

# 3 Ways to Celebrate With or Without a Valentine

Not everyone loves Valentine's Day. Especially if your valentine is gone or has changed. Divorce, separation, death or trauma can overwhelm the wounded heart with grief, pain and loneliness, which only intensify during a holiday where others are celebrating love that for you is now a mere memory.

I've personally known the devastation of abandonment, loss and heartbreak. And yet I also know the victory of progressing one painful step at a time from barely surviving to really living. In my daily interaction with people in pain, it saddens me to see those who seem to want to stay stuck. Those first few steps can be the hardest.

But no matter who was at fault or how unfair things may have been, we still can choose to move forward. Whether this is a good time or a deep valley, we can always celebrate love. Contrary to what many assume, love is not merely a warm fuzzy feeling. True love takes action! The following are three actions that have helped me over the years—not just on Valentine's Day, but also for the ups and downs of everyday life.

## 1. **Love yourself.**

Self-care is so much more than manicures, massages and movies. Encompassing all areas of life, biblical self-care is crucial for successfully navigating the onslaught of life's challenges. Try incorporating a self-scan into your daily routine. *Stop.* (Really.) *Ask,* "What do I need right now?" Then *take care* of that need.

Consider your spiritual needs (such as feeding on God's Word and pouring out your heart to the Lord), your physical needs (such as getting enough sleep, nutrients and regular exercise) and your emotional needs (such as processing the feelings in a healthy way and surrounding yourself with good support). Self-care is not a luxury, but a lifeline. And when we take care of ourselves, those around us will also benefit.

For a more complete self-care checklist, see *Formerly A Wife* (divorce recovery), *Goodbye for Now* (grief support and preparation) and *LOVE OUR VETS* (PTSD support).

## 2. Love someone else.

When Jesus instructed us to love our neighbor as ourselves, it wasn't just a nice suggestion. It was a command! It's ironic how when I'm having a pity party, one of the best things I can do is reach out to someone else who may be hurting. Not only does it take my mind off myself, but it is a blessing to the other person.

Who do you know who could use some encouragement today? Pray for them. Maybe take them a gift basket, or give them a call or email. Or send a card in the mail (remember how to do that?). Love in action will also help put our own suffering in perspective.

## 3. Love the Lord your God.

This is truly the supreme love to celebrate! God's all-surpassing grace was expressed through the suffering and death of His Son on the cross ... for us who deserve nothing but eternal separation from Him. When was the last time you just sat, alone, *with* Him and pondered the awesome wonder of His eternal love for us, and the privilege of loving Him in return?

We must ask ourselves, "Is He my first love? Over and above everyone and everything else in my life?"

This love we can celebrate anytime, now and throughout eternity. And the other reassurance of God's love is that *He will never leave, and He will never change*. Not even the most amazing earthly Valentine could ever come close.

I hope you truly do have a happy Valentine's Day and are able to celebrate all three of these loves. Every day!

"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:37-39). {eoa}

**Welby O'Brien** holds a master's degree in counseling from Portland State University and a teaching degree from Biola University, and based on her own life journey, she has authored *LOVE OUR VETS: Restoring Hope for Families of Veterans with PTSD* (), *Goodbye for Now (grief support)* and *Formerly A Wife (divorce support)*. *Practical, personal and rich with scriptural encouragement*, Formerly a Wife was

*featured on The 700 Club and has been a recommended resource by DivorceCare, American Association of Christian Counselors, Stephen Ministries and the Church Librarian Association. Goodbye for Now provides structure, guidance and comfort amid the overwhelming chaos of grief. Learn more at .*

---

## **Sad on Valentine's Day? Spirit-Filled Psychologist Offers Survival Tips**

Valentine's Day, the holiday that celebrates love and romance, isn't always as popular as it may seem. In fact, it serves up hurt and longing for many people, says psychologist and author Dr. Barbara Lowe.

But don't give up. On the *Dr. Barbara Lowe's Whole Life Podcast* on the Charisma Podcast Network, Lowe shares some tips to help you enjoy the day no matter what you're going through. "The Lord God Almighty loves you deeply and wants to meet your needs," she says.

