

The Secret Snare of 'Share and God Will Bless You' Memes and Chain Letters

Have you ever received those chain letters or had someone send you a meme promising blessing if you'd just type "Amen" or share with your friends?

Perhaps you've seen those ones with a picture of Jesus manipulating you by saying, "Share if you're not ashamed to have me on your wall."

How about those memes with a pile of money, promising if you share that God will bless you "100-fold" or "Your blessing is coming"?

Beyond the fact that these share/like/send-and-you'll-be-blessed chain letters and graphics are annoying and potentially spread malware in emails, there is one reason above all other that they are so destructive.

The Reason Blessing Chain Letters Are So Destructive

I'll be honest: I get a ton of these every week on Messenger, and I don't answer them or even open them, if I immediately determine that they are chain letters.

A chain letter is a letter or message that convinces the reader to send that letter on to a predetermined number of recipients or as many recipients as possible.

Many times, these chain letters spread false stories with stolen images of sick or injured children, urban legends or promises of blessings if you just pass them on to your friends.

Beyond the threat of viruses and malware, these chain letters

spread a very destructive message.

Nowhere in the Bible are blessings promised to us because we shared a message or meme.

I realize that this probably goes without saying, but the deeper issue here is a total misunderstanding of what faith is and why God blesses us.

Faith isn't just a mental assent that God is all-powerful and the creator of the universe; it is a conviction that no matter what situation we're in, no matter our circumstances, God will take care of us.

Falling into the trap of sending a chain letter or meme, thinking that it will somehow bring us blessing, is actually transferring our faith in God to faith in that chain or meme. It is no different than a good-luck charm.

Most times these chain letters or memes promise health and wealth. The problem is that the Bible never promised either of these.

Ephesians says that God has blessed us with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3b).

Heavenly blessings don't necessarily mean that we'll be rich and have perfect health while here on earth. In fact, many Christians rich in heavenly blessings had just enough for their daily needs. Some of them were sick for a very long time before they went home to be with Christ.

Furthermore, Jesus warned us in Matthew 5 against laying up treasures here on earth, because they are destructible and perishable.

We can lose our money in a market downturn, we can invest it unwisely or we can be robbed.

But heavenly treasures are eternal.

How God Blesses People

1. God blesses all people.

In Matthew 5 Jesus instructed us to love and bless our enemies and those who persecute us, as sons of our Father who does the same. He sends sun and rain to those who live justly and unjustly.

In several places throughout Scripture, we see that blessings are not contingent upon our behavior, but that God blesses those He chooses to bless.

2. The righteous and just are rewarded.

If God simply blessed people randomly, regardless of whether or not they lived their lives in obedience to His Word, we'd find it demotivating to live in obedience.

While we don't obey God so that we will be blessed, God chooses to reward our obedience to Him.

We obey God's Word out of love and honor for Him, and His Word clearly says that He honors those who honor Him.

But because of your hardness and impenitent heart, you are storing up treasures of wrath against yourself on the day of wrath when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed, and He "will render to every man according to his deeds." To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality will be eternal life. But to those who are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath, will be tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man who does evil, to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile. But glory, honor, and peace will be to every man who does good work—to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile (Rom. 2:5-10).

How Should We Respond to Chain Letters and Memes?

1. Kindly ask your friends to stop sending them.

Your friends may not be aware of the destructive nature of these messages and memes. Kindly inform them of their destructive nature and the possible threat of viruses and malware, and then ask them to stop sending them.

2. Don't open them.

While this may not prevent memes from popping up on your timeline (apart from unfriending or unfollowing your friends on Facebook), you can avoid opening the emails and messages on Messenger.

Many times, this is enough to reinforce the message that you do not want to receive these messages any longer. {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their two active boys, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an associates of 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 rosilindjukic.com.

Helping Those Who Hurt—The Supernatural Way

On Monday, we heard about and then grieved the loss of life in Las Vegas. As of when I'm writing this, 59 people have died and 510 were injured. Of course, everyone there was affected. It's hard to imagine.

There's so much on my mind.

We can't prevent every tragedy, but we can love well. So let's let people know we care. We love. We like.

