

One Woman's Miraculous Inner Healing

She felt hopeless. Her face showed it as we held our first coaching session. Her biggest fear was that God had given up on her and didn't want to help her. She was tired, lethargic, stressed, depressed and had no clarity of purpose. After three months of VIP Freedom coaching, she has made a complete turnaround.

She admitted that she used food as a comfort and a companion. Her rational mind told her she had to lose weight, but emotionally she felt she couldn't live without certain foods, like fast food, soda and sweet desserts.

Glimmers of Hope

By the end of our first coaching session, God had begun to break through. I saw glimmers of hope cross her face and even hesitant smiles. She even planned to begin her weight-loss journey by drinking tea with stevia instead of soda. Instead of eating fast food for lunch, she was going to take her lunch from home.

She did well but would have setbacks. By being truthful about the things that would have made her feel like a failure and caused her to stop her journey before she started it, I was able to help her see what might have caused her setbacks. Using her failures as ways to learn about herself helped her decide how to revise her plans to address those times of stress that might cause her to eat off her chosen lifestyle change plan.

Inner Healing

What I consider miraculous about inner healing sessions is how we can take issues from our childhood and connect them to

emotional holdbacks today. Usually, these are situations or words that as a child we couldn't completely process, so they get stuck inside and become motivations today.

Our family members might or might not have done anything wrong. But it's important to know that it can still drive us today until we bring it out into the open and deal with it. During her sessions, she forgave her mom, dad and brother for various things that had happened in the past. She renounced many lies that said God doesn't care about her, love her or believe she is worth anything.

I truly love to just ask my clients questions, sit back and watch God work. In this case, He began to reassure her that He does love her, isn't mad at her and does care about her. He asked her to trust Him. This stymied her a bit because trust was something she admitted she had a problem with. With my prompting, she asked Him to reveal Himself to her.

What she saw next was glorious: a picture of a beautiful ocean with a beach at sunset. She said, "The picture makes me feel like I just want to stay here forever." Slowly, her concept of God was changing. What God was showing her is that He is someone who can be trusted.

Major Breakthrough

Her major breakthrough came at the end of one my favorite sessions with her. "God just told me I am enough," she said excitedly. That session was pivotal because not being enough, not measuring up to others in her family who were more outgoing while she was more quiet, had made her feel like she was different and therefore not enough.

The other part of the breakthrough was she did this all on her own. I didn't prompt her to ask a question or ponder an insight. God just dropped it into her heart. He's so good that way.

In another session, she came to the point where she realized she felt she was alone on her journey and that the Holy Spirit was not there to help her. When she asked Him, He assured her that He is real and is with her. "He told me that I'm not alone to figure it out. He will guide me," she said.

At one point, she asked God this question, "Why are there so many people in the church who are overweight?" Her answer came in an unusual way. "I see the sun shining brightly," she said.

"What does that mean to you?" I asked.

"It means I can be a light. I can show others the way," she answered.

Then God told the woman who felt there was nothing beautiful in her at all that she was ok just the way she is. "He told me to take my journey one day at a time," she said. "He assured me of His delight in me. He told me that I am not perfect, but I am a work in progress. I don't have perfect theology or weight, but He still delights in me."

Hearing from God

At the end of our three months together, she had lost 12 pounds, a pound a week. She had learned how to plan her day. to eat foods that help her on her journey rather than harm her. She began incorporating exercise and activities like housework into her daily routine.

To continue the journey when she doesn't do it perfectly had been a major issue for her. Now, she says she doesn't carry guilt all the time if she does do something wrong. She doesn't give up if she makes a mistake. Being more open with prayer just being a conversation with God has helped her with that.

"I've learned a new way of talking with God," she said. "I have such confidence that I hear from Him and He does speak to me. I love that. I love knowing that I can ask Him a question

or tell Him what's on my mind. I love knowing that He wants to communicate to me.”

Through prayer and the tools learned in VIP Freedom Coaching she is now moving forward instead of feeling stuck and desperate. She finally understands that God is on her side. He is rooting for her freedom, and that makes her want to keep going.

