

Bill and Pam Farrel: 'Christmas Is For-Giving'

The holidays can help bring families together—but sometimes, they highlight problems as well. Best-selling authors, speakers and family experts Bill and Pam Farrel share a powerful message on forgiveness.

After Maria, Operation Blessing Makes a Difference in Puerto Rico

Natural disasters from fires to hurricanes to floods marked the U.S. during the fall of 2017, and the body of Christ stepped up to respond in love. This inspiring clip showcases the work of Operation Blessing in Puerto Rico, which continues to suffer in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Watch God at work through His people!

Dynamic Testimony of Healing

Through Forgiveness

Spirit-Led

“In Him we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Christ, which are in heaven and on earth” (Eph. 1: 7-10).

God is faithful and true, and He forgives our iniquities our perversity and our sin. The following is a beautiful testimony of forgiveness.

A divorced man with seven daughters was given a chance to help his daughters start to heal emotionally from years of pain that he caused them, but he struggled within himself to make the right choice. Convinced they would never believe him, he was afraid his daughters would not accept his apology.

He also struggled to forgive himself. We shared with him the power of Jesus Christ to forgive and to release us from all unrighteousness. We gave him the opportunity to make his life right with Jesus. He accepted the offer and prayed and asked the Father to forgive him and asked Jesus to be his Savior.

We began to explain to the man about his daughters' need to hear him apologize to them so that they could start to heal. Without his sincere words of sorrow for the pain his iniquities caused, they would have a very difficult life. We asked him if this was what he wanted for them.

As sincere tears flowed from his eyes, he asked each one of his girls to forgive him. Each one fell into his arms and cried from the depths of their hearts.

This man made the right choice: He asked the Lord to forgive him for his wickedness and then asked his daughters to forgive him as well. The Lord knew the sincerity of this man's heart and pardoned his iniquities, his perversity and his sin. And the Lord knows the sincerity of your heart as well. And He wills to give you another opportunity to make painful situations in your life right too.

For more on forgiveness [click 3 Steps to Spiritual Readiness.](#) {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at beckydvorak.com.

5 Iron-Sharpening Elements of a Proverbs 27:17 Friendship

According to Facebook, I have more than a thousand friends. Some of them I've never met in person. Many are acquaintances. Some are closer friends.

Then there are the friendships that go deeper. These are the relationships that have stood the test of time. Friendships based on eternal priorities. Loving relationships that truly want the best for the other person...even when "the best" might be a little painful.

These are the friendships that fulfill Proverbs 27:17: "Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."

What does this type of friendship look like?

They require good listening skills.

Good listeners take the time to listen. They're not in a hurry and they allow me the space I need to process what I'm experiencing and confide in them when I'm ready. They listen between the lines of conversation—listening as much for what is not said as for what is said. These friends can look me in the eye and know when I'm holding back. This is a skill I need to continue to develop!

They are encouraging relationships.

These friends know when I need a phone call, a hug, or a card. They're the ones who drop me an email to say, "This verse reminded me of you. How are you doing today?" Their encouragement is not flattery, but rather provides the fuel to keep on persevering when I'm weary. It's difficult to encourage others if I'm self-focused.

They provide the opportunity to ask hard questions.

Small talk is nice. Surface questions are polite. But these friends have earned permission to ask questions such as, "What has the Lord taught you since we last met?" Or, "What has the Holy Spirit been convicting you of?" Still, the way we ask those questions can make a huge difference. This is not an interrogation.

They offer the opportunity to give without expecting in return.

These friends give of their time for lunch or coffee or maybe just a phone call. They might send a card or a bookmark—something tangible to remind me of this precious relationship. Still, the relationship is not about the gifts. As the adage says, "It's the thought that counts!"

They are relationships that include prayer.

Nothing beats the encouragement of being told someone is praying for me. To know that in their intimate time with the Lord, my name is being lifted before the throne of heaven is balm for my spirit. Praying for someone else communicates that this is a friend who is as concerned with spiritual and eternal matters as they are with temporal and physical ones.

This is not just the kind of friend I want to have. It's the kind of friend I want to be.

How about you? {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at avawrites.com.

