

Is Your Jesus Too Small?

I love Christmas. The music, lights and decorations. Trees with their ornaments, Christmas villages and especially nativity scenes. Of all my Christmas decorations, my favorite is a large tabletop display that includes a manger set in the midst of a hustling, bustling Bethlehem.

A friend has a tradition regarding the nativity scene to remind her young family of the central focus of Christmas. She sets up the crèche with Mary, Joseph, the animals and the shepherds. On Christmas morning, they read the nativity story, and one of her children places the baby Jesus in the manger. Then they sing a Christmas carol about the birth of the Savior.

Think about Christmas carols such as “Silent Night,” “Away in a Manger” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” What do they have in common? A baby. Cute. Helpless. Non-threatening. Christmas overflows with images of a babe whose first bed was a livestock feeding trough.

The images are there, but it seems the babe in the manger is being pushed out of His own birthday. Why are people so against the one whose birthday we celebrate?

More Than a Baby

Because He did not stay a baby—Jesus grew up and went about His Father’s business. He stepped on toes. He pushed people’s buttons—especially religious people.

He’s still stepping on toes and pushing our buttons by touching the idols that compete with Him for our attention and worship—even religious activities that make it easy to avoid intimacy with our heavenly Father.

Yet that’s the reason the Word became flesh. The God of the

universe took human form—not as an adult, but as a helpless baby. Still, when Jesus was born, something happened beyond the simple birth of a baby. The infinite, sovereign, Creator God chose to temporarily limit Himself within the body of a finite human being.

J.I. Packer wrote, “The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless human baby, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child. The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as this truth of the Incarnation.”

Charles Stanley put it this way: “Christmas is that moment in time when God, in His unconditional love, stepped out of heaven onto earth, in order that we might one day step out of earth into heaven.”

And C.S. Lewis wrote, “Once in our world, a Stable had something in it that was bigger than our whole world.”

Is Your Jesus Too Small?

If you think of Jesus Christ as nothing more than an innocent baby surrounded by animals and shepherds, then your Jesus is too small. And if your Jesus is too small, your problems are too big. Your temptations are too powerful. A world filled with terrorism is too fearful. And your hope is swallowed up in despair’s darkness.

But John, the Gospel writer, tells us Jesus is both life and light. His light cuts through our darkness. Here’s another description of Jesus from Revelation 1:13-18 (NIV):

Among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held

seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

Jesus is more than a baby. He is the glorious, majestic Son of God! There isn't a manger big enough to hold Him anymore because the universe itself isn't big enough to hold Him.

What will you do with Jesus Christ? I'm not talking about the baby lying on a manger. I'm talking about the Son of God who brings light and life.

Will you surrender to, and honor, the Son of God who entered this world as a tiny baby, but didn't stay a baby? Then, during this Christmas season, will you purpose to tell someone else about your Savior?

We celebrate the birth of baby Jesus at Christmas, but He is more than a baby! {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 .

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Not Getting What You Need From Your Spouse? Marriage Expert Shares Help and Hope

“One sinner marrying another is a setup for pain.” Those surprising but wise words come from Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley, a practicing OB-GYN who also has a doctor of ministry and has ministered to thousands through the years. In her many conversations with husband and wives, she shares with host Marti Pieper on the *Hope for Your Marriage* series on Charisma News, she hears one common complaint: “I’m not getting from my spouse what I need.”

But, Dr. Carol says, there is hope. Since, as she says, “no other human being can give you everything you need,” the key is to focus on your own spiritual maturity. “The more you grow and the more you become a resilient, built-up and mature human being, the more you will have to give to your spouse. Marriage is not so much about being happy—although in a godly, healthy marriage where both people are committed and loving, there is much happiness ... I truly believe marriage is about learning to love well. And that includes finding healthy ways to get your own soul filled up so that you have something to give to your spouse.”

But how can couples achieve that filling and maturity? Dr. Carol offers three practical tips. First, she says, “Learn to feed yourself. God makes mental, emotional, spiritual nourishment available, just like He makes physical food available. Just like God makes fish swim in the ocean and grain grow in the field, but He doesn’t bake your fish and put it on your plate or hand you a sandwich, you have to learn to

find what you need and decide to take it into your being. It's the same with the soul nourishment we need. It's out there. Some of it you will get from your husband or wife. Some of it, you will need to look to other godly, health sources—but learn to feed yourself.”

