

The Supernatural Secret to Getting out of Your Destructive Mental Loop

What was I doing a few days ago, you ask? Oh, you know: sharpening pencils, tweaking lesson plans, dusting my classroom, and taking a course in how to stop an active shooter. Normal teacher stuff.

In college I took a class on how to use a copy machine and a laminator, but I wonder if I had continued with my education degree, if the syllabus had also included “how to wrestle a rifle away from a shooter” or “how to drop a shooter with a knee kick to the groin.” Hmm. (Do you want to take a minute to picture me practicing these things? Permission to laugh out loud.)

I had an interesting moment of worship in the middle of our active-shooter training, and that’s really what I want to tell you about.

These police officers were encouraging us over and over again to do anything to try to stop the shooter’s mental loop. Even just coming at the guy and pushing his gun up will break the train of thought he’s in. I had this kind of bizarre thought of, *That’s what Jesus does for me!* Jesus moves toward me when I’m a hot mess and disrupts my thinking. So I took my own personal brain break in the middle of this training and thanked the Lord for the way He steps in, gets my attention, breaks my destructive mental cycle and helps me refocus in a constructive, life-giving direction.

The active shooter training was traumatic, I have to say, although extremely valuable. That night I woke up in the middle of the night and kept picturing the scenario we walked through and how I could have reacted differently. Fear comes

like a monster from under the bed in the night, you know, and in the dark I started a mental loop of terror. *What if this really happens to me? What if I'm trapped in a room and have to rush a shooter?*

So I got out of bed and decided to listen to some worship music. The Lord was already awake waiting for me, and out of all of my worship songs on shuffle, he brought up *Leaning on The Everlasting Arms*, by David Crowder.

What have I to dread? What have I to fear?/ Leaning on the everlasting arms./ I have blessed peace/ With my Lord so near/ Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Why should I fear a shooter when I know Jesus will be with me in that situation if it ever arises? I thought. *Jesus will be my help.*

Four times I listened to that song in the night, until my breathing calmed and the inexplicable peace of God brought my heart rate to normal.

If we come to the Lord with our fears and anxieties, worshiping him, soaking in the truth of who he is and all that we have in him, He will break our mental loops and set us on a new mental track that leads to joy and peace and hope. I think the trick is just to get into the *habit* of recognizing a bad mental loop and practicing going to the Bible and to Scripture-based worship music to get the mental jolt of truth we need.

Because really, except for Jesus' intervention in our lives, aren't we all on the same path as the shooter? Destructive thoughts that lead to bad actions that lead to brokenness in our own lives and the lives of others? It's not the gun that brings chaos and death but the sick heart behind it. Only Jesus' redemptive work moves us away from that kind of darkness of soul.

What destructive mental loop do you find yourself in lately? Can you find a Scripture verse or a worship song that will open the way for Jesus to break that bad thought cycle? {eoa}

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3 Power-Packed Truths All Single Women Need to Hear

Do you feel out of place as a single woman in your church?

Are you frustrated by the comments and suggestions spoken to you by well-meaning friends and church family:

- about how God is preparing your husband for you.
- about how if you stop focusing on your singlehood, “It will happen for you.”
- that Jesus is your husband ... and more?

I get it, I really do.

I never envisioned myself being single and in my 30s. The only thing I ever wanted to be was a wife and mom. I had no great aspirations beyond that (well, maybe I dreamed about being a famous singer a time or two).

But there I was, in my 30s with no boyfriend, no husband and no one I'd even consider to be either of those.

I will admit, I was a little devastated.

Both of my siblings were married and had kids; most of my friends were married and had kids; and I'd heard every comment, ever so-called prophecy, and ever comment disguised as a prayer that you can imagine.

It was so bad that at one point I commented to a well-meaning friend, "If God has to take *this* long to prepare my husband, what's wrong with him? I am not sure I even want him at this point!"

I was being facetious, of course, but what I was really trying to say was, "Please stop.

"Please stop making the comments.

I would have said that in those words if I had understood at the time that it was what I was truly feeling.

Marriage did eventually happen for me at 34.

In all my desire to be married, eventually getting married, and being a wife for a decade now, I've learned some things that I'd like to share with all my single friends.

I hope this will encourage your hearts.

3 Things Single Women Need to Hear

I wish I had understood these three things much earlier before I got married.

Five years before I met my husband, I went on a dating hiatus. I didn't set out for it to last five years, I simply knew that there was something broken in me that God needed to fix because I had a long string of failed relationships behind me with guys I had no business dating in the first place.