The Unshakable Power of Facing Your Secret Truths

A secret is a truth we want to hide or conceal from others. However, when we try to keep the secret from ourselves, it is denial. The truth is too difficult for us to deal with. But, the more we try to hide a truth, the more it cries out to be heard. Truths we try to keep from ourselves are the ones that

cry the loudest.

Liar! Liar!

We've had many foster children through our home. Lynn* became adept at lying because she believed her own lies. When she would do something wrong, she would tell herself a story with her own slant and would thoroughly believe it.

Nathan* had a Ph.D. in deception. Even when cornered with all the facts and two witnesses, he would swear that everyone else had their facts wrong.

In both cases, they kept secrets from themselves. It was easier than facing the truth about themselves. They made their own truth, and they kept the real truth secret for as long as possible.

Secret Truths

We guard our secret truths, conceal them, hide them. For many, the truth is more difficult to face than grand efforts at trying to keep it secret. There are secrets we keep from others and secrets we try to keep even from ourselves.

Those we try to keep from ourselves are the most difficult to control. They want to rise to the surface, even though we try to shove them down into the cellar and throw things at them to keep them quiet.

Sometimes this looks like more things we think we need to do, sort of like trying to outrun the secret. Other times it is expressed in self-destructive, addictive behaviors. We throw things at the secrets like: drugs, alcohol, food and more food, sugar and more sugar, absence of food, throwing up food to keep others from knowing we are eating too much food, pornography or buying more things.

One thing I know about truth: It will be heard. It may take years, decades, lifetimes, but it wants to be heard, even if

just by ourselves.

Telling the Truth

The opposite of keeping secrets from ourselves is sharing our truths and embracing them. Mine will be different from anyone else who was present for portions of my life. No one has been in my shoes for every day, of my life. Even if they were walking alongside me all the way, every moment, they do not have access to my brain, my processing system, my filter through which I experience the world.

I can't remember the details of every scene in my life. I can remember many sights, sounds, tastes, feels, smells of houses, places and things. They form the backdrops for the scenes to unfold. I can remember many scenes almost verbatim, like a movie played in 3-D, surround sound on IMAX. It is so real I can reach out and touch it. I can remember how the scenes impacted me—some negative, some positive. This is my truth.

Truth Changes Me

Remembering these and writing about these doesn't change what has occurred in my life, but it can help me understand how these things are causing me to do things I really don't want to do today. It's not just remembering these things that can be impactful, but interpreting how those were seen through my lens as a 3-year old, 8-year old and so on into adulthood.

It changes me as I allow God to help me process through each situation which I've shoved into a supposedly secret compartment of my brain. It is then that I can begin to unravel the truth from the secret and bring it into the light of day.

I am like Lynn in that there are things I remember completely and those I tend to fill in of my own accord. This is dangerous if you are a 64-year old still seeing through an 8-year old's lens. This is why I must bring God into the

equation to help me understand how to embrace the emotions I felt as a child, forgive situations I would rather not face and go forward understanding God will comfort, teach, protect and provide for me. He will be my companion, the one who understands my deepest needs and the one who tells me who I really am.

Tell the Truth

Unlike Nathan, I do not have a Ph.D. in lies. I'm not very good at it, even though I will admit having tried it a time or two. I see the truth about my life very well. I've learned the best way to keep my story straight, it simply to tell the truth. The more I tell God's truth about me, the more my ears hear it. and the more His truth becomes a part of me and changes me.

This is the truth I am understanding today. It is not about living in the past, but seeing what life-giving truths to carry forward to the future and what death-bringing lies to release. I give God memories which only bring me fear, shame, guilt and rebellion and take hold of His truths which bring renewal, restoration and revival.

Experience Truth

I have been memorizing Scriptures since I was small so I rationally know the words. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32) are some of those words. I thought that as long as I knew the facts about Jesus I was fine.

The word "know" in this verse goes a bit deeper than just head-knowledge. It's more about knowing it in the depths of our souls and making it a part of the very fabric of our being. It's when we experience for ourselves the truth, as it says in The Message, that Jesus' truth will free us.

It's when we deny how He is leading us and go off on our own

way, choosing not to be accountable to God, anyone else or even ourselves that we become captured by our own desires. We are supposed to deny our own selfish interests and step into the truth of what God is telling us will be beneficial.

