

How to Eat Your Way Out of Your Adrenal Fatigue

“The battle is real,” as my friend says.

And when it comes to adrenal fatigue and food, it is a tough battle to wage.

I don't know what it's like for others, but for me, it was a vicious cycle. Giving into fatigue led to mindless eating, and mindless eating usually meant unhealthy “comfort foods” that would put my body in a relaxed state that only fed the fatigue. And so the cycle went.

The fact is that much of our diet causes chronic inflammation to our organs and arteries. Inflammation puts stress on our bodies, which causes strain for our already overtaxed adrenals.

How Food Affects Adrenal Fatigue

The trick is to stop listening to our emotions that want to be soothed with chips, cookies and burgers, and go for the foods that will help heal our bodies, reduce inflammation and boost our metabolism.

Before we get into the do's and don'ts, I just want to say that I am trying my best to follow this plan. I'm not there yet, but I am much better than I used to be. I eat far fewer carbs, far more protein, far less junk food and sugar ... but I could eat more leafy greens.

Nix the Caffeine

One of the very first things you must do to help good adrenal function is to stop the caffeine habit. Caffeine is a stimulant. It agitates your body and causes your adrenal glands to work needlessly. Replace caffeinated drinks with

water and herbal teas.

Cut the Carbs

While one needs carbs in their diet, we can all agree that our society consumes far too many carbs and far too few leafy greens. Carbs cause our blood sugar to spike, and in moderation, this is OK. But proteins help our energy levels work at a slow, even pace. To help your adrenal glands function better, switch to a *lifestyle* of lower carbs, higher protein and a large, daily dose of leafy green vegetables.

Update! In February 2017 I began a ketogenic lifestyle, and it has been crucial in my healing process. Find my Keto articles and recipes here.

Gut-Healthy Foods

To help with good digestion, begin to add foods to your diet that are rich in probiotics: natural yogurt, homemade sauerkraut, kefir and other fermented foods. These foods promote good health in the body, which aids in warding off viruses. By doing so, it cuts down on the stress your body would otherwise face.

Other Foods You Should Eat

–Colored vegetables.

–Sprouts.

–Ground flax.

–Brown rice.

–Oats.

–Berries.

–Honey.

–Fresh/raw seeds and nuts.

–Black beans.

–Eggs.

***Update 2018 – This list has been edited since writing it. I have crossed out the carb-heavy foods as I truly believe that only whole-food carbs can be advantageous for adrenal fatigue sufferers. Leave behind the grains and sugar, and reach for a sweet potato!*

Food You Should Avoid

–Sugary fruits.

–Refined grains.

–Sugar.

–Caffeine.

–Starchy foods.

–Trans-fats.

Two More Food Tips:

1. **Food allergies** and/or sensitivities put a lot of extra strain on the body. Many times we don't realize that we have food allergies or sensitivities until we've eliminated those foods from our diet.

I am lactose intolerant, and I've noticed that anytime I have food with milk or cream in it, my body suddenly feels horrible. An easy way to determine a food allergy or sensitivity is to do an elimination diet. Once you've eliminated all foods that typically cause a reaction, introducing them back into your diet one by one will help you determine whether you need to avoid a certain food altogether. Typical allergies or sensitivities are: dairy, eggs, gluten,

nightshades and nuts.

2. **Candida** is an abundance of yeast in the body that can cause fungal infections. The result is a body that falls prey to viruses and an assortment of symptoms very similar—and connected to—adrenal fatigue. Following a Candida diet that restores your friendly bacteria and stops the yeast overgrowth will help to reduce stress in the body. {eoa}

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**Spirit-Filled Psychologist
Offers Powerful Advice for**

Your Post-Holiday Blues

Have you experienced deep emotional pain during the holidays? Clinical psychologist Dr. Barbara Lowe says many people do. In her clinical practice in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, she says, "Our phone rings off the hook as the new year starts because people are coming out of the holidays.

"And often they've experienced pain being around their family of origin ... and things that have been bothering them underneath the surface have kind of bubbled up," Lowe says on *Dr. Barbara's Whole Life Podcast* on the Charisma Podcast Network. Part of the reason for this, she says, is "the roles we've played in our families of origin and maybe roles that we're continuing to play. ... We all play roles in our family, whether we come from a healthier family or a less healthy family. No family is perfect. None of us comes through unscathed because of sin and brokenness in the world."

But what happens when, as healthy adults, we step out of those roles? Lowe says that sometimes, we face persecution or criticism from other family members "because we're stepping out of what has been holding the family together. It's like every dysfunctional system is held together with this imaginary glue that tries to keep everyone in place. And there's this feeling like .. 'If you rattle it, we're all going to break because of the chaos we grew up in. We don't want that to happen again, so don't break out of that role.'"

What God wants, Lowe explains, is just the opposite: that we become children of freedom, as Romans 8 describes. To do that, she says, we must step off the triangle of pain in our relationships and walk in freedom. "The triangle of pain has three points, and each point is a pain point. It's a role that when we play it in relationships, we are getting into a painful cycle. There is the role of the persecutor. That's the role of the blamer: 'You're doing everything wrong.' ... Now

when someone else comes against us with this kind of persecution, this blame, this criticism, our tendency is normally going to be to go to one of the two other points on the triangle: the caretaker/fixer or the victim/child.”

To have healthy relationships, Lowe says, we must stay off this triangle of pain and its sinful cycles. To learn more about how to do this, listen to this podcast.

How the True Comforter Can Release You From Your Comfort-Food Addiction

There was a time when I thought the best butterscotch brownies in the world were an out-of-this-world comfort. Then I realized I was becoming addicted to comfort foods, which caused me to gain up to 430 pounds and have a death sentence pronounced over me.

When I began to understand I was a sugar- and comfort-food addict, I also began to see why I was always stuck in the Romans 7:19 conundrum. “For the good I desire to do, I do not do, but the evil I do not want is what I do.”

I wanted to stop eating all the things that were making me gain weight, but I didn’t do it. I didn’t want to gain weight, but I did it anyway.

I learned that my problem was actually threefold: I was broken metabolically, emotionally and spiritually.

Broken Metabolism

My metabolism was that of an addict. I had low beta endorphins, the feel-good hormones, and low serotonin, the hormone that says everything is right with the world. Foods with high sugar and carbohydrates, which we typically call comfort foods, help elevate those hormones in our bodies. Problem solved, right? Wrong.