Second, Dr. Carol says, “Study your spouse. That is a lifelong journey. Continue to learn what makes your spouse tick. What are their dreams, hopes? What is their baggage from the past? Where is God working in their life? What are the places where they need healing? How does God see them? And therefore, who has He called you to be to them? So continue to study your spouse.”

And the third of Dr. Carol's top tips is simple but profound: “Stay on your knees. ... Two sinners, married to each other, are a setup for pain—unless God is the glue holding you together. You absolutely need His intervention to truly have the kind of intimacy and relationship that He designed for you and that you desire. God is a God of intimacy, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, intimate in Himself. And He designed marriage, the intimacy in marriage, to be a picture of the intimacy He experiences. ... So stay on your knees in that journey.”

To hear more of Dr. Carol's wisdom and hope for your marriage, listen to this podcast.

Anne Graham Lotz: Here's the Real Christmas Miracle You Need

At this time last year, I was undergoing chemotherapy. Because I was confined for days to my bed or a chair due to severe side effects, I found myself watching television Christmas movies. So many of them referenced either what they called the "magic of Christmas" or the "Christmas miracle." But none of them accurately explained the real miracle of Christmas, which is so much more than even reconciliation in a family, falling in love or finding your heart's desire under the Christmas tree.

The real Christmas miracle is this: Anyone and everyone can come into a right relationship with God. Anyone and everyone can be restored to fellowship with God. Anyone and everyone can be born again. We can start over. And best of all, anyone and everyone can enjoy the presence of Jesus living within. Even you. Even me.

This astounding, supernatural miracle is illustrated by the experience of the virgin Mary. She was a young girl, living in the small mountain village of Nazareth. We assume she was like any other girl in her town—poor, somewhat uneducated, yet with the small hopes and dreams of all teenage girls in her village to one day be a wife with a home and children of her own. But she also must have been unlike others in her innocence, purity, godliness and desire for the things of God. She may even have clung to a deep desire for the Messiah to come in her lifetime. While she knew from the familiar prophecy of Micah 5:2 He would not come from Nazareth and therefore she would have had no expectation of her own involvement with Him, she could dream (John 1:46).

When she reached the marriageable age of approximately 13 or 14, she was betrothed to an upright man named Joseph. Once she entered into the betrothal, she was considered married to Joseph in every way except sexual intimacy. The betrothal would last for approximately one year, during which time they lived separately. Joseph would then use this time to prepare a home that they would share after the formal wedding ceremony. For years, for centuries, according to Jewish tradition, this had been the way of her people. Everything about Mary's betrothal was normal ... traditional ... customary ... until the angel came.

What was Mary doing on that history-splitting, life-altering day? Was she winnowing wheat? Harvesting grapes? Milking a cow? Making cheese? Baking bread? Drawing water? Was she just going about her everyday responsibilities when God invaded her life? I suspect Mary had never seen an angel before, yet it wasn't his appearance that troubled and frightened her. It was how he greeted her.

"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28-29, NIV). Seeing her expression, the angel immediately sought to put her at ease by telling her not to be afraid. But what he then revealed must have thrust her into the stratosphere of bewildered amazement: "Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:30-33).

It is forever to Mary's credit that she didn't drop down in a dead faint nor run away in panic nor laugh hysterically at something so absurd. Instead, with great poise and sincerity, she inquired, "How will this be ... since I am a virgin?" (Luke 1:34).

Consider carefully the angel's response, because his explanation to Mary of what would happen to her physically parallels what happens to you and me spiritually when we receive Jesus Christ by faith. The angel answered her question in this way: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). "For nothing is impossible with God" (Luke 1:37, ESV).

Mary knew:

-This would immediately turn her life upside down and inside out.

-She would face public humiliation.

-Joseph might reject her.

-The potential for the immediate destruction of all her own hopes, plans and dreams.

Despite all that, Mary immediately submitted to what she recognized as God's will for her when she responded, "I am the Lord's servant. ... May it happen to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38, GNB).

At that moment, Mary fully embraced what God had for her, which was radically different from anything she had ever thought of for herself. Her faith in God's word as it was told to her by the angel, and her submission to God's will as she let go of her life to embrace His, resulted in the miraculous conception of the physical life of Jesus within her.