The truth will win every time. Knowing it, really experiencing it, will set us free. We must give up secrets. They are doing us no good. Instead, step into the light of God's truth and live. {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at teresashieldsparker.com.

Activating God's Psalm 103 Benefits

The Scriptures remind us to “forget not all of His benefits” (Ps. 103:2b). But first, we have to know what His benefits are in order to remember to activate them in our lives. Psalms so beautifully describes His benefits:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all

His benefits, who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. 103:1-5).

1. He forgives our iniquities.
2. He heals all our diseases.
3. He redeems our life from destruction ("the pit").
4. He crowns us with lovingkindness and tender mercies.
5. He satisfies our mouth with good things.
6. He renews our youth like the eagle's.

In my next article, we will look into "He forgives our iniquities."

Supernatural Healing: Good or Evil?

Some Christians really squawk when they hear someone teach or testify about healing, as if healing were an evil thing. They would be less convicted for their doubt and unbelief if the person were not healed to begin with. But we are not going to be like the squawkers, Instead we are going to ponder on the goodness of this gift of healing. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change or shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Healing is a gift from God, and is found through the Bible. In other words, healing is biblical. Because it comes from our Savior Himself, it is beyond good—it's great!

For those suffering from severe pain, God's gift of supernatural healing is the greatest pain reliever there is. When a man suffering from a year-year migraine receives supernatural healing and all pain instantly disappears, he starts to rejoice. When a woman's painful and crippled arthritic hands heal, she sheds tears of joy.

Does the mama of a 20-year-old girl, who was born with a deformed hip that never grew correctly and caused her little girl daily pain and suffering, question if healing is good or evil? Of course not; she knows by the witness of her own heart and by the smile on her daughter's face that this is only good, and she glorifies God for His healing power.

When these people receive their healing, they do not question if healing is evil. No, they know it's good, and they know it comes from God, It changes their life, and they can't help but testify on His goodness to others.

God's gift of supernatural healing is good and perfect. {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at beckydvorak.com.

What to Do When You Find Yourself in the Wilderness of the Soul

I distinctly remember, as a new believer, the first time that I felt as if God had left me. There I was, navigating an

emotional valley, seemingly on my own. It was a weighty declaration, as I recall, to tell a fellow believer that I was going through a wilderness season. Though a bit more mature today, after being a Christ-follower for over four decades, I am still completely undone by wilderness of soul—the desert encounters.

Natural deserts are a part of the ecosystem known as drylands. The primary characteristic is a lack of water. Drylands cover 40 percent of the world's land surface, and contain thirty percent of the world's population. Cultivating crops and life resources is doable, but more difficult. Onward to our spiritual application.

Learning from Our Choices

The experiences of Israel in the wilderness are clearly formulated into a divine exhortation. They are nearly chilling reminders.

“They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness” (1 Cor. 10:3-5).

When God gives a clear warning or an example for us to note, wisdom says I need to pay attention.

Before you say, “This will never happen on my watch,” consider this: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12).

Thankfully, the next verse offers hope:

“No temptation has taken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it”

(1 Cor. 10:13).

You mean that Israel had a way out of the wilderness other than the fate they experienced? Precisely.

They made wrong lifestyle choices, clearly put forth in the passage: idolatry, sexual immorality, testing Christ, grumbling ([1 Cor. 10:7-10](#)).

These remain killer choices today. Perhaps you are personally aware of some in the present day whose faith did not endure in the wilderness. They may have deemed God unfair and no longer worthy of being followed, investing instead in what seemed to be more palatable options.

God's Weight Room

The wilderness is God's weight room, his training center, to develop us. Standing up under temptation is the first ministry process that Jesus went through. Human logic would dictate that following His baptism and a public proclamation that the Father was pleased with Him, a ministry launch would be in order.

It actually *was* a ministry launch, just not the kind we might desire.

The top man from each team needed to face off. This set the tone for all who would follow. If Jesus was led there, might not Holy Spirit lead each of us into wilderness testing as well? Going "from glory to glory" is indeed our destiny, but we must not mistake that to simply mean "from one high point to another."

Wilderness interludes are an integral, balancing component, undergirding us more than we know.

