

Why It May Be Time to Clean Your Spiritual Filters

I've been thinking about filters this week. Especially since the first of the month is when I switch out the main air conditioner filter.

For the past several years, I've had my home's air conditioning system serviced semi-annually. And I'm compulsive about cleaning and changing the A/C filters.

It all started a few years ago when the A/C unit began leaking—in the house. The A/C technician responded to my frantic call. Turns out nothing was wrong with the system ... that is, nothing that couldn't be corrected by cleaning the filters once a month. The A/C system had to work too hard to pull the air through clogged filters, causing algae to build up in the drainage pipe. Yup, we brought it on ourselves by not changing the filters.

This week, I also cleaned the pool filter. The first time I did that years ago, the filter actually changed color as I hosed the sand and dirt from between the accordion folds. Yucch! As the dirt flowed off with the water, I wondered why I waited so long. And also wondered how much dirt was still in the pool because the overloaded filter couldn't capture any more dirt. Lesson learned. Now the pool filter gets cleaned regularly.

And of course, we even set up spam filters on our computers to protect us from garbage emails and viruses.

Hmmm. Now I'm wondering about my *life* filters. Am I waiting too long to clean my own filters?

Have I gotten casual about what I read? Is the content of that novel I picked up for some light beach reading really what I

want to fill my mind?

Casual about what I watch? Are summer television programs merely fun “escapism,” or are they another way to clog my filters?

What are my filters, anyway?

When I think of filters, I’m reminded of an old children’s song, “Oh Be Careful, Little Eyes, What You See.” The first stanza repeats the title, with good reason. Images stamped in our minds’ eyes often originate through our physical eyes. When Jesus said, “The light of the body is the eye. Therefore, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light” (Matt. 6:22), He may very well have been speaking about a filter.

This same children’s song also includes a stanza about our ears. Words and music are powerful influences. God spoke the world into existence with His Word. Jesus is the living Word. The words I listen to nestle deep in my soul and influence me in ways I may never fully realize.

While the first two stanzas of this song speak of what we take in through our eyes and ears, the remainder of the song speaks to what we do. We need to be careful of what we say, how we use our hands, and where we go.

What we take in through our eyes and ears affects what we say, what we do and where we go. Ultimately, it touches the state of our hearts. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) tells us, “Above all else, guard your heart, everything you do flows from it.”

And Proverbs 4:23-27 reminds us of the relationship between the state of our hearts and what we see, what we say, what we do and where we go:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.

Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you.

Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways.

Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

Hmmm ... sounds a lot like that little children's song, doesn't it?

The cleaner we keep our filters, the less dirt we'll need to clean out of our hearts.

Now if you'll please excuse me, I have some filters that need tending.

How clean are your filters? {eoa}

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How Heaven Sees Your Prayers (and Why They Matter)

It can seem a bit odd. In this day and age, when there's so much to do and distractions abound, there is still a place with one singular focus. When so many things are needed, there is still a group that holds fast to Jesus' words and chooses the better part. And as the truth of what Jesus spoke so long ago becomes increasingly evident, some are able to look beyond wars, rumors of wars, men growing faint from fear, famines that inundate already-impoverished regions and atrocities against the innocent who are caught in fights for power.

In this room, there is only one focus. In this room, one thing is preeminent. The music resounds. Praises are lifted in heartfelt adoration. Voices overlap like waves upon the shore, singing, "Holy, holy, holy" to the only one worthy of praise and adoration.

In this place, time ceases to exist. How long has the worship been ongoing? One person may say it's felt like mere minutes. Others may say they're sure it's been years but hasn't felt like it in this environment of night-and-day worship mixed with spontaneous songs, prayer and praise. There is so much going on, but it is never-ending.

And everyone's focused on one thing—worshipping the God of all gods.

Before decades of night-and-day prayer in Kansas City was streamed 24/7 to the nations, before unceasing prayer emanated from the foothills of Germany or was divinely orchestrated through King David's elaborate staffing for God's pleasure, what was on earth was first in heaven. And it still continues to this day. Not as a cacophony of conflicting elements, but as a unified symphony that is deliberate and unforced, flowing

harmoniously to the Creator.

All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 7:11-12).

