wrote for me: "How My Abortion Turned Into a Ministry."

Another incredible memory I have is how God used the Operation Andrew prayer cards in our church.

The idea of the Operation Andrew prayer cards was to list five names of people you wanted to invite to the crusade. These cards were sent to the involved churches months ahead of time, so people could pray over these names well in advance, believing that God would soften people's hearts and prepare them to attend the crusade.

They are the inspiration behind this post I wrote: "What To Do When Someone Won't Listen to the Gospel."

After my father, who was the pastor of our church, presented the Operation Andrew prayer cards to the congregation, one member felt led to do something special with those cards.

After going home that Sunday, he went into his garage and made a clear fiberglass church with a large slot in the roof.

The following Sunday, each person filled out, not one, but two Operation Andrew cards. One card they placed in their Bible; the other card, they slid into the fiberglass church.

Each Sunday, one of the ushers would bring that church to the front of the auditorium, and we'd pray over the names in that box.

Miraculously, well before the crusade, many people whose names were in that Operation Andrew box received Christ, and many more attended the crusade and received Christ that week!

Many things set Billy Graham apart from every other televangelist:

- His loyalty to the simplicity of the gospel
- His unwavering fidelity to the Word of God
- His deep integrity
- The fact that his life was never marked with scandal

God used him to touch lives, from the most obscure to those who were household names. And his message to both was the same.

He will forever be remembered as a man who spoke truth with simplicity and boldness.

Thank you, Billy Graham, for standing boldly for Jesus and being faithful wherever God placed you to minister.

See you at the house.

Enjoy the included video from the Portland 1992 crusade.

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her Bosnian hero. Together they live with their two active boys, and she enjoys fruity candles, good coffee and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. Her passion for writing led her to author her best-selling book *The Missional Handbook*. At *A Little R & R* she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. You can also find her at *Missional Call* where she shares her passion for local and global missions. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

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The Spirit-Powered Way to Release Your Burdens to God

What have you been carrying that is weighing heavy on your mind? What burden do you need to get rid of, but are afraid to release to God? Why don't you trust Him with that heavy burden? These are all questions that beg an answer.

The truth is, there are answers for these questions. Many times, we know we need to hand these to God, but the trust level just isn't there. Or we have no idea how to release them. After all, didn't He give us this burden to carry?

Give the Burdens to God

God tells us the burdens we try to bear alone are too heavy for us to carry. So what do we do them? We learn the unforced rhythms of grace by allowing Him to carry them for us. He longs for us to release the burdens and learn to live freely and lightly. What difference would that make in your life if you could do that?

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me. Get away with Me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matt. 11:28-30, MSG).

Get Away With Jesus

We all need to get away with Jesus. We need to spend time with Him. We need to allow Him to help us with the things that seem

so burdensome in our lives.

God tells us the answer, but He also tells us that most of us won't tap into the answers. "In repentance and rest is your salvation. In quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it (Isa. 30:15, NIV). We don't want to repent because that means we need to change what we are doing that is taking us out of being in alignment with God. Worry is one big one.

I find trust is another one that is difficult. If we fully trust God that means we must allow Him to handle the problems we can't seem to let go of. If we let go of them, He will show us what to do. And if He doesn't, we still need to trust Him.

Rest and Quietness

If we can hand the burdens to Him. If we can repent, by turning around and going the other way, we will find rest for our souls and quietness for our minds. We can learn to live freely and lightly. {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker *is the author of seven books, all available on Amazon. Her latest book, Sweet Hunger: Developing an Appetite for God, is available now, and Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds is the No. 1 Christian weight-loss memoir. She is also a writing and weight-loss coach, blogger, speaker, wife and mother. Visit her online at [tereshieldsparker.com](#) to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts.*

This article originally appeared at [www.tereshieldsparker.com](#).

Why Acknowledging This Truth About Addiction Will Set You Free

This is the first of a series about addiction of all forms. We are going to look at this difficult situation through the eyes of truth found throughout God's Word. Today, we are going to look at this and ask ourselves what is it? Is it as the world says—a disease? Or is it something else?

Is addiction a disease? This is a good question. The world claims that it is, but what about God? What does His Word have to say about this? Let's search out the Scriptures to find out.

Let's begin with the basics. The dictionary definition of "addiction" is "the state of being enslaved to a habit or practice or to something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming, as narcotics, to such an extent that its cessation causes severe trauma."

The world of psychology believes that addiction is a disease. Here is a direct quote from the American Society of Addiction Medicine, "Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.

Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one's behaviors and interpersonal relationships and a dysfunctional emotional response. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission. Without treatment or

engagement in recovery activities, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.

I agree with most of this explanation except for the following words: "chronic disease of brain reward" and "like other chronic diseases." The world has pridefully removed God from life, except when there is a tragedy, then they remember God and place the blame on Him, which in essence is refusing to accept responsibility for your wrongdoing and placing the blame on someone or something other than yourself.

This same scenario took place back in Genesis when Adam and Eve's lust for the forbidden fruit was manifested and found out. Neither accepted the blame for their own disobedience to God's rules, but instead passed the blame to someone else. This is interesting and still happens today.

Then they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard Your voice in the garden and was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What have you done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:8-13).

The chain of blame holds people in bondage, as we see here. Adam blames Eve for giving him the forbidden fruit, but in reality blames God for giving him the woman in the first place. And so often we will hear people jokingly blame it all on Eve, but as we study out the Scriptures, Adam was there when she ate of the fruit. "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasing to the eyes and a tree

desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). Adam could have rebuked Eve and told her no, but he did not. He was an accomplice to this crime before he ate of the forbidden fruit for himself. And then we look at this passage again and think, "Wow! That's very arrogant of Adam to speak so disrespectfully to God and tell Him that He's responsible for this mess."

Allow me to challenge you with this common response, "I will not accept the fact that the devil put this sickness upon me. I refuse to say that I was overtaken by the devil, but it was God who permitted this, and this is the reason why I am sick." Just like Adam, people blame God for their troubles all the time.

Let's go back to Adam's first crime, and where did it begin? Sin begins in the mind, in the realm of our thoughts. And if we do not do as the Word instructs us, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is complete" (2 Cor. 10:4-6).

Satan planted the seed of temptation to disobey in Adam's mind with negative words, and he dwelt on this thought, acted upon it and sinned against God.

The Bible tells us in James 1:14, "Each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed." Ponder upon the way this verse is written in the Amplified Version of the Bible, "But each one is tempted when he is dragged away, enticed and baited [to commit sin] by his own [worldly] desire (lust, passion)."

Now, let's backtrack just a bit. It wasn't just Adam who did

not accept the blame for his sinful actions, Eve did the same. When God asked her why she had committed this sin, she blamed the serpent who tempted her. "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:13b). How often do we hear people say, "The devil made me do it!" No, Satan did not make you sin. Yes, he tempted you, but you made the decision to sin all on your own. You are responsible for your sin.

1 Corinthians 10:13 clears this matter up of about who is responsible here, "No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it."

I can hear your contradicting thoughts, you argue, "That's easy for God to say, He's God. He's a supernatural being. He doesn't know what it's like for us here on earth." And I respond to you and say, "You are wrong. He does understand exactly what you are going through." Hebrews 4:15 explains how Jesus was tempted when He walked this earth in human form, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who was in every sense tempted like we are, yet without sin."

Do you think the temptations Jesus had to overcome were somehow easier than what you need to overcome? Back in Jesus' day there was rebellion, lying, cheating, stealing, murder, prostitution and other sexual sins, drunkenness, and this list goes on and on, just as it does today. Not only did He show you by personal example that it is possible to overcome temptation, He loved you so much that He took it a step further in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was about to enter into His final hours on this earth, and be slaughtered because of our sin, to redeem us from it and its consequences, such as sickness and disease and other forms of the curse. Let's read this portion of Scripture from Luke 22:41-44:

He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." An angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly. And His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

As we study this, we see that Jesus was being tempted by the enemy, Satan, not to fulfill the plan of atonement for us. And I personally believe this was the greatest temptation of all time, but even though He was being tempted, He did not sin. And what I teach people with this portion of Scripture is that it was at this point that Jesus overcame the human will so that we could overcome it as well.

We are talking about biblically overcoming addiction in this series of articles, and no matter what the addiction is, whether it is an addiction to drugs, alcohol, sex, pornography, gambling or food, you have the ability with God to overcome any and all forms of addiction. But we must look at addiction through the eyes of truth. According to the Word in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." Blaming others, and bad situations in life does not help, and calling addiction a disease does not set you free either. In the natural, disease needs medicine or medical treatments; you do not overcome addiction by becoming addicted to something else. And calling addiction a disease does not set you free; it gives you an excuse to continue in the choice of your sinful addictive behavior. {eo}

Becky Dvorak is a prophetic healing evangelist and the author of DARE to Believe, Greater Than Magic and The Healing Creed. Visit her at .