The effect of those foods on the body wear off after a while, and I need to eat more—hence, the feeling that I can't stop eating the brownies or the sugar cookies.

Having a broken metabolism also means I have unstable blood sugar. When my blood sugar is low, my body asks for more sugar. When my blood sugar is low, my mind gets foggy or confused, I can't think logically, I get a low-level headache, I feel depleted like I have no energy and I am hungry! At least that's how it affects my body.

When this happens, if a glass of water doesn't do the trick, I eat protein. Focusing on eating protein instead of what I might *desire* to eat instead helps me be intentional. However, I don't wait for hunger to hit, because we all know when hunger hits, we can become ravenous monsters. So I eat small amounts of protein throughout the day to make sure I don't have that blast of hunger. Protein is my go-to source to keep my blood sugar level stable.

Emotionally Broken

I did not learn how to process my emotions as I was growing up. There were many reasons for this, one of them being that my mother was emotionally unstable with high highs and low lows. She was diagnosed at one point with manic depression, similar to what they call bipolar today. She also had anxiety and other issues.

She was confusing emotionally to me. If she had a bad day, she

might take it out on me. If she had a good day we'd be dancing in the kitchen. I never knew what kind of mother I'd come home from school to find.

On the flip side was my very even-keel, mild-mannered, godly father, who was the hard worker in the family. I wanted to be like him. He read his Bible all the time, went to church every time the doors were open and prayed a lot.

I should have learned from him that the Holy Spirit is the source of peace and comfort, but I didn't connect the dots. I just knew I wanted my emotions to behave like his.

Eating Away My Emotions

I learned early on that I could manage my emotions, at least for a while, by eating them away. This was way easier than trying to figure out how to deal with them.

I shoved any negative or positive emotions down to the cellar of my life, where I thought I'd buried them. When some situation would trigger them again, I threw more comfort food at them. This ran rampant over my life for way too many years.

Today I understand more clearly that God gave us emotions for a reason. What we eat will affect how we feel, but feeling those emotions and processing through them is the best thing we can do for ourselves and those around us.

Spiritually Broken

All along, God had been telling me to stop eating sugar and breads and eat more meats or proteins, vegetables and fruits. This was exactly what I needed to do, but I was too spiritually broken to listen to Him.

I was a spiritual rebel in this area. I was sure I couldn't do what He wanted me to do. I was always weak around foods made with sugar. I was 100% right about that. I am weak around those foods, but I did not realize I could trade my weakness

for God's strength. Paul says so right in the Scripture.

"He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10, NIV).

It took me a while to trust God and rely on His strength instead of my own weak and shaky foundation. Then I realized that the biggest issue I had was really a spiritual one.

"Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24-25, NLT).

The Real Comforter

Jesus is the answer, but how do I access His comfort? In John 14:16 Jesus tells His disciples that He is going away, but the Father is going to send them another Comforter.

In the Passion Translation, that same verse says: "And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Savior, the Holy Spirit of Truth, who will be to you a friend just like Me—and He will never leave you. The world won't receive Him because they can't see Him or know Him. But you will know Him intimately, because He will make His home in you and will live inside you."

To be comfortable means we have physical comfort or ease. We are cozy, snug, warm, pleasant and agreeable, but the word also means to have a mental and emotional state of comfort when we are contented, undisturbed and at ease.

Dual Meaning of 'Comfort'

Notice there is a dual meaning of "comfort." There is physical

comfort, and there is mental and emotional comfort. The comfort the Holy Spirit brings combines these with the state of spiritual comfort.

When Jesus told the disciple He wouldn't leave them comfortless, He wasn't talking about food and clothes, though we know when we trust Him He will provide what we need. He was talking about the comfort that comes from knowing we are in right standing with God.

He was talking about that still, small voice of the Holy Spirit inside us telling us, "You are beautiful. You're My prize. You, My daughter, are enough. Remember I'm right here with you. You are never alone. You need not fear because I am as close to you as the air you breathe."

True Comfort

Because the Holy Spirit has chosen to make our bodies the temple where He lives, He will guide us continually if we let Him. He will direct us when we don't have a clue where we are going. His presence is our secret weapon against the world. He is our comfort.

When we choose to use foods to alleviate our stress, anxiety, despair, sadness, anger, frustration, overwhelm, overwork, regret, guilt, shame, depression and even to elevate our moods to be anywhere near happy, we are at best getting a false sense of comfort. We have bypassed the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

He alone is our Comforter, not the foods we crave. Those will be part of our demise if we continue to allow them to control our lives.

The Holy Spirit will be our source of true comfort if we allow Him to. Friends, trust me, we want Him to comfort us. Brownies don't hold a candle to His comfort. It is truly out-of-this-world good. It is exactly what we need. {eoa}

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Anne Graham Lotz: ‘Pre-prayered’ for the New Year—And Beyond

While we may not know what the new decade holds, we are confident of who holds it. So on this New Year’s Eve, it seems very fitting to be pre-prayered for the future.

Join Me as We Pray Together

Lord of eternity,

You are the great I Am ... the same yesterday, today and forever.

As we approach the new decade, our apprehension is overcome by our expectation. Could it be that we are truly approaching the end of human history as we have known it? In the next 10 years, will we experience the beginning of Your kingdom on

earth? Are we soon to hear the trumpet blow, and the loud voice of the archangel calling us home? The intense yearning in our hearts cries, "Yes. Please. Let it be so."

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You rule over the nations. You are the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. While no one can understand Your ways, we are confident that You have a plan and are working it out for our good and Your glory (Rom. 8:28).

Yet we honestly confess: when Christ-followers are persecuted to the death; when gunmen open fire in churches; when religious leaders are not safe in their own homes; when floods, tornadoes and storms ravage our land; when derogatory expletives and vicious name-calling replace respectful debate and disagreement; when our political leaders put their own interests before the people's; when our business leaders lie; when our spiritual leaders contradict Your Word; when our social leaders divide; when our allies become our enemies and our enemies become our allies—what's going on? *Where are You?*

We are tempted to think You are ... distracted ... disengaged ... disinterested.

Inattentive ... inactive ...impotent.

Outmaneuvered ...outmoded ... outclassed.

Unable ... unaffected ... or even unaware of our fear, our helplessness, our confusion, our outrage. Why do You seem so small while our problems, disasters and enemies seem so large? Help us to regain our focus.

