

Learning to Be Content in Your God-Given Singleness

In 1 Corinthians 7:25-40, Paul encourages those who have the gift of remaining single to stay single—to rejoice in it, have fun and serve the Lord. Spiritually speaking, the single person and the married person have no advantage over each other since no one is spiritually superior because of their marital condition. But Paul is saying that single people have some practical advantages that married people do not have.

In verse 25, he tells us clearly that this is his personal counsel and not a command from the Lord. But he has good reasons to recommend singleness. Don't forget that at the time Paul was writing this epistle, intense and horrific persecution was increasing in the Roman Empire under Nero. So Paul was being very practical when he called singles to remain single if they could do so without sinning. Persecution is difficult enough for a single person, but multiplied when a spouse and children are involved, just as our persecuted brethren around the world can attest.

Paul also points out that marriage, while it may solve some problems, can cause a whole lot more. When two people are bound together in marriage, problems of human nature are multiplied. When you are dating, you tend to see only each other's good points, but marriage allows you to see your spouse's faults with a magnifying glass. So we must consider marriage carefully and cling to the grace of God when we combine two distinct personalities, two sets of likes and dislikes, two sets of emotions, two sets of characteristics, two sets of temperaments and two sets of wills.

Another reason Paul gives for exercising the gift of celibacy is the shortness of time (see 1 Cor. 7:29-34). Both for single and married people, he reminds us that life is short and this

world is passing away, so we shouldn't let earthly concerns and sorrows eat us up. Rather, focus on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Believers must learn to be content in whatever condition and situation they are. God has a purpose and plan for you; figure out what it is. Learn to love God and His kingdom above all else.

Prayer: God, help me to be content with where You have me today. Help me to focus on You and not my circumstances. I pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

"I know both how to face humble circumstances and how to have abundance. Everywhere and in all things I have learned the secret, both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil. 4:12). {eoa}

Michael Youssef, Ph.D., is the founder and president of *Leading the Way with Dr. Michael Youssef*, a worldwide ministry that leads the way for people living in spiritual darkness to discover the light of Christ through the creative use of media and on-the-ground ministry teams. Youssef was born in Egypt.

This article originally appeared at .

4 Real-Life Tools to Revive Your Parenting

I am sure every generation of parenting has come with its own unique challenges.

This generation of parenting comes with challenges that previous generations have never had to face—namely devices,

screens, the constant pull of the internet and how it constantly stimulates and entertains our children for us.

Screens are a non-stop battle in our home.

My children wake up and are not even all the way down the stairs before they are asking to play video games, even though every morning they get the same answer: No.

If I'm honest, I'll admit to those days when my fatigue was so overwhelming that I gave them each a device so I could rest from the constant barrage of questions and quarreling. And over the Christmas holidays, we relaxed our rules quite a lot.

Because our children spend so many hours doing school in one form or another, we didn't feel guilty for doing this, but today they both started back to school, and it's time to revive my parenting.

And I don't just mean getting back to our structure and routine. Putting the devices away and the rules back in place.

One thing I've pondered over the past several months is how often I let life happen. To be sure, life will happen no matter how intentional we are.

The question is, when life happens, do we lasso it and use it as a stepping stone, or is it using us like a pinball machine—throwing us around, left and right—while we sort of hope we land in the hole with the most points?

In a sense, I feel like lately I've been living in a pinball machine.

Here's a truth bomb for us all: Godly kids don't just happen.

They don't even happen just because they grow up in godly homes with parents who truly love the Lord.

I know this as well as anyone, having grown up in a pastor's

home all my life. How many times did I see kids from Christian homes grow up indifferent to God, church, the Bible, and never truly cultivate a relationship with the Lord?

Before you assume I'm throwing all the blame on the parents, I'm not.

I know full well that as children grow into adulthood, they are fully responsible for their own decisions. However, I am wondering today if I'm doing all I can—and should—to help my children have their own individual experiences with God now, at an early age. I am convinced that if a child has a genuine experience with Jesus Christ, and as he grows continues to have experiences with Jesus Christ, it will be much harder for him to walk away in his teen and young adult years.

As a child, I had many such experiences.

I recall at age 6, kneeling at the altar weeping. I didn't know why I was weeping—I just was. I could feel the presence of the Lord, and it took my too my knees in tears. I would often weep at hearing the story of Jesus dying on the cross.