Make eye contact. Smile. Ask how they're doing and care enough to listen to what they say. When people ask us, we can answer their questions.

We can offer comfort. Be present. We can listen. Sympathize. Empathize.

We can share. Talk. Ask. Tell stories.

We can see needs and help before being asked. We can let others help us.

Reach out. We can let others reach in to us.

We can look for the lonely and sit by them. Listen. Talk. Just be present.

We can comfort the hurting by listening. By offering support. Maybe by connecting them to those who can help.

We can "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15b). We don't need to question or analyze their tears. Just share them.

We can hug and smile.

We can ask "How can I help?" instead of "Can I help?" We can

keep asking “How can I help?” until they let us.

We can be careful *not* to share verses like “The Lord is near to the broken-hearted” (Ps. 34:18a) unless we stay close, too. And let’s not share, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28) unless we welcome them to come to us, too.

Finally, in good times and bad, let’s be who we know we can be, and let’s do what we 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 drkathykoch.com.

Stuck in God’s Waiting Room? Here’s the Powerful Prescription You Need

Are you in God’s waiting room? Have you been praying for something, on hold for an answer, hoping for your circumstances to change?

I confess, waiting is not my favorite activity. And right now, I’m waiting for something especially critical: test results of a loved one’s cancer scan.

During this time of uncertainty, I started to wonder, *Is there a proper way for Christians to wait?* Should we be doing something while we wait, or is waiting, well, just waiting?

For the Christian, waiting is not a passive experience. Even

though this may sound contradictory, waiting is active.

Here are four things the Bible tells us to do while we wait on the Lord:

Do It With Courage

Waiting takes courage. As Christians, we don't cower in fear over what may happen. The future may be uncertain, but we belong to the One who not only knows the future, He holds it in the palm of His hand! David phrased it this way in Psalm 27:14 (ESV):

"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!"

Stay in His Word

During times of waiting, we can be bombarded with advice that may sound good. It may even be what we want to hear. But if we're not careful, we can be influenced by well-meaning advice that is not consistent with God's Word. Use this time to soak in what God has said, both to be encouraged and to be prepared for whatever answer the Lord brings. As the psalmist reminds us in Psalm 130:5:

"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope."

Wait in Silence

This one can be difficult for me. During our times of waiting, it's easy for us to make our request the topic of conversation in every conversation. We whine about our pain, complain about the injustice and throw ourselves pity parties. However, King David reminds us in Psalm 62:5

"For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him."

That doesn't mean we shouldn't share our concern and ask for

prayer. But it does mean that once we do, we should spend our time seeking God's heart, growing in quiet intimacy with Him.

Persevere in Your Waiting

This one can also be difficult if we're in an extended time of waiting.

During this time of waiting, do what the Lord has called you to do. Are you in ministry? Continue to serve. Are you working? Work heartily (Colossians 3:23). The prophet tells us in Hosea 12:6:

"So you, by the help of your God, return, hold fast to love and justice, and wait continually for your God."

The answer will come. Still, it may not be the answer we want. That's when we need to remember God is sovereign. Although our short-term circumstances might not appear so, He is always at work for our ultimate good and His eternal glory. As God's children in Christ (John 1:12), we can rest in this assurance from the prophet Isaiah:

"From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him" (Isa. 64:4).

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.

Not-So-Random Acts of Spirit-Empowered Kindness

Kindness is a virtue most of us appreciate and many of us aspire to.

You may have heard about the practice of random acts of kindness. It supposedly began in 1982 when Anne Herbert scrawled the words “practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty” on a placemat. The rest, as they say, is history.

Now there’s a new way to express kindness. Zachary Gibson started the Tiny Mailbox Project earlier this year. Gibson set a goal of 100 tiny mailboxes around Los Angeles earlier this year. But his idea has spread far beyond the city limits of LA.

The Tiny Mailbox Project provides the opportunity to be kind, one person at a time, without necessarily meeting the recipient of your kindness.

The concept is simple. Each mailbox contains an encouraging note along with several blank cards. The recipient takes the note and leaves one for someone else.

In a recent [interview](#), Gibson shared his belief that “trying to restore a little faith in humanity is a good thing.”

