

Prophecy: A Gift From God for His People

Prophecy is a gift from God, which He uses to speak to His people.

At Onething, International House of Prayer's annual year-end conference (Dec. 28–31 at the Kansas City Convention Center), thousands of people come to hear an encouraging word from the Lord.

For Leslie C. from Louisiana, God used the Onething 2017 prophecy rooms to “confirm something that’s been on my heart for over a year now,” she said. “A weight has been lifted. I have clear direction. He’s a loving God.”

The word, delivered by a team of three ministers in a room set apart for prophetic ministry, also “confirmed I was hearing His voice and not my own desires.”

Leslie's husband, Kevin, came seeking direction about an area of his life and received a word concerning a different area, but it was still applicable. “God showed what was more important that needed to be addressed,” he said.

Such is the power of prophetic words to edify, exhort, and encourage believers (1 Cor. 14:3).

Some people receive a word of encouragement during a difficult season of life.

The ministers told Millie P., who moved from Venezuela to Denver two years ago, to look to the mountains for God's help, and that God was going to move mountains in her life.

The minister actually saw a picture of the Rocky Mountains, but didn't know where Millie lived. (Ministers don't converse beyond first names before giving words.) They also didn't know

that she's struggling to learn English and launch her engineering career in the U.S.

"They had never met me and they identified where I'm at spiritually," she said, mixing Spanish with English. "I know I'm not alone in the fight, that God sees me. I have hope, and know it will be good. God is my strength."

These reactions are common, as the Lord highlights things about complete strangers in order to bless and strengthen them in their walk.

Millie was initially fearful about receiving prophetic ministry because she was fearful about her future and didn't want to hear a negative word, but her husband, Kenneth, assured her that prophecy was not to foretell events but to build her up.

His advice to people who question prophecy's validity?

"It's biblical," he said. "It's a New Testament reality, a principle of Scripture. Our heart and desire is to hear from God."

Prophecy can also play a role in salvation, as it says in 1 Cor. 14:24-25.

When Natalie H., from Michigan, visited a local church at the urging of her sister, "they told me all kinds of things about myself, things that no one knew," she said. This led to her salvation and departure from witchcraft.

She came to Onething this year, bringing several friends, and received a prophetic word to keep pressing into God.

"They said God sees my crying out for Him to reveal Himself to me [more], so I'm going to keep doing it," she said. "They also said I'm good at writing, which is something I do in my personal time, but I don't show to anyone. This encourages me to step out."

The Lord can do so much through prophetic words: activate gifts, confirm direction and comfort and strengthen His people.

There can be fear about believing if God will speak, and we must test the words because Scripture says we prophesy in part (1 Cor. 13:9), but God loves to use fellow believers to bless His body.

As Leslie from Louisiana says, “it’s all a matter of trust in the Lord, that He has your best interest at heart.

“He’d never do anything to hurt you or embarrass you,” she adds. “Prophecy is for encouragement, to build you up and continue to show His love to you.”

How can you grow in prophecy? {eoa}

*A Detroit native who was raised in Vermont and Connecticut, **Adam Wittenberg** worked as a newspaper journalist until 2012, when he moved to Kansas City to complete the Intro to IHOPKC internship. Afterwards, he earned a four-year certificate in House of Prayer Leadership from IHOPU and is now on full-time staff in the marketing department at IHOPKC. Adam is also active in evangelism and has a vision to reach people everywhere with the good news of Jesus Christ.*

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God’s 2 Peter 1 Process to Renew Your Soul

You should see the house my son-in-law and daughter bought last year. It’s quaint and is located in an old neighborhood,

with huge trees that overhang the street and drop a carpet of gold leaves on the ground about this time every year. The plan is to renovate and flip the house, and they've done a great job so far, with refinished hardwood floors, new tile and lots of makeover in the kitchen, the instillation of egress windows in the basement, building a deck for the backyard, and now they're working on painting the house.

Except it's Montana, and when the calendar says "first day of fall," the temperature starts to drop quickly and the forecast says snow on the mountaintops come Sunday. Not ideal paint conditions.

This old house has tired, fragile cedar siding that needs to have the old paint scraped off by hand. The kids are racing the clock, so I put on work clothes, grabbed my own scraper, and went over to help.

The cedar has vertical grooves in it, and the wood is soft. The paint has to be carefully scraped out of each little groove. As soon as I started, I wondered if I would be spending one hour just on this one square foot of siding.

My next thought was, "Oh wow, this is my soul."

"Jayme," I said, "This is just like my soul!" She totally gets me and shook her head with an understanding yes.

Following Jesus means a wonderful restoration back to the person I was always meant to be, but He comes with a scraper. Slowly, slowly he chisels off the old me with all of its sinfulness and faults, until he has a clean surface on which to apply the new.

Peter writes to the followers of Christ and talks about the power God has given us to live godly lives. In light of this power available to us, he gives this command:

For this reason make every effort to add virtue to your

faith; and to your virtue, knowledge; and to your knowledge, self-control; and to your self-control, patient endurance; and to your patient endurance, godliness; and to your godliness, brotherly kindness; and to your brotherly kindness, love (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

You know what I see in these verses? The soft, fragile wooden ridges of my mind and heart—ridges that are covered with old, peeling layers of selfishness, ignorance, desire to quit hard things, worldliness, impatience and pettiness toward others. Old paint that has to be slowly chiseled, chiseled, chiseled.

God's divine power scrapes away the old, and I am required to make every effort to prime the raw wood with layers of godliness.