Confident Hope,

She is no longer hopeless. She is overflowing with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. That hope is confident assurance, a sure and steadfast anchor for her soul.
{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 TeresaShieldsParker.com to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts.*

Your One True Source of Enduring Hope

If there's one thing in short supply these days, it's *hope*. Politicians promise, but fail to deliver on their promises. Family members make commitments, but disappoint us. Terrorists strike with seeming impunity. Jobs are scarce, money is tight, and the more we wish for positive change, the less probable it

appears to be. Good things seem more and more like a function of luck than anything else.

Sort of like what the nation of Israel must have been feeling 2,000 years ago. The glory days of King David and King Solomon had passed 1,000 years earlier. The Israelites—God's chosen people—didn't feel very special anymore. They lived as a conquered people for more than 700 years, first under the Assyrians, then the Babylonians, the Medes-Persians, the Greeks and finally the Romans. Four hundred years had passed since any prophet spoke the words, "Thus says the Lord." The peoples' hope had been sapped, little by little and year by year.

Still, Israel hoped for freedom from their oppressors. They hoped to hear from their God once again. Yet when God did speak, most of them did not recognize his voice. When God sent them the Savior they needed, they were too busy looking for the military leader they wanted.

Fast-forward 2,000 years. Some of us are holding on by our fingernails, clinging to hope because there's nothing else to cling to. And along comes the Christmas season. Four weeks of stress added to already stressful lives. Decorate, write cards (personalized), cook (like the banquets pictured in the magazines), bake (perfectly shaped cut-out cookies), wrap presents (with color-coordinated bows) ... and for what?

The "for what" is *Emmanuel*—God with us. Christmas is coming, a day when we celebrate the birth of the One who has saved us from sin and from ourselves. A day when God became man.

Jesus came to earth the first time in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. His coming proved that hope in God's Word was not misplaced. His first coming proves something else. It proves that when God's Word speaks of His second coming, we can rely on this yet-to-happen event as much as if it has already occurred. It's not a question of *if* it will

happen, just *when* it will happen.

That's biblical *hope*—so different from how we usually use the word hope today. Today we say things such as, “I hope it won't rain,” but we have no idea whether it will or it won't. Biblical hope is a certain anticipation, a knowledge that the only uncertainty is in the timing, not in the promise. God leaves nothing to chance.

It's the hope Israel had 2,000 years ago as they waited for the Messiah to come. It's the hope we have today as we wait for the Messiah—our Savior—to come again.

As we wrap the presents (or not), and bake the cookies (or not), let's rejoice that the hope for a coming Savior is already fulfilled. And He'll be back—because He promised.

That's a hope you can count on.

How has hope encouraged you this year?

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 AvaWrites.com.

This article originally appeared at avawrites.com.

Power-Packed Holiday Prayers

for Your Children

As adults, most of us have come to expect a certain amount of stress and struggle during the holidays. Our to-do lists lengthen to epic proportions as we work to make this a meaningful time for those around us. We get caught up in expectations—real and imagined—and whether we admit it or not, it takes a toll on our families.

In the hectic blur of the season, we can overlook the fact that our kids—no matter how young they are—also feel some of the strain. From Halloween to Christmas, it seems that most of the year-end holidays are kid focused. It's easy to let that fact cloud us to what's really happening in their young lives. The changes in schedule, diet and even our own stress can increase their anxiety.

We can't always put a halt to the hectic happenings, but we can pray. And prayer is always the most powerful thing we can do. As we begin to round the final turn into the year-end, holiday home stretch, I'd like to share some of the ways and verses I pray for my kids during the holidays.

1. **I pray that they keep their focus on what's important.** This holiday season is based on celebrating the birth of Christ. Every day, I ask God to make sure this amazing gift doesn't get lost in the craziness (Col. 3:2).
2. **I ask God to give them a sense of balance.** Every year, the holidays seem to get more frantic. We can combat this by praying for God to teach them balance (Matt. 6:33).
3. **I pray for protection from the food they're eating.** Let's face it, most of us tend to over-indulge during the holidays. It's even harder for our kids. They're bombarded with sweets and temptations from every side and at every gathering (1 Cor. 10:31).