In that place, seated outside of time, sits the one who reigns, has always reigned and will reign forevermore. In that place, the natural response to the power, majesty and magnitude of God is what we see replicated on earth. The created, compelled only by their experience with their God, respond to Him with unhindered adoration. It's a reaction as natural as the moon's pull upon the tide or helium's draw on a latex balloon—as simple as cause and effect.

And in the midst of this scene, voices carry forth words, not just of love and appreciation, but of prayer.

Here on earth, prayer can often feel lackluster and less than otherworldly. But from heaven's view, prayer is not just a simple act but one that is connected to the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan.

Through intercession, the Lord connects His power to our heartfelt words mingled with faith. Despite the weakness we sometimes feel, we are brought into a powerful dynamic of reigning with our God. Not only does the Lord respond in power, furthering His track record of faithfulness, but our hearts are moved so we're better positioned to labor with Him, carrying on the cry of those who've gone before us, "Here I am. Send me" (Isa. 6:8b).

Of course it's possible to serve without spending hours in prayer, but longevity in intercession fuels and sustains a happy heart of service that is connected to the fulfillment of God's desires. And this is accomplished over time as we "wear

away the carpet," seeking the Lord's power in the lives of loved ones, enemies and those we will never meet. We grapple with the taunts of the enemy and claim the age-old promises that seem dry. And we ask the Lord to breathe upon these truths once more as we await His hand.

No longer does troubling news hit hardened hearts. No longer do we only desire to pray. Instead, we begin to have ideas on how to strategically act. But we know that before we act, we must pray.

Try as we might, it's often hard to guess exactly how God will solve a problem. Throughout time He has proven again and again that He has a myriad of ways of accomplishing one goal. But those ways are not easy to fathom, let alone predict. Healing? Resurrecting the dead? Winning battles? Freeing humanity from sin and death? The strategy of the Trinity works every time but is often hard to anticipate.

The Lord works in mysterious ways, or so they say. If anything, the Lord consistently works in powerful ways, doing what we least expect, in ways we wouldn't have imagined to accomplish the things we prayed and hoped He would do, even when we don't notice His actions.

When we have more month than money, but a bill was lower than we expected. Or when our loved one needs a miracle and is transferred to the doctor administering an alternative to chemotherapy. Even when a friend speaks the exact thing we needed to hear right when we needed to hear it, He is working. For as much as He could do on His own, there is much God desires to do with the participation of His children.

Unlike a high-profile family business in which the small, inconsequential tasks are given to the less capable, we are invited into the highest echelons of judgment and leadership. There's no 90-day waiting period before we get involved.

It might not seem like the most efficient way to run a kingdom

for the being with all power, all authority, all wisdom, all knowledge and all sovereignty over all things. But in His humility and kindness, the God who could command our every action and force our very involvement has decided that this is the way He will operate His kingdom—by inviting the partnership of those who voluntarily reciprocate His love.

The Lord desires partnership in His global family and invites us to participate in His plan of redemption and fulfillment, in word and deed. He desires to work with us. However, in the kingdom, this looks different than we might think. We might not think of picking a man in the middle of the United States who didn't enjoy prayer to start an ongoing prayer meeting. We might not even think to send him a modern-day prophetic man he'd never met before to confirm that God was speaking to start a 24/7 house of prayer with worship. But that is what the Lord decided to do to prepare for His Son's glorious return. And not just in one small city in the United States, but in cities around the globe. In small churches, available buildings, homes, and even outdoor spaces.

Of course God could accomplish any and everything without the involvement of human beings, but He has decided that even in the most terrifyingly wonderful time of history, He will accomplish His ancient desires in response to the prayers of believers wanting Him to accomplish His ancient desires.

While there are mysteries believers encounter when following God, one thing He has made abundantly clear is the relationship between prayer and His response. Of the many attributes that separate God from other gods who are worshipped in the earth is the reality that He not only hears prayer but He responds to prayer.

In His relationship with His one and only Son, the movement of God is preceded by prayer: “[The Lord] said to me, ‘You are My son; this day have I begotten you. Ask of Me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the

earth for your possession'" (Ps. 2:7b-8).

The God of all gods, who desires to dwell with His creation, will return to the earth to rule, to reign, to live among His people. Not just to a people who needed help or some type of rescue, but to a people who were watching and waiting for His triumphant return, anticipating the fulfillment of His promise. Before His great finale, He desires a preamble, and a preamble He will have.