God of our fathers. Lord of the nations. You are the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. No one can understand Your ways. We turn to You. We return to You. Now. "Are You not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hand, and no one can withstand You" (2 Chron. 20:6b, NIV).

Did You not establish us as one nation under God? Have we not pledged, "In God We Trust"? But now we find ourselves constantly bombarded with the shrill voices of those who demand we distance ourselves from You; that You are just one of many gods, if you are a god at all; that we cannot risk offending each other by calling on Your name. We hear the enemy insinuating that You are "not fixing this" because You *can't fix this*. Our faith is being assaulted.

Our spirits rise up within us and seek to throw off the smothering cloak of spiritual oppression and political correctness. We shout Your Name. You are Yahweh. Jehovah—the personal God. The great I AM—the eternal God. The All-mighty—the powerful God. You are Jesus. Savior. Immanuel. God with us, never to leave or forsake us. Your power has not been diluted or depleted over the ages. You are just as powerful, just as much in authority as You were in Creation, in the deliverance of Your people from Egypt and in the parting of the Red Sea. You are the one who sends down the fire (2 Chron. 7:1). Who fells the giants (1 Sam. 17:1-50). Who makes wars to cease (Ps. 46:9). *Who raises the dead!* (2 Kings 4:1-37; Luke 7:11-16; 8:40-42, 49-56; Eph. 1:17-21).

As we look ahead into the new year and even further ahead into the new decade, we choose to place our trust in You. If "...the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord" (Ps. 2:2, BSB), we trust in You. If "... the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging" (Ps. 46:2-2, NIV), we trust in You. Though "nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall" (Ps. 46:6a) we in trust You. When "the wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright" (Ps. 37:14), we trust in You. We trust You. *We trust You!*

We are told we can worship You in our own churches, but we cannot bring You into the marketplace or the workplace; into

the State House or the school house; onto the battlefield or the football field; into the courtroom or the back room or the bedroom. As though the God of gods can be contained, boxed in, restricted, bound, hidden. We laugh at such foolishness and exalt You as the Most High God who strides the winds of the earth. The clouds are the dust of Your feet (Nah. 1:3). The heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain You (2 Chron. 6:18). How much less any local church building? We invite You to have Your way in our lives. In our city. In our state. In our nation. In our world.

Now arise, O Lord God. Look on us, Your people who are called by Your name. Listen to us, as we cry out to You on behalf of our nation. Do not reject us. Have pity on us.

We feel the encroaching evil. "See, darkness covers the earth, and thick darkness is over the peoples" (Isa. 60:2, NIV). Darkness and gloom are descending. Those who hate us are infiltrating us. Those who are dedicated to destroying us are all around us. Are You at the head of this army? Is this the beginning of the Day of the Lord? Have we tried Your patience and crossed the line into Your judgment? Are You holding us accountable for our sin and rebellion and defiance, for our profanity and blasphemy and idolatry? "You alone ... are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?" (Ps. 76:7). *Are You?*

Light of the world. "Arise, shine" Your light into the darkness of our own hearts (Isa. 60:1). Most Holy God. You are righteous. You always do the right thing. We have done wrong. Your light reveals we are covered with shame because we know better. We have had generations of blessing and prosperity, yet we have refused to thank You and instead give ourselves credit for what has come from Your hand. We have agreed with those who contradict Your Word. We have turned away from Your truth and believed lies. We have treated life casually. We have destroyed our environment selfishly. We have passed by the needy uncaringly. We have demanded entitlements defiantly.

We have not listened to those who have warned us of the consequences of drifting from You. Because we don't know You, we don't know ourselves, and wallow in the uncertain twilight of gender nonbinary confusion.

And now, as we look into what has been dubbed the Roaring '20s, we come face to face with a mess. What can be done to save us from ourselves? Even as the question reverberates in our minds, the answer is given: The solution to our spiritual and moral meltdown—to the restoration of the crumbling foundation of our nation—is not politics, nor the economy, nor health care, nor welfare or immigration reforms, nor free higher education, nor the court system, nor corporate or Wall Street regulation. You are the answer. You are the solution. Yet instead of turning to You, we seem to be turning farther and farther away from You. *But not now.* Now we turn back. We turn around. We return to You. We run to You. We cling to You. We plead with You ...

Turn to us! Draw near to us! (James 4:8). If You do not help us, we will be defenseless. If You do not protect us, we will be exposed to danger. If You do not deliver us from evil, we will be overcome by it. If You do not have plans to give us hope and a future, we will slide into the past tense as a nation (Jer. 29:11-13). Into oblivion.

Father of all mercies. You have said that our land is a land that You, the Lord our God, cares for; that Your eyes are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end (Deut. 11:11). As You look on our nation from this day forward, from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2020, we ask for what we know we don't deserve. We ask for Your blessing. *Please...*

—Bless our national and local primaries and elections. Raise up men and women who will lead us back to You. Raise up another Asa, who was fully committed to the Lord all his life (2 Chron. 15:1-17). Raise up another Jehoshaphat who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. (2 Chron. 29:4-20:32).

Raise up another Josiah who renewed the covenant of his people with You—"to follow the Lord and keep His commands. ... As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord" (2 Chron. 34:1-33). Raise up leaders of moral and spiritual integrity who have a strong faith and a healthy reverence for You and therefore the wisdom to make right decisions. Put Your choice in the Oval Office.

–Bless our homeland security teams. Give them eyes to see the bad guys, ears to hear the evil chatter, minds to understand the tweets and codes and the will to act before the enemy does. Protect us from evil.

–Bless our policemen and firemen, our armed forces and Border Patrol—all those who risk their lives to keep us safe. Restore to them the respect they deserve. Protect their lives and their families. Bring to the light of justice any corruption and abuse so that we can trust those in uniform. Guard those who guard us.

–Bless our judges and prosecutors. Cause them to serve faithfully and wholeheartedly, remembering that they are accountable to You (2 Chron. 19:8-11). Punish those who do wrong. Encourage those who do right.

You are the fountainhead from whom all blessings flow. The list of our needs and our requests is endless. *Please*. Bless our doctors. Our lawyers. Our bankers. Our teachers. Our commissioners. Our farmers.