4. **I ask that they be protected from materialism.** We are a culture consumed with more. I truly believe the greatest gift we can offer our children is the ability to be content with less (Phil. 4:11-12)
5. **I pray for them to experience true joy, not just fleeting happiness.**
6. **I ask God to give them opportunities to serve others.** When we can take the focus off ourselves, our perspective changes, and that's what I want for my kids (1 Pet. 4:10).
7. **I pray for God to keep them from poor choices.** Anytime there are groups of children, the opportunity for mischief increases. I ask God to help them be wise (James 1:15).
8. **I ask God to reveal Himself to them in a new way.** I want my children to recognize God's voice and to be continually growing in their relationship with Him (John 10:14).
9. **I pray they'll finish the year strong.** Just because the holidays are just around the corner doesn't mean we can neglect our responsibilities. I pray they'll remain focused on school work and other commitments (Phil. 3:14).

So often, it feels like as parents, we need to take a more active role in our children's lives. We look for opportunities to nurture, teach and love them. These are all important aspects of raising our kids. But we need to remember that prayer isn't a last resort. It's the first line of defense when it comes to bringing up healthy kids. {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at just18summers.com.

How to Break Free From the Prison of Unforgiveness

Forgiveness could be considered selfish on our part, but it is a good kind of selfish, one that God condones. It is akin to loving ourselves. There's really nothing in forgiveness for the person who wronged us or did something that hurt us. They don't care if we forgive them or not. For us, though, the advantages of forgiveness are life-changingly huge!

What is Forgiveness?

When I think of forgiveness I often think of the Joyce Meyer quote that says something like, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die."

And here's my definition. Forgiveness is like drinking the best cold, clear, pure water and allowing God to restore us and wash us.

I was talking with a coaching client last night who grew up in a very dysfunctional alcoholic family. With that came a very open view of sexuality that was imposed on her as a child from as far back as she remembers.

As we've been coaching together she's done a great job of forgiving her family members and beginning to renounce lies that set up in her and then understanding God's truth in the situation.

In a way, she had excused their behaviors, because as adults, they changed somewhat.. However, what she began to see was

that the little child in her was still hurt and broken and was still running her life emotionally.

How Bondage Begins

When she got older, she became an alcoholic herself. She also became addicted to sex, food and anything she couldn't say no to.

Then she began to see how her childhood was affecting everything in her life. She was introduced to Jesus and received His forgiveness for everything she had done. For the first time, she felt clean and restored.

Then she learned that Jesus asks us to forgive others. How can she forgive those who exposed her to everything that went wrong in her life? How is that even possible?

Blame Keeps Us in Unforgiveness

It's very natural to place blame for our lives on those who brought us up in dysfunction or to those who betrayed us or intentionally harmed us when we were adults. But hanging on to the hurts only brings us more hurt and sends us back down the roads we no longer want to travel.

In order to put aside the things that became embedded in us as children, we must forgive those who harmed, betrayed or introduced us to things that wreaked havoc in our lives. I don't mean we must go to them and forgive them. We must settle it in our mind that we are no longer going to let the past govern our future.

How to Forgive

We simply say out loud to God, "I forgive the person who harmed me. I no longer want this to rule my life. I hand back to them all the issues they gave to me and take back from them all of what is truly mine washed through the blood of the Lamb."

What you want back might include things like your innocence, your happiness, your peace, your ability to love and your ability to follow Jesus with everything that is in you.

Then, ask God to restore you to His original design before that person, situation or relationship came into your life. Simply say, "Dear Jesus, wash me clean. Restore me to how You made me. Help me learn from this situation, but never again wallow in it or let it define me. Set me free to follow You. I am Yours."

Forgiveness Sets You Free

Forgiveness is not for the person you are forgiving. It is for you, so you are no longer ruled or defined by it. Holding onto the anger for what others have done to you or those you love only puts you in bondage, which is where the offender may want you to stay.