As a teenager, every year I'd have a genuine, personal experience with Jesus Christ at summer and winter camp.

These experiences served as milestones in my Christian walk, and I've often reflected back on them, especially in the darker seasons of life when I was discouraged.

So, reviving my parenting doesn't just mean reviving our daily routine or reinstating the house rules, it also means reminding myself to be intentional about guiding my children's hearts spiritually. Here's what I'm doing this year.

4 Ways to Revive Your Parenting

1. Prayer

There is nothing like parenting to drive you to your knees. Daily. Hourly. Every second.

Parenting helps me dwell at Jesus' feet, daily asking for wisdom in the broader sense of parenting, as well as in the very specific areas I see in my children's lives where they need a breakthrough. I couldn't do this thing called parenting without Christ—mainly because I'm so selfish and so broken. How on earth can I teach my children godly behavior when I'm so broken myself?

2. Remember: House rules are not just about modifying your children's behavior.

Here's the thing: good people go to hell every single day. I know that sounds harsh, even cruel, but it is true.

I don't want my children to just be good people; I want my children to be godly people. If I teach them how to behave well, but never reach their spirits, I have only done my job halfway.

But there's another thing: my oldest is like me—he is a pleaser. He will do anything within his power to make sure that people are happy with him, proud of him. Just teaching him to behave well, without ever truly guiding his spirit, will teach him that God loves him only when he does good things. It gives him a very distorted image of God.

The house rules are in place to help our home run smoothly. But my prayer for 2018 is that God will give me wisdom to know how to use them—and those moments when my children need discipline—to help them see the spiritual reasons behind the rules.

One of the books I'm reading this year that delves into this subject so well, is *Shepherding a Child's Heart*.

3. Spending time with my children individually.

We may not be able to consistently do mommy-son dates because of the unique schedule in our home, but I do make it a point to spend one-on-one time with each child consistently.

One thing I want to do this year is use some of that time to have spiritual conversations with them, reinforcing what we're learning from the Bible and helping them connect everyday situations with God's Word and their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I believe that this one-on-one time is extremely powerful and helps to make abstract concepts more personal and real.

4. Bible instruction is not just about the stories.

One grave concern I have is that my children not look at Bible stories in the same way they look at Thomas the Train and Barney—as cartoons, fictional stories or fantasies. I also don't want them to see the Bible as just a storybook or church as just something we do on Sundays.

So many Christians compartmentalize their life into spiritual and secular activities: washing the car is secular but quiet times are spiritual. If the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us, everything we do is spiritual and the Bible should—in its own unique way—touch every area of our life.

I want to cultivate that understanding that biblical truths are infused into everything we do—because we don't do Christian things, we are Christians. It's our identity, it is the core of who we are.

The Bible is more than just Samson being a superhero or Jonah being swallowed by a whale. It's daily instruction for how we live our lives: its lessons on obedience, respect, humility, and loving one another.

Parenting is, by far, one of the hardest things we've ever done.

Just the time when we think we've figured it out, that we've finally broken through and we know what we're doing, things change. They grow. They hit a new milestone.

And we're thrown back to Jesus' feet crying out for wisdom and understanding in how to do this thing called parenting. And that is exactly how God designed it.

We were never meant to parent alone.

We need God's wisdom, the power of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge that we do the best we can; and then pray and believe that God's grace will flow over everything, filling in the cracks of our human brokenness. {eo}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live with their two little boys in the country, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an associate degree in practical theology and is passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author a number of books. She is the author of "A Little R & R," where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at these other places on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.

This article originally appeared at .

Activate Your Faith for Your Supernatural Healing

The Holy Spirit constantly challenges my faith, and causes me

to think about what I believe and why I believe a certain way. And so I present the same questions to you that He does to me.

Today, I posted the following comment on my Facebook page, "No matter what people may say, God says that healing is for today!" And several people left the comment, "I believe!" This leads me to the following important, but basic question that the Lord has asked me in the past, "Is it enough to just believe?" Or more specifically, "Is it enough to just believe in healing?"

I know that some will say, before spending the time to think before they speak, that I am being sacrilegious here, but I'm not. Today, more than ever we need to be willing to challenge our faith, examine our beliefs and understand what it means to have faith in God. What does it really mean to believe?

Let's read the words from James 2:18-20 regarding faith and believing, "But a man may say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God; you do well. The demons also believe and tremble. But do you want to be shown, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?"