–Bless our preachers and seminary professors. Like Ezra of old, stir their hearts to be devoted to You first, then to the study and the preaching of Your Word (Ezra 7:10). When they preach or teach, compel them to preach the Word, not books about the Word. Motivate them with holy fear of standing before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for the way they have impacted others by their words and by their deeds. Remove those whose lives are out of sync with their

lips. Raise up a generation of spiritual leaders that You approve of as workmen who do not need to be ashamed because they correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15, 4:1-2). Fill them to overflowing with Your Spirit.

—And Father God. Please. Bless our families. The unloving spirits of infidelity, dishonesty, treachery, hypocrisy, immorality, pornography and adultery are sweeping through our homes. The enemy seems to be attacking us on every level, on every front. A vast army of evil seems to have been unleashed against the home. Especially the homes and families of Christ-followers. “We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You” (2 Chron. 20:12). We plead for Your divine protection. We plead for Your divine wisdom to counter the attacks so that our families are strengthened in their relationship with You. Be the center of our homes.

—Lord of love, we pray for You to bless our enemies. Yes, we do. Open their ears to the Truth. Open their minds to understand the Gospel. Open their hearts to long for Your love. Draw them to Yourself as moths are drawn to a flame. Your Light is stronger than their darkness. Bring them into the Light. Save them for all eternity. BUT if they reject You, we ask that You turn them on each other. Distract them. Destroy them. Prevent them from continuing to attack and persecute the righteous.

—Lastly, God our Father, bless us. Bless me. Make me into a vessel of honor, an instrument “... for special purposes, made holy, useful to our Master and prepared to do any good work” (2 Tim. 2:21b). I know the night is coming when work for You will cease (John 9:4). Give me the strength and health to redeem the time. Use me now for Your kingdom and Your glory. Open my lips to boldly and fearlessly make known the gospel (Eph. 6:19): the Good News of redemption for the past; hope for the future; joy for the present regardless of circumstances; love that is unconditional, boundless and

eternal (Eph. 3:14-19) found at the cross. Open my lips to just give Jesus to a world that is increasingly desperate. Use me as an ambassador of peace on earth by first leading people into a right relationship with You, then with each other. When the world around me unravels, help me to stand strong on my faith in You. And when people see me standing strong, help them to see You.

And now, God of grace, as we pre-prayer for the New Year, we ask, bottom line, that You send down Your Holy Spirit in fullness. Ignite the fire of revival in our own hearts. Protect us. Defend us. Comfort us. Empower us. Equip us as we put on the full armor of God so we can stand against the devil's schemes, so that when the day of evil comes, we may be able to stand our ground, taking up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God—and pray.

With this in mind, we remain self-controlled and alert while we keep on praying until we prevail in prayer (Eph. 6:10-18, 1 Pet. 4:7). And we keep on watching expectantly. Are the Roaring '20s the decade of Your return? We fervently hope so! *Even so, come, Lord Jesus* (Rev. 22:20).

For the glory of Your great name—Jesus, Amen. {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.*

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4 Spirit-Filled Steps for Overcoming Your Season of Depression

What happened to my joy?

The question tugged at the corners of my soul as I trudged through each day. A dark cloud hovered over every waking moment. And sleep? That was a struggle, too, as insomnia moved in and took up residence. I had one bed-wetter and another child with night terrors, so the sleep I *did* get was often fragmented and restless.

How I hated mornings. I dreaded facing a new day.

How am I supposed to be a good mom when I feel so sad, so weary, so... depressed?

Numbness presided over my heart. Things that used to bring joy now seemed empty and hollow. Routine tasks now overwhelmed me with paralyzing force. I didn't want to go out, didn't want to do fun stuff with my kids and especially didn't want to talk about how I was really feeling.

Depression carries such a stigma. If I admitted my daily struggle, I feared people would see me as weak or unspiritual. They might lecture or give unhelpful help. They might *judge* me.

Oh, what a prison depression can be. It's like walking through a deep, dark valley with insurmountable cliffs towering high above, blocking out any ray of light or hope for escape.

I've spent time there and come out the other side. Moms or

dads, are you walking through this deep valley? May I share with you what I learned?

1. **Get real with God.** He calls Himself “the God of hope” and invites us to pour out our hearts to Him (Rom. 15:13, Ps. 62:8). He can handle our pain and is not disappointed when we struggle. He is still a miracle-worker and healer of hearts. I find it helpful to write out my prayers in a journal.
2. **Let others in.** It’s really hard to own this struggle, but admitting our need and asking for help is a huge step in the healing process. Maybe it’s a trusted friend who could take the kids for a few hours a week. Maybe it’s a prayer group who will lift you up to God when you’re too down to pray for yourself. Maybe it’s a doctor who can evaluate your struggle from a medical perspective.
3. **Do something for yourself.** This may sound selfish, but sometimes it’s the healthiest, most *unselfish* thing you can do. You can’t pour into the lives of your children if your tank is on empty. Go to coffee with a friend. Get a pedicure. Find a cozy spot and read a book. Go for a jog. Take up a hobby. Find *something* that gives you rest, even enjoyment, and make room for that in your life. It will make you a better person when you get back “on duty” and give you something to look forward to in the future.
4. **Progress, not perfection.** The day may seem daunting, the job overwhelming. But instead of striving for perfection, aim for progress and rejoice in each step. Many a day I’ve walked through my house looking for one tidy room where I can sit and just breathe for a minute, only to find that messes are everywhere. I’m learning to delight in each room tidied, instead of being disappointed that I didn’t get the whole house cleaned.

Depression is a cruel companion, but it does not define us. We

are not helpless victims, but treasured children of God. He is always close at hand and has made us more than conquerors through His unconditional love. {eoa}

Meredith Mills is passionate about sharing the relentless love of God and encouraging others to walk deeply with Him. She blogs at [and](#) is on Twitter @DazzledByTheSon.

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Does the Bible Really Say to Put Yourself Last?

Most of us are dedicated to taking care of others before taking care of ourselves. This flows out of a well-meaning but jaded way of looking at how we are to live the Christian life.

JOY

I learned in my teens that JOY stands for Jesus first, Others second, then Yourself. The message I heard from every pulpit was that focusing on myself would be selfish and only get me in trouble.

I understand clearly where this message comes from, and it is true. We are humans, and as such, we are self-centered and want what we want. The JOY acronym, though, is misleading.