I confess: I don’t have much faith in humanity any more. The Bible tells us no one is righteous (Rom. 3:10). Even if I didn’t believe what the Bible says, all I have to do is observe humanity in action.

Yet, just when it appears kindness has died out, it shows itself once again—this time in the midst of disaster. Hurricane Harvey is the worst weather event to hit Houston in

50 years. Still, it provided the backdrop for a massive, ongoing act of kindness on the part of furniture store owner [Jim McIngvale](#).

McIngvale has opened up his two showrooms for evacuees without regard for his immediate profits. His daily losses are estimated at a minimum of \$30,000 per day.

So what can professing Christians learn from Zachary Gibson and Jim McIngvale?

We know the Bible tells us kindness is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22). This means that the more we surrender to the leading of God’s Spirit in our lives, the more kindness will mark our relationships.

Yet kindness has not marked our conversations and behavior very much in the area of politics or morality. Christians are known more for what we are against than what we are for. Many of us have lost the ability to stand firm for biblical values without trying to destroy those who disagree with us at the same time.

And along come tiny mailboxes and a furniture store owner to remind us what kindness could look like if we stopped being belligerently self-righteous.

What would happen if Christians spoke the truth—in love (Eph. 4:15)?

Or if we were so surrendered to the Holy Spirit that our “fruit” attracted those who are hungry for food that feeds the soul?

What would happen if being kind wasn’t just something we practiced with other Christians, but something we practiced regardless of the recipient?

Perhaps it’s time to find out. What do you think?

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

This blog originally appeared at avawrites.com.

Soul-Shaping Wisdom From Rules on Rocks

When my daughter Grace was in kindergarten, I picked her up from school one afternoon and asked how her day had been. It was picture day, so I asked if lots of girls wore pretty dresses.

Grace took a deep breath and said, “Well, some of them did. Adrianna had a pretty dress with squares and lines, and she wore cowgirl boots. And her hair went like this way and this way (she gestured to her head) and it was brushed so smooth you wouldn’t believe it.”

I gave the appropriate oohs and ahhs, when Grace said, “Mama, on Sunday at church they talked about Moses and God and how God wrote rules on rocks. And one of those rules was not to be thinking about what somebody else has and be wanting it. But, Mama!! That is soooooo hard! I just can’t stop. I’m trying and trying, but it’s hard.”

I agreed with Grace that sometimes it was hard not to want what someone else has and asked her what it was she was wanted so much.

Grace said, “Adrianna’s clothes and her smooth hair and her cowgirl boots! Mama, she looked so pretty, and she is going to be in the yearbook for her picture looking like that.”

I told Grace, “She sure will, but Grace, you will be in the yearbook looking beautiful, too. You will have on a beautiful dress and a pretty bow in your hair. And you have on cute boots, too.”

Grace replied, “Not as cute as Adrianna.”

Those rules on rocks are hard on all of us sometimes. It’s easy to compare ourselves to other mothers and fathers and feel we don’t measure up. We get a glimpse of someone else’s life and want it for our own. Remember this: God made each of us different. He made your Pinterest-loving mama friend to be herself, and He made you to be you.

And you are beautiful just the way you are—smooth hair and cowboy boots or not. {eoa}

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

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How the Church Can Truly Be the Church

What do I want you to remember after reading this blog?

- The church is most beautiful when it’s being the church.

- When like-minded people come together, they can accomplish much.
- People should do what they can do and not think so much about what they can't do.
- Accepting help is humbling, refreshing and right.
- Not being able to find adequate words with which to say "thanks" is frustrating.
- Paying it forward can be more emotional than receiving a gift.
- Sometimes telling others about a need is hard. Do it anyway.
- Be open to the Holy Spirit telling you someone needs your help. Then follow through.

That's a lot to remember. Do you agree it might be worth it?

What's My Story?

In August, 2016, two friends helped me with my products. As they transferred boxes from one car to the other, I commented about how easy it was. I remember them looking at me, confused.

I explained that I have an older car with a very deep trunk. One friend immediately commented that I need a new car—something like theirs with a hatchback that allows for easy loading and unloading of heavy suitcases and boxes. I rather quickly dismissed the comment and explained that my car worked fine and I wasn't in a financial situation where a car payment would be a good thing to add.