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them. But the wise took jars of oil with their lamps. While the bridegroom delayed, they all rested and slept.

But at midnight there was a cry, "Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!"

Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. But the foolish said to the wise, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps have gone out."

The wise answered, "No, lest there not be enough for us and you. Go rather to those who sell it, and buy some for yourselves."

But while they went to buy some, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut (Matt. 25:1-10).

In our day and age, this reality can be seen throughout the earth as the Lord prepares His people for His return. This time of preparation can sometimes feel chaotic as He does the work to transform the environment here on earth to reflect that in heaven, raising up night-and-day worship throughout the nations. (John describes the scene he sees around the

throne of God in [Rev, 4:6–11.](#))

In houses of prayer, songs of worship with words of prayer and adoration arise to the one who is holy, holy, holy. We haven't quite seen all that is visible around God's throne in heaven, but we catch glimpses.

Through songs of love to our deliverer and friend, we are strengthened in our faith and resolve to follow His leading. With every word of prayer to our Creator and King, we are encouraged to continue to seek His way. And with every moment of listening for the response from our Healer and Redeemer, we are reminded that He is faithful to finish the work He has started and He will accomplish it with excellence, even as He involves us in that work.

In His omniscience, He has chosen a way that can look weak, outpaced and small—like sending a baby to destroy an evil empire, selecting a colt for a triumphant entry or using a cross to launch an endless victory.

He still uses the weak things of this world to confound the wise, and He's still in control.

Prayer was His idea, is His instrument and will forever be our eternal dialogue. The great strategist of heaven, the very captain of heaven's armies is enacting a plan, a plan we probably wouldn't have chosen or even thought of, but a plan that will lead, as always, to unequivocal triumph.

"Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying: 'The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever'" (Rev. 11:15).

What helps motivate you to pray? {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at ihopkc.org.

For more on prayer from the International House of Prayer, listen to the podcasts below!

The Spiritual Sickness That Can Hijack Your Weight Loss

Do you have a sinking sickness inside that no one can diagnosis because it's not really a physical illness? You just don't feel like everything is quite right? It could be that your negative emotions are actually making you sick, like mine were.

Emotionally Sick

There's an interesting verse that says, "A calm and peaceful and tranquil heart is life and health to the body, but passion and envy are like rottenness to the bones," (Prov. 14:30, AMP). The Message really brings it down to where we live, saying, "runaway emotions corrode the bones. The New Living Translation says these types of negative emotions are like "cancer in the bones."

Our runaway emotions can make us feel sick inside. Sometimes

it's like a kick in the stomach. Sometimes it appears like nagging headaches we can't get rid of. It makes us feel we are on the verge of becoming ill or like our bones are aching, and even though we don't, we are afraid we have the onset of some horrible disease such as cancer.

We are emotionally sick or, as some doctors have said, emotionally ill. It's not the type of emotional illness a psychiatrist might diagnose, though. It is a very spiritual issue.

Emotions Can Be Good

Emotions themselves are not the problem, though. God gave us emotions so we could experience this world in all of its abundance. They help us weave together a tapestry of life where we would never know the height of joy if we did not experience the depths of sorrow.

Those who are healthy emotionally don't hide their emotions, but are willing to feel them deeply and profoundly, share them with God and with others without shame or regret. They embrace their emotions as a part of their lives, not as a burden or something they need to hide.

Solomon, the writer of Proverbs, is talking about negative emotions, such as jealousy, anger, frustration, unforgiveness and even fear. These are the runaway emotions that we allow to run roughshod over our minds, hearts and bodies.

When that happens, there is either a general malaise that falls over us or a shroud of mistrust that we cannot get rid of. It has become part of us and so we live our lives carrying the pain of what has been done to us, what we are afraid will be done to us or what we wish we could be but feel we never will be.

We try to overpower these emotions by enacting some sort of revenge to make the person or persons we are jealous of, angry

at or afraid of pay for just living and being who they are. This never works. Most of the time even if they knew our feelings they have moved on, and really don't care that we are seething inside.

Runaway Emotions

Runaway emotions. are kinds of feelings that we just can't let go. We can't get away from them. No matter how hard we try, we keep rehearsing the scenario that happened over and over and over in our minds trying to make it come out differently or trying to figure out how that person will be punished by God for how they made us feel

The more we do that, the more the issue gets stuck in our minds because, of course, there is no solution except simply to forgive the person and move on. Instead, we let these runaway emotions dominate every corner of our minds.