Focusing on Jesus first is always right. However, we have to go to His Word to find where we need to focus next.

Great Commandment

Jesus, in answering a Jewish leader about what commandment is greatest, told us the answer: “‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these’” (Mark 12:29-31, NIV).

Jesus clearly tells us that we cannot love others if we have no love for ourselves. He also tells us we cannot really love Him unless we are taking care of our heart, soul, mind and strength. If we don't take care of every part of ourselves, we have nothing left with which to love Him.

The Amplified version makes how we love ourselves even clearer when it adds, “You shall [unselfishly] love your neighbor as yourself.” Once again, how can we unselfishly love our neighbor if we don't love ourselves the same way?

Unselfish Self-Care

Many people read that they should love themselves and think that means they are being prideful about how they look, how smart they are or what talents they have.

That isn't what Jesus means by loving ourselves. What He means is to take good care of ourselves—body, soul and spirit. If we take good care of ourselves, we will know how to take care of others.

Unselfish self-care is making sure we are healthy in every way—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. This means eating healthy, getting enough exercise, expanding our minds by reading and studying, taking good care of ourselves emotionally and staying in touch with God spiritually, which includes reading and studying His Word.

These are our basic needs. However, many people, especially those who are trying to please other people, put all their needs aside and expend all their energy trying to take care of others.

They do a poor job of it, though, because they have not taken of and invested anything in themselves. As a result, they quickly burn out. That leaves those who were depending on them not knowing what to do.

The Golden Rule

The Great Commandment goes hand-in-hand with the golden rule. "In everything you do, be careful to treat others in the same way you'd want them to treat you, for that is the essence of all the teachings of the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12, TPT).

I thought I had taught this verse to one of our foster sons who was not being very kind to kids in his classroom. After being suspended from school again for shoving a boy in his class, I had him repeat the verse to me. He said, "'Do unto others what they do to you,' and he said mean things to me, so I shoved him."

He didn't get what Jesus was saying at all. However, when I asked, "How would you want him to treat you?" The wheels began to whirl in his brain.

"I want him to be nice to me," he said.

"Then you need to be nice to him first even if he isn't nice back. Can you do that?"

Positive Self-Care

He was honest and said he didn't know if he could be nice because the boy was mean. At that point, I realized he had no deep well of self-care to draw from.

All of his life, he had been told he was worthless, stupid and no good. If we could change how he thought about himself, he might be able to begin to see others in a different light. We began working on that, but for some people, it takes a long time to change their view of themselves.

What about you? How do you view yourself? What words do you use to define yourself? What negative things have people told you about yourself that you cannot get away from no matter how far you run?

Change Your Self-Talk

In order to treat others with love, we first have to learn to treat ourselves with love. When this concept began to make sense to me, I took an inventory of all the negative self-talk I told myself throughout the day.

My big one was: "Teresa, that was a stupid thing to do." The other was, "You can't do that. You're too fat or you're too dumb." I was my own worst enemy.

In addition to working on loving myself by taking care of my body, eating healthy food and exercising, I also had to start eliminating the negative words I was speaking over myself. Words like "stupid," "fat" and "dumb" had to go.

Positive Affirmations

I had to begin to tell myself the things God says about me. I kept track during the day of when I said negative things to myself and replaced those with positive words. That day, I spilled the entire contents of my purse in the checkout lane at the grocery store.

I immediately went to my default and said out loud, "Teresa, you are so stupid." Realizing what I had just done, I corrected myself and said, "Teresa, you're smart for picking everything up. It was just an accident. Everyone has accidents."

Don't get me wrong. I didn't change all at once, but God began shining His light on all the ways I was beating myself up over and over again.

I had to learn how to take care of and love myself even in my spoken and unspoken words. I had to take those negative words captive and replace them with what God says about me.

What God Says About Me

To really understand that, I searched the Scriptures and wrote down 77 positive affirmations with references. These are things God says about me, and so I repeat them over myself when I need encouragement.

To begin with, I chose one affirmation and repeated it to myself at least 10 times a day to get the truth down inside me. The great thing about God is that when He cements these truths in our lives, they will overflow into the lives of others. This is huge, and it's one way loving ourselves helps us love others.

One of my favorite affirmations is "I am beautiful." I have one kind of socks I wear. I have many pairs, of course. They all say, "I am beautiful" on the toes. It reminds me every day of what God says about me when I am about His work.

"What a beautiful sight to behold—the precious feet of the messenger coming over the mountains to announce good news!" (Isa. 52:7a, TPT). There are 76 others that are just as powerful as this.

77 Affirmations

The list of 77 affirmations is a free download on my website. It's also something I encourage those embarking on a lifestyle change journey to read, internalize and keep handy to refer to every day.

The scripture references are included, but I purposefully did

not write out the entire verse. Looking up the verses is all a part of internalizing the truths of how God sees us. It helps us to understand more of what He is saying to us.

The big truth is for us to love ourselves unselfishly by seeing ourselves as God sees us. Then, we can really love Him with every part of us and love others in that same way.

You may download the 77 affirmations as my gift to you. Go here: . {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.

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3 Biblical Reasons Christians Should Say No to the Enneagram

If you don't know what an Enneagram is, don't feel dumb or alone. A lot of people are still unfamiliar with the Enneagram.

In fact, I had never heard of it until a few months ago when I saw someone post about it on social media.

Shortly after that, I saw several articles pop up about how it can help your marriage, how it can help your walk with God and even a pastor who took several weeks to preach a series of Sunday sermons on the Enneagram to his congregation.

That's when I realized I needed to know more about this really funny word.

The Enneagram isn't something new; it's just in the past couple of years that it's gained traction among Christians. It teaches that there are nine different personality types.

What makes the Enneagram concerning from the start are its origins in the occult, divination and New Age. This article from The Gospel Coalition delves into the occultic background, and I encourage you to read it for yourself.

3 Biblical Reasons Christians Should Say No to the Enneagram

Beyond the sketchy origins of the Enneagram (something Christians should absolutely take into consideration), there are other reasons why we should reject the urge to join this new fad in the church.

Over the past few months, my dad (Dr. Hackett and author of the blog "Foundational") and I have been writing about our concern about the direction the evangelical church is heading.

There is a growing love affair with New Age ideas, hedonism, Gnosticism, spiritism and extra-biblical revelation.