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How to Extend Your Love Long Past Valentine's Day

I never thought a sandhill crane would make me cry.

A pair of these brown beauties were living in our little corner of the neighborhood for the last year. It seems fitting, since they happen to be the logo of our development.

We've watched them establish a routine. Foraging for food. Teasing our dogs by remaining just outside the boundary of the invisible fence that corrals our two eager boxers. Proclaiming, quite loudly, that they were large and in charge.

And always together. Until now.

For the past week, we've only seen one. One by himself (herself?) searching for food. And looking ever so lonely. I find myself hoping against hope that he's alone because his mate is nesting somewhere in the area. Wishing that she'll accompany him again a month from now with two newly hatched chicks.

Because, you see, sandhill cranes are one of those breeds that mate for life. And life for them is usually longer than 20 years. They mate when they're about 2 years old, and spend the next 20-30 years nesting, raising chicks, and watching them leave to start their own families.

A circle of life. The rhythm of nature.

It makes me appreciate the lifetime I've had with my own husband. Seasons and decades. Experiences that have been good, bad and occasionally so ugly the only thing you can do is stifle a gag reflex. Otherwise known as life.

There's something special about sharing all those things across decades with one person. With someone who knows you, sometimes better than you know yourself. Someone who gets your quirks, overlooks your faults, and loves you anyway.

Someone who understands what real love is. Not just the hearts-and-flowers kind of love celebrated once a year on Valentine's Day. But a love that's in it for the duration. A love that puts the other person's needs and desires ahead of your own. And a love that never lets go.

I'm grateful for that kind of love. For the "mate for a lifetime" commitment. I know that not everyone has the opportunity for that experience, and I don't take it for granted.

So here's my challenge: Valentine's Day has passed, but don't wait another 12 months to show your love. While hearts and flowers are nice, consider other ways to communicate the deep joy and privilege of doing life together.

Identify a task the other person is responsible for, and surprise him or her by taking care of it. Do something together to get out of your rut. It doesn't have to be dinner at a fancy restaurant (although that's always nice!). Perhaps a spontaneous neighborhood walk after dinner. Or maybe sharing, without jokes or teasing, how much he or she means to you. Hold hands. Lock eyes with a smile. Bite your tongue when he leaves his clothes on the floor (again). Or when she tells you (for the 20th time) to pick up your clothes.

Expressing love—real love—isn't easy to do day in and day out. We're selfish by nature. We want our marriage and our world to revolve around us, not around the other person. And we want it *now*.

Christians know that to maintain this kind of deep, unselfish, humble love requires the supernatural equipping of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who encourages, prompts, and gives us

the desire to love our spouse the way we want to be loved.

And if you need additional motivation, consider my lonely sandhill crane. Don't wait till it's too late to say—and show—your love.

You won't be sorry! {eoa}

Ava Pennington is a writer, speaker and Bible teacher. She writes for nationally circulated magazines and is published in 32 anthologies, including 25 *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books. She also authored *Daily Reflections on the Names of God: A Devotional*, endorsed by Kay Arthur. Learn more at [www.ava-pennington.com](#).

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Prayer for Those Touched by the Florida High School Tragedy

In Jesus' name, we lift up the families and friends and the community of those who were shot and killed, and those who are injured and in surgery. I lift up the students and faculty of Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, that they will find comfort through our prayers and support. Help everyone affected by this terrible tragedy this day.

Father God, cover them with the power of Your steadfast love, and may Your mercies carry them through the tomorrows of uncertainty. Help them to find healing in their minds and emotions from all the fear and terror of this horrific event. Help us all to heal together.

In Jesus' name, amen.

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23, ESV). {eoa}

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Why Your Definition of Real Love May Be Incomplete

What is love? What's real about it? Is love that ooey-goey feeling you get when you first meet that special guy? Is it the sparks that fly as you sit close together? Is it that unbridled enthusiasm you feel when he asks you to marry him or the overwhelming excitement of walking down the aisle to meet him?

Real love is all that and more. In order to stand the test of time, it must be rooted and grounded in the love God has for us. We love others because God first loved us (see 1 John 4:19). This is the only way we can understand what real, unconditional love is all about, because throughout the life of a marriage relationship, that will be tested in plenty of ways.

When It Falls Apart

Real love that can only come from God is forgiving him when he forgets to take out the trash for the fourth week in a row or

promises to pay the electric bill but forgets to setup the online bill pay, and you come home to a dark house.