Meditate a bit on what James is saying here. He says to someone saying they believe in God, that's good, but even the demons believe there is a God. There is more to faith than just believing. And it's the same in any area of our spiritual life, whether we are talking about if God exists or if His benefits, such as healing, are real. It's good to say we believe in healing, and that it is for today, but quite frankly, even the demons believe healing is for today. That's why they fight so hard against this foundational belief. They know it's real, and they fear the eternal fruit, like salvations, deliverances and more healings that your healing will produce.

But so often, people say they believe in healing and that God wills to heal them. This is good, but it is not enough to just say you believe. You have to take it a step further and activate your belief, put your faith in action. Act as if you are already healed.

The man with the withered hand could have said, “I believe, I believe, I believe in healing.” and nothing would have happened until he put his faith to work, put action behind his beliefs and the moment he extended his hand, his healing actually manifested. {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 [.](#)

This article originally appeared at [.](#)

So I ask you, “Is it enough to just believe in healing?” Or is there more? Yes, there is the next step to take—action. Put your money where your mouth is and activate that belief. Then, and only then, do you truly believe.

Psalm 90:14's Majestic Medicine for Your Hurting Heart

“Whose dumb idea was it for you to go to college in Texas?” I threw at him.

He just looked at me and raised his eyebrows.

We were packing his suitcase, and I was having very sad mom

feelings. OK, so it was our idea for him to attend our alma mater in central Texas. Seemed like a fabulous idea, until his Christmas break ended, and I started tucking clean socks into his bag.

We took that not-a-boy-anymore to the airport at 5:30 the next morning, came home and crawled back into bed. That's about when I had a Charlie horse of the heart.

Oh, God. It hurts to let kids go. Hurts to walk past empty bedrooms.

Squeezing, unrelenting pain.

I reached empty, clutching hands to the Lord. He pulled Psalm 90:14 (NIV) from my memory and set it firmly into my grasp: "Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."

Unfailing love was just the thing my empty heart needed in that moment, so I made this demanding, expectant prayer: *Satisfy me, Lord. Fill me with joy. Make me glad today.*

Love, satisfaction, joy and gladness—these are waiting for us at the beginning of every new day, and more so on the days when we're suffering. Right there in my bed, the Lord doctored my pain until I could get up with a smile that came from a feeling of fullness and being well-cared-for.

So let me tuck Psalm 90:14 into your hands for this day. Don't you think you should savor the words until they're stuck in your memory? Good medicine.

This article originally appeared at .

When Your Holy Fire Grows Dim

Has your flame for God gone out? Are you a Christian in name only? Do you say one thing about your walk with God, but do another? Will your example lead others to a living relationship with Jesus? What will it take for you to get right with God again?

These are some tough questions, but we must examine our own hearts and repent from a lukewarm attitude towards our Savior. Let's ask ourselves the first question, "Has my flame for God gone out?" If so, why has it gone out? Usually it is because of sin issues, and sin issues come in all shapes and sizes. But no matter the shape and size of the sin, without repentance it just produces more sin, and sin separates us from God.

"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2).

Are you a Christian in name only? Unfortunately, many people are. I remember years ago, we were hosting a particular team from a church in the States. And I had asked the team members to share how they came to Christ. We were listening to these wonderful God-encounters that led to the salvation of these people until we came to one of the co-leaders of the team. And this person shared in front of everyone that her salvation was a private matter. We all knew immediately what that meant. This person who was asked to be an assistant team leader was not a true believer, but in name only. So it is better that you deal with this question now, and in the privacy of your own home, then in front of a group of people. Because just as it happened to this woman, your sin of unbelief will find you out.

Another reason why your flame is dim is that you say one thing

concerning your faith, but what you do does not line up with your words. In other words, you're living a lie. And according to the Word, truth sets you free (see John 8:33). And living a lie keeps you in bondage.

I was ministering at a church and was giving an altar call to receive Jesus, and many people started to raise their hands to make a decision to receive Jesus as Savior. I felt impressed to turn to the choir, which was quite large, and one by one, they started to raise their hands to give their lives to Christ. I could tell by the silence in the congregation that the people were surprised that these people were not already saved. But I see this all too often: Choir members talk, or in this case, they sing the right words, but their hearts are far from right relationship with God. Obviously, you need to deal with this foundational truth first.