And this is the similarity between Mary's experience and ours:

You and I place our faith in God's Word, which says:

-We are all sinners.

-Physical, spiritual and eternal death are the wages of sin.

–God sent His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross so that whoever places faith in Him would not perish but have everlasting life.

–The blood of Jesus is sufficient to atone for any sin and all sin.

–If we confess our sin, God will be faithful to cleanse us and forgive us.

When we place our faith in God's ways, this means:

–He will give us eternal life, which is not only heaven when we die but also a personal, right relationship with God now.

When we place our faith in God's Word, this means:

–We will have the right to become God's child, born supernaturally into His family, if we believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and receive Him into our hearts.

When we place our faith in God's Word, this means:

–If we hear the word of truth—which is the gospel as I have just related—and believe it as it applies to us and if we claim Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord (grasping the Lamb of God with our own hands of faith, confessing our sin and guilt, believing that they are now transferred to Him and that we are cleansed with His blood), we conceive the life of Jesus within us spiritually in the person of the Holy Spirit. And that's a miracle! (Rom. 3:23, 6:23; John 3:16; Eph. 1:7; 1 John 1:9; John 17:1-3, 1:12; Eph. 1:13-14; John 3:3-6).

This Christmas, experience the miracle for yourself. If you already have, then please tell others they can experience it, too! {eoa}

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including her new release, Jesus in Me: Experiencing the Holy Spirit as a Constant Companion, from which this article was adapted.

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6 War Room Prayers of Faith You Can Pray Over Your Kids and Grandkids

It's important to keep your kids surrounded with faith and love (instead of fear and doubt).

Anyone can believe what they see in regards to their child. But faith believes something it can't see yet, according to the promises in God's Word.

So let's be faith-filled parents and grandparents! Let's believe the best of our children and believe that God's Word is working in their lives.

We can do that by taking regular personal prayer time to pray for them (not at them)—praying in faith according to the Word.

Here are six faith-prayers to get you started:

1. For safety (Ps. 91:10-11).

Father, I pray that no evil can come near my children today.

They have supernatural protection everywhere they go, for God's angels are with them. He has commanded those angels to watch over my children, holding them up and keeping them safe. No sickness can come near our household, and no plan of the enemy can prosper against us.

2. For good choices (Deut. 30:19, Rom. 8:14).

Father, in Jesus' name, I thank You for helping my children make right choices for their lives today. I declare that they make godly choices every day. They choose Your way in life: right friends, right decisions, right actions, right thoughts. Your blessing is on them, and they are led by Your Spirit in their choices.

3. For favor (Ps. 5:12, Luke 2:52).

Father, I ask that You give my children supernatural favor today as they obey Your Word. I ask that as Your children, they will have extraordinary blessings and opportunities. I declare that the favor of God is upon them, and people want to bless and help them. They are treated like sons of the Most High God everywhere they go.

4. For supernatural guidance and help (John 16:13, 14:26).

Father, I trust the Holy Spirit in my children today. He is leading them and guiding them into truth, and they listen to His voice. He is teaching them and helping them in the affairs of life. My faith is not in my children's ability to do everything right, but in the mighty Holy Spirit who lives in them.

5. For their divine destiny (Jer. 29:11, Rom. 11:29).

Father, I thank You that You have a wonderful, divinely ordered plan for my children's whole life. They have a divine destiny, and I declare they are walking in it and toward it today. Help them every day to fulfill Your perfect plan for

their life. I declare they have a bright future!

6. For obedience (Eph. 6:1-3).

Father, I call my children obedient. I declare that they honor their parents and other adults, so things go well with them. Everywhere they go today, things go well for them. And because they obey, they will live a long, satisfying life on the earth—the zoe kind of life. Obedience is a blessing in their life; thank You for helping them to understand that more every day. {eoa}

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How to Flip Your Complaints About Christmas Into a Christ-Centered Testimony

You may be reading this in early December, but complaints about Christmas already abound. Have you heard them?

—“Christmas has become too commercialized!”