"With any holiday, we have a lot of expectations," she adds. "And every holiday is so materialized by commercials that it is easy for us to build expectations that are impossible, and if you have recently lost your significant other or you've been betrayed, or you're in a difficult relationship, or you want to be in a relationship and you're not in one ... whatever you're going through, I want to encourage you that there is hope."

One of the ways to get through holidays, Lowe says, is by practicing self-care. If you're in a romantic relationship, she encourages you to "express your needs and wants. ... Let's say for Valentine's Day that what you're really needing is to feel loved, but your spouse is not very good at rising to the occasion. What can you do to ensure that you do feel loved [in a way] that is within your values? We don't want to go have an affair to make sure we're loved," Lowe says. She urges listeners to make themselves more aware of God's love and plan ahead for feeling loved by themselves or by friends.

"If you are single on Valentine's Day and you wish that you were not single, instead of hiding through the day or burying yourself ... or trying to find a date that you are not that interested in to get through the day, why not plan a very special day and/or weekend for yourself?" Lowe says. "So I'm encouraging you to plan ahead, think about what you need. Think beyond that A need to the B, C and D options of how you could meet that need by yourself."

For more about how to not only endure but enjoy Valentine's Day, no matter what your relationship status, listen to this podcast.

---

## **Anne Graham Lotz: Are Our Nation's Current Crises God's Gifts to Inspire Awakening?**

"In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord" (Isa. 6:1a).

For my birthday one year, my mother sent me a package wrapped in plain brown paper. When I opened it, there was a gaudy, multicolored straw basket inside, stuffed with tissue paper. I actually thought my mother had totally lost her good senses! I tossed out the tissue paper, wondered what in the world I was going to do with the basket, then called to thank her for her "gift."

Mother laughed when I thanked her for the basket, then asked what I thought about what was inside it. I told her that nothing was inside except tissue paper, and I had thrown that out. She responded urgently, "Oh, no, Anne! Inside that tissue paper is your real birthday gift!"

I ran outside, opened up the trash can and went through the garbage piece by piece until I came up with the wad of tissue paper. Inside was a small gold ring with a lapis lazuli stone that had been taken from the flooring of the Shushan Palace where Queen Esther had lived with King Xerxes. I had thrown out a priceless treasure simply because of the way it was wrapped!

As our nation seems to reel from crisis to crisis, brown package to brown package—the latest being the impeachment of the president, Kobe Bryant's tragic death and the threat of the coronavirus—I have remembered Mother's birthday present. Is it possible these "packages" hold within them a treasure? Could it be that God is wanting us—as a nation—to look up? To turn to Him in repentance of sin? To call on Him for help? Is God impressing on all of us the need to get right with Him now so that we are ready at a moment's notice to meet Him face-to-face? Could the treasure God wants to give us in the brown packages be a spiritual awakening?

In the Old Testament, God wrapped His glory in an earthly tent that from the outside must have appeared like a big, brown package. The tent was called the tabernacle. It housed the manifestation of God's presence when the children of Israel

wandered in the wilderness. God instructed the Israelites to cover the tabernacle itself with layers of goat hair and ram skins and even seacow hides! (See Ex. 36:14-19). A casual observer would never have suspected that there would be any glory there! Yet the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:35b).

Sometimes God wraps His glory in hard circumstances or ugly obstacles or painful difficulties, and it just never occurs to us that within those life-shaking events is a blessing in disguise.

So, like Isaiah, when something bad happens—when disaster, disease and death show up unexpectedly—look up! Ask God to open your eyes to His glory. {eoa}

**Anne Graham Lotz**, *second child of Billy and Ruth Graham, is the founder of AnGeL Ministries and former chairman for the National Day of Prayer Task Force. She has authored 15 books, including her new release, Jesus in Me: Experiencing the Holy Spirit as a Constant Companion.*

*This article originally appeared at and was adapted from Anne's book, Expecting to See Jesus, Chapter 6.*

---

## **How Confessing and Forsaking**

# **This 'Acceptable Sin' Transformed This Woman's Life**

It's the acceptable, condoned, even sanctified sin because that crafty, wily old wolf in sheep's clothing has made it appear to be so. We joke about it from the pulpit. We even encourage it with our doughnuts, cookies and lollipops every Sunday and at every committee meeting and small-group get-together.