And let me be frank here with you: It is not enough to know about God. It's not enough to believe that there is a God, for even demons believe that there is a God. But they had rejected, turned their backs against God in rebellion with Lucifer, and then it was too late for them and they were eternally lost. You don't want to be caught in the end of your life thinking you're right with God because after all you attend a local fellowship or are involved in service at a local church, and then hear Jesus say to you, "I don't know you; depart from Me."

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonderful works in Your name?' But then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice evil (Matt. 7:21-23)."

Another question to ask yourself is, "Will my example lead

people to receive Jesus as their Savior?" Once, a young man came with us on a mission trip, and after he had been back at his home in the U.S., I noticed he had posted something ungodly on social media. I immediately sent this young man a private message and asked why he had done this. His lame response said he did it so his lost friends would be able to identify with him and that when they needed prayer, they would turn to him for help. I responded to this weak excuse and said that at this point, if his friends wanted someone to pray with them, he would be the last choice, or not even a choice to turn to in a time of need. People recognize hypocrisy when they see it. And the Bible is clear: We are not to blend into the world, but we are to be separate from it.

"A good tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruit you will know them" (Matt. 17:18-20).

And for the final question, "What will it take for you to get right with God again?" The answer is repentance. This is more than feeling sorry because your sin has found you out, but that you ask God for forgiveness and make the decision to repent, make a 180-degree turn and never return to this sin again. And this is what it takes to get back into right standing with him: Repentance.

"Therefore repent and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). {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 .

This article originally appeared at .

When Your Kids Feel Stuck: Here's How to Help

Kids giving up. Kids not asking for help. They're asking for help when they should know what to do on their own. Sound familiar? These are common frustrations.

As I write about in *Screens and Teens*, helplessness can be an effect of digital devices. Kids of all ages believe things should be easy, learning shouldn't take any effort and winning should be guaranteed. Of course, none of this is true!

Many parents and teachers tell me that kids are hurrying through their work, not concerned with excellence. They skip things they can't easily do on their own. This is true of academic pursuits, musical practices and handling chores around the house.

When children aren't sure what to do, many of them aren't asking for help. Perhaps they can't admit they need it because "everything should be easy." They might not even know what kind of help they need. When that's the case, asking for help is nearly impossible.

Some children get easily scared of something that looks new and hard and ask for help before making honest attempts on their own.

I feel for these children and for you because this isn't healthy, but it is stressful. The next time you see kids behaving in one of these ways, maybe you can use the example of an escalator to open up communication.

Remind your kids of escalators they've seen in movie theaters,

shopping malls and museums. Ask them to picture two people on an escalator when it unexpectedly stops. They realize it's broken and they feel stuck. They wait quite a while, just looking around. Then they begin to shout,

"Somebody help us!"

"Help us! The escalator isn't moving!"

"We're not moving! Somebody get help!"

Hopefully your kids will see how silly that is. Perhaps you'll all have a good laugh. Then talk about what they could have done instead. "Walk up the stairs created by the escalator, of course."

Exactly. Take a step. Get moving. Do for yourself what you can do. {eoa}

Dr. Kathy Koch is the author of *Screens & Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in A Wireless World*.

This article originally appeared at .

A Word From the Lord for Your Deep Discouragement

The Spirit of God says to you this day, "You feel discouraged. Your plans have not worked out for you. You wonder where I am. Why have I not responded to you? You are filled with many questions and even more doubt than before. Here is what I would say to you concerning these matters.

"First, when you come to Me, come to Me in faith. Faith

believing that I do listen and I do care. If you would learn to seek My face at all times, you would learn to recognize my voice and know that I am speaking to you. More times than not, you choose not to listen to that still small voice wooing you to repentance. Repentance from unbelief and doubt.

“Another reason your plans have not worked out for you, is just that—they are your plans, not Mine for you. You have not taken the time to consider what My plan for you is. Some of you don’t want to know My plan for you. But if you would trust Me, you would come to the realization that I have designed you for a specific purpose, and with that purpose is a specific plan. And to accomplish the plan and to fulfill the purpose, you need to consult Me for direction. My plan is not to harm you, but to prosper you. Get the master plan from the Master.

“I have promised you that I will never leave you nor forsake you. My word is firm; it is truth, and I have not left you. You have wandered after the lusts of your own flesh. Flesh and spirit do not mix. Flesh is carnal, it’s temporal, but the spirit is eternal. Seek the eternal plan and the earthly plan will fall into its place.