This one isn't really new. Remember the 1947 classic movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*? More than 70 years ago, people were complaining about Christmas commercialism. One of my favorite quotes from that movie is:

"Yeah, there's a lot of bad 'isms' floatin' around this world, but one of the worst is commercialism. Make a buck, make a buck. Even in Brooklyn it's the same—don't care what Christmas stands for, just make a buck, make a buck." —Alfred, the janitor at Macy's in *Miracle on 34th Street*

—"Christmas is being ruined by the politically correct crowd!"

"Merry Christmas" might offend someone, so how about "Happy Holidays"? If you don't like that one, feel free to wish people a "Merry Coffee." Yes, that phrase is now appearing on the cups of a certain national coffee chain.

—"We've lost the true spirit of Christmas!"

What's the true spirit of Christmas? Ask five people and you'll receive six answers, and most of them are usually found in a Hallmark Christmas movie. The spirit of Christmas is love. Giving. Family. In one Christmas movie, the spirit of Christmas is an actual spirit who hasn't "crossed over" yet!

Perhaps you've shared these same complaints. Maybe you have a few of your own about the Christmas season.

We can dwell on the complaints, or we can change our perspective and our behavior.

Instead of complaining about commercialism, just don't buy into it (pun intended!). Declare your family gift exchange a "homemade zone." All gifts must be homemade or services offered. No purchase required!

Instead of getting upset over politically correct greetings, extend a little grace. Perhaps the store employee is simply following her manager's instructions. The next time someone

wishes you a “Happy Holiday,” why not respond with a dose of kindness? I try to reply, “Thank you. And if you celebrate Christmas, Merry Christmas!”

And the true spirit of Christmas? I love those Hallmark movies as much as anyone, but they miss the boat on this one. The spirit of Christmas isn’t any of the things usually mentioned. The spirit of Christmas is Jesus! All those other things—love, giving, family—they’re all made so much better because of the birth of the one who came to restore us to our heavenly Father.

So as we enter the Christmas season, the next time we feel the urge to complain, let’s just flip it around. Don’t be part of the problem; be part of the solution. Grumbling about “those people who are tarnishing our Christmas celebration” won’t win them over and will only reinforce negative stereotypes about Christians.

When we reflect Christ to a hostile world, we proclaim the real reason for the season. Let’s start 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 .*

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Detroit Lions' Chaplain: How Holy Spirit's Intervention Saved My Marriage

Dave and Ann Wilson's 10-year marriage had come to a crisis point. But only one of them knew about it.

Dave, now chaplain of the Detroit Lions and host with his wife, Ann, of *Family Life Today*, had planned a romantic anniversary dinner complete with "romance and talking and roses," he says. On the way home, he stopped in the Detroit-area parking lot where they were about to launch Kensington Church, now a multi-campus congregation. That's when, he tells host Marti Pieper on the *Hope for Your Marriage* series on Charisma News, he received an unwelcome surprise.

Ann refused to kiss him. He couldn't believe it.

"And so I finally asked her, 'Is anything wrong?'" Dave says. "And she says, 'Yeah. ... I've lost my feelings for you.'

"I was dumbfounded, because if you had asked me before that night, 'What's your marriage on a scale of 1 to 10?' I would've said it was a 10, at least a 9.8. And I guarantee my wife would agree," he explains. "And then here we are sitting there, and she's saying it's not a 10 at all."

Ann shares her perspective about that crucial moment. "I'm amazed that he thinks it can be a 10, because I'm thinking we're 1, maybe 2.5. But here's what I thought, *Well, of course, he's so clueless and not in touch with our marriage. Of course he thinks we're great, because he's not even thinking about us.*"

Ann had struggled for years with Dave's busy schedule and lack of attention to their relationship. "I started out angry," she

says. But by this time, “my anger had turned to bitterness. My bitterness turned to resentment. And now [I was] at a place where I didn’t even care [Dave was] gone. I fully expected him to argue back because that’s what we did.”

But something changed that night, and it began with the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. As Ann waited for Dave’s words of defense, he started to reach for his day planner in the backseat of the car. “I was reaching back to grab it and prove to her that she was wrong,” he says. “‘I have been home! I can show you what nights I’ve been home, blah, blah, blah.’

“And as I’m reaching back, I feel the Holy Spirit ... the Spirit nudges me pretty strongly and says, ‘Don’t you touch your planner. Just shut up and listen.’ I really heard two words: ‘Shut up.’ And so I pulled my hand back.”