This leads to stress and overwhelm because we can't concentrate on what we're supposed to be doing when we're trying to fix any situation that has already happened. Sometimes these aren't even our problems. Sometimes, we borrow our husband's, children's or friend's problems to stress over.

The Overflow of Uncontrolled Emotions

Then stressing for a lot of us leads to the one thing we can do: We end up gorging ourselves with food. For me, it was always desserts or other high-carbohydrate foods. This does just what the Scripture said. It corrodes our bones, which means to dissolve or destroy slowly. The Proverbs verse stops short here though, because for me this problem was gradually, but surely killing me.

As a coach, I talk to many women who have food issues. For most of them, issues from their past that they have never dealt with are overwhelming their daily lives to the point that they aren't even aware that it is not normal to feel that

way.

Every time I am able to get close and personal with them, when they pull back the curtain enough to lay all their cards on the table, the problem stems from something in their childhood. They may think it's an ex-husband, a runaway child or their last boss, but most of the time those presenting issues are just the tip of the iceberg.

The Core Issue

When we get down to what is really bothering them, to what they really want, it is they want to be and feel healthy. Proverbs 14:30 in The Passion Translation says a tender and tranquil will make us healthy. The Message says a sound mind makes for a healthy body.

Sound mind should sound familiar. In 2 Timothy 1:7 AMP, Paul said, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity or cowardice or fear, but He has given us a spirit of power and of love and of sound judgment and personal discipline, abilities that result in a calm, well-balanced mind and self-control."

Paul is letting us know that the sound mind or judgment that God has given us requires something of us to make sure it is implemented. Personal discipline is one of those. (See [Success from Failure](#).) So when our minds keep perseverating over hurts done to us or our loved ones, we must discipline ourselves to take those though captive.

Outsmarting Our Minds

I learned to do it this way. "God, I'm rehearsing how I can solve this problem again. Instead I choose to take this thought captive, hand it to You, let it go and think about the next thing on my to-do list." Sometimes I realize rehearsing these crazy scenarios is just one of my procrastination techniques. (See [Procrastination and Weight Loss](#).)

When I start thinking of it again, I repeat my prayer again until pretty soon my mind gets tired of me doing that and leaves me alone. When I do this, I'm basically outsmarting my mind. I trained it to rehearse that problem. Now, I have to train it to think of something more productive.

Suffice it to say that losing weight was much easier when I stopped trying to solve all my problems and everyone else's. That nagging sick feeling that something just isn't right has gone away, along with 250 pounds of unwanted weight.

My Version of Proverbs 14:30

For what it's worth, here's my composite version of Proverbs 14:30. This helps me understand this verse better to be able to apply it to my life:

"A tender, tranquil heart and a sound mind, which comes from personal discipline and self-control, will make your body healthy, but jealousy and other runaway emotions corrode your bones and destroy your body."

Instead of hiding those runaway emotions or stuffing with food to keep them quiet, it's time to take control of them in Jesus' name. {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 best-seller, [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 [TeresaShieldsParker.com](#).

This article originally appeared at [teresashieldsparker.com](#).

This Deep Desire Comes Straight From God's Heart to Yours

Twenty years ago, I moved from New York City to a much smaller city in Florida. More of a small town, actually. I welcomed the fresh air, the slower pace and the improved quality of life.

But I also needed to make some adjustments...

- About a week after our move, after a particularly long day unpacking boxes, we tried getting a pizza delivered. Several phone calls later, we discovered nothing remained open after 10 p.m.
- The satellite post office near our home closed for lunch each day.
- I was late for church one morning because a cow stood in the road and a sheriff's deputy blocked the street with his car while we waited for the cow to move.

One of the biggest adjustments I had to make was in realizing I could not leave the house without running into someone I knew. Someone from church or from our neighborhood. Someone from the interdenominational Bible study I attended or from the nonprofit agency where I volunteered. The anonymity of living in a big city disappeared faster than a bag of M&M's at a chocoholic's convention.

But that was nothing compared to what I've experienced lately on the internet. Facebook seems to know exactly what ads fit my interests. One order on the Barnes & Noble website resulted in emails touting products geared to my interests. The website *Spokeo.com* contains detailed information about me and anyone for whom I might be searching.