Because we have a form of godliness, but deny its power, we have to find that power in other places:

So we create adrenaline-charged atmospheres in our churches. We become fascinated by New Age doctrines.

We practice energy healing. We preach self-help, self-care and how to live your best life now.

We obsess over preachers and evangelists of the past, visit their graves, take pilgrimages to their churches, engage in necromancy and pray for their mantles.

We "Christianize" yoga, meditation, centering and other Eastern religious activities.

All because our godliness being void of power has created a vacuum that demands *something* ... something for which we have determined that God, the Bible and the Holy Spirit are not enough. Blasphemous.

It is worse than blasphemous, because we expect unbelievers to deny God and His power, because by their very definition, they do not believe in Him.

But the light that is in us has become darkened, because by our very definition we *should* believe, and we don't.

We lie. We blaspheme. We declare God's power and deny it at the very same time. But then we go a step further and march right into the devil's territory and borrow His sulfur-saturated, evil, twisted, distorted, and demonic ideas and try to worship God with them.

I would like to add that researching Enneagrams has caused me to consider why Christians are so preoccupied with personality tests at all.

We spend a lot of time filling out questionnaires that tell us about ourselves, doing those silly Facebook quizzes and pondering whether we're introvert, extrovert or somewhere in between.

I know. I have done this very thing.

But preparing for this article has given me a whole new

perspective on this and it is central to the danger I find not only in Enneagrams, but in this entire quest to know who we are.

1. Christians should say no to Enneagrams because their identity is in Christ.

The very first danger I see with Enneagrams is the quest to know who we are.

This is a natural question every human, at one point or another, asks themselves: "Who am I?" God created us with this deep need to find our identity. And He simultaneously created the answer: Himself.

When we discover our true identity in Jesus Christ, we have no need for personality tests, quizzes, Enneagrams, Myers-Briggs—all of which have, at one point or another, been proven as scientifically inaccurate.

Of course they are! Human psychological study will never be so advanced as to answer the plaguing question: "Who am I?"

The temptation to identify ourselves as introvert or extrovert; melancholy or sanguine; judging or perceiving; or any of these personality types is great. We get a false sense of knowing ourselves and understanding others. But we will only ever truly know ourselves when we seek to know God. The more we know who God is, the better we see ourselves for who we really are.

More importantly, the more we glorify God in our lives, the less our significance and self-awareness matters to us.

2. Christians should say no to Enneagrams because self-awareness is a trap.

I am deeply concerned with how much the church has begun to shift its focus off God, His sovereignty, and His supreme glory and on to self:

–Self-care.

–Self-help.

–Self-actualization.

–Self-awareness.

In other words, self-glorification.

The idea of “self” in general flies in the face of God’s Word that commands us, “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself” (Phil. 2:3, NKJV).

Self-awareness has its roots in ancient philosophy that denies God and His supremacy in our lives.

As Christians, we are not called to be self-aware; we’re called to be God-aware!

When we become God-aware, our identity comes into proper alignment, and we understand that we are:

–Lost.

–Helpless.

–Corrupt.

–Not good (Rom. 3:10).

–Chosen.

–Adopted.

–Redeemed.

–Made new.

What more do we need to know? In other words, our self-awareness cannot help us. Apart from God, we are nothing and

nobody; we cannot redeem or cleanse ourselves. When we are aware of this, if our natural inclination isn't to turn to God, but to try to help ourselves, we will spend the rest of our lives in futility.

Once we come to a proper view of ourselves, our only hope is to become God-aware and find a new identity and awareness in Him!

3. Christians should say no to the Enneagram because it is rooted in the counsel of the ungodly.

Psalm 1 tells us that we are blessed when we do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly. Why?

Because the mind of the unbeliever is unregenerate; it is filled with knowledge rooted in philosophies that deny God, His power and His very existence. While I know that this may seem extreme to some (perhaps many), if we call ourselves Christians, we must allow God's Word to dictate every decision and action of our lives. And His Word clearly says that we are *blessed* when we do not walk in the counsel, in the philosophy and in the advisement of the ungodly.

So using a personality test rooted in occult and New Age origins, attributing our identity and awareness of who we are to it, and then allowing this newfound identity to determine our direction is dangerous. There is no blessing in that!

The Christian should, instead, turn to God's Word, allowing it to reveal who we truly are apart from God—in all of its raw, rough, ugly detail, and then discover Christ's solution to that problem. Through that, we will uncover our real identity.

When we become aware of who He really is, our own desire for affirmation and significance loses importance.

Once we come to this place, our direction is clear; the question of "Who am I?" is answered, and we have peace and

security—the quest is over. And that vacuum we were born with is filled. {eoa}

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

This article originally appeared at .

How to Strip Away the Enemy's Deep-Seated Lies That Have Left You Clothed in Shame

Do you wholeheartedly see yourself as clothed in a beautiful robe of the righteousness of Christ? Or do you still define yourself by your weak moments or the shame from your past?

Several months ago, I heard what seemed like the audible voice of the Lord saying my name while I was waking up. An inner cry rose up inside of me, and I said, “Lord, I just want to be who

I was made to be." I immediately heard Him respond and say, "You already are; you just need to believe it."

Later on I went for a walk and saw a group of beautiful butterflies drinking nectar from some wildflowers, when I sensed the Lord continue saying, "Juliet, you are a butterfly who still believes you are a caterpillar."

This dialogue with the Lord started a process of Him revealing a dark and hidden area of shame-based thinking that robs me from understanding at a heart level my real identity in Christ. I want to point out that deep-rooted lies and core beliefs about our identity can remain stuck within the subconscious, which means that we are not conscious of them.

However, these lies and core beliefs are exposed when just the right painful circumstances touch these places indirectly. An example might be a friend who is in a busy season and doesn't have the time to connect with us, triggering in us an old wound of rejection. The pain of rejection feeds an insecure core belief of not being enough or worthy of one's attention. Most often, these fears and insecurities reinforce our shame-based thinking, which feeds our worst fear of *believing there is something wrong with us*.

This stronghold of shame started at the very beginning of time when Adam and Eve felt disconnected from their perfect union with God the moment they sinned. In Genesis 3:7, it says that "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked [Adam and Eve became aware of their vulnerability and humanity apart from God]. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves."