Fast forward to last May when my chiropractor and I decided his medical team would inject stem cells into my back in hopes of healing what was long-standing and increasingly challenging pain.

Dr. Gideon saw my car. He told me he hesitated to keep treating me if I continued to drive that car. He was concerned about the loading and unloading of my product in and out of

the deep trunk. But it was also the fact that I had to fall into a deep seat and then make a real effort to step out of my car, which was low to the ground. Also, the seats weren't fitted, so my back had absolutely no support. Again, in that instant, I dismissed his comment as important but irrelevant, because I didn't think I could do anything about it.

Trust God

Before the end of that day I believe it was the Holy Spirit who reminded me of my friend's comment from the previous August. After praying and searching my heart to make sure my motivation was appropriate, I called her. I briefly explained that she might have actually had a Holy Spirit-powered, divine inspiration many months prior, based on what was now going on with my back.

Humbling

I asked if she was serious in her offer to help get me a car. I had no idea what she had in mind, but I decided that if I teach and believe that our relationships are intentional and God introduces us to the people He wants us to know, then acting upon her verbalized interest and concern was appropriate. She listened and very quickly exclaimed, "I'm on it. Glad to help. No problem. You'll hear from me soon."

Humbling. That's what it was as I recognized that this friend and the other friend who was a part of the original conversation were going to encourage people from their church to help me in my time of need. As I understand it, emails were sent to people who have gotten to know me and the reason for my need was explained.

Notes and checks arrived in my mailbox. Before I knew it, people from one church decided to be the church. They blessed me with not just a car, but an ideal car for my situation. One gift would not have bought me a car, but working together, small gifts and large gifts made the difference. I was

reminded that we can all do something.

My friends worked with Steve Beck, my fabulous salesman, and he found the car they wanted to buy for me. I was overwhelmed when a friend dropped me off at the dealership so that I could see my new car for the first time and drive it home. It's still hard to put into words an adequate expression of my gratitude to the people who stepped up and did something precious.

Thankful

Thank-you notes have been sent. Many prayers of gratitude have been spoken to God, the One who gives the greatest gifts of all. I've asked Him to bless my friends in beautiful ways.

I paid it forward by giving away my old car to someone I knew needed it. That was such a fabulous feeling and continues to be a reason I'm grateful for my friends' generosity. Yes, my fitted and heated seats are helping my back tremendously. Having a hatchback for loading and unloading boxes and heavy suitcases for airport trips is fabulous. Knowing my friend has reliable transportation gives me great joy. Great joy!

What are you going to do today or this week? Will you be on the lookout for someone who needs help, and will you respond? Do you have a need, and have you been afraid to tell someone? Maybe today is your day. Could you pass a blessing forward and be doubly blessed? Do you need to thank someone for something? Accept help? With others from your church, how can you be the church? {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.

How Small Steps Can Lead to Big Weight Loss

One of my greatest joys is meeting friends on the journey. When I'm blessed to travel for interviews, speaking events or workshops, I like to meet with those going forward with all that is within them towards a goal of total transformation.

Begin With Small Steps

Together we work on celebrating the small steps of success whether they are walking a few more steps each day, getting out of a scooter and walking with just the aid of a cane, losing a pound, running a 5K for the first time or losing 20 pounds in a month. And yes, we have had people in our weight-loss coaching groups do all of those things.

It's so important on any journey toward transformation to recognize when change of any kind begins to happen and celebrate it instead of being afraid we can't sustain it. It's in the embracing of small steps that the real transformation begins to happen.

Starting Exercise

I remember the first week I decided to give up candy and begin exercise. I put firm boundaries around the candy and I focused on exercise. When I came back to my group the next week, what joy I had in being able to report I had survived a week without candy and loved going to the pool to exercise so much I had done in five times instead of my goal of three. I haven't stopped on either of those changes.

I was able to fully embrace both stopping a bad habit and

starting a good one because of the sheer pleasure it brought to accomplish something, even something small. Those first small steps many years ago have morphed into losing over 260 pounds and keeping it off.