Total strangers seem to know me very well.

To know and be known—truly known—is our deepest desire. Even the apostle Paul noted, “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12, NIV).

God created us to know and be known. He created us to be intimately related to Him. He revealed Himself in His Word using a variety of names and attributes to help us know who He is and how He works. We learn from His Word that He is perfectly righteous and just, absolutely faithful and merciful, and truly trustworthy and holy. And because He is who He is, we can trust the most intimate facets of our life to Him. His Spirit resides in His children, and nothing surprises Him. He knows the ugliest details and loves us anyway.

When we’re in a right relationship with the Lord, we’ll have the confidence to be vulnerable and transparent in our relationships with others. To know and be known is a gift, not just with God, but with fellow travelers on the road of life.

If you’re not as intimate with the Lord as you would like, what will you do about it? {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 avawrites.com.

This article originally appeared at avawrites.com.

Why Failure May Be Your Road to Spiritual Weight-Loss Success

Everyone craves it, and once we get it, we want more of it. It's what the American dream is built on. It's the seven-letter word that makes all the difference in world-success. But we can't talk about that word without its antithesis-failure.

Without a doubt our goal when tackling any project, is to succeed. We don't want to be branded with the scarlet F on our foreheads for all the world to see. We don't want to fail.

So, what happens is that many times, we don't try for fear of failing. We want to lose weight, but have stopped trying because we've always failed before, and failure seems worse to us than trying. Success, though, is best learned at the hand of failure.

When we get to the point where we have gained weight and want to lose it, most of us try to muster up the willpower to just fly into another diet. We try for a week and have success, and then we throw up our hands in defeat.

We may know how to be successful in every other area of our lives, but being successful at losing weight seems impossible. That's because losing weight and living healthy a healthy life are not about a diet. It's about a process, and failure is a huge part of that

Motivation

It all begins with motivation. At the outset, we determine that instead of diet, we are going to learn how to incorporate change on all levels into our lives. If we are going to submit

to total change, that means losing weight has to be about more than just fitting into that cute dress for our high school reunion.

Our motivation must then move us to understand that God Himself wants us to be in good health physically, just as our souls prosper spiritually (See 3 John 2, AMP). This is yet a deeper understanding of why we are on this journey. It's bigger than we are. It goes to our destiny in Christ.

Self-Control

Motivation leads us to surrender completely to God and allow Him to begin to teach us how to walk this journey. However, knowledge is really not our problem as much as applying knowledge. This is where self-discipline and self-control come into play.

I always felt I had no self-control, no way to bring myself into line with what I really wanted to do. "I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is bad, but I do it anyway" (Rom. 7:19, NLT).

The Lesson of Failure

This was because I was afraid to fail. I'd always failed before, so I just kept doing what I had always done instead of changing, because I didn't want to try and then fail again.

When we are going toward any great endeavor, we will encounter resistance in the form of fear of failure. When this arises, you know you are on the right path.

When you fail, and you will because you are human, don't turn and run the other direction. Look at what happened. Dissect it and see where you went wrong, and then determine not to do that again.

Christmas Cookie Fiasco

About the second or third Christmas that I had gone sugar-free, my daughter came home from college and wanted to make sugar cookies with me. We decided to use cookie cutters to make cookies for the extended family to decorate.

I did well with not eating the dough or the cookies and saving them for party day. Afterwards, though, folks didn't take their decorated cookies with them. We were left with lots of cookies. That night when I was cleaning up, I tasted one, and that was it. I was off to cookie land!

The next morning I woke up, went downstairs to the kitchen, saw the cookies sitting on the counter, had one in my hand, and I heard God whisper, "What are you doing?"

I took all the cookies and threw them in the trash. Since that day, I've not had a problem discarding things I might be tempted to eat that I shouldn't. I only learned this hard lesson by failing. I wouldn't have learned it any other way.

Rising From the Ashes

From failure, we can learn how to discipline ourselves. We can learn to stay within good boundaries because we have learned from experience what works for us and what doesn't work.

That then leads to success, born of failure. I have no problem staying away from cookies even when well-meaning people might tell me one won't hurt me. It will hurt me, because I know one will lead to way more than that. For me, it's best to stay inside my safe boundaries.