Satan's fingerprints are all over this because it is something far more deadly than any of the things we ordinarily think of as sin, and yet it is one of the seven deadly sins. I am talking about the thing I've never heard even one pastor preach about and the one we never want to admit—gluttony. Yet this is the one sin that's eating Christians alive.

## **What Is Gluttony?**

Several times, the Bible mentions those who are gluttons and advises people not to associate with someone who is a glutton. The Weymouth New Testament translates one of the "acts of the flesh" listed in Galatians 5:19-21 as "riotous feasting," while the Wycliffe Bible calls it "unmeasurable eatings." Other versions translate it as "orgies, wild parties, revelries." These are all words for gluttonous behaviors.

The definition of a glutton is "one given habitually to greedy and voracious eating." Synonyms are overeater, hog and stuffer. I will admit, this was my rebellion of choice. I saw it as the acceptable sin because no Christian I had ever met said it was wrong to eat until you were stuffed.

As a matter of fact, most joked about the upcoming church carry-in supper as one where everyone would have to wear expandable clothes. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against church dinners, but as a sugar- and comfort-food addict and a

glutton, the emphasis on eating unlimited quantities of food just justified my chosen sin.

## **I Wore My Rebellion**

I wore my rebellion where all could see it. At 430 pounds, there was no hiding my sin. It was always with me, but then no one dared mention it to me lest I point out their third piece of pie.

Yet my sin, like many others God lovingly tries to steer us away from, was killing me. I thank God for a rude cardiac surgeon who bluntly told me I'd be dead in five years if I didn't lose at least 100 pounds and keep it off. That was a wake-up call. However, it took several more years and many more circumstances before I owned my addiction.

## **Acting Against My Addiction**

As any addict knows, to recover I had to do a 180-degree turnaround. I had to give up those things I craved, the things that if I ate them, I couldn't stop. I had to face my emotional demons and recognize how they impacted my relationship with God.

I changed physically. To date, I've lost over 250 pounds. I changed emotionally. I fully embrace my emotions, learn from them and work to know better how to handle them instead of allowing them to handle me.

I changed mentally. My mindset has been totally renewed to include taking care of myself before I even attempt to help anyone else. I changed spiritually. I accept the glorious grace, strength, mercy and mystery of who God is and how He works in my life.

I stay away from foods with sugar and flour or that combination. This is true any place I am, even when others are eating them. I stay true to my commitment because obedience to what God has instructed me to do is more important to me than

the things I crave.

I am aware that my life is a testimony. People are watching me to see if I stay true to the journey to which God has called me. That is even more motivation to be obedient.

## **Destruction of Food Addiction**

I pray for divine encounters with people who suffered like I did for years because I know they want a way out of the destructive pit of food addiction. Satan has gripped them by the stomach and won't let go. The way out is not easy, but it is possible when we submit totally to God and desire to be transformed and changed from the inside out. (See Rom. 12:2, MSG.)

I have immeasurable compassion for those who are where I was. It's why I write books. When I was super morbidly obese, I wouldn't ask for help, but I would read a book. I just couldn't find one written by someone who had been where I was and had overcome.

It's why I speak, share blog posts, post on social media and go to the trouble of delivering a weekly podcast message. God has given me a platform. I use every opportunity to make the church aware that they must wake up to Satan's tactics before it is too late.

## **Walking Out of the Pit**

Food addiction is a true addiction, and it takes someone who has been there to walk beside you to help you walk out of the pit of where you are. That's the reason God called me to do weight loss coaching when I could just be spending my retirement years writing novels and dabbling in painting.

It is my greatest joy to work with individuals in my group or one-on-one and help them discover the root issues behind their addiction, put those to rest in the hands of Jesus and begin to trust Him completely, especially with what they eat, how

they move and how they navigate everyday life.

It's in the everydayness of our lives that change happens.

God changed me as I gave up sugar and flour. I came out of food addiction by clinging so tightly to Jesus, there is no reason to want anything else. His presence has become food and drink in the best meal I've ever eaten, as it says in Matthew 5:6 (MSG).

I am well aware the problem is that most of us want to overindulge in the foods we desire instead of Him. We must make it our mission to find the "why" hidden in that statement. Our very lives depend upon it.