Real love is picking up his dirty socks while he tries to take a shower without getting your lingerie (which is hanging all over the bathroom) wet. It's sleepless nights before and after the babies come. It's both of you working 40 hours a week, raising a couple of kids and trying to get everything done at the same time

Real love is going the extra mile even when you feel there is no extra mile left in you. It's understanding when he forgets to pick up the kids from school because this was the evening of your yoga class. It's him understanding when you forget to get coffee and bagels for breakfast when you text him specifically to ask what he needs from the grocery store.

What Real Love Is

Real love is patient, sometimes (see 1 Cor. 13:4). It's kind, if you've gotten sleep the night before. It's not jealous when you find out the girl from the office he went to lunch with is his supervisor, weighs 50 pounds more than you do and is 10 years older. When you get your master's degree before him, love doesn't rub his nose in it.

Real love doesn't demand he go to the chick flick with you. It doesn't throw his clothes out on the lawn because he came home at midnight after hanging out with the guys. It also doesn't remember how many other times that has happened.

Real love lifts up the times he has told you the truth even if it hurt. Real love never gives up on him, and his real love never gives up on you. Real love continues to have faith in both of you. Real love always has hope that commitment and passion will win. Real love endures everything, even endless bouts of the flu passed back and forth like ping-pong balls.

How God's Love Works

God's love is the only real love we know. Every time we show love, we reveal His love. God's love is what takes us through every stage of life from new and budding sparks to tried-and-true, passionate love. It believes that whatever happens in this life, real, extreme and undying love, when based in the Word of God and mutual respect for each other as people of faith, love and hope, will last forever.

No matter how much we love one another in our human strength and no matter what level of commitment we have, we cannot love unconditionally without God's real. Unconditional love flowing through us.

We live to be identified as lovers of God. We also know with confidence God's love for us is unending and unfailing (see Ps. 13:5).

There is nothing in the universe with the power to separate us from God's love. I'm convinced that his love will triumph over death, life's troubles, fallen angels, or dark rulers in the heavens. There is nothing in our present or future circumstances that can weaken his love. There is no power above us or beneath us—no power that could ever be found in the universe that can distance us from God's passionate love, which is lavished upon us through our Lord Jesus, the Anointed One! (Rom. 8:38-39, TPT). {eo}

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of seven books, all available on Amazon. Her latest book, *Sweet Hunger: Developing an Appetite for God*, is available now, and *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds is the No. 1 Christian weight-loss memoir*. She is also a writing and weight-loss coach, blogger, speaker, wife and mother. Visit her online at [to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts](#).

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Your Mark 12:31 Prayer for True Love

I was four people deep in line at the post office, which placed me next to greeting card racks on either side of me. My eyes went to the cards on the right, but after looking at a few, immediately I turned away. (Is there any greater sign of human depravity than in some greeting card lines these days?)

Averting my eyes to the left, the other card rack held beautiful cards, and I gave it a spin. Every card made me think of someone, and I wished I could load up a big handful, take them home and send meaningful notes to every person who was coming to my mind.

That brings me to the people in my life and how I feel like I'm failing most of them most of them.

"You need to work on calling on all of your students," said my principal. This has been the same constructive criticism I've received in all of my reviews with him. But there are so many students, and it seems impossible to make sure 18 in a class are receiving my full attention—no one sliding by. It's hard. I vowed to keep trying to improve my skill, to get all of them to participate.

The classroom is a microcosm of my life. So many people with birthdays and sickness. Moms, aunts and in-laws. People who need an encouragement and the attention of a friend. Husband and kids. Students who are struggling. Neighbors whose names I can't seem to remember.

Always someone sliding by.

Jesus tells us the second great command of God: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31b).

Every day, I fall short of loving all of my people well. This makes me sad, and I come to the Lord today with his commandment in one hand and my inability to keep it in the other.

How, Lord? I ask. How can I love the way you want me to love?

He brings to mind John 3:16a: "For God so loved the world ..."

God is capable of loving the whole world—no sliders. He asks me to love my neighbor, but there sure are a lot of neighbors. My heart and hands feel too small for the job. I start to crumble with guilt, but then I think, *No, God wants me to succeed here. He wants me to obey and to love blamelessly.*

Don't you think that second commandment is too big for us to keep on our own?

So I'm coming to the Lord needy today. I'm bringing him this little heart of mine that needs to grow in love, and I'm asking him to help me. And while I'm at it, I pray he'll help you love your people, too. {eo}

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