My heart was broke, my self-worth was shattered, I had been in an abusive situation that I had only narrowly escaped, and I knew that before going into a new relationship, I needed Jesus to heal whatever it was in me that kept me going from bad to worse.

Because at that point, I didn't even want to imagine what could be worse than what I'd just been freed from.

It was during these five years that I learned these three things.

1. Singleness is not a disease.

I know in the church, we would never admit that we think this way, but unconsciously, we do.

The older a single person grows, the more desperate married people become to rescue them from singlehood, as if their singleness is somehow negative.

Even worse, many single people are left with the impression that their singleness is somehow not pleasing to God.

In fact, I've read books written to married women that imply—or outright state—that women are created for marriage.

This is not true at all.

We are created to glorify God, whether it be as a single woman, married woman, mom, empty-nester or widow. We can fulfill the purpose for which God created us no matter our station in life.

Though the Bible speaks a lot about the importance of marriage, it also speaks to the importance of being single.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul encourages those who are single that they are able to devote themselves to the Lord in a greater capacity because they do not have the added responsibilities married people do.

The conclusion is: Singleness is not a disease to be rescued from; it is not a displeasing status in life; but it is a season of life—or even a lifestyle—in which you can fully devote your life to serving the Lord with a passion that will bring you tremendous fulfillment.

2. Marriage will not fulfill you.

I think at one point or another, most single people fall into this trap. Thankfully, I do believe many realize the trap for what it is and come to the correct conclusion that marriage will not solve their problems.

Before I met my husband, I was engaged to someone else.

What should have been one of the most exciting and happy times of my life was a living nightmare. My fiance was manipulative and abusive, and every day, I lived in terror that something I said or unconsciously did would set him off.

Thankfully, only a few months before our wedding, I walked away from him for the third and final time.

But I learned a very important lesson through that: Marriage won't solve your problems. It can, in fact, create new ones, or at the very least, exacerbate the ones that are already there.

While I wasn't married yet, the closer we got to our wedding, the worse our problems became, and I began to imagine living with that man as my husband 24/7, unable to escape his silent treatments, destructive words and out-of-control anger.

It was then that I realized that while as a single person I'd felt lonely and longed for that deep human connection with someone, marriage wouldn't solve it.

The fulfillment and satisfaction—the sense of belonging—wouldn't happen for me in marriage.

I needed to find those things apart from marriage, because it is entirely possible to be married and lonely, unfulfilled and dissatisfied.

God didn't create humans to be the source of happiness, fulfillment and satisfaction for other humans. That burden is far too great for someone to carry.

He created us to find our joy, fulfillment and satisfaction in Him—and when we do, we release those around us to be who they were created to be: companions.

3. Know your purpose.

If you think your purpose is tied to being married then you don't understand your purpose at all.

Women were not created solely to be wives and mothers. Yes, biologically we are created with that function, but there have been many women throughout history who have accomplished great things for the kingdom of God and were never married and were never mothers.

I think of Amy Carmichael and Gladys Aylward—two amazing missionaries through whom many, many people came to Christ, and whose impact and legacy live on today. They never married.

But they knew their purpose, and it had nothing at all to do with marriage.

They were just as able to fulfill that purpose as single women as they could have if God had sent them a husband. Their purpose didn't depend on them being married. Nor did it depend on them being single.

If you know your true purpose, whether or not you get married, you will be able to live a life of joy, fulfillment and great satisfaction in Christ while serving and glorifying Him with your life.

The single greatest purpose we have as humans is to glorify God.

That is why we were created. How we accomplish that purpose varies depending on our gifting and calling.

If you don't know your calling, I encourage you to get alone with God in prayer—and possibly fasting—and ask Him to reveal

that calling to you.

Then, I encourage you find a mentor, someone whom you trust, who you know is discerning and wise, and who clearly and consistently hears the voice of God, and allow them to confirm what God spoke to you in prayer.

In 2003, I felt God call me to Croatia as a missionary.

I had no reason at all to believe I'd meet my husband here. All I knew was that I could either sit around and wait for something that might never happen, or I could roll up my sleeves and go about the Father's business.

I found my purpose, and I heard my calling.

My dear single friend, you are not a second-class citizen in the body of Christ.

You are not incomplete because you are not married. You are complete in Christ just as you are.

Your singleness is not a disease that you need to be healed of or rescued from.