## **Does He Have Your Stomach?**

Paul told the church at Philippi, "Many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:18-20, NIV).

Does the serpent have hold of you by your stomach? Have you willingly allowed him to make your overeating, gluttonous ways a stronghold in your life when the only stronghold should be occupied by God Himself?

I'm concerned about this sneaky, deadly path he's led us down. Obesity and excess sugar have been linked to so many deadly diseases—congestive heart failure, diabetes, high blood pressure, many different stomach and colon ailments, and even cancers. Yet I know those who would rather continue eating themselves to death than give up the foods that are killing them.

## **Winning the War With Gluttony**

We must do everything we can to win this food fight with

gluttony. We must embrace transformation with everything that is in us. Transformation only comes when we hang on tight to Jesus and do exactly what He tells us to do.

I'm not talking about a diet. I'm talking about a total lifestyle change—body, soul and spirit. Are you ready? What's holding you back? {eoa}

**Teresa Shields Parker** is the author of five books and two study guides, including her latest, *Sweet Journey to Transformation: Practical Steps to Lose Weight and Live Healthy*, and her No. 1 bestseller, *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds*. She is also a blogger, spiritual weight loss coach (check out her coaching group, *Overcomers Academy*) and speaker at . Check out her new podcast, *Sweet Grace for Your Journey*.

*This article originally appeared at .*

---

## **Your Faith-Key to Experiencing the Miracles You've Been Praying For**

Consistency with your confession of faith is key when it comes to bringing your miraculous transformation to fruition.

If you are constantly whining and complaining, you will not have a miraculous intervention. This is what the Israelites did. And because of it, they ended up wandering around in the

desert for 40 years when it was only an 11-day journey. They complained about everything and were thankful for nothing.

Think about all that the Lord had done for them—supernaturally rescued them from their enemy and provided for their every need. He provided supernatural protection from plagues and the spirit of death, and again by supernatural means gave them direction by a cloud in the daylight and protection by a pillar of fire in the night. He made a way of escape for them from their enemy by parting the Red Sea, satisfied their thirst by pouring water from a rock, and rained down fresh bread and quail (meat) from heaven. Their clothing and their shoes did not even wear out. And all they could do was complain and accuse God and their leaders of evil intentions.

We read this and think to ourselves how spiritually blind they were, but we can act just as they did. God gives us everything we need, and yet we allow our confession of faith to be filled with doubt and unbelief. How do we change this?

1. We need to repent for our willful and negative confessions of faith.
2. We need to ask forgiveness for the reason behind these negative words against our God and His readiness to meet our every need.
3. The next step is to ask Holy Spirit for His help to teach us to hear how negatively we speak against the promises of God.
4. Along with Holy Spirit's help to hear how we speak, we need to ask Him to teach us how to speak with faith for our needs to be met.
5. We need to focus on the promise of God to meet our need and not on the problem.
6. We need to make a quality decision to use the power of our words and speak God's promises no matter what is going on in our bodies or the situations around us.
7. And we have to speak faith on a consistent basis, not just once in a while.

If we will put these seven principles into practice, our confessions of faith will produce what they are meant to. {eoa}

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

*This article originally appeared at .*

---

## Why Your Best Defense Isn't a Good Offense After All

Thirty-five years ago, I stopped a pickpocket. It happened on Nassau Street in lower Manhattan as I watched a man match his stride with a woman in front of him. When he was close enough, he reached into her side coat pocket from behind and lifted out her wallet.

She was clearly oblivious to what was happening, so I said something. Actually, I shouted something. It wasn't very profound. More on the order of, "Hey, you! That's not yours! Give it back!"

The victim stopped and turned around. The thief did the same. Then he called out something I'll never forget. "Mind your own business!"

That's right. He chastised me for interfering with his

“business.”

I had forgotten about that incident until recently. Before I canceled my landline, I received a steady stream of scammer calls. You know, the ones where someone calls from “Windows” and says they’ve seen “suspicious activity” on your then they offer to help.

The frequency of these calls was beyond annoying. No matter what I said or did, I couldn’t stop them. So I confess to having a little fun at their expense. If I couldn’t stop the calls, it gave me a tiny bit of satisfaction to cause them grief, too. So I might have pretended to be deaf and make them repeat themselves umpteen times before I hung up. Or I might have feigned cluelessness about owning a computer, so how could they have received notification of suspicious activity?