Personal failure is the best teacher if we can take shame out of the equation. We ask for forgiveness. and then we learn from our mistakes. Shame is there if we have not learned our lesson.

Discipline

"Disciple" and "discipline" are two words that are really

close in meaning. To be a disciple of Christ means we follow His disciplines, we obey what we know God wants us to do. Discipline is meant to help us correct our disobedience.

To have self-discipline sets me free to follow God in all things. As the Psalmist said, "I will walk with you in complete freedom, for I seek to follow your every command" (Ps. 119:45, TPT).

Failure and success are both a part of self-discipline. We discipline ourselves when we see an area in our lives where we have a tendency to fail over and over again, like me with the Christmas cookies.

In subsequent years, the cookies have become an inconsequential thing that go in the trash after the event is over. Now everyone at the party has success in that we haven't added extra pounds to our bodies, but we've had a bit of fun together..

Developing Character

We all want to be perfect, but it's failure that develops the all important aspect of godly character. In Matthew 5:48, Jesus tells the people listening to be perfect. The Amplified version defines perfect here as "growing into spiritual maturity both in mind and character, actively integrating godly values into your daily life."

We can only do that by living our lives, by making mistakes and learning from them, from putting ourselves out there, by being resolved to step out in faith even when it feels like we will fail.

From that will come the impetus for our greatest successes. I should know. Embracing and learning what God wants me to learn from my failures is one of the biggest reasons I've lost over 250 pounds and kept it off since 2013.

This, of course has been my greatest lesson about failure. My success came because I failed greatly. My success would not have been so notable had my failure not been so humongous. Great success only comes from great failure.

There is no direct path to losing weight and changing your lifestyle to a healthy one. It's up and down, it's around corners, through flooded creeks, over downed trees and up and over unscalable walls.

It's an impossible journey only made possible by the grace of God. It's His strength and His power flowing through us every day that brings success out of our most difficult failures.
{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 best-seller, [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 [TeresaShieldsParker.com](#).

This article originally appeared at [teresashieldsparker.com](#).

Cora Jakes Coleman: Dismantle Satan's Strategy by Becoming a 'Ferocious Warrior'

Like many pastor's kids, Cora Jakes Coleman, eldest daughter of the Rev. T.D. Jakes, grew up knowing the Sunday school answers. "I had been very good at mastering faith forever and

really pushing others to believe and trust that God had it all figured out. And it was going to be OK,” she says.

But then infertility hit. “It struck my faith. It struck everything I believed, everything that I trusted about God. Everything that I thought was good and lovely about God turned into barrenness and darkness and brokenness,” she tells Dr. Steve Greene on the “Greenelines” podcast.

That’s when Coleman truly became a ferocious warrior. “Where some people will fight against the knowledge of God, I decided to challenge the Word of God and apply it to my situation in a different kind of way. ... I decided to analyze my situation to figure out the strategy of the enemy so I would be able to tell others the strategy as well.”

Coleman shares that strategy and more in her new book, [*Ferocious Warrior: Dismantle Your Enemy and Rise*](#) (Charisma House, 2019). “The whole movement behind *Ferocious Warrior* is a new hashtag: [#thedevilisadummy](#),” she says.

That hashtag, Coleman says, means “We have to stop allowing our situation to become smarter than our state. We have to stop allowing those attacks that come at us to become stronger than the God and the power we have working on the inside of us. ... when you begin to look at things as, *Oh, I must be a threat to the enemy* ... you begin to walk in a different type of authority.”

To discover how you can dismantle the enemy’s strategies and become a ferocious warrior yourself, listen to the podcast below.

Despite Loughlin's Firing, 'When Calls the Heart' Fans Remain Loyal

What could end up as the biggest family reunion ever will take place Oct. 4-6, 2019, in Vancouver, British Columbia. That's when "Hearties," fans of The Hallmark Channel's top show, *When Calls the Heart*, and its soon-to-come spinoff, *When Hope Calls*, will gather for the fifth Hearties Family Reunion.

Change marked the just-concluded season, which included [Hallmark's release of actress Lori Loughlin \(Abigail Stanton\)](#) after she and her husband, fashion designer Mossimo Giannulli, were charged in a college admissions bribery scheme. But the half-million identified Hearties stand firm in their love for the family-friendly show. "When Hope Calls the Heart," the theme of this year's reunion, describes the fan base as well as the shows themselves.