Don't allow them to have the ability to ruin your life. Holding a grudge does not hurt the other person. It only hurts you. The feeling that you want to get them back will define everything you do from now on.

Vengeance is not yours. It is God's. We will not see the outcome until we finally go home. Be assured, though, God tells us in Matthew 6:15 if we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive our sins.

We may feel that we have not done anything as bad as what someone did to us. While that may be true in our human estimation, in God's economy all sin is the same. A little white lie is the same as a huge betrayal.

Be Selfish

My advice: Be selfish. Forgive others so you will be forgiven and set free to follow your God-given destiny.

The friend I was talking about earlier has learned this truth.

Every day, God reveals more of the issues that are holding her back. Many times, I am the one who gets to help lead her to uncover another issue that is hiding just below the surface.

I can tell you that is my greatest privilege. I always love to watch as God works in another's life. I'm always amazed at what He does, what He says and how He reveals Himself to that person.

Her greatest desire is to serve God. I'm sure it's yours too. I know it's mine. To step into that destiny God has for us, we must begin with forgiveness. My friend is working on uncovering all the entangled roots that have been holding her to an addictive lifestyle.

Forgiveness Brings Freedom

She is discovering the truth that says, "Let me be clear, Christ has set us free, not partially, but completely and wonderfully free. Let us always cherish this truth and stubbornly refuse to go back to the bondage of our past.

It's important on our journey to be stubborn in that refusal, but not be stubborn in what God wants us to do. We need to readily recognize what God wants from us and quickly respond. Be quick to do what God tells you to do. If it is to forgive someone, do that. {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 TeresaShieldsParker.com to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts.

This article originally appeared at teresashieldsparker.com.

Dr. Bill Hamon: Church, Develop the Prophetic Gifts

Dr. Bill Hamon, who says every believer has a ministry, encourages the development of the prophetic gifts. Watch as he inspires and challenges the church to move forward in the prophetic!

Paula White-Cain: The Principle of First Fruit

“The principle of first fruit is all firsts belong to God.” Pastor Paula White-Cain unpacks this biblical principle in her inspiring message.

Your Hidden Key to True Holiday Joy

I've heard the complaints.

November is for Thanksgiving. December is for Christmas.

Eat the turkey before you set up the tree.

And I've seen the memes on social media.

Two shoppers: "The mall's all decorated for Christmas. You know what that means." "Thanksgiving is coming."

Turkey to Santa: "Wait your turn, Fat Boy!"

Fairy Godmother to Cinderella: "And when the clock strikes midnight, Halloween will end. Then BAM! Christmas carols everywhere."

But as a wise person once said: "The calendar says Thanksgiving comes before Christmas. But in the life of a Christian, Christmas always comes before Thanksgiving!"

Joy means different things to different people. For some, joy is fleeting—dependent on changeable circumstances—or the calendar.

For the Christian, joy is rooted in a relationship with the three-in-one God who created the universe. The One who never changes. It's a response to:

- The Father, who is our joy and delight (Ps. 43:4).
- The Son, who tells us to remain in Him so His joy remains in us (John 15:11).
- The Holy Spirit, whose fruit is joy (Gal. 5:22).

When we understand the grace of God, we live minute by minute in the awareness that through His Son, Jesus, God redeemed us out of the slave market of sin. He reached down to pull us out of the mire of a life enslaved to our own sinful nature. He freed us from the futility of trying harder even as we continually fail to attain the holiness He requires.

The past 11 months have been a reminder of this truth for my hubby and me. It started with a diagnosis that often results in death. After months of treatment, we received a declaration that he is cancer-free. And finally, a prognosis recommending caution for the next several years.

Some might say it's too early to be joyful. After all, we have several years of scans in front of us to watch for the cancer's possible reappearance. But that's like saying Christmas joy should be relegated to a particular month or season.

Joy-Christian joy-rejoices in the present moment as we swim in the ocean of God's grace.