But one call stands out from all the others. The scammer call came (again) and I messed with the caller (again). This time, his response left me speechless—and reminded me of the pickpocket from 35 years ago. When he realized I wasn’t falling for his line, he chastised me for wasting his time! He had called me for fraudulent purposes, intending to scam me, yet he had the nerve to say *I* was wasting *his* time?

Clearly the pickpocket and the scammer both subscribed to the philosophy, “The best defense is a good offense.”

Then I thought of how I often respond when I’m under the Holy Spirit’s conviction. Yup. The best defense is a good offense:

—Lord, I know I’m supposed to forgive, but what she did is so much *worse!*

—Lord, if I don’t get this job, then it’s *your* fault if I can’t pay my bills.

—Lord, I know you said I need to put others’ interests ahead of my own, but if you want me to glorify you, I *need* that

opportunity.

Sigh. What I *need* is humility. I need to call my behavior what God calls it. Unforgiveness is sin. Pride is sin. Selfishness is sin. The best defense is not a good offense. The best defense is humility and surrender to the Holy Spirit. Because, in reality, I have no defense of my own for sin. I only have the payment made by Jesus Christ on my behalf.

My best defense is my *only* defense. His name is Jesus. {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 .

*This article originally appeared at .*

---

## **Instead of Fearing the Ministry of Angels, Learn to Discern Them**

Prophetic minister Jennifer Eivaz believes angels are real and that believers can learn to distinguish them from counterfeit spirits. She also believes God sometimes sends angels for the purpose of healing, which she says she has experienced personally.

“A lot of us are really apprehensive when we talk about angels because we’re so afraid of the counterfeit,” she says on the *Take 10 With Jenn* podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network. If you see what you believe to be an angel, she says, “You just ask that angel, ‘Whom do you serve, and why are you here?’ And depending on the answer, that will tell you everything.”

Eivaz adds another key insight to keep in mind when discerning angels. “By the way, a real angel, it won’t let you worship it. It will rebuke you, possibly,” she says. “The apostle John, in the book of Revelation ... just succumbed to the glory of God that was on the angel talking to him, and he began to worship that angel, and that angel rebuked him. ... If you start going the wrong direction with the real angel of God, it will set you straight. ... God’s holy angels, they always adhere to the Word, the written Word—they never deviate [from] it.”

Eivaz proved her ability to discern angels in one of her first angel encounters. “I was pregnant with my son, and I was just struggling one night in particular, and I just couldn’t keep any food down and something just wasn’t right. And I kept saying to myself, ‘If this doesn’t end in a few hours ... If this doesn’t stop, this problem in my body, if it doesn’t stop in like an hour, I’m going to take myself to the emergency room.’ It just seemed like something was really wrong.

“Well, when I said that to myself, this light showed up in front of me; I couldn’t make out the form. But I knew inside by the discerning of spirits—that ability from the Holy Spirit to distinguish what’s God and what’s not God—I knew in myself it was an angel,” Eivaz says. “I said, ‘Put your hand on my stomach. And when you do that, I’ll be healed.’”

“And so this angel did exactly what I said. ... It reached out and put its hand on my stomach. And when it did that, I was healed. So again, I’ll ask the question, ‘Do angels heal?’ because a lot of people say no, but we have to know from the Bible that there are demons of affliction. There’s a spirit of

infirmity,” Eivaz says. “Jesus cast a spirit of infirmity out of the woman who was bent over for 18 years, so we can conclude then that if there are demons of affliction, there are angels sent for the purposes of healing.

“Nevertheless, we always give God the glory, because God is the healer; Jesus is our healer. And we don’t give credit to the angels,” she says.

To learn more about the work of angels and how to discern them, listen to this podcast.

---

## Why You Need to Build Spirit-Filled Silence Into Your Life

Why is quiet such a rare thing in our world?

Consider that:

–When we get into our cars, one of the first things we do is turn on music.

–When we come home to an empty house, how often is the television turned on for “background noise”?

–If a group of people are silent for more than a few seconds, someone invariably feels the need to say *something*, even if it’s just to make small talk.