I have found that the turbulence of the wilderness is not only sourced from around me but from within me. The circumstances

are a real contributor, no question, but it's my inner response that reveals the real issue. Anxiety and insecurity for example, may exist in my soul, but I can compensate by comforting myself in other ways. The wilderness however, offers me no props. When God takes away your water and says, "The only place to satiate your thirst is in Me," you must find a way to believe that the wilderness is not devoid of God.

" My heart is in pain within me, and the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling come into me, and horror has overwhelmed me.

I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest. Indeed, then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest" (Ps. 55:4-8).

My creation of this tranquil wilderness shelter would be a quiet mountain cabin with a great view, running water and a strong internet connection. Yes, let's get away into the wilderness! God's version is akin to stretching me to the max, causing me lean into Him, breaking new ground for my faith and planting my roots deeper into His heart—creature comforts as we know them not on the top of His list.

'Directed' vs. 'Wandering'

Through personal experience and observation, I find two broad categories by which to understand the wilderness. A "directed wilderness" is a desert season through which I am learning God's ways. I am embracing the opportunities for growth that God puts before me.

On the other hand, a "wandering wilderness" is a desert season in which I am resisting the leading of the Lord, and mostly camping out in grumbling and discontentment. Jesus was directed into the wilderness and did not wander while there. This is my desire, to be like Christ.

The wilderness is not a “one and done” proposition. God will lovingly guide us, patiently overseeing our stumbling, always giving us a chance to try again. The drylands, then, are a place of thirst—a resource that we must learn how to mine and harness. Author Sara Hagerty describes it well:

“the degree to which I allow weakness to become thirst for more of God, and the degree to which I allow myself to lean into that thirst rather than run from it, is the degree to which I am becoming my best self ... Our thirst is how God allures us. The thirsty don’t just find God, they thrive in God.

The writer of Hosea offers a similarly promising picture: “Therefore, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

From there, I will give her vineyards to her, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope. She will respond there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt” (Hos. 2:14-15).

Partnering With God

There has never been a time when I’ve ardently partnered with God in the wilderness, that He hasn’t been faithful to speak tenderly, release a greater fruitfulness (vineyards) and a more hopeful outlook, and renew my first-love heart response.

I like prayers that hit the bullseye, prayers that I know stand a good chance of getting results. Here’s one of my favorites: *God, increase my thirst for you. Do whatever it takes to increase my yearning for you. Refresh my vision and enlarge my desire to please your heart.*

When I sprinkle a little fasting onto this prayer, I often find myself in a state of wonderful deprivation, the chamber of my soul fueled to seek the face of God. {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at ihopkc.org.

Teaching Kids to Be Thankful in a Me-First World

Not long ago, I suggested that [November could be a month of thankfulness](#) rather than be a month with one Thanksgiving Day. Does that appeal to you?

We would be better off if we become grateful people and not just say we're thankful. We need to recognize what and who we can be and even should be grateful for. Some people make a list. Some keep a gratitude journal. I think doing something has value. It makes gratitude more concrete and real. This may be especially true for children of all ages.

Thankfulness comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word, "thankfulness." As I wrote about it in *Screens and Teens*, "Thinking leads to thanking. I'm not talking about teens who say 'thank you' because their dads glare at them. I'm talking about grateful being who we are, not just what we do and say. Gratitude can be a built-in part of our identities. This is what allows us to be thankful 'in all circumstances' ([1 Thess.](#)

[5:18](#)).”

Let’s get our kids thinking about thankfulness. Maybe it would help focus their thoughts if we gave them categories to think about. They could make lists or just process ideas internally and then talk with you. Young children can dictate their answers to you or older siblings. I picture some of you collecting, posting, and talking about many lists. (If you do, I’d love to see pictures.)

Let’s Get Practical

Try these categories. Let me know what you think of to add. Maybe you could put each set of words on a piece of paper, assign each family member a color of pen or pencil and start writing. If you leave the papers out somewhere, hopefully each of you will stop by often as you think of things to add. Remember to discuss why you’re grateful on the nights when you make time to go through the lists.

You might want to list a few things first on each paper to provide examples. After a few days, help your children who haven’t listed much think more. Discern why they’re hesitant. What don’t they understand about gratitude?