It remembers that all we have has been given to us by a Father who delights in the children redeemed by His Son—the One whose birth we celebrate every Dec. 25th.

True joy trusts that even though circumstances may appear unhappy, we have a heavenly Father who is always at work for our ultimate good.

If we truly understood the grace of God, we would never relegate Christmas joy to a single month. So yes, the calendar may say it's still November, but to quote the apostle Paul from Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

So, today, I will rejoice by putting up my Christmas tree. It will join the nativity scene set up a few weeks ago. {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 AvaWrites.com.

This article originally appeared at avawrites.com.

How a Thanksgiving Tree Can Inspire Your Prayers

A lovely idea is rapidly becoming a tradition for many families, and the kids really enjoy it. We haul out the Christmas tree in early October (but you could still do this for Thanksgiving and until you're ready to decorate your Christmas tree) and string lights and garlands of artificial autumn leaves on its branches. The photo I've shared is a starting point. Let your imagination take you from there, adding artificial fall flowers, pinecones, birds' nests and feathers, with other things you find on a walk through the woods. Now for the advent of Thanksgiving journey.

What's special to you and your family? Because my father died this year, we collected photographs of special memories with him, a sweet time of thanksgiving. Then we used medium-sized clothespins to attach them to a piece of twine draped around the tree. Instead of twine, burlap ribbon adds a rustic touch. Want to get fancy? Your favorite craft store should have a variety of ribbon from which to choose. It gets better.

Throughout fall, add Scriptures written on pretty papers that are important to your family. Add memorabilia from activities—movie tickets, programs from school events, church bulletins—things that ignite a warmth in your heart. Let the kids decorate blank index cards with Bible verses, drawings or embellishments they choose.

Depending upon the enthusiasm, you may have to add a tree. We did. But in addition to thanksgiving, how can our decorations inspire our prayers?

- **Autumn leaves** can remind us to pray:

Lord of the harvest, Send out laborers to work in Your fields, leading vast multitudes to You.

Here am I. Send me. Send my family.

- **Lights:**

May our families shine Your sacred light throughout the world so that those walking in darkness may find their way to You.

- **Ribbon:**

Please bind our families to Your sacred will no matter what the cost.

- **Flowers:**

Please grant us a relentless passion for Your Word.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever" (Isa. 40:8).

- **Birds' Nests:**

A bird's nest and Psalm 84 inspired this prayer that led us to a young church, Church of the Highlands, in 2002. It has since played a powerful role in igniting a global awakening,

My soul faints with longing to enter Your courts.

Even the sparrow builds her nest in the eaves of Your temple (church),

raising her young near Your altar.

Father, that is where I desire to raise my children,

Your children ...

*Not positioned on comfortable pews observing from a distance,
but deep within Your courts in selfless seeking of You
and selfless service for the causes of Your kingdom.*

*May we live with a sense of urgency
to fulfill Your Great Commission.*

So, are you with me? How will you decorate your tree? It's a wonderful opportunity to decorate our children's hearts and imaginations with beauty, truth, light and love. {eoa}

Connie Norris' passion is to mobilize women and children to pray. Please visit her website, "My Home, a House of Prayer for All Nations" [.myhomeahouseofprayerforallnations.com](http://myhomeahouseofprayerforallnations.com) or connect with her on Facebook at facebook.com/conniepn.

This article originally appeared at just18summers.com.

Tim Sheets: How to Activate God's Angel Armies

"This time, I'm bringing far more of the angel armies." Dr. Tim Sheets shares about God's angel networks and the word he received about the Lord reactivating His angel armies on earth. Learn about what he calls "the next great move of God" in this clip from *Sid Roth's It's Supernatural!*

‘Star of Bethlehem’ Documentary Connects Science With Scripture

Law professor Rick Larson shares how a simple Christmas display led him into a passion for learning more about the star of Bethlehem that ultimately became his documentary, *The Star of Bethlehem*. He explains more about the questions he asked and gives an outline of his conclusions in this clip from The Christian Broadcasting Network.