–The word “crickets” has come to mean silence, the kind of silence heard on a country evening when, apart from the chirping of crickets, there are no other sounds.

–Speakers searching for a particular word often fill the gap with a drawn-out “um” rather than allow silence to hang in the air until the word occurs to them.

Why does silence make us uncomfortable?

The fear of silence actually has a name: “sedatephobia,” a diagnosis that has become prevalent in the past 50 years or so.

The rapid development of technology has added to this problem. Many people experience symptoms akin to withdrawal if they are separated from the external stimulation of their devices for even short periods of time.

Even among Christians, the concept of having a “quiet time” (reading the Bible and praying) is something we have to be intentional about or it just doesn’t happen.

Becoming comfortable with silence has been an adjustment for me this past year. Living with someone for four decades usually meant having a person home to talk to or to listen to. Either way, a silent house was not the norm.

But the consequences of discomfort with silence reach beyond physical or psychological implications. In filling the silence, we’re drowning out the voice of God in our lives.

How many of us have said, “I wish I could hear God speak to me”? The truth is, He *is* speaking to us through the Bible. Still, His Holy Spirit also speaks to our spirit, prompting us with conviction, comfort, thoughts and ideas to provide guidance and direction. Of course, the Holy Spirit will never direct us contrary to His written Word.

But if we’re dependent on a wall of sound to dull our senses, why are we surprised that we cannot hear God speak to us? Remember the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings:

*And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind*

*split the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake came, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, a fire came, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire, a still, small voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood in the entrance to the cave (1 Kings 19:11b-13a).*

Could it be our dependence on background noise has caused us to become obsessed with seeking God's dramatic moves because He is now competing with all the other sounds and stimulation in our world? Are we convinced that if God is speaking, it must sound like a strong wind, an earthquake or a roaring fire, and if it doesn't, then it must not be God?

Instead of filling the silence, what would happen if we intentionally built periods of silence into our day? Not nap times, but rather, quiet times without external stimulation. Such times are when it will become easier for us to hear and recognize God's "still, small voice," or as other translations phrase it, "low whisper" (ESV)" or "gentle blowing" (NASB).

Even better, what would happen if we were to train our children to have a quiet time in their day? A time when they sit still and think about what God has done for them. The children's program in Bible Study Fellowship International (BSF) actually incorporates such a quiet time as preschoolers are taught a Bible lesson, then spend a few minutes simply lying down and thinking about what they've learned.

If we encouraged this practice in our homes, perhaps when they grow to adulthood, children wouldn't be uncomfortable with silence. Instead, those "crickets" might help them recognize God's gentle whisper guiding them through life.

*What do you think? Are you filling the silence or are there quiet times in your daily routine? Is it time to begin*

*building those quiet spaces today? {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 .

*This article originally appeared at .*

---

## **Your Phil. 3:10 Path to Deep Intimacy With God**

Sometimes we can feel like God is far away from us, or not answering us when we call. But it’s not true at all, and we can’t go by feelings. He is very close to us! The Bible even calls Jesus “Immanuel” (Matt. 1:23), which means “God with us.” He’s not “God far away from us,” and He’s not hiding from us—He’s God *with* us!

Our heavenly Father is an open book, if we choose to read Him. Paul stated in Philippians 3:10 (AMPC): “My determined purpose is that I may know Him” and went on to describe just what that looked like: “... that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly.”

We can do that too. God wants us to know Him that intimately,

that closely.

There's a difference between knowing *about* someone and knowing them. You and I know *about* our favorite movie star or political figure; we know who they're married to, where they live, maybe what they like to eat or what their favorite color is.

But we don't have their personal cell number or know their true motivations and desires. We've probably never even met them in person. We don't really *know* them like we do someone who is close to us.

Lots of people are like that with God. They know some things *about* Him, but they don't really *know* Him. They don't know what to expect from Him in a given situation because they're not intimately acquainted with Him.

Can we get closer to Him? Can we know Him better? I think we can—I think we're supposed to. Paul had that with God. You can too! That's the kind of deeper relationship God wants with you. He wants to be closer than you've ever imagined. He is ready, willing and able to have the closest relationship possible with you, if you want it.