But the Holy Spirit had more to say. “One word: Repent, repent, repent, repent, repent ... I knew with one word, what God was saying in the word ‘repent.’ It was, ‘You’ve lost your first love.’ You’re running around doing all this ministry, speaking at all these places, leading all these places, and you’re far from Me. ... If you want your marriage to work, it starts with Me. You’re not going to fix this horizontally. You’re only going to fix this vertically.”

To hear how God used that moment of brokenness to set the Wilsons’ marriage on a healing journey described in their new book, *Vertical Marriage*, listen to this podcast! {eoa}

Why We Know God Is Willing and Able to Heal Skin Cancer (and any Other Disease)

Is God able and willing to heal skin cancer? Is skin cancer greater than God? Most of my readers immediately respond with the correct answer, "No!" while others do not know Him as healer, so in all honesty, they are not sure which is greater. And then there are many who say He is able to do anything, but perhaps, He is not willing to heal skin cancer or any disease for that matter. But I am here to testify to you that our God is both able and willing to heal all who come to Him.

Let's look to Luke 5:12-13 from the Amplified Version of the Bible. It says, "While Jesus was in one of the cities, there came a man covered with [an advanced case of] leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean and well.' And Jesus reached out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' And immediately the leprosy left him."

From this Scripture, we can see not only God's willingness to heal, but His ability to heal the incurable disease. And this portion of Scripture isn't just so we rejoice at this amazing healing from long ago, but that our faith would be stirred today, in the time of our need for His healing touch. Let's look at a modern-day healing and be encouraged that we serve a living God who is both able and willing to heal us today.

On Oct. 10, 2019, Liberty submitted a prayer request on behalf of her father. She wrote: "My dad had prostate cancer years ago; [he] had a botched operation and lots of radiation therapy. Last week his doctor told him he had skin cancer. I need people to believe with me that his body is completely restored in the name of Jesus. We are not believing the lie of

the enemy. Thank you.”

I responded to her request on Oct. 17, 2019. “Liberty, in the name of Jesus, I renounce this cancer lingering in his body. I curse it at its root and seed and command it to die off at the seed and dry up at the roots and be completely gone from his body, never to return again. I command every cancerous cell and tumor to be gone in Jesus’ name. I say, ‘Body be healed, be strengthened and be made whole for the glory of God, amen.’”

Liberty wrote back on Nov. 11, 2019, with this wonderful praise report: “Becky, I want to thank you and give all the glory to God for my dad’s healing.

“The doctor had taken a biopsy from his face, he was told it was skin cancer. The following tests showed NOTHING, I think they were surprised because they even took an X-ray of it to make sure. He is all clear and will remain that way in Jesus’ name. Thank you, Lord, for Your mercy.”

Our God is able and willing to heal skin cancer, or whatever deadly disease is attacking you and your loved ones. {eoa}

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For more about God’s power over cancer, check out Spiritual Strength Through the Valley of Cancer, a Charisma e-book available at this link for just \$.

The One Spiritual Step That Moved This Woman Out of Carb Addiction and Into Her Divine Destiny

Yesterday, I worked about six hours straight on my next book. Somewhere during that time frame, I wrote the word “discovery.” It’s not an earth-shattering word by any stretch of the imagination, but the minute I wrote it, it was as if God illuminated it to me like shining a flashlight directly on it.

He has done this numerous times with Scriptures I’ve read, but never with something I’ve written. Of course, I pray that every word I write is inspired, but I knew the minute I couldn’t get that very ordinary word out of my mind that He wanted me to understand something deeper, something more about it.

What Discovery Really Means

So I set out to discover what the word “discovery” really means. I was surprised to find out that at its core, a discovery is a revelation.

The dictionary definition is “the process of discovering.” To discover means to gain sight or knowledge of something, to see, expose, make visible, disclose or reveal. A discovery, I learned, is an enlightening or astonishing disclosure or a revelation.

Now I was even more curious as to what the dictionary would

say about the word “revelation.” It is an “act of communicating divine truth or something that is revealed by God to humans.” I had no idea that all of that was in the word “discovery.”

What the Scriptures Say

Then, of course, I had to go to the Scriptures to see if discovery is mentioned. I had a sneaking suspicion that if “discovery” was in the Word, it would be in a newer translation. Two portions of Scripture really stood out to me. The psalmist tells us that there is no end to the discovery of the greatness that surrounds the Lord (see Ps. 145:3, TPT).