When I left the kids' house yesterday after working for a few hours, I was missing a layer of skin on my knuckles and could barely move my fingers. Making an effort to renovate something is nothing but hard work and sweat equity, but I can use my imagination and picture that cute little house with a fresh coat of paint by the end of the week. It's going to look so good.

When we know Jesus, He promises He is likewise making us into new and beautiful creations. We all get tired of the process, but we can't give up. The effort we make to add good qualities to our souls will make our lives incredibly effective and productive. (See 2 Peter 1:8 if you don't believe me!) And we have God's divine power fueling us every step of the way.

It's worth the painstaking scraping, don't you think? Being made new? {eoa}

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Why Even Comfort Foods Can't Fill Your Inner Emptiness

What are you hungry for right this very moment? Most of us would probably mention some sort of food, even if we have just eaten. The thought of hunger most always takes us to food.

Let's face it, though, most of the time the lack of food is not why we are hungry. Our hunger goes deeper than that. It goes to the very core of why we are alive in the first place.

We Hunger

We hunger for acceptance. We hunger to be seen and heard. We hunger to make a difference in a world where divergent ideas starve our ability to have an opinion at all.

So when we say we are hungry for a piece of your favorite dessert, maybe we are just filling a void inside us. That emptiness says, "I know there's more to life than this, but for now, I'm just going to stay out of everyone else's way and eat cake."

Overeating comfort foods is really just a cry for connection, significance, personal power and the meaning of life and its purpose.

God-Shaped Vacuum

"There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man, which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ," Blaise Pascal, a French mathematician who was also a Catholic is quoted as saying.

He hit the nail on the head. Still there are many people, even those who call themselves Christians, who still struggle with feelings of emptiness.

I know I did, and I know for myself one of the main sources of that was feeling I didn't matter ... enough.

A good friend of mine once told me, "You can't save everyone in the world." Helping people out of jams, pulling them from the fire of their circumstances, pointing them in the right way has always been a passion of mine. I answered my friend by saying, "No, but I can die trying."

Desire Gone Wrong

This was spoken out of a true desire, but for most of my life, I was going about it in the wrong way. As a result, this desire contributed to me gaining up to over 430 pounds. (I'm so thankful today that when I finally began listening to God, I lost over 250 pounds and have kept it off for more than five years.)

I knew I had gifts that God had given me, and I knew God's desire is for all people to come to Him, so I was trying my hardest to get everyone I knew to the place where they could accept Him, even in the midst of their personal struggles.

All my self-effort resulted in me feeling like a failure, because no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't save everyone in the world. So, when I didn't see the results I wanted, I would feel as though I failed God.

I wasn't good enough, and when I wasn't good enough at writing a story to bring more people into a deeper relationship with God, or wasn't good enough at sharing the way out of a situation with someone headed the wrong way, I felt ashamed. I felt I had let God down.

Filling the Void

Weren't my good works supposed to make God notice me? Weren't they supposed to help fill the emptiness inside me that would make me feel like I mattered just a little bit?

Still, though, the void, the emptiness was still there. So I filled it myself with the only thing I knew to stave off the emotional hunger inside. I filled it with the foods I loved, the ones that were always there to comfort, protect and be a companion to me.

I didn't understand that good works would not fill the void. Perfect church attendance wouldn't fill it either. Neither would worrying about everyone and trying to help fix their problems.

Sharing my gifts and talents with everyone and not charging while going into debt only made matters worse and just made me feel used and even emptier.

Who Is God?

It took me a long time to understand that God is not just my sidekick or even my associate who helps make *my* plans come true. As Elisabeth Eliot, author and missionary, explained, we cannot assume God will always act the way we think He should or support our plans of how we think things in our life should go.

"This is a God of our own creation, a counterfeit god," Eliot said in her book *No Graven Image*. "Such a god is really just a projection of our own wisdom of our own self."

In the book *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller said, "In that way of operating, God is our accomplice, someone to whom we relate as long as He is doing what we want."

God, though, the real God, our personal sovereign God of weighty glory is not our accomplice. He is God. He is the one

who makes the plans, and we are the ones who carry them out, but only when we realize that it is not in our strength, but His that we operate. And we follow His bidding, not our own.

God's Glory

The hole I was trying to fill and a vast emptiness because it had to do with my limits as a human being. I am not God. I am made in His image, but I am not Him.

For me to accomplish anything worthwhile here on this earth, it must be by His power, and it must always point back to God's glory.

God is not who we think or imagine Him to be. He is much more than we can think or imagine or dare to dream of.

God's Infinite Beyondness

His glory is as Keller described "God's infinite beyondness ... His weightiness ... His supreme importance. If anything matters to you more than God, you are not acknowledging His glory. You are giving glory to something else."

This especially holds true of what we try to do for God, rather than what God asks us to do. If we follow His lead the way won't always be easy, but it will be faith-filled. It will be a God-honoring life.

As Jesus said we will have everything in abundance, more than we can expect, life in its fullness until we overflow (John 10:10).

Taste and See

When our lives are completely full and overflowing, our hunger problem will be solved. Our emptiness will no longer be a problem. There will be no voids in our lives because we will understand that at any time we can "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

As Paul said, “We view our slight, short-lived troubles in the light of eternity. We see our difficulties as the substance that produces for us an eternal, weighty glory far beyond all comparison, because we don’t focus our attention on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but the unseen realm is eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17-18, TPT).

What are you hungry for? I’m hungry to experience the eternal weighty glory. What we do here on earth is not nearly as important as making sure we are always looking for the glory of God.