While growing up, my identity was scarred and damaged by my earthly father's extreme brokenness. Deep inside, I believed that there was indeed something wrong with me because I had unknowingly taken on my earthly father's shame. I imagine that you might relate to similar feelings of shame that say deep

down inside, “There is something wrong with me.”

If our core belief is that there is something wrong with us, we will perform for love, striving to prove we’re OK and worthy of acceptance. This mentality feeds legalism—the belief that we must earn or deserve God’s love and acceptance. The opposite of this is licentiousness, which says, “Why even bother. If I’m bad, I might as well give up trying.”

The truth is that Father God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. [God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, to be *holy and blameless* before Him in love.” He adopted us into His family by Christ Jesus—to the praise of the glory of His grace which He graciously *bestowed on us in the Beloved*” (see Eph. 1:3-6; emphasis added).

In the Message translation, 1 Peter 2:9-10 gives a powerful declaration of who we are in Christ: “But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be holy people, God’s instruments to do His work and speak out for Him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference He made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.”

I want to share some more truth with you about how our heavenly Father has removed our garments of shame and sees each one of the redeemed as clothed in the righteousness of Christ. The following passage illustrates that our robe is “put on by God” through faith, rather than by what we do. At the beginning of Zechariah, there is a powerful scene that unfolds, where Joshua, the high priest, is accused by Satan.

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?”

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and was standing before the Angel.

Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, "Take away the filthy garments from him." And to him He said, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes" (Zech. 3:1-4, NKJV).

The name of Satan means "the accuser." In Revelation 12:10, it says that Satan accuses us day and night before God. The accuser says, "You're bad. You're a loser and will never measure up." However, Hebrews 7:25 tells us that Jesus, our advocate, always lives to intercede on our behalf. Jesus says, "Father, I've clothed My beloved ones in My robes of righteousness. They are holy and without blame."

In many ways, in this present age, we relate to God mostly as sons and daughters. The prophetic picture in Psalm 45 describes us as His royal daughters (or sons) clothed in beautiful robes standing before the King. It's a song about the love of King Jesus for us and the glory we will share someday as His eternal bride (or partner): "Listen to me, O royal daughter; take to heart what I say. Forget your people and your family far away [let go of your past shame]. For your royal Husband delights in your beauty; honor Him, for He is your Lord" (Ps. 45:10-11, NLT)

"The bride, a princess, looks glorious in her golden gown. In her beautiful robes [of righteousness], she is led to the king" (Ps. 45:13-14).

This psalm reflects how our heavenly Father sees us based on our identity in Christ, which is confirmed in the New Testament as well:

[Jesus] died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. ... If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:15-17, 21, NKJV).

Beloved, do you still see yourself through the old lens of shame as a caterpillar? Or do you genuinely believe you are a butterfly in the spirit—a new creature in Christ?

When we have mother and father wounds, it distorts this picture of how our heavenly Father sees us and our belief about His love for us on a personal level. Consciously, we know He's a God of love, but subconsciously, we don't believe that He will love and accept us whenever we are weak. Instead, we listen to the voice of the accuser and live in anxiety and self-condemnation. Fear and self-condemnation both keep us trapped in a state of introspection and rob us from connecting with the presence of the Holy Spirit at a heart level. If the enemy can keep us stuck in a shame-based mindset and focused on our perceived weakness, we will miss out on walking in the authority of God's kingdom.

I have good news for you! It's not God's goal to perfect us in our areas of weakness (so we can relax and take our eyes off ourselves). Instead, He uses our weakness to teach us to depend on Him humbly, so we will decrease, which makes more room for His life to increase through us. Paul describes this well:

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect

in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

How do we overcome shame-based thinking and begin to see ourselves as sons and daughters of the King clothed in robes of righteousness?

Growing in surrender and faith based on the understanding of God's unfailing love are the primary keys. Once we truly comprehend and receive the depth of God's love, we can fulfill His plan of loving and obeying Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength—along with genuinely loving others as ourselves. Ephesians expresses the dynamic of God strengthening our faith, which increases our capacity for surrendering to God's love and results in being filled with more of Him.

That [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:16-19).

Our faith becomes stronger as we posture our hearts to listen to the Lord. Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Whenever I hear from the Lord, faith becomes an anchor within my heart, and it holds me steady through the storms of life. Hebrews 3:7-8 says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts," but lay down your walls of self-preservation.

If you sense there are walls of self-preservation around your heart that are hindering you from hearing from the Lord, ask Him to give you the grace and courage to express your pain to Him. If the wall deep down inside of you had a voice, what would it be saying? An example might be, "I am afraid that if I lay down this wall of protection, no one will keep me safe."

I encourage you, beloved, to lay down your walls of self-protection and trust Jesus to share the job of protecting you. In the world, we will experience sorrow and suffering, but our heavenly Father is always there to use everything for our good when we surrender our lives to Him.

Hind's Feet on High Places is a beautiful allegory, written many years ago by Hannah Hurnard. In this story, the main character's name is Much-Afraid. On her journey to the high places with the Chief Shepherd, Much-Afraid learns two crucial lessons: *acceptance with joy* and *bearing with love*. Some practical ways to surrender our will is to rejoice in the Lord by faith—no matter what—and to allow His love to set the pace of our lives in how we relate to others. Recently, when I was required to surrender something very dear to me, I heard the Lord telling me to thank Him for the years I had to enjoy doing what I loved. Acceptance with joy helps to minimize feelings of loss and disappointment.

A few years earlier, I was feeling anxious about potentially losing what I described as important to me. I heard the Lord say, "Whatever you give to Me, you will not fear to lose, because it's Mine and no longer yours." The enemy will no longer attack us with fear in the specific areas that we have genuinely surrendered to the Lord. What are some examples of things we might surrender to God? Reputation, title, position, friends, family members, finances or even our need for sleep.

Here is a perfect example of God's strength operating through our weakness: I woke up recently at 2:30 a.m. on a day when I had to speak at an event. I immediately ran to fear instead of

God. Consequently, I took a sleep aid rather than turning to the Lord in faith. I felt so much anxiety about it that I ended up staying awake for the rest of the night. God was faithful, and He showed up the next day in my weakness. However, the lesson I learned was to trust Him more with my need for rest.

Here are some verses that connect faith and righteousness, and some regarding surrendering—or death to self:

For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (Rom. 1:17, NIV).

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction (Rom. 3:22, NRSV).

And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Phil. 3:9, NKJV).