The Hardest Part Is Starting

Admittedly, the hardest part of any journey is starting. Many times we want to start with a bang. Most declare, "I'm going to do what you did. I'm going to stop eating sugar and gluten." This lofty plan usually ends in disaster no matter how hard a person tries.

I admire the do-or-die attitude. I was once that way as well. All it did for me was push me to go on some kind of extreme regimented diet. I'd lose a lot of weight and then be so excited to go off the diet that I'd watch television all day, with my only exercise getting up to get more junk food. All my boundaries were lifted. I changed nothing.

Change of Vision

To go forward, I had to have a change of vision for myself. I did that by questioning every habit I had. I measured it against the standards I knew God had for my life. Was this a habit that needed to stay or would I be better off if I replaced it with a different habit?

When I began to think of bad habits I wanted to change, I had a list a mile long and kept adding to it. It included every bad food I was eating, when I ate and why, the fact I wasn't exercising, wasn't reading my Bible consistently, wasn't feeding my mind with good preaching and teaching. I wasn't taking times to just be quiet before God and listen to His plans for me. I wasn't allowing Him to pour into my life because I was afraid of what He might tell me.

Too Comfortable

I had gotten pretty comfortable where I was, sitting in my lazy chair watching *Oprah* and eating chips and dip. No matter how much I admire that TV icon, she was definitely not feeding my spirit. I'm sorry, friends, but if you pit Oprah against Joyce Meyer, Joyce is going to win every time in kingdom rankings.

Here's my point. I knew what to do. I knew what was right to choose, I just got stuck in my comfortable rut.

One day I was blasted out of my rut by a simple statement. "Alcohol is one molecule away from sugar. Alcohol is liquid sugar." With those softly spoken words, my life crumbled at my feet. I realized completely that I was addicted to sugar. When I started my journey, the dangers of sugar were not addressed widely like they are today. But I knew beyond a doubt that I was a sugar addict.

When My Real Life Began

Owning those words began a domino effect of change. As I stepped into each change moment, the next opportunity to transform presented itself. I didn't have to wonder what to work on next. It would always be standing there in the form of a life-altering "chance" meetings.

When I made the decision not to stay in my easy chair eating whatever I pleased, my real life began. It was almost like God had put my life on pause until I stepped into the ownership of who I am in Him and who I can become when fully submitted to Him.

Now as I travel and meet someone with that same kind of let's-do-this attitude, I am encouraged for them and take on their joy for the changes they are embracing no matter how big or small those may be.

I never realized before that joy can be more than just my own. It can be a profound joy for others as they walk similar life

paths. If in some small way I have helped them, my joy is even greater.

Today, my joy is multiplying daily. {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.

The Simple Way to the Matthew 11:28-29 Promise of Rest

Are you tired?

Do you feel life is rushing along at breakneck speed while you are be dragged behind it. flailing and flapping in the wind?

Do you often feel stressed out, anxious and worried about how you're going to fit everything in your already-tight schedule?

Just this morning, I sat down with my husband—short of breath, heart pounding, pouring out my stress and anxiety over the fact that my schedule just got really, really crazy.

Ironically, I'm studying both Psalm 91 and the book of Hebrews.

I'd just read that morning Hebrews 3 and 4, talking about entering into God's rest.

In just two weeks, I'll be joining Courtney from Women Living Well and Good Morning Girls in blogging through her new study, "Rest and Release."

And I've learned that when God talks in threes, He is really trying to get our attention.

I think He's trying to tell me to step back. To rest.

But what does this mean?

While we often think rest means a Netflix binge, a weekend at the coast, going to bed earlier or a mom's night in with a bubble bath and a good book, I've learned something very important about rest.

Rest that doesn't include Jesus Christ doesn't touch your soul.

We see three kinds of rest in Scripture, and we see them here in Psalm 91:1-9:

1. Rest is found in Jesus Christ

Psalm 91 clearly illustrates that our rest, comfort and security is in the Lord. "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1-2, KJV).

The words "secret place" in the Greek indicate protection, while the word "shadow" means defense.

God is our security and our comfort. And when we're secure and comforted, we are not anxious—we are able to relax and rest knowing that we're protected and cared for.

But to have that rest and security, we must first learn how to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. David said that

when we do, *then* we abide under the shadow (defense) of the Almighty.