When have you experienced that glory in your life? {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of seven books, all available on Amazon. Her latest book, Sweet Hunger: Developing an Appetite for God, is available now, and Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds is the No. 1 Christian weight-loss memoir. She is also a writing and weight-loss coach, blogger, speaker, wife and mother. Visit her online at to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts.

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This Hebrews 6 Truth Can Set You Free From Diets

Wait, don’t go on that diet! You can have freedom from diets and get what you really want, which is to lose weight and keep the weight off.

It is possible, but it will take a little work. It’s not a magic fix, but it can be the best thing you’ve ever done for

yourself.

A diet is a hope or a wish wrapped in a partial truth. To lose weight we have to eat differently than we have, which is what a diet is. However, that's just part of the truth.

Even though we know the diet won't fix us, we hope, we wish, that we will be the size we desire for the rest of our lives. That's the part a diet doesn't offer us, but it's why we go on the diet in the first place. That makes the diet a partial truth wrapped up in a wish for more.

Change Is Possible

There is only one way to keep the weight off: We have to change our lifestyles. That change has to address everything in our lives including what we eat, how we move, how much sleep we get, how we work, how we play, how we handle stress, how we reward ourselves, how we handle our emotions and what we really and truly believe about God.

The reason commercials that say things like "Lose 20 pounds in a month" bring in customers is because they speak to what we really want. We want to keep the weight off but not change the way we eat forever. We don't even think changing is really possible.

I'm living proof that with God, change is possible. I once weighed 430 pounds. Crazy, but true. After losing more than 250 pounds and having kept it off for five years, I'm feeling like a halfway normal human being.

The latest, greatest diet is where we have placed our hope or wish. When we gain the weight back, we lose what little hope we had and just give up.

Secure Promise

In this day and age, "hope" has lost its meaning entirely. We use it as a synonym for wish: "I hope it won't rain today." "I

hope I can lose 20 pounds.”

The real meaning of hope, though, is biblical. It is a secure promise. When God is involved, what He has promised us, what He desires for our lives will happen. We can bank on it.

“God has given both His promise and His oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to Him for refuge can have great confidence as we hold to the hope that lies before us.

“This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain into God’s inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest” (Heb. 6:19-20, NLT).

The hope we build based on what God wants for us is a strong and trustworthy anchor, a sure thing, what we stake our lives on no matter what comes our way.

With God, my biggest mess has become my greatest message and it can be for you, too. First, though, we have to trust Him enough to allow Him to remove the obstacles that keep us from trusting Him enough to do what He shows us to do.

Working through freedom principles with several different coaches helped me understand how to embrace total lifestyle change. I had many emotional roots that had to be dealt with before I could trust God to provide for me, protect me, comfort me, lead me, teach me who I am and be a companion to me.

I had to give up my need to respond to every one of the latest, greatest diets which experience had taught me don’t work in the long run. I had to surrender my bad habits and put good ones in their place.

I had to understand where my fears, needs, desires and dreams had gotten sidetracked. I had to understand that when they got

sidetracked, they also derailed my absolute trust in God. And I had to understand how to trust God to help me.

Letting God Lead

My issue wasn't learning what diet I needed to incorporate, it was allowing God to lead me to become the person He wants me to be—body, soul and spirit.

When I finally understood how to do work through all of these things, it didn't just change my weight, it changed my entire life. {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of seven books, all available on Amazon. Her latest book, Sweet Hunger: Developing an Appetite for God, is available now, and Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds is the No. 1 Christian weight-loss memoir. She is also a writing and weight-loss coach, blogger, speaker, wife and mother. Visit her online at to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts.

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Biblical Guidance to Make Your Prayers More Powerful

Dandelions—the bane of many homeowners who strive for manicured lawns. Adults see them as an irritation. A nuisance.

But children see dandelions as a source of unlimited potential. Wishes, hopes and dreams wrapped up in the seeds of a wildflower.

When you were a child, did you ever pluck a dandelion puff to

make a wish? Carefully, of course, because you didn't want to waste even one feathery seed. After all, the one seed that dropped prematurely might have been the one to carry your wish to heaven.

Then we grow up and face reality ... or do we?

How often do we, as adults, view prayer the way children view dandelion puffs? We close our eyes tight, carefully pick the "right" words and fling them to heaven, wishing and hoping God will say yes to our request.

Is that how prayer works?

Not according to the Bible.

Most of us have grown up with a definition of prayer that is incomplete. How many times have we defined prayer as "talking to God"? But prayer is more than just presenting our requests and wishes to God. We don't just talk to Him, we have conversation *with* Him.

This means we talk ... *and* we listen. We listen as God speaks to us through His Word. We listen as the Holy Spirit prompts us to act according to His leading.

Prayer is more than just presenting our desires to God. It's about aligning our thoughts with His thoughts. Our heart with His heart. Our will with His will.

The ultimate goal is not to change God's mind, but to change ours.

So as summer moves into fall, are you watching the wishes, hopes and dreams of the summer drift away on passing autumn breezes? Does it seem as if the heavens are made of brass, causing your prayers to hit the ceiling and drop back to earth in mockery of your desires?

Biblical Guidance for Prayer

Unlike dandelion puffs which depend on the whims of the wind, prayer is never futile. But God does give us some guidance for effective prayer:

A – Jesus tells us to **abide** in Him and have His words abide in us (John 15:7).

B – **Believe** when we pray (Mark 11:24).

C – Come with **confidence** (Heb. 4:16).