Find your joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, purpose and calling in Christ, so that regardless of whether or not God sends you a husband, your life glorifies Him and blesses those around you.

You are complete now.

You can have complete joy now.

You can be fulfilled now.

You can walk in your purpose and calling now.

Let God use you for His kingdom to fulfill your purpose and calling today. {eoa}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their two active boys, 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 the Book of Job Can Help You Break Your Depression

This is Part 1 of a two-part series.

The life of Job, a man whose story is told in the book of the Bible by that name, contains many lessons for us today. In it, we see the value of patience, perseverance and the importance of holding our tongue, not to mention God's faithfulness, restorative power and goodness.

Job's story sticks with us because it's quite epic and vivid: A rich man loses everything, suddenly and without warning, and yet remains faithful to God. His friends, and even his own wife, discourage and accuse him, but Job's faith remains: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He will stand at last on the earth" (Job 19:25).

Eventually (after more than 40 chapters), the Lord vindicates

Job and restores everything that the devil stole, with increase (Job 42:12).

Although Job's story ends well, there is much we can learn from the long journey it took to get there. These truths can encourage us when we're facing loss or hard circumstances, or even in the ups and downs of life.

1. God Is in Control

Start to finish, the Lord remains on His throne—no matter what happened to Job or what happens to us. We often don't see it, and we usually don't feel it, but God's power does not decrease when life is stormy. His strength is unchanging, and His will is good—at all times.

As Job confesses once he hears from God: "I know that You can do everything, and that no thought can be withheld from You. 'Who is he who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me which I did not know" (Job 42:2-3).

Understanding God's sovereignty and power to bring good out of evil can sustain us in times of trial. Scriptures that contain this same truth can guide our prayer lives. For example: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want ... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4). "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever" (Matt. 6:13).

2. Satan Is Subject to God

In the first two chapters of the book of Job, the devil has to ask God's permission before he can attack Job. And the Lord allows the attack because He knows Job has the faith to endure

it (Job 1:8).

Nothing Satan does is outside of God's control. Although his rage is great (Rev. 12:12), he cannot function beyond what God allows.

Some liken the devil to a pawn, which God uses to bring about His will. It's a deception that the devil has power or authority; he has nothing but what is given to him, and that power is temporary—and always subject to the will of God.

We live in a world that is "passing away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17).

Let us take heart. Satan may attack, but God is always able to deliver from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13), give grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16) and work all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

3. The Lord Will Vindicate the Righteous

God brings order to chaos (Gen. 1:1–31), and His arm is not too short to save (Isa. 59:1). Even in persecution, Job knew that his Redeemer would save him: "I know that I will be vindicated" (Job 13:18, NKJV).

God promises vindication for His people all throughout Scripture. Take these following verses to heart through prayer and meditation:

"For the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their power is gone, and there is none remaining, bond or free" (Deut. 32:36, ESV).

"For the Lord will vindicate His people and will have compassion on His servants" (Ps. 135:14).

"Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry

*to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?"
(Luke 18:7, NASB).*

We don't know the timing or the way, but God is faithful to restore what the enemy stole (Joel 2:25–27). He's looking for people like Job, who will faithfully proclaim His goodness, sovereignty and salvation, no matter the circumstance: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against the ones doing evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The *righteous* cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles" (Ps. 34:15-17).

Where do you need God's vindication in your life? {eoa}

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Believing God for the Manifestation of Your Pain- Free Future

Living pain-free is a blessing and one that so many take for granted. But those who are suffering from chronic pain

struggle to maintain their normal lifestyle and often have to alter their activities to sustain peace, joy and even sanity for some. Let's face it, chronic pain associated with sickness, disease and injuries prevents us from living our lives to the fullest as God intended. I know my personal and family friend, ministry advocate and assistant, Palma, is rejoicing for the supernatural healing of her leg, hips, bones and even her blood pressure. Living life without pain is a blessing, and like Palma, you no longer have to suffer from it. Jesus suffered so you can be free from it. Here is Palma's testimony.

"Becky, I have accompanied you on many ministry trips and witnessed how the Holy Spirit works through you to teach and heal. During the recent trip to Canada, I asked you to pray for my left leg, hips and bones. I had been experiencing pain and discomfort that made sleeping, walking and climbing steps difficult. You also prayed for my blood pressure, a concern of many years. While on this ministry trip, the leg pain lessened, and upon returning home, I am pain-free! I walk two miles a day and do a rigorous workout in a fitness center three times a week. Praise the Lord!