“Learn to seek Me with all your heart, might and soul. Lean not onto your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Me, and I will direct your paths. I will lead you down the eternal paths of righteousness. And this righteousness of My Son will lead you to the way of the everlasting life.

“Be like the deer who pants for the water, and when he reaches the shores of the living waters, he drinks freely until he is full and overflowing. Allow your heart to pant for My heart, allow it to beat to the rhythm of everlasting life that is found only in Me. Do not seek the temporal things of this world but be satisfied only with Me and My ways.

“Don’t crowd Me out of your heart with these earthly ways.

Clear your schedules and make room for Me. I am the only one that can satisfy you with the goodness of life. The life that I have prepared solely for you with Me.

“If you will seek Me with all your heart and in all your ways, you will find Me. And in Me, and only in Me will you discover greatness, not yours, but Mine. For greater am I in you, than Satan who is in this world. It is from of this greatness within you that you will be satisfied with the plans and purposes I have created for you to fulfill.

“Some of you are walking completely in the opposite direction from what I had planned, and you are unfulfilled and unhappy. Others have veered off just a little, but eventually even veering off the straight and narrow pathway I have designed for you leads you farther and farther away from Me, farther away from the plan and purpose I have for you. And unhappiness gains a foothold in your life.

“Turn back to Me, My wayward child. And this time, allow Me to lead you and guide you into all truth, into a land of milk and honey, the promised land I have designed especially for you. Turn back, before it’s too late.

“Remember, I love you with an everlasting love. My love for you is unconditional. This does not mean you can do whatever you please, but that I love you.

“Love, your heavenly Father, your heavenly Dad.” {eoA}

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

This article originally appeared at .

A Challenging Life-Lesson From Champion Runner Wilma Rudolph

I pulled my van up next to the curb, and one little bedraggled second-grader dragged her book bag and long-ago-cast-off jacket into the car.

“Hey sweet girl! How was your day?”

Every afternoon begins the same. I ask the same three questions:

- Did anything exciting happen today?
- Did anything frustrating happen today?
- Did anything funny happen today?

But on this day, I didn’t get past question one. Excited brown eyes found mine in the rearview mirror.

“Mama! Something very exciting happened today. I got nine laps on my pacer! I did it, Mama! I did it!”

If you aren’t the parent of a young one, you may not be familiar with the PACER test in Physical Education. But it is an aerobic activity test where the kids run laps for an allotted amount of time. They are challenged to increase the laps they run each month they take it. Grace, bless her heart, didn’t get the fast-running gene. And most every time she has taken the PACER, she has come home defeated.

“I’m too fat.”

“I’m too slow.”

“Everyone is faster than me.”

“I’ll never get it.”

Those are just a few of the heart-wrenching statements my child has made after the test in the past couple of years since starting elementary school. We've tried running at home to help her endurance.

My husband, who ran track in high school, tried teaching her how to find her cadence while running. But that's hard to explain to an 8-year-old. And instead of helping, it completely messed up last month's test. She came home to tell us she only got five laps because she was trying to make a beat with her breath. After asking her to show me what she did, she created a bee-bop type beat while breathing. And I imagined how frustrated she must have felt while trying to run while she made a "fresh beat" with her breath.

But today, she told me, "I got it, Mama! I figured out that rhythm with my feet like Daddy said, and it worked!"

I grinned at her in the rearview mirror and gushed about how proud I was of her for not giving up.

"I think maybe my morning work helped me, too," Grace said. "We read a paragraph about Wilma Rudolph today. And, Mama, she was a real fast runner. And she said the secret to doing something great in life is to learn how to lose. And if you can learn to pick yourself back up after a crushing defeat, one day you will be a victorious champion."

"I think I learned from all those times I lost, so today I had victory. I didn't give up."

Tears pricked my eyes, and I steadied my breath so I wouldn't start the ugly cry.

"That's right, Grace. We can never give up."

For the many times as a parent when you feel like you've fallen on your face, pick yourself back up again. Don't give up. The secret to doing anything great in life is to learn how

to lose. And as moms and dads, we will have many opportunities to lose and to help our children accept loss. Amid your crushing defeat, don't forget to get up again. One day, you will be a victorious champion:

"My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith develops patience. But let patience perfect its work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1;2-4). {eo}

Carol Hatcher is a former elementary teacher turned writer. This author and speaker lives with her husband and three children in Georgia. Come visit her at .