D – Don't **doubt** (James 1:6).

E – Don't use **empty** phrases (Matt. 6:7).

F – **Focus** on who God is, not on your circumstances (Isa. 26:3).

G – Expect God to show you **great** things (Jer. 33:3).

H – Follow the leading of the **Holy Spirit** in your prayer (Jude 1:20).

I – **Intercede** for others (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

J – Ask in **Jesus'** name—would Jesus ask for what you're asking for? (John 14:13).

K – If possible, **kneel**, letting your physical position reflect your heart (Eph. 3:14).

L – **Listen** for the Lord's call (1 Sam. 3:4).

M – Ask with right **motives** (James 4:3).

N – Know that the Lord is **near** to all who call on Him in truth ().

O – Before we pray, are we **obeying** what we already know? (1 John 3:22).

P – **Persevere** in prayer (Luke 18:1-8).

Q – Pray without **quarreling** with brothers in Christ (1 Tim. 2:8).

R – **Rejoice** regardless of our circumstances (1 Thess. 5:16).

S – **Seek** His presence (1 Chron. 16:11).

T – Pray with **thanksgiving** (Phil. 4:6-7).

U – Pray in **unity** with other believers (Acts 1:14).

V – ?

W – Know **where** your help comes from (Ps. 121:1).

X – **EXamine** your heart (Ps. 66:18).

Y – ?

Z – ?

Which of these verses is God speaking to your heart about today?

Here's a challenge for you...

*Can you find a relevant verse for the letters V, Y and Z?
{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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5 Wondrous Ways Christian Women Should Care for Themselves

If self-care is an unbiblical concept, what does that mean for Christian women and their need to care for themselves?

This is a very important question we must answer, because the danger in leaving that question unresolved is the tendency to jump to the other extreme of neglecting ourselves in service to others.

Neither the modern concept of self-care nor the tendency to neglect our spiritual, physical and emotional needs is biblical.

Jesus didn't neglect His spiritual, physical and emotional needs to serve His disciples and followers.

We see repeatedly in the Gospels that Jesus took time away from people to get alone with the Father. And I think it is not coincidental at all that we read about this in the Bible, because we need Jesus' example to give us balance.

Though the modern concept of self-care is rooted in humanistic and New Age ideas and doctrine, it is still necessary for women to be intentional about caring for physical and emotional needs.

But the motivation behind it is just as important. And here's why:

A mark of true Christianity is humility. Humility isn't thinking of yourself less, it is not thinking about yourself at all. It is the ability to live without being preoccupied with ourselves.

And this is what I'm striving for in my own life.

For so many years, I've been preoccupied with myself: how I look, how I come across to others and whether or not I stand out too much.

But through the years, I've been able to turn off a lot of these thoughts in order to strive to be more concerned with others' feeling of comfort than my own.

But this doesn't mean I neglect caring for my spiritual, physical and emotional needs.

What it means is that I realize that in caring for my needs, I free myself to be able to continue making others' concerns a priority.

5 Wondrous Ways Christian Women Should Care for Themselves

Here is how I feel that caring for ourselves differs from self-care.

Self-care is inward-focused. It's all about giving to myself first so I can give to others. Even I have been guilty of saying this exact thing.

But I've begun looking at this from a whole different perspective.

I've begun thinking of caring for myself as another way of giving to my family and to those God has entrusted to me for ministry.

It's not about giving to me at all. I am not in this equation.

God has given me this body to serve with, and I care for my body so that I can continue to serve in the way God has called me to serve, and so that my whole body (spirit, soul and physical body) is a testimony to His greatness.

Self-care also assumes that my spiritual, physical and emotional health and well-being rely solely on what I do or don't do.

But it is God who created our bodies.

We can do all of the things I've listed below and still find ourselves struggling physically and emotionally, and yet still live in peace and joy knowing that God is still God, despite our momentary struggles on earth.

1. Be faithful in daily devotions.

One of the greatest ways we can care for ourselves is by making our spiritual care a No. 1 priority. This should be first on our list.

It should be a priority above everything else.

If our spirit isn't cared for, everything else will be out of order.

If we want a spirit that has a strong foundation of joy and peace, no matter what our circumstance, we need to have a spirit that daily fellowships with Almighty God.

A heart that knows the heart of God.

A heart that is continually leading us back to the mirror of God's Word to see our reflection.

A heart that is daily being nourished with the meat of the Word.

A hearty spiritual meal consists of

- **Daily Bible reading.** I recommend that we read a whole chapter a day, a book at a time. This way we get a complete picture of what God is saying through His Word. Here are some posts about how to read the Bible
- **Prayer.** Start with 10 minutes or so a day and

continually work toward increasing your prayer time. Check out my Bible study, 7 Days to a Better Prayer Life that teaches you how to pray.

- **Bible study.** This is different than Bible reading. Once or twice a week, we should set aside time to take a portion of God's Word to dig deeper into, using resources like a Strong's Concordance, Bible dictionary and insightful commentaries.
- **Bible Memorization.** We should make it a regular habit to memorize God's Word. By memorizing God's Word, we are hiding it deep in our hearts and allowing it to transform our lives.

2. Practice biblical meditation.

The Hebrew word for meditation means to mumble to oneself. We should make it a regular habit to speak God's Word to ourselves, going over it word by word and allowing God to show us how each word applies to our daily lives. This is a process of renewing our minds.

A healthy nourishing diet I'll be honest, a few years ago, I didn't want to hear this. I was too exhausted to think about changing my diet. But what I discovered was, it was my diet that was contributing to my exhaustion.