Hearties who attend the reunion will have the opportunity to visit the set of Hope Valley, meet cast and crew members and interact with other Hearties from across the globe. And the fan base includes a wide range of people, says the show's executive producer, Brian Bird, in an interview with Dr. Steve Greene on the "Greenelines" podcast. "We get teenagers on up to grandmas at the Hearties family reunion. The male Heartie factor is growing," he says. "I will say when I meet a man who likes the show ... you don't lose your man card when you watch *When Calls the Heart*. In fact, you get you get an extra one."

Check out heartiesfamilyreunion.com for more information on this one-of-a-kind event. And listen to the podcast below for more Hearties insights from *When Calls the Heart* executive producer Brian Bird!

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Lessons From Gideon to Stop Procrastinating and Start Your Spiritual Weight Loss

Procrastination was the bane of my existence for way too many years to count. I had lost weight many times and then would gain it all back plus more. So I got to the place where I just gave up. I wouldn't even try to lose weight anymore because I always failed. Failing felt worse than just being super morbidly obese.

The Perfect Plan

By this time, I was well over 350 pounds, but I was postponing action. I was stalling. I was dragging my feet. I was procrastinating.

I was waiting for someone to come along who was really smart. They'd develop the ultimate dream cure for obesity where everyone could indulge as much as they wanted in desserts, high-carbohydrate goodies, all their favorite comfort foods and not gain an ounce of weight.

The perfect plan for me would be a blissful way to lose weight. It would be a plan that showed me I wouldn't fail. Failure is a big reason I was procrastinating or putting things on hold. I didn't want to fail yet again. I didn't want to wear that failure label. I didn't want to fail God one more

time.

Gideon

When I think of a procrastinator, I think of Gideon. God had a task for him to do. He was going to rescue Israel from starvation at the hand of the Midianites. God told Him so, but Gideon needed more information. He was afraid he would fail so he put off doing it.

He had fear on several levels. He felt he couldn't do it. His clan was the least in all of Israel and he was the runt of his family. In other words, if it had been put to a vote by those of Israel, Gideon wouldn't even be on the ballot!

He was afraid of the enemy. They were stealing all of Israel's food, including his family's. He was threshing his grain in secret at night so they wouldn't come and steal it. He feared for his life and the lives of his family members.

In Judges 6:14b (NIV), God asked him a simple question. "Am I not sending you?" I love that God didn't say, "OK Gideon. You don't want to go. I'll go find someone else." Nope. God had a destiny assignment for Gideon.

God Had A Strategy

God was very strategic in choosing Gideon. He knew Gideon wasn't a fighter or a leader. He was a farmer. He knew Gideon didn't have the credentials, but that's exactly why God chose him. Gideon would have to rely on God and God alone.

He also knew that with Gideon's small army leading the battle and winning the credit would go to God, not Gideon.

God, though, had to get Gideon past his fear of stepping into the unknown, which is another big problem for those of us who deal with procrastination. Gideon had no paradigm for how to win this battle.

Gideon's Tests for God

When the job is something we know we can handle, most of us get it done. Gideon needed God to "prove" to him that He was going to use him to rescue Israel.

Gideon decided he must test God. He laid a wool fleece on the threshing floor. He asked God to make the fleece wet, but the ground under it dry. The next morning, God had answered Gideon's request.

Gideon was still dragging his feet. He wasn't sure he could trust what God was saying. So he laid out the fleece again the next evening and asked that in the morning the fleece be dry, but the ground under it wet. God complied again.

I love that God was patient with Gideon's human tendency to procrastinate. To Gideon's credit, when God responded to the second fleece, he and his army began to move.

God's Win

From then on, Gideon followed God's instructions completely. God helped Gideon pare down his army to just 300 men. The result was that the enemy panicked and either killed each other or ran away. That day, Gideon became the mighty hero God proclaimed him to be (see Judg. 6:12, NLT).

I love Gideon's story because it points out how the only way you and I can become mighty heroes is to follow God, even if it means we drag our feet a little along the way.

Back when I stopped even trying to lose weight and was waiting for the magic cure, God was still working in my life behind the scenes, setting up situations to bring me to the place that I would follow Him completely.

My Breakthrough

I've long ago repented for the many years I wasted

procrastinating, not wanting to fail again and wanting to be perfect in how I went about getting healthy.