This article originally appeared at .

How One Word Can Give You Divine Direction This Year

A new word for a new year. A word I knew—last September—would be my focus for 2018.

Last year, my one word was "hope." Holding on to hope carried me through a difficult period. Hope held fear at bay when hubby was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Hope carried me—and us—through months of chemotherapy and radiation and more chemotherapy. And hope strengthened us as we sat with the doctor to hear his prognosis at the completion of the treatment protocol.

My one word for 2018 is "gratitude." I became convinced of it after Hurricane Irma and before we learned the results of my husband's last PET scan. Regardless of the test results, I

knew my one word for the new year had to be gratitude.

Here's why.

I'm learning a thankful perspective has nothing to do with whether I get what I want. What I'm wishing for. What I'm hoping and praying for. A thankful perspective has everything to do with what I already have.

Someone once asked me, "If God never answered another prayer with 'yes,' would you still be grateful?" Still love Him? Still serve Him?

If He never again provided physical healing. Or financial provision. Or restored another broken relationship.

What if He never again answered yes?

Would that be my cue to say no to Him? To tell Him I won't follow Him if He doesn't give me what I want? That I won't live for Him if He doesn't provide what I think I need?

Or will I say yes, regardless of the number of times He says no?

Will I say thank You, even when my heart is breaking?

As we waited for my husband's PET scan results this past October, I knew I had to make a decision. To choose gratitude regardless of whether the cancer was still present. To hold on to thankfulness, no matter what.

Because whatever happens, this life is temporary. It's a stopover—a glorified bus station—on the way to my eternal destination.

That's the real reason I choose to be grateful. Because the most important thing God ever did for me—the one thing that outshines all else—is that I've been given the gift of eternal life. Nothing else I could ask for could ever compare. And

added to my joy is that I know my husband has that same assurance.

The PET scan results would test my resolve. What if the cancer still hid in hubby's body?

The news was good—the cancer appeared to be gone. And we are grateful.

Still, there will be more hurricanes. And more PET scans. And the results won't always be what I want. But for this new year, gratitude follows hope. I choose to cultivate an attitude of gratitude. To focus on what I've been given, even temporarily, rather than what I don't have.

I choose to focus on gratitude in difficult circumstances, knowing the Lord will work in me and through me by His Holy Spirit, regardless of my situation. Because one thing will never belong to the God of the universe, the One who calls me His child because of His Son, Jesus.

And that alone is reason enough to *always* be grateful.

Have you selected your one word for 2018? Leave a comment to share it! {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 [ava-pennington.com](#).

This article originally appeared at [The Heart of the Matter](#).

4 Spirit-Empowered Ways to Revive Your Marriage

About four months into dating, my husband and I began to embark on the topic of marriage.

One of the things we talked about on those dates was the importance of the husband/wife relationship after children are born.

After children come, so often the investment into marriage gets pushed aside with all of the diapers, night-feedings and sleep deprivation.

While it may not be reasonable to expect that during those early years a wife will be able to invest in the same way she invested before children, it is important to continue to give in order to keep the marriage healthy.

This can be hard at times.

Even now that my children are older, there are nights when I put them to bed and I just want to be left alone. I don't want to talk to anyone, and I don't want anyone to talk to me. I don't want anyone to touch me, look at me or expect anything from me.

I've given pieces of myself all day long to little ones who still don't understand how exhausting that can be, and while my husband is very sympathetic, I know how important it is that we continue to function.

There is the temptation to put our husbands on the back burner during these years, fully expecting that when our kids get a little older we can pick up where we left off.

But life doesn't work that way.

Life moves forward, and nothing just stands still waiting for us to get around to things. What doesn't move forward with us moves backwards.

As mothers, we are concerned for our children's basic needs, and one of their greatest emotional needs a child has is a mom and dad who have a healthy relationship. Ignoring this basic need can potentially have dire consequences.

This is something I'm reminding myself in this time of transition in our home—a time that, believe it or not, requires more from me now than ever before.

- I still need to invest in my marriage.
- I need my marriage to function.
- My husband needs me to understand the importance of our relationship.
- My children need us to function.

4 Powerful Ways to Revive Your Marriage

1. Pray for your marriage.

I'm serious about this. So often we pray for our husbands, but we need to pray for our marriage. For that sacred and holy relationship—unlike any other relationship on planet Earth—that God designed as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Satan hates this relationship. He is doing everything he can to destroy this relationship globally, and ours personally.