I love the fact that there is always something more we can discover about God. However, I was really intrigued by the next passage I found.

“Jesus said to all of His followers, ‘If you truly desire to be My disciple, you must disown your life completely, embrace My ‘cross’ as your own, and surrender to My ways. If you choose self-sacrifice, giving up your lives for My glory, you will embark on a discovery of more and more of true life. But if you choose to keep your lives for yourselves, you will lose what you try to keep’” (Luke 9:23-24).

Why Surrender Is Key

Surrender is a necessary principle for spiritual maturity. It is also a big key on our weight loss and healthy living journeys. What Jesus is telling us here is that if we choose to surrender our wants, desires and even the things we think we need to survive in this world, God will reveal to us what true life is all about.

In other words, when we surrender, we automatically begin a journey of discovery of more and more about true life. When we walk with God, He begins to reveal things we didn’t know before.

We may think we know all about the Christian life, but Jesus is saying we haven't even gotten started until we surrender what has been holding us captive to earthly things and keeping us from being all in with God.

Surrender Brings Destiny

Surrender for me, of course, was giving up certain foods I couldn't seem to say no to. These were foods made with sugar and flour. I was addicted to them. Others may be addicted to these or other foods, but my addiction also included any foods with high carbohydrate content. They didn't have to contain sugar, but the higher the carbs, the more the foods captured me.

When I began the journey toward giving up these foods, my life began to morph into one of purpose and destiny. When I weighed 430 pounds, I kept trying to shoehorn my life into a destiny I wanted for me. I told God how it would be great if I could do this or that, but nothing seemed to work out as I thought it should.

Still, all along He had been talking to me, but it was about surrendering certain foods to Him. Little did I know, doing that was the beginning of my destiny.

Follow Jesus

He used my biggest failure to teach my greatest lesson. It's a simple one, really. I am just really stubborn so it took me quite a while to learn.

The lesson is just this: Follow Jesus. Do what He says. I had to do what I already knew He wanted me to do. I didn't like it. I didn't want to give up sugar and flour. I wanted to eat all the delicious foods I had grown up with and lose weight too.

It didn't seem to me like it was very destiny-oriented to have to give up things others could eat, but when I began walking

through that process, God began to teach me more and more about Himself. He was teaching me more and more about how He and He alone has the keys to abundant living here and in the great beyond. He was teaching me more and more about how to trust and obey Him.

The 2020 Word

Every year, God gives me a word for the year. This year, it has been a combination of three words: "vision," "insight" and "discernment." He's taught me this is His equation for clarity. First I have to have His vision, which is the *what*.

Then, I need His insight into how to carry out whatever the *what* is. Finally, I must discern timing, purpose and everything surrounding them. With those three things, God helps me have clarity for what I need to do next.

For next year, I wanted my word to be "restore." There are so many things I would love for Him to tell me are being restored, but see, I don't choose my word for the year. God always chooses it for me. I know beyond a shadow of a doubt His 2020 word for me is not "restore." It is "discovery." I'm both scared and excited to see where that word leads me.

On a Discovery Quest

Knowing discovery is connected with revelation, though, makes me even more intrigued about what the year 2020 will hold.

I know most of it is wrapped up in this verse: "Lord, You are great and worthy of the highest praise! For there is no end to the discovery of the greatness that surrounds You" (Ps. 145:3).

It's a quest I've been on, but now it is one that God has highlighted and is redefining and deepening for me. I can't wait to see what the year holds.

This is unusual for me on another level. I've never had God

give me His word for the year this early. Maybe that is just so I can ask you: What's your 2020 word? If you know, share it in the comments. If not, tell us how you will know your 2020 word. {eoa}

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How This One Supernatural Key Can Unlock Your Food Addiction

What does an adventure with God look like? When I was a kid, I loved to listen to true stories foreign missionaries would tell when they came to our church. To me, an adventure with God looked like going to an exotic foreign country, South America or Africa, or some remote Caribbean island.

I actually did listen to the missionaries when they came to church. I was so convinced and convicted about the need that at one point I felt I was called to be a foreign missionary.

Back then, I felt an adventure with God would involve seeing

all the places I'd never seen and having all the people who didn't look like me flocking around to hear more about Jesus.