Jesus said, in Matthew 11:28-29, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Soul rest.

When our soul is rested, our body can rest. When our soul is rested our spirit is at rest. Our whole being is at rest.

You won't find soul rest in a Netflix binge.

You won't find soul rest at the coast.

You won't find soul rest in a bubble bath and a good book—or at the bottom of a glass of wine.

You just won't find it there!

Soul rest is found in only one place, and that is in Jesus Christ. If we want to find deep, lasting, rest that goes all the way to the soul, we must first come to Him.

Jesus said these things:

- Come to Me
- Take My yoke upon you
- Learn from Me

When we do these three things, we will find rest, we will realize how gentle and humble He is, we will discover that His burden is light.

2. Rest is discovering that we will never be enough.

Let's face it.

Let's just be really, really honest. The ugly kind of honest.

You know, the kind where you throw open the doors and show the world that your couch is piled high with unfolded laundry, your sink is overflowing with dirty dishes and your toilet hasn't seen a scrub in a week.

That kind of honest.

We will never be enough.

On our own, we're all a hot mess.

Our salvation is dead, rotted and attracting flies; our good deeds stink to high heaven of hidden motives and manipulation; our efforts to try to keep the Ten Commandments are broken down, on cinder blocks and rusted out because we gave up on them years ago.

The fact is, God never intended for us to be enough.

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but so much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the One working in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

Paul says that we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and then he gives us the key.

It is God. He is the One who produces in us the desire and the ability to carry out this work of our salvation so that we live a life pleasing to God.

Salvation is a gift—we can't earn it; we don't deserve it.

The Holy Spirit is a gift—we don't earn Him or deserve Him.

Living out this Christian life is impossible without grace—we don't earn it; we don't deserve it.

It is time we stop trying so hard live this Christian life out

in our own strength, but rest in the Holy Spirit's work in our heart.

3. Rest is faith and trust in God's truth.

David said, "He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall find protection; His faithfulness shall be your shield and wall" (Ps. 91:4).

In Hebrews 1-4, the writer talked about entering into God's rest. Those who didn't enter into His rest were those who lived in willful unbelief and rebellion to God's Word.

We see that faith and trust in God's truth bring rest.

As much as people want to believe that truth is relative, it simply isn't. By virtue of its nature it simply can't be.

Truth by its very nature must be firm, solid and constant. It must be unwavering and unchanging, for if it isn't, then it's simply not truth.

How can something be true if today it is one thing but today it is another?

Scripture clearly supports the fact that truth is eternally established when we follow this sequence of verses.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)—Jesus is truth.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1)—Jesus is the Word.

"Forever, O Lord, Your word is settled in heaven" (Ps. 119:89). Truth—the Word—has been established from eternity past and for all eternity.

"For I am the Lord, I change not." Malachi 3:6 – Truth, the Word, God is unchanging.

Understanding that truth is unchanging, it is constant and it is unwavering gives us the ability to trust in this truth. We can place all our faith in this truth.

And when we do, we are protected. "His truth shall be your shield and buckler" (Ps. 91:4, NKJV).

Ephesians 6 also tells us that truth is the belt in our armor. The belt is what held all of the Roman armor together and in place.

When we accept that God's Word is absolute, that it is truth—it is truth from eternity past and for all eternity is unchanging, and when we accept It as the final authority for our life as our protection and armor, we can rest.

We can rest in its finality.

We can rest in its authority and unchangeableness.

My dear friends, if you're like me—tired, worn down and exhausted from life's demands, I challenge you to do what I'm learning to do. Stop. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Ask yourself why you're doing what you're doing and why you're trying so hard. Then go to the Word. Let it refresh you, restore you and give you life.

The rest you're seeking is soul rest. Deep rest. Rest that goes deep inside and settles your flustered emotions and anxious, churning thoughts. This rest can only be found in Jesus. {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their two active boys, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an associates of 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 +](#).

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What Does the Bible Say About the Last Days?