But before I was able to make this very important change, I had to look deeper than just my diet to discover a hidden reason to why I was so resistant to making the diet changes I knew were necessary for my physical healthy and well-being.

I began to ask myself this very important question, "Do I live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, or am I looking to food to meet a deeper emotional need?"

It was then that I realized that I wasn't looking to food to nourish my body; I was looking to food to medicate my soul.

Instead of looking to God for comfort, I turned to the idol of

food for comfort.

To be free enough to make a radical diet change, I had to address some deeper emotional issues; and once I was free in my soul to make this radical change to my diet, and began switching to cleaner, whole foods and eliminating foods that were causing chronic inflammation in my body, I began to physically feel remarkably better.

This gave me the energy I needed to give to my family in ways I had never been able to give to them before.

My husband and children noticed a radical change in me and my ability to be more active with them as well as more positive and fun.

I have chosen to adopt a ketogenic approach to eating. It's maybe not for everyone, there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to a healthy diet. Find what works for you, and then make it a lifestyle.

3. Get enough sleep.

If there is one thing many women struggle with, it is getting enough sleep. Especially moms of little ones. This may be impossible for a season, if you have a newborn, or even toddler, you may be in a phase of life where getting enough sleep just can't be managed.

But when your baby is sleeping through the night again, it is time to get back in the habit of going to be early enough to get a full eight hours of sleep.

Even one night of sleep deprivation can cause damage to our bodies. This study shows that even a single night of lost sleep can induce insulin resistance.

When calculating what time you want to get up, make sure you account for some quiet time with Jesus before the rest of the family wakes, and then count back eight hours and set your

clock.

But there is one more thing that you should do one hour before you go to bed, and that is either turn off all of your screens or use blue blocking glasses.

Here's why.

Our screens prevent our sleep hormones from signaling to our bodies that it's time to go to bed. You can either purchase these great blue blockers, or use a blue light filter app on your device, like this one that I use.

Getting enough sleep allows our bodies to fully detox.

But more than that, in His Word, God prescribed rest. Throughout the Old Testament we see God commanding the Israelites to rest from their labors to worship Him and celebrate Him.

In fact, whenever we see rest in the Bible, it all comes back to God.

True rest happens when our spirits and souls are at rest. When we are in right standing with God, our spirits and souls rest and our bodies don't feel strained.

If you're soul-weary, a trip to the beach, a good book, a Netflix binge or a tub of your favorite ice cream will not help. You need to get on your knees and seek God's face.

Allow His presence to refresh you, and then sleep a peaceful sleep.

4. Leave yourself some margin.

This is one of the biggest struggles in today's society.

Technology that was meant to simplify our lives has in fact lured us into the trap that we can do all of this multi-tasking, making our lives more complicated than ever before.

Add to that the fact that wherever we go, we're available to everyone. Day or night.

Our cell phones have ensured that we never miss a call, text or notification. And for many like me, their cell phones are their office, so they are never truly away from work.

So, whether we're at the park with our kids or home relaxing with our spouse, we're never truly resting because our phone is ringing and pinging, reminding us of people and things we need to attend to.

For some, the ringing and pinging goes on all night.

With two kids in school (one in home school), I'm learning the value of margins for myself. I'm learning to close my laptop and leave it closed. I'm learning to use the "Do Not Disturb" feature on my phone.

Because if Jesus needed to pull away from people, so do we. But here's the most important reason why we need to have margins in our life:

Our society is noisy. So. Very. Noisy.

The TV, radio, internet, social media, blogs, books, cell phones, all of the stuff that is constant vying for our attention is competing with God's voice in our lives.

And we can't hear Him if we don't turn it off.

When we fail to turn off the noise and just sit alone with Him in the silence: no Facebook or Instagram, no Twitter or email, no pinging and ringing, no talking heads telling what to believe and how to think.

With just the Holy Spirit speaking to us through His Word and in prayer, we will begin to feel a rest in our souls as we've never known.

5. Invest in relationship.

This is so intimidating, isn't it?

I mean, most women don't want to admit it, but we're intimidated by one another. We're intimidated by each other's perception of body image, by each other's exercise regimen and diet, by each other's parenting skills and marriage.

Somewhere along the way, we allowed mean girls and the media to turn us from friends into frenemies. From compatriots of our heavenly kingdom to competitors in this fallen world.

And the results are saddening.

Girls, we need relationship. Not only because God created us, females in particular, with a deep need to connect with one another, but also to challenge one another. Iron sharpening iron. So that by being accountable to one another, we learn from one another how to have been character and how to be more Christlike.

Even Paul urged Titus to instruct the older women to encourage the younger women. They needed that relationship, that accountability.

Relationship feeds the soul and nourishes our spirit.

When we choose to submit ourselves to our peers, allowing them to hold us accountable for our spiritual walk, our emotional stability and our physical habits, we are caring for ourselves in a very significant way.

God entrusted us with our bodies—all three parts—and expects us to take responsibility to care for them.

But our motivation for caring for ourselves is just as important as how we care for them. Are we caring for ourselves because we arrogantly assume we deserve it?

Or are we caring for ourselves so that we can continue to go about the Father's business? {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, Pinterest and Google +.

This article originally appeared at .

How Love for God and Family Unites These Women From Different Cultures

Note: This is Part 2 of an interview with author Lorilee Craker. Find Part 1 here.

Behind Amish romance novels, tourist spots and "reality" TV shows stand real people, with longings and loves just like the rest of us. Every Amish and Mennonite woman has a story. What would it be like to be welcomed into their homes and share those stories over a cup of coffee?