Not for Everyone

After serving in the public relations department of a foreign mission board for a couple of years in my 20s, I got a much better idea of what being a missionary is like.

That kind of adventure with God is full of perils, near disasters, close calls, political upheavals, unrest, war, death and disease, not to mention family, climate, language and cultural adjustments. It's not all fun, games and excitement. It's not for everyone.

I've finally come to understand that dream I had of a great adventure on the foreign mission field has been translated into the greatest of all adventures, that of following God with every part of me—body, soul and spirit.

This is the adventure of daily walking with God even when things may not seem grand and glorious. As a matter of fact, they may seem very dull, ordinary and mundane.

How Not to Navigate the Journey

It's in these moments when we are likely to run to something else to bolster us up instead of God. I don't really know why it happens with us humans, but it does. When we are living what I'd call a basic life of marriage, building a family, pursuing education, crafting a career path or climbing the organizational ladder, we cease to believe we are on mission for God.

It's then that we seek other things to fill our desires. For some that becomes the desire for more and more money, working endless hours to buy a bigger house, better cars or sending the kids to better schools.

Then, an opportunity comes to make more money. It's not

exactly legal, but who will know? And then, we are off down a path we never saw coming. We are so far into it, we can't get out and we are drowning in our own desires to continue to rake in the money. Our ordinary life has turned into a nightmare.

For others it is finding a listening ear in a co-worker who begins to become more than just a friend, and before long, their marriage is in jeopardy because they felt they needed something more than the normality they had.

It happens in what seems like a blink of an eye. Everything they have built—their marriage, home, family, job—falls apart and they, too, are living in a nightmare, all because they just wanted something different.

For others, it is drugs and alcohol. Of course, no one starts out to be a drug addict or an alcoholic. It begins innocently, but for some it morphs into an addiction that leaves them penniless and alone, so very alone. And they wonder, *Where is the adventure in that?*

The Slow, Steady, Silent Killer

For me, it was comfort foods. You may think that given all of the choices we've mentioned food isn't such a bad choice. The problem with overeating, bingeing and eating out of addiction to certain substances like sugar is that it is a slow, steady and silent killer.

First it takes our health, then our jobs, our mobility, our relationships and eventually our lives. We are still the same person; there is just more flesh on our bodies.

It takes all of our time and effort just to move, much less work a normal job, do housework, laundry, cooking, errands—and forget having sex with our spouse. That's the very last thing on our list.

Eating out of addiction is a silent but deadly killer of joy

and everything necessary for survival. We aren't even aware it is at work in us until the cardiac surgeon tells us we have five years to live unless we lose weight and keep it off.

What Happened?

Let's go back just a minute, though. The reason we started down this trail of thought was because we were after a great adventure with God. What happened to detour us? Where did we get off base? After all, we were just living the American dream, weren't we?

I am very supportive of our foreign missionaries, and I know they do a great work. The truth is we are not all called to go to a foreign country. However, we are all called to have a great adventure with God, even in the ordinary sameness of our everyday lives.

Let me say it a different way. We are all commanded to have that great adventure with Him wherever we are, whether we find ourselves in a far-away land or in the city where we grew up.

Surrender Comes Before Adventure

Admittedly it is much harder to have that great adventure when you are in a very familiar environment. We don't see what we do every day as an adventure, but it is if we are committed to following God every step of the way.

An adventure is defined as an exciting or unusual experience—a risk. In order to be able to take a risk we must surrender every part of what we want to God every single day. We have to surrender our neat and tidy idea of what life is going to be like.

We have to be willing to take a journey into the unknown. Each step with God isn't a step that is known or even comfortable. It's a risky step of faith. We have to be so in tune with God's heartbeat that we understand what He's asking us to do

at any given moment.

Decisions, Decisions

Should I go to this grocery store or the other one? It doesn't seem like it matters, but God may have a person He needs you to encourage at that other store, the one you rarely go to.

Should I spend money on this program or not? It might not be something you usually ponder because you have the money to get it, but what if God wants you to save the money to help someone in need, someone you don't even know about yet?

Should I take that job, look for another or stay where I am? Decisions don't always have clear-cut answers from God, but when we are committed to doing what He wants things become much clearer.