Jesus first cautions us not to be deceived. He says that many false Christs will arise and lead many astray. And Paul also warns us in 2 Timothy 3:13, "But evil men and seducers will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." If someone declares they are the Christ on this earth, be secure in the truth that they are not. Even if they perform great signs and wonders, they are not. Why? According to the Word in Titus 2:13, He will not appear to us on the earth, but He will appear to us in the clouds, and be caught up with Him, along with our fellow believers. "as we await the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Again, Revelation 1:7 confirms the way He will come to us on that great and glorious day, "Look! He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen." And we who are alive will shed this earth suit and be supernaturally changed. 1 Cor. 15:50-53 explains it like this, "Now this I say, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a

moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible will put on incorruption, and this mortal will put on immortality.”

Next, our Lord encourages us not to be afraid because there will be wars and rumors of wars, and explains that these things must take place, but the end is not yet. Wars and rumors of wars are frightful events, but God promises us in Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, yes, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

He continues to speak to us about the political arena and says that nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. He reveals to us that there will be disasters in various places such as famines and earthquakes. And makes it plain that these are not the final signs, but the beginning of birth pangs.

The world will be in chaos, and its inhabitants will be insecure, not knowing how to meet their daily needs, but we have security in God’s Word that promises us that if we seek first His kingdom and all of His righteousness then all these things that we have need of will be met. Matthew 6:31-33 says, “Therefore, take no thought, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ (For the Gentiles seek after all these things.) For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you.”

Did He not provide for the Israelites when they wandered in the desert for 40 years? According to the Scriptures, God graciously provided for their daily needs. He supplied His people with water from the rock (see Ex. 17:5-7), it rained down manna daily (Ex. 16:4), they had fresh meat (see Ex.

16:13) and their shoes and clothes did not wear out (see Deut. 29:5).

He then discusses with them about the individual who calls him or herself a follower of Jesus Christ: "Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. And you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matt. 24:9).

Let's face it: This is a very serious matter that will take every ounce of faith to overcome the temptation to recant. Jesus understands this temptation all too well. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He is so afraid of the torture that He is to endure for you and for me that He starts to sweat great drops of blood. He cries out to His heavenly Father to come up with another plan, to remove Him from this situation. Hebrews 4:15 confirms this point, it says "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who was in every sense tempted like we are, yet without sin." He overcomes the power of the human will to run away from His destiny, to be selfish and to turn away from our need, to allow fear, doubt and unbelief to control His actions, and finally surrenders to His Father's will and lays down His life for us. Matthew 26:39 in the New King James Version of the Bible reads, "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

He tells us that many false prophets will rise and lead many people away from God. And Peter also warns us in 2 Peter 2:1-3 (MEV), "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with deceptive words. Their judgment, made long ago, does not linger, and their destruction does not

slumber.”

Women especially tend to be led astray by their emotions. The Bible warns us not to be gullible in 2 Timothy 3:5-7, “having a form of godliness, but denying its power. Turn away from such people. Those of this nature creep into houses and captivate silly women who are burdened with sins and led away with various desires, always learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Women, we are not to be naïve, but wise. No matter how godly, how charismatic, how charming or how appealing the one with the message may seem, we are responsible to try the spirits and judge the message against the Word of God.

Not everyone will have to confront the possibility of being martyred for their faith, but we will all face some sort of tribulation and be hated because of our faith in Jesus. He says that during this stage of the last days that many will fall away, and they will betray and hate one another. And because of the increase in lawlessness that most people’s love will grow cold. But He makes it clear: “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 24:13).

And this portion of Scripture closes with Jesus declaring, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14).

And just to clear up a matter of confusion, can the date of Jesus’ return be predicted? According to the Scriptures the answer is no. It states in Matthew 24:36, ““concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” So the next time you hear someone has figured out the exact date of Jesus’ return, you know not to listen to them. Only the Father knows the exact date and time, but as we read in Matt. 24:3-15, God does want us to be aware of the season and clearly gives us the signs to look for.

I encourage you to open up the Word of God, start with Matthew 24 and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand the basic teachings concerning the end times. He is faithful and true and wants you to know and recognize the basic signs of the last days.

A Call to Rise Up

Hear the passionate call of women of God to rise up! “We can rise above what our culture is telling us a woman has to be in this hour.” Rise Up/TheCall, Oct. 9, 2017, Washington, D.C. riseup2017.org.