Now having lost more than 250 pounds, I can say there is no perfect way to lose weight and become healthy. It will be trial and error even when we have totally surrendered to God and are following what He is showing us what to do. We are human. We won't do it perfectly. We need Him to reveal to us exactly what to do and follow Him in the process.

The issue is many don't have an inkling of how to follow God in order to lose weight. That's why I coach. I've been there. I'm still there. I can give you guidance and a step-by-step process to discover it for yourself. After all, the only plan you will follow is one you know was tailor-made for you by the God of the universe.

I can tell you what it's not. It's not following after the latest, greatest diet trend even if it is touted in every post you see on Facebook and Instagram. A magic fix is what we all want, but it doesn't exist.

What God Wants for You

What does exist is a God who loves us and wants the very best for our lives. That will mean, among other things, doing the hard work of changing our bad habits by incorporating the good habits we know we need to do, but we've been avoiding like the plague.

It will mean using the word "no" to certain foods and food portions and saying "yes" to healthier choices. It will mean setting aside perfection and embracing failure as a great teacher to show us what not to do again.

It will also mean that we will get closer to God than we ever have before. This is where transformation happens. It's messy, uncomfortable and a little scary, but oh, so freeing.

Once I started down this path, losing 250 pounds really did become the easiest hard thing I've ever done. Whatever you have to lose, whatever bad habits you have to change will be much easier when you simply follow God completely.

There is no better way. {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 best-seller, [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 [TeresaShieldsParker.com](#).

This article originally appeared at [teresashieldsparker.com](#).

Why You May Not Want What You Deserve After All

I deserve this.

I earned it.

It's my right.

A sense of entitlement. We see it in political debates about whether certain government benefits are a "gift" or have been earned.

It shows up in marriages and other relationships as individual people focus more on their rights than on the relationship.

We see it in our culture as people promote their own "right to

privacy" over the sacredness of someone else's life.

We even see it in our relationship with God, although we don't always admit it.

But a sense of entitlement isn't a new wrinkle in human development. Way back when the ancient Israelites left Egypt, their sense of entitlement was as strong as ours today. First, they complained about a lack of food. Well, OK, I can understand a desire for daily sustenance in the middle of the desert. But after a year of God miraculously providing daily food in the form of manna, they complained about a lack of variety!

That account started me thinking. How often do I carry a sense of entitlement into my relationship with God? Of course, I don't call it that. Instead, I say things such as:

It's not fair!

Why did this have to happen to me?

When is this suffering going to end?

Fair? Where did we get the idea that our Creator and Redeemer is *fair*? Think about it. Innocent animals died to cover Adam and Eve's sin, pointing to the time when the perfect, sinless Son of God would die in our place for *our* sin. If a relationship with God were based on fairness, we would not have a relationship with Him at all. Instead, our future would hold nothing but judgment.

Fair is not the same as good. God is good. He is perfect. And He is sovereign.

One of the names of our great God is *Adonai*, the sovereign Lord. It means He is in control. Because I'm a Christian, He is not only *the* sovereign Lord, He is *my* sovereign Lord.

Each time I complain about my circumstances, in effect I'm

saying I know better than He does about what is best. That's a bit arrogant on my part, isn't it? My finite assessment versus the viewpoint of the infinite, sovereign Creator of the universe.

I may claim to trust God's leading and provision, but I'm ashamed to say, too often I allow my situation to distract me from remembering His faithfulness. Like the ancient Israelites, I grumble and complain, not because I don't believe He is Lord, but because I don't like the circumstances my Lord has engineered for me.

The sense of entitlement I criticize in others is just as ugly in me.

The demand for my rights to be honored is just as conceited in me.

Worst of all, every time I complain about what the Lord has allowed in my life, I become arrogance personified.

But demanding what I deserve is not really what I want. Because if God were to give me what I deserve, it would mean living without the assurance of His salvation through Jesus Christ. The result would be spiritual death and eternal separation from Him. It would mean living without His indwelling Holy Spirit, His love, His guidance and everything else He provides to His children.

I may be foolish at times, but I'm not stupid. I don't want what's *fair*. And I don't want what I *deserve*.

Thankfully, in God's mercy and grace, He doesn't give me what I deserve. And that's just fine with me. {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 avawrites.com.

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