In the pages of *Homespun: Amish and Mennonite Women in Their Own Words* (Herald Press), Amish and Plain Mennonite women swap

stories and spin yarns while the reader sits in. The book's editor, Lorilee Craker, bestselling author of *Money Secrets of the Amish*, collected these personal writings and authentic perspectives on life, hospitality, home, grief, joy and walks with God from Anabaptist women's periodicals. Among the stories shared are essays penned by well-loved Amish and Mennonite writers such as Sherry Gore, Linda Byler, Lovina Eicher, Dorcas Smucker and Sheila Petre.

Here she shares more of her own background and experience of growing up Mennonite and how *HomeSpun* came together.

Q: You describe yourself as a simple Mennonite girl from the prairies. Can you share a little bit about your childhood?

My childhood was deeply rooted in the Mennonite culture. Growing up, I witnessed my two grandmothers with their hair in a bun and always wearing dresses or skirts. I thought this was normal! None of my grandparents spoke English—all four of them spoke German or Low German. At family gatherings, we would eat Mennonite food such as borscht, *varaneki* (pierogies), *platz* (fruit strudel) and *pluma moos* (cold plum soup). We ate those things in my home, too, so again, this was all very normal. We were also bound by similar values of faith and peace, and by stories of where we had come from.

Q: Your family's roots in Mennonite communities run deep, but your family history is an example of the many different stories people have. Can you tell about both your mother and father's background?

My mother's family came over from Ukraine in the 1870s. They were pioneers who homesteaded on the prairies, but they never lost their culture or assimilated too much into the broader community. The ties of language, food and culture that bind them to their pioneer great-great-grandparents are startlingly durable.

My dad's family had a completely different story. They came in

the third wave of immigration from Ukraine, after World War II. They fled Stalin as refugees and experienced his holocaust. My dad lost his twin sister to starvation, so those stories were imprinted painfully on his heart.

I knew from early on that there were lots of different kinds of Mennonite stories.

Q: Growing up in Manitoba where there was a large Mennonite population, you didn't realize most people didn't live the same way you did. What was the biggest adjustment for you when you moved to Chicago for college?

The biggest adjustment was that no one seemed to know what a Mennonite was, or they assumed that I should be wearing a bonnet and driving a buggy like the Amish. Everyone seemed to think that being Amish or Old Order Mennonite and being my kind of Mennonite were one and the same. This assumption led to lots of explanations on my part about the difference between my modern Mennonite upbringing ("like Baptist, with a German accent and special foods") and those other related subcultures.

People were surprised that I wore makeup and nail polish and so on. In Winnipeg, people knew that Mennonite women were modern because they knew so many of them. That wasn't the case in Chicago.

Q: Explaining how you were Mennonite, not Amish, eventually led to you writing your previous book, *Money Secrets of the Amish*. What did you learn in that process that made you feel more connected to what your roots?

As I visited Amish homes and barns in Michigan and Pennsylvania for my 2011 book, I recognized bits of their dialect, *Deitsch* (Pennsylvania German), from my spotty grasp of Low German. Their baby naming customs were also similar. The Amish women's hair buns and long skirts, not to mention the tantalizing aromas of fruit strudels (*platz*, to me) baking

in their ovens, reminded me of my beloved grandma Loewen. I recalled my little dynamo of an *oma* (grandmother) tsk-tsk-ing me about the length of my skirt. She always had a twinkle in her eye as she chided me, but I still made sure to go for full coverage as I interviewed the Amish.

The peace and gentleness I felt when visiting the Amish reminded me so much of visiting my Grandma's farm. I felt oddly at home among my spiritual and cultural cousins. It was amazing to me that over 300 years had passed since our break up and we still had things in common! I came to realize we were more closely tied to me and my upbringing than I had ever dreamed.

Q: What are some of the differences between Mennonite and Amish beliefs? What are the biggest similarities?

While there is a great variety of Mennonite culture, practices and lifestyles, from very old-fashioned to very modern and even progressive, the Amish are much more the same across their communities. They are extremely dedicated to living much as they did in 1693, when they split off from the Mennonites over the matter of buttons. Mennonites were okay with buttons, but tailor Jacob Amman's followers, the Amish, thought they were worldly. To this day, Amish fasten their clothes without buttons.

The similarities lie in spiritual roots of being peace-loving, set-apart people with a radical faith. The most modern Mennonite in downtown Winnipeg might name their children Isaiah, Ezra, and Naomi, and the most conservative Amish will have children with those same Bible names. They have both kept some remnant of their dialect—Amish speak Pennsylvania Dutch which is really Deutsch—German. I was startled to recognize bits of the Amish dialect as being similar to my own Platt Deutsch—low German. Foods are similar sometimes, too. And food customs, like *faspa*, which is a cold meal served on Sunday late afternoon so the ladies wouldn't have to cook on Sunday.

Q: What was the inspiration behind your new book, *Homespun*? How did you collect the stories included in the book?

Herald Press approached me about being the general editor of a collection of writings from Amish and Mennonite women. I collected the stories from mainly two sources, *Daughters of Promise* magazine, a beautiful and beautifully written literary journal done by conservative Mennonite women, and *Ladies Journal*, a much more spare periodical by Amish women.

It was thrilling for me to discover new writers and incredible writing from mostly unknown writers! These women have a lot to say and I was fascinated by their take on modern life. To hear from women specifically appealed to me, as a feminist. Sometimes in conservative subcultures, their voices are silenced or muted. This book gives them space and grace to speak.