Nor must you surrender any part of yourselves to sin to be used for wicked purposes. Instead, give yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to Him to be used for righteous purposes (Rom. 6:13, GNT).

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Gal. 2:20, NLT).

He died for everyone so that those who receive His new life

[a butterfly represents a new and transformed life] will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them (2 Cor. 5:15).

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints [faith working through love] (Rev. 19:7-8, NKJV).

Beloved, are you ready to surrender your shame-based thinking to the Lord and put on His robes of righteousness by faith?

Where do you need freedom from fear or shame? {eoa}

Juliet Canha moved to Kansas City in 2002 with her husband, Randy, and three children to participate in ministries at the International House of Prayer. While at IHOPKC, Juliet has ministered in deliverance and inner healing counseling, provides friendship group leadership as a district pastor, leads the altar ministry team, oversees the community care department and has taught marriage enrichment and spiritual wholeness discipleship classes and seminars. She also leads the Journey Together Forerunner Church Women’s Ministries.

Juliet is also a licensed minister and a certified Christian counselor. One of Juliet’s passions is sending out monthly blogs to her friends, family and those she’s ministered to through the years. She also loves going on nature walks with her husband and spending quality time with her family and friends. Juliet is the author of an inner healing workbook called Spiritual Wholeness & Emotional Comfort, and recently co-authored a discipleship and inner healing manual called Spiritual Wholeness Toolkit. These resources can be ordered online here.

This article originally appeared at .

Why Taking a Year-End Spiritual Inventory Will Help You Follow God More Fully

When I was in high school, I worked in the toy department of a department store. Twice a year, we prepared for an outside firm to take inventory. We worked with these teams to count every item on the shelves, and I do mean *every* item. We even included incomplete or damaged toys and games to ensure everything was counted.

Today, I apply the concept of taking inventory in other areas of life. For example, before I head out to the supermarket, I examine the pantry and the refrigerator to determine what we need. On those occasions when I forget this important step, the result is too many of some groceries and not enough of others.

What was good for the toy department and for my pantry is also good for my spiritual life. I need to take spiritual inventory on a regular basis to evaluate my condition. The end of one year and the beginning of another seems to be the right time to ask myself some pointed questions. This week I am:

Taking Stock

Proverbs 27:23 (NIV) tells us to “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.” In biblical times, wealth was often measured by the size of one’s flocks and herds.

Today we usually measure wealth by the size of our bank accounts. But true wealth has nothing to do with counting dollars. So I will be asking myself:

–How have I grown in my relationship with the Lord this past year?

–Which fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) have I cultivated?

–How have my earthly relationships grown and developed?

Checking Up

Psalms 139:23 gives us a glimpse into King David’s heart as he pleaded with God: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.”

It’s natural to want to avoid dealing with unpleasant things. But some things must be dealt with or the consequences will be worse than the confrontation! I may not want to face the areas of my life that require changing, but I do want to be all God desires for me to be. This means asking:

–What habits from the old year am I dragging into the new year?

–What bitterness or resentment do I need to release?

–Who do I need to forgive before the new year begins?

Planning for the New Year

Proverbs 16:3 (NASB) admonishes us, “Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established.”

Like many people, I live a busy life. Without plans and lists, my schedule would soon fall apart. But I also want to be sensitive to God's plans for me, because I know He has them!

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) reminds me, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." While this promise is specifically for the nation of Israel, the applicable truth for me today is that God does, indeed, lead me according to His best for my life. The question is, am I following His leading so I can experience His best for me?

In order to be available for what God desires for me, I am asking myself:

-Am I serving where *I* want to serve or where God has *called* me to serve?

-How tightly am I holding on to my own agenda and ambitions?

-How much flexibility is there in my calendar? Am I open to God's interruptions?

One year from now, I hope to do this exercise again. And it's my prayer that I will not have wasted the time God extended to me.

What questions are you asking yourself as this year ends and the new year begins? {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 .

How You Can Point Your Family to Jesus as You Celebrate Christmas

Oh, the familiar swirl of the season ...

Tiny bodies, mouths open and eyes wide, marveling at myriad dazzling lights. Preschoolers to teens explaining their every “need” on an ever-increasing wish list. Moms and dads scrambling for the best prices on this year’s must-have items. Parties. Recitals. Church programs and special events.

A towering evergreen, begging to be dressed in glittering apparel. Trips to visit beloved grandparents and extended family. Holiday tunes blaring from every radio and television. Apple-cinnamon scented candles. Chocolate-oatmeal cookies and a dizzying array of pies fresh from the oven.

But somewhere in the rush of activity, there’s an undercurrent of *knowing* and of realizing there’s more to these days—that there is meaning, value and purpose to this season. As parents, we inhale deeply because we know if we’re not careful, we’ll let it slip away. Moments of depth and meaning could dissipate like swirling, twirling snow flurries that never linger long enough to cover the frozen ground.

Emmanuel—God with us. We read, write and sing about it. We teach our children that God sent His only Son—as a baby—to grow; live a perfect, holy life and bear the weight of our sins on the cross.

The beginning of God’s plan of redemption for a broken world includes the shadow of a cross over a hay-filled manger, and

the startling vision makes our hearts clench in shame and anguish.

So, why do we *rejoice* at Christmas? Why do we call Jesus a hope-filled gift from God the Father?

Three days after His death, Jesus rose again, defeating the sin and brokenness that held us captive. *God with us* means that the one who created us not only rescued us from sin and death, but He desires *relationship* with us. Through Jesus, we can walk with God in our moments, seeking His heart and wisdom in every circumstance and every storm. We can find strength for each day's journey and take joy in knowing we are never alone.

This is cause for true wonder and joy, and this is the *heart* of the Christmas message to live and breathe with our families.

Oh, the beautiful, magnificent gospel of Jesus Christ! "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NIV).

This holy season, we can be intentional about pointing our children to Jesus. We can set aside family time to pore over Scripture, detailing the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. We can encourage older children to dig deeper and to discover Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah.

And we can encourage our children to reach beyond themselves and be givers—to share the wonder and joy by making cards, baking cookies or caroling for a neighbor or shut-in. We can lead by example and engrave priceless memories on our children's lives.

Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Christ. But this birthday of miracles is part of an intricate tapestry, a

master plan—originating in the very heart of our Creator God.

Come! Let us adore Him! {eoa}

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