I Trust You, God

God longs to hear us say, "I trust You." Even more than that, He longs for us to show Him by the choices we make and by stopping to inquire of Him when we have a nagging feeling that something isn't right with a decision we are about to make. We defer to Him in order to show Him that we trust Him to lead us.

As Americans and Christians we always want a definitive answer and a reason why we are making a certain choice. Friends, here's where that great adventure with God comes in.

By saying yes to traveling this journey, we must realize that we are saying yes to something that has no definitive boundaries or outcomes. Our plans have to go out the window for His to take over.

Total Surrender Is the Key

This is why total surrender is an integral part of this great adventure. We cannot take the journey without surrendering

every single part of us.

If we have a propensity toward wanting bigger and better and nicer things, we must surrender our desire for money and possessions.

If we have an inclination toward needing more and more people to validate us, we must surrender our desire for popularity.

If we feel like we have to have something to make us feel more powerful like drugs or alcohol, we have to surrender our desire for being important, famous and powerful.

When we fail or get overwhelmed and crash and burn without something to comfort us, we have to surrender our desire to be perfect.

We lay all these things at the feet of Jesus and ask Him, "What do You give me in exchange?" And He gives faith for embarking on His great adventure.

More Scary Than the Jungles

This adventure is even more scary than the jungles of Africa. Whether we are there or here, we should never be afraid because God promises to be with us when we are sold out for Him.

"Just think—you don't need a thing, you've got it all! All God's gifts are right in front of you as you wait expectantly for our Master Jesus to arrive on the scene for the Finale. And not only that, but God Himself is right alongside to keep you steady and on track until things are all wrapped up by Jesus. God, who got you started in this spiritual adventure, shares with us the life of his Son and our Master Jesus. He will never give up on you. Never forget that" (1 Cor. 1:7-9, MSG).

Give Up to Get

Surrender what is standing in your way, especially if it happens to be a food addiction, in order to take that great adventure with God.

When I surrendered sugar to God, everything changed for me—everything. I'll tell you about that sometime.

Just understand this: When you give up something to get God, you get everything you need.

You won't regret it. {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 .

This article originally appeared at .

When Your Marriage Brings Pain and Problems, Try Scripture's Surprising Solution

Pain. Problems. If you're married, you've almost certainly faced them. And marital experts Jay and Laura Laffoon are no

exception.

“We talk about ‘the big three’ in marriage,” says Jay in the Laffoons’ interview on the *Hope for Your Marriage* series on the Charisma Podcast Network. “The big three areas that you will disagree on the most are money, intimacy and family. And then you wrap all of that up in the fact that men and women communicate very differently, process very differently, receive very differently. Those three can become really, really explosive.”

What’s a couple to do? The Laffoons’ surprising answer is also the title of their new book: *Celebrate Your Marriage*. But, Jay emphasizes, “that doesn’t mean we don’t have trials. It doesn’t mean we don’t have arguments. We argue passionately in our house. But what it does mean is that we’re not afraid to laugh at ourselves, when we can really look in the mirror and go, ‘Did I just say that? Did those words just come out of my mouth? And oh my goodness, I’m such a ding-dong.’”

“It was actually Martin Luther, the great Reformer, who said ... ‘I judge the depth of a man’s face by his ability to laugh,’” Jay adds. This is one of the greatest theological minds that ever existed. And he didn’t judge a man by his ability to exegete Scripture, by his ability to pray; it was his ability to laugh. Because I think Luther understood that life is difficult, but Scripture is clear: ‘Laughter doeth like good medicine.’”

When times are tough, Jay says, “You’ve got to take a break. You’ve got to take a break from the thinking about it all the time and the arguing and the discussion to say, ‘You know what? We just need a half-hour of doing something fun,’ and maybe that’s just a walk. ... Maybe we just need to go get an ice cream sundae or ... just step out of the situation for a little while.”

And Laura adds an important word: “We titled our ministry

'Celebrate Ministries' because we do want to encourage people to celebrate what God has brought together and the way He's uniquely gifted you and put you together and remember that you are each other's biggest fans, even in the midst of crisis and loss and arguments and discussions and parenting issues and all the stuff that life throws at us," she says. "You are each other's biggest fans, and God brought you together for a reason. So celebrate that; celebrate that every day."

To learn more about how to celebrate your marriage in good times and bad, listen to this fun and inspiring podcast.