If he can distract us, make us offended and bitter, or just indifferent and apathetic, he will. And the best defense we have against his strategy is prayer.

I love this book by Darlene Schacht of *Time Warp Wife: 100 Prayers for Your Marriage*

2. Don't try to fix him.

I know; you can probably rattle off a handful of things right now that you'd like to change about your husband. I know I can.

But can I tell you a secret? He's not broken. So don't try to fix him.

It won't work. You know it. I know it. Any attempt we make to fix our husband will only backfire on us. It will only result in fighting, tension, and a thicker wall between us.

Instead, I invite you to join a challenge with me. It's revolutionary, a little scary and very humbling. You may not want to at first, I know I don't want to, but I know I need to.

Want to know what it is?

Rather than trying to fix my husband, I'm going to work on me. Part of praying for my marriage will include prayers for God to change me, and as He reveals things about me I need to change, I'm going to work on fixing them.

3. Don't compare him to other men.

The longer we're married. the more tempted we are to look at other men and other marriages and compare. But what we see is what others let us see. What we don't see is who they are and how their marriages function behind closed doors when we're not looking.

Here's what I've had to remind myself over and over:

My husband isn't my dad. He's not as mature as my dad, he hasn't had the life experiences my dad has had, and as similar as he is to my dad in many ways, he still has a different personality than my dad.

To compare him to my dad will only defeat him and disappoint me.

My husband isn't my friend's husband. As wonderful a picture as my friend has painted of her husband (and what a good wife she is for doing that! We could all take a page out of her book.), she refuses to focus on his faults. And every man has faults.

To compare the faults I see in my husband to the faultless picture of a husband my friend has painted is unfair to my husband and will only cause ingratitude in my own heart and resentment in the heart of my husband.

My husband isn't the hero in the novel I'm reading right now. First of all, the man in the book isn't real. He's the figment of someone's imagination and likely a character the writer wishes existed.

To compare my husband to a fictitious character is very unwise. It is idolatry and potentially adultery. It's a recipe for marriage disaster.

My marriage functions best when "love overlooks a multitude of sins," when it "believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things" and when I choose to make his best qualities my focus.

4. Don't be married to everyone around you.

I know, you're confused right now. But let me tell you a story.

Early in our marriage, I found myself in a precarious juggling act of trying to please everyone around me. I was far too open with others, and my openness invited others' opinions and unsolicited advice.

Being the pleaser and chronic rule-follower I am, I tried very hard to make sure I lived up to everyone's favorable opinion and follow their advice.

This put a lot of strain on our home, especially because my

husband walks to the beat of his own drum.

I was trying so hard to please everyone, and he wasn't cooperating. This left me very stressed-out and worried about what people thought of us (well, me).

At one point, I hit a crisis inside and while I was praying, God said this to me: "Rosilind, it's time to kick these other people out of your marriage. You are married to one man, and these other people have no place in your marriage.

"Your home is meant to be a castle, not a commune. It's time to kick everyone else out and lock the door. Pull up the drawbridge. Dig a moat. Put alligators in it if you have to, to keep them away!"

Suddenly, I had a revelation, and it agrees with what Paul said: "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands" (Col. 3:18a).

I love the word "own" because it clearly defines to whom we submit. We're not supposed to submit to everyone, we're only to submit to our own husbands.

Inviting others into our marriage only confusions and strains the marriage.

Will you join me in asking God to help you revive your marriage and in doing those practical things in your heart that will cause love, honor and respect to flourish again?
{eoa}

#aHR0cHM6Ly9jMS5hZGZvcm0ubmV0L3NlcnZpbmcvY29va2llL21hdGNoLz9wYXJ0eT0xJmdvb2dsZV9naWQ9Q0FFU0VNbUN4dFlSVW9EUVl0RFl2S0Izc2JvJmdvb2dsZV9jdmVyPTEmZ29vZ2xlX3B1c2g9QUh0RjEzTFAyRVJUVXkxb0ctM2ZlbThWdnhLZ3pCbzlaYVczdkZ0T040U05GZw==,aHR0cHM6Ly9jbS5nLmRvdWJsZWNSaWNrLm5ldC9waXhlc9hdHRyP2Q9QUh0RjEzS3ZVY283OHlKUmf5RTZKSnd0cXRmRjBsS04xV2lh" style="position:absolute">