One more comment before I give you the categories. This exercise is very self-focusing. That’s fine because the only people who will be grateful are those who know what they can be grateful for. But, we don’t want this to encourage self-centeredness or pride. You can expand the idea to be more family-centered if you’d like. For instance, you could put each person’s name on a piece of paper and have others list things about that person they’re grateful for. If they’ve already used the categories when thinking about themselves, it should be easier to think of things from the categories for you and their siblings without even listing the categories on the family pieces of paper.

Thoughtfulness Categories for Thankfulness

- attitudes, actions, beliefs
- For example, among other things, I'm grateful for my positive outlook, actions I've taken so I will lose weight and my belief in Christ.
- people, things
- For example, among other things, I'm grateful for my brother because of his constant support, and for a new shelf a friend built for me that is allowing me to have easy access to some of my favorite books. (Look not only at what your children list, but the order in which they list everything. Are many things listed before any people? Or, are the only people they list family members? Have a conversation.)
- strengths, challenges, interests
- For example, among other things, I'm grateful for my problem-solving abilities. Your children may be surprised to find "challenges" as a category. It's so worth thinking about these things with the big picture of life in mind. For instance, I'm grateful for each of my three knee surgeries because God used them to show me I couldn't do everything myself. I learned to ask for help and to allow people to serve me. People were blessed and I'm a better person. I'm grateful I'm interested in our government, our country's Christian heritage and our future as a nation.
- spiritual self, emotional self, social self, intellectual self, physical self, character self
- For example, among other things, I'm grateful for:
 - Spiritual: the examples of Nehemiah and Esther from God's Holy Word inspire me.
 - Emotional: It's been a long time since I was surprised by my quick temper.
 - Social: I love introducing people to others and watching their friendships flourish.
 - Intellectual: I enjoy putting ideas together in new

ways.

- Physical: My back is much better.
- Character: I've become more teachable, especially in regard to what I need to do to lose weight.
- past, present, future
- For example, among other things, in my past, I'm grateful that my parents encouraged my brother and me to pursue our musical interests, because we still enjoy music today. In the present, I'm grateful for an excellent chiropractor who is staying knowledgeable through many training opportunities. For the future, I'm grateful for opportunities coming up that will allow me (and all of Celebrate Kids) to influence more people. (And, I can't wait until I can fill everyone in!)

If you read something that makes sense, don't wait to implement your ideas. Thanksgiving Day is 17 days away, but we can have a month full of thanksgiving. And starting now will make the day more meaningful than typical. We can celebrate thankfulness this month! {eoa}

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

This article originally appeared at drkathykoch.com.

Anne Graham Lotz: Happy Birthday, Daddy!

"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, and I will deliver him and honor him. With long

life I will satisfy him and show him My salvation" (Ps. 91:14-16).

Today, Nov. 7, 2017, my father turns 99 years of age. And thus he enters into his 100th year. I think I can speak for my entire family when I say we are all amazed ... and very thankful ... that he is still with us. My mother moved to heaven, the place Jesus called our Father's house, 10 years ago. And I, for one, never imagined Daddy would continue to live without her, much less outlive her for such a lengthy period of time. What a treasure it has been to have these last 10 years to enjoy his presence that has always included his humor, his prayers, his insights, his stories, his encouragement and his love.

But Daddy has grown very quiet in the last few months. It's as though after years of preaching the gospel, he has nothing more to add to what he has repeatedly stated more times than can be counted: "Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. I will set him on high, because he has known My name. ... For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 14:6, 3:16).

The life and message of Billy Graham are so entwined with that simple gospel message, they cannot be unwound. My prayer on this, his 99th birthday, is that in the silence I will hear my own voice in a chorus of dozens ... hundreds ... thousands ... millions of other voices picking up the message and proclaiming it without compromise to a world that desperately needs to know the hope of everlasting life by coming to the Father through faith in His Son.

I can't think of a more meaningful way to celebrate Daddy's birthday than by sharing the gospel with someone else! Join me in the celebration:

Happy Birthday, Daddy!

From All of Us

The video is my all-time favorite version of a hymn that was written as a beautiful tribute to Daddy. Make sure you listen to it all the way through.

Anne Graham Lotz, *second child of Billy and Ruth Graham, is the founder of AnGeL Ministries and chairman for the National Day of Prayer Task Force. She has authored 15 books, including her latest, The Daniel Prayer.*

This article originally appeared at annegrahamlotz.org.