Q: What themes did you notice emerging as started compiling the stories? How is *Homespun* organized?

As I read stories for the book, a number of themes arose, so I arranged the stories by those topics and wrote a brief introduction tying them together.

Welcome. A deep sense of hospitality is fundamental to these women. Yet it's not hospitality in the HGTV, your-house-needs-to-be-perfect kind of way. As one of the writers shares, it is easy to overthink hosting, but Jesus made it look quite simple, and his hosting style can be described in one word: love.

Abide. Hospitality is sacred and spiritual, but it doesn't mean these writers don't want to have an appealing home space in which to dwell. They want to abide in an abode, if you will, that nurtures them and feeds their spirit. The writers here expound beautifully on what home means to them.

Testimony. Story makes the world go round. When we hear the

stories—the testimonies—of others, we are better able to understand our own story and our place in the world. These narratives stirred different emotions in me.

Wonder. The blazing faith of early Anabaptists is evident in the openness of these writers to all things wondrous. These are true stories of miracles, phenomenal happenings that don't make sense from a human perspective. They highlight the possibility of the miraculous happening all around us, in big ways and small.

Kindred. A core value of both Mennonites and Amish is the preeminence of family—kinfolk, whether they be kindred or not. Our kin shape us in ways both known and unknown, good and bad. These essays and stories speak to the tremendous influence of family.

Beloved. These essays enthused my soul, and I came away feeling as if I had just been to church. My cup had been filled. There is something wonderfully elemental and childlike about the devotion expressed here, devotion even in doubt. These pieces drew me closer to the One who calls all his daughters “beloved.”

Q: What do you ultimately hope readers will gain from reading *Homespun*?

I hope they will find a pocket of peace and gentle witness in their hectic, modern lives. These women have a countercultural, singular mindset that is refreshingly different. I hope our readers will see their own stories in a new, *Homespun* light! {eoa}

Learn more about Lorilee Craker online at [www.lorileecraker.com](#). You can also find her on Facebook (@LorileeCraker), Twitter (@lorileecraker) and Instagram (@thebooksellersdaughter).

Facing Breast Cancer Surgery, Anne Graham Lotz Finds 'A Vibrant Calm in the Storm'

Editor's Note: Ms. Lotz's surgery is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 18. Please join us in lifting her before the Lord before and after this procedure.

"He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes" (1 Sam. 3:18b).

Hurricane Florence is still making her presence known. My cell phone alarm is continually giving me alerts that the storm is swirling all around, spinning off thunderstorms and tornadoes as well as flash floods. And this is the day, exactly one month following my diagnosis of breast cancer, when I go in for preoperative procedures before my surgery in the morning.

What I want to convey to so many of you who are praying is that the storms may be swirling *around* me, but they are *not* swirling *within* me. I have total peace. Joy. Expectancy. Trust. I know I am in God's hands. I know also the reason for what I can only describe as a vibrant calm is that I am not only being carried by our heavenly Father, I am being carried by your prayers. So before I know the outcome of the surgery, I want to praise the Lord for His great faithfulness, and also to say a heartfelt "thank you" ... *to you!* Please continue to pray!

Here is a link to a song that I listened to this morning as I stretched and worked out. I pray it will bless you as it has me. My eyes are fixed on Jesus. Therefore, all is well. {eo}

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 latest, The Daniel Prayer.

This article originally appeared at .

Is Being a ‘Good’ Christian Preventing You From Overcoming Your Food Addiction?

” Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], *he is* a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life]” (2 Cor. 5:17, AMP).

Spiritual Awakening

I was made new when I accepted Christ at age 7. Then, I grew up. I had already become a new creation. So I couldn’t deny that I knew I wasn’t allowing God to bring spiritual awakening into how I was eating.

It was as if what I ate was something I hid away and kept in a locked closet. I decided this part of my life was for me alone. No one else, especially not Jesus, was allowed into my closet.

I allowed Him into every other part of my life, but I would

tell myself I needed certain foods to keep me anywhere near sane.

God had offered to make all of me new. He had given me this great gift of being joined to Him, but I kept one part back for myself. It was included in what Jesus offered me, but I rejected it.

The 'Good' Christian

I didn't want to be reborn and renewed in the types of food I ate. I didn't want that particular "old thing" to pass away. I didn't want to be spiritually awakened in that one area.

The truth is I couldn't see how to be what I considered a "good" Christian without food to comfort me, keep me from blowing my top in anger or screaming in frustration.

When I felt stressed and overwhelmed, how else could I celebrate and pat myself on the back without eating some great dessert Grandma had always fixed for me?

How could I have fun without going out to eat or making a huge dinner with all the trimmings? That meant love, family, fun and relaxation. I didn't know how else to enjoy life other than eating great foods.

I'd Rather Die

I didn't see sugar and high-carbohydrate content foods as my selfish indulgent pleasures. I saw them as a necessary part of life. As a matter of fact, I told myself I would rather die than not eat my favorite foods.

So when I ended up in the hospital weighing 430 pounds, a cardiac surgeon told me I had five years to live if I didn't lose at least 100 pounds and keep them off. I really didn't care if I went to heaven. I just didn't want my children to suffer.

God used that rude cardiac surgeon to get me to see, though, that what I was doing did not just affect me. It affected my entire family. For me to be gone before my children became adults would certainly be selfish. If I could stop them from suffering because their mom wasn't there, I wanted to do that.