He wants to be known by you—to have His power and glory and love flowing freely through your life!

Because it takes time to truly know someone. And it takes proximity—you have to be in the same place at the same time, sharing things and going through some things together so that you know what to expect from each other when real-life pressures come along. {eoa}

**Karen Jensen Salisbury** has been in ministry over 30 years. Formerly a lead pastor, then an instructor at Rhema Bible College, she is currently an itinerant minister and author of several books. Connect with her on her website, ; Facebook; Instagram or Twitter.

*This article was excerpted and adapted from Karen's new book, Closer Than You Ever Imagined: Experiencing the Deep Relationship With God You Always Wanted and appeared originally at . To read the first part FREE, preorder your copy or join the Launch Team, click here.*

---

## **Anne Graham Lotz: Follow God's 'Road Markings' to Live in His Abundance**

“See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I am commanding you today, and the curse, if you will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn from the way which I am commanding you today” (Deut. 11:26-28a).

When I drive down the highway, painted lines on the pavement provide helpful guidance. A dotted white line lets me know that if the lane of oncoming traffic is clear, I can pass other cars. A solid line means no passing is allowed. The highway department is not trying to take away my joy in driving. The lines on the road are intended to keep me safe, and keep others safe, while I'm on my way to my destination.

In a similar way, as we live and travel down life's road, we can push the boundaries God has established. But we do so at our own peril. If we go outside His “road markings,” the

likelihood is that we will get hurt, as well as hurt other people. At the very least, we will experience life on a lower level than He intended. The alternative is to take God at His Word, stay within His boundaries and trust Him to know what's best for us.

Let's consider some of His road markings:

–When God says to have no other gods before Him, He knows that other gods—such as money, fame, sex, pleasure, power—will enslave you.

–When God says not to create and worship idols, He knows that behind them are demonic forces who will weaken you, deceive you and suck you into evil attitudes, words, actions and thoughts that you had no idea you were capable of having or saying or doing.

–When God says not to misuse His name, He knows that unless you reverence Him, you will not have even the beginning of wisdom with which to live and make your decisions.

–When God says to set aside one day in seven in order to focus on Him, He knows that such a lifestyle will help keep your faith anchored and remind you that the world doesn't need your effort to continue spinning.

–When God says to honor your parents, He knows it will lead to a richer, fuller, longer life.

–When God says not to murder, He knows that human life has a high value. Yours and theirs.

–When God says not to commit adultery, He knows sexual betrayal destroys a marriage bond and cracks the foundation of a nation.

–When God says not to steal, He knows that if we want others to respect us and our possessions, we need to respect them and their possessions. Without mutual trust, we cannot have safe,

healthy relationships.

–When God says not to lie, He knows that integrity is foundational to a successful life and a strong society.

–When God says not to covet, He knows the danger of never being content with what we have, whether it's a spouse, a home or a job. We will be dominated by greed that demands more and more until we are insatiably unfulfilled (Ex. 20:3-17).

This simple and incomplete rationale for heeding God's road markings illustrates that His practical, divine directions for living are for our own good. And while you may be questioning what the Holy Spirit has to do with what is in essence the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses, we may benefit from being reminded that the entire Bible is "God-breathed"—divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit, both Old Testament and New Testament (2 Tim. 3:16).

When you or I go outside His directions for living—His road markings—we wind up with less than God intended us to have. This begs the question, what if you have gone outside God's road markings? What if you have hurt yourself or someone else and now want to live according to God's directions? The first step is just to tell Him. Be honest.

So at the beginning of this new year, whether you have been living in ignorance of His directions or in rebellion against them, tell Him what you have done, where you are and that you want to live as He directs. Then start reading your Bible. Study it, love it and live by it. God the Holy Spirit is your helper. Your strengthener. Your Counselor. He is just waiting for you to turn to Him and give Him the freedom and authority to bring order out of your chaos. {eoa}

**Anne Graham Lotz**, *second child of Billy and Ruth Graham, is the founder of AnGeL Ministries and former chairman for the National Day of Prayer Task Force. She has authored 15 books, including her new release, Jesus in Me: Experiencing the Holy*

Spirit as a Constant Companion.

*This article originally appeared at .*