Although I'd lost weight many times, the issue was this: I had not been dedicated to a total healthy lifestyle change, so I never kept it off. I went back to eating the way I always had, and I gained the weight back plus more. I knew I had a choice: change or die. For me, to live meant I had to embrace change.

One of the first changes I had to make was to give up sugar. And to do that, I had to understand why foods made with sugar and flour meant more than life to me.

Forgiving Grandma

My Grandma was my person. To me, she embodied love and comfort. I began to see that the way she did that was to fix all my favorite foods and allow me to eat as much as I wanted, any time I wanted.

Her dessert table was a 24-7 smorgasbord, always open and available at my every whim. Food became my love language, and that overfull feeling, I equated with feeling alive.

I had always wondered why I felt as though I were living in the Romans 7:19 conundrum of "I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway."

I had an emotional attachment to food, and to break that meant I was going to have to confront my relationship with the person I had loved most in this world. Although she was already in heaven, I still knew that when I was stressed, frustrated or depressed, baking and eating her oatmeal cookies, banana nut bread or special cakes would make me feel as though I could face the world again.

The Real Comforter

So I forgave her for feeding me the delicious foods that had become addictive to me. I renounced the lie that the Holy Spirit doesn't know how to comfort me and will comfort me in a way that will harm me.

The moment I did that, I felt love and peace invade my being, like being swaddled in a warm and very secure blanket. I understood for the first time that this is what real comfort feels like. It's not an overfull feeling, which leads to harming my body. It is a peace that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

He is Comforter, teacher, guide and director. If I look to Him for these things, I will not live in the struggle of what I should and shouldn't do. I will live in peace. {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is the author of seven books, all available on Amazon. Her latest book, Sweet Hunger: Developing an Appetite for God, is available now, and Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds is the No. 1 Christian weight-loss memoir. She is also a writing and weight-loss coach, blogger, speaker, wife and mother. Visit her online at to find her books, coaching programs and free gifts.

This article originally appeared at .

Self-Care Is a Popular Teaching, But Is It Biblical?

Have you wondered if as a Christian woman it is OK to practice self-care?

I don't know about you, but when I see these buzzwords and bandwagons, I grow a little cautious. And here's why. I don't follow a crowd.

Not to overspiritualize something, but Jesus *did* say that the road to life was narrow and not very populated.

So, not only is it narrow, but you won't even run into a traffic jam on this narrow road.

So, whenever I see a large crowd of people moving in one direction, I tend to want to move in just the opposite direction. And I see a lot of people rushing after the idea of self-care.

Even Christian people.

I have thought a lot on this topic of self-care.

I'll be honest and say, I haven't read very much (hardly at all) about what my favorite writers have to say about this, mainly because I wanted to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to me what His thoughts are.

And since praying and pondering what has come to my heart, I have two concerns about what is termed self-care.

Is Self-Care Biblical for Christian Women?

When you look at what secular society terms "self-care," it is very easy to get drawn in, because websites that promote self-care encourage women to take care of their health, laugh and be in the moment.

All good things that everyone should do.

But the further down the list we go, we begin read about yoga, meditation and this very deceptive line that I found on the website PsychCentral, "Good self-care is key to improved mood and reduced anxiety. It's also key to a good relationship with

oneself and others.”

And here are where two red flags pop up for me.

1. Self-care is self-focused.

The secular concept of self-care is completely void of God—and thus secular. And this is the foundation for my concern for Christian women engaging in self-care.

We are responsible for our mood, our anxiety levels. And thus, we need to do those things for ourselves that will improve our mood and reduce our stress and anxiety.

But what does Scripture say?

Scripture tells us that true and lasting joy is only found in the Lord. True joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives. You can read my post [25 Verses that Command Us to Have Joy](#) to see just how often the Bible talks about this.

Throughout Scripture, we’re commanded to make God our joy.

Not a good mood.

Not self.

And when our lives are centered on God’s Word, and when we’re living in right standing with Scripture, joy is a natural outcome.

When we’re stressed-out and dealing with anxiety, Jesus tells us to come to Him. “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

Peace will not be found in yoga, meditation, mindfulness, becoming centered and balanced, or any of these other secular activities.

True, lasting peace that surpasses all understanding and that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus is only found in

Christ Jesus.

2. Self-Care promotes New-Age practices.

When we fall into the first trap of trying to find joy and peace in ourselves, and apart from Christ, we'll naturally fall into this second trap.

And that is because they are coupled together.

Finding joy and peace within ourselves requires buying into the New-Age belief that is humanistic at its center. It places self as the deity in our lives.

It is self-exalting.

Self-care recommends yoga and meditation; mindfulness and being centered and balanced. It recommends speaking affirmations.

These are all New Age-based buzz words that come from humanistic and New-Age beliefs that place man at the center and leave God entirely out of the equation.

Yoga, meditation, mindfulness and centeredness all come from Eastern religions. You can read my post here on how biblical meditation differs from Eastern meditation.

Affirmations such as "You are amazing. You are loved. You are wonderful. You are worthy" are not empty words.

These types of affirmations are full of self-exalting, humanistic values that completely contradict God's Word.

Instead, the Bible tells us that we are to meditate on His Word day and night. The Hebrew word for "meditate" literally means "to mutter under your breath."

Speaking.

Do you see how this secular view of self-care flies right in

the face of how Christians are supposed to live when their lives are founded upon the principles of God's Word?

So then, how is a Christian woman supposed to take care of herself in a biblical way?

That is what I want to explore with you in some upcoming posts. {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, Pinterest and Google +.

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