Also, one recent day you let me know you were praying for my blood pressure. It had stabilized to normal range. Little did we know that this same day, my blood pressure would jump to the high 150s with no apparent reason. A sure attack by the enemy! Because of what I have learned in the presence of your teachings, I took authority in Jesus' name and renounced the attacking spirit, prayed in the Spirit and listened to your CD, "100 Healing Scriptures," throughout the day. By evening, my blood pressure was normal. Thank you for your obedience to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to pray for me on that day. I have not only witnessed the power of Jesus working through you but have also received healing."

Let's look to the Scriptures: "But [in fact] He has borne our griefs, and He has carried our sorrows and pains; yet we

[ignorantly] assumed that He was stricken, struck down by God and degraded and humiliated [by Him]. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was crushed for our wickedness [our sin, our injustice, our wrongdoing]; the punishment [required] for our well-being fell on Him, and by His stripes (wounds) we are healed" (Isa. 53:4-5, AMP).

As I teach you from *The Healing Creed* where it says, "He carried our sorrows," this word "sorrows" in Hebrew is *mak'ob* and means "physical and mental pain" from Strong's Reference H4341. Our Lord carried our physical and mental pain and bled from a horrific whipping so we could be free from it while living on this earth. And no, we do not have to wait until heaven to be free from pain; that is a works mentality, a wrong doctrine. The truth is there is no pain and suffering allowed into heaven, and we do not carry our earthly baggage with us. When Jesus was whipped at the whipping post, it was to heal us from all physical and emotional pain, sickness and disease while on this earth. That's why the Scripture says, "By His stripes we are healed."

So strengthen your faith and learn to believe for the manifestation of your physical healing. Discover what a blessing it is to live life-pain free in Jesus' name, amen.
{eoa}

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What the Spirit-Filled Life Looks Like

Pastor Mark Driscoll, accompanied by his wife, Grace, explains the study behind his new book, *Spirit-Filled Jesus*. Watch as he tells more about the process in this vibrant interview with Charisma founder and CEO Stephen Strang.

Pulse Survivors Experience Second Miracle

God allowed Luis Ruiz and Angel Colon to survive the tragedy at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando on June 12, 2016. But then He did something greater: He turned their hearts to Him. Hear their story in this inspiring podcast!

Dr. Michael Brown: A Christian Response to Homosexuality

In this thought-provoking video, Dr. Michael Brown discuss the critical issue of how Christians should respond to homosexuality and other LGBT issues. Watch it below, and share

your response with us!

How to Love Your Life, Even When It Hurts

There came a time when I had to accept that my life had not turned out the way I thought it would, and no amount of wishing it were different was going to change it.

I thought I had done all the right things and that I was on track for living out the life I envisioned. I graduated from college, got married, had three children and pursued a career for 15 years until deciding to be a stay-at-home mom. I had stayed committed to my promises and persevered through thick and thin. I had made my faith and following God a priority and even served in ministry. Although not perfect by any means, I had honored my marriage vows and tried my best to be a loving, devoted wife and the best mom I could be. I had kept my family and friends close. But sometimes on the road of life, we come across an unexpected bump that causes our plans to get derailed and our hopes to be crushed. Then one day, something tragic or life-altering happens that drains the joy out of living, or we simply wake up and realize the life we are living is not the one we expected, much less the one we wanted.

Perhaps you can relate. Maybe you had a dream crushed after years of pursuing it. Perhaps you stayed at a job for 30 years, building your retirement fund, only to have that company go bankrupt and take your life savings down with it. Perhaps you've experienced the heartbreak of infertility when you planned on having a houseful of children. Maybe you had a

loved one die far too soon. Maybe you were struck with a disease that limits your abilities and independence. Maybe you thought you'd be married by now but are still single, or maybe you invested years in a marriage that ended in divorce.

I don't know what you've faced, but whatever happened that changed your life or rocked your world just may have snatched your love for life too. And as a result, just maybe you don't think you can ever love life again.

Trust me, friend. I understand.

I had been married for 26 years, 10 months, and five days when my divorce became final. After many painful months of separation, it had become obvious that reconciliation was not possible because of my husband's refusal to stop the behaviors and infidelity that caused the marriage to fail, leaving divorce as the only option. My heart was broken. My visions and dreams of growing old with my husband—dancing arm in arm at our children's weddings, buying a beach house to enjoy together in retirement, celebrating future holidays and special occasions with our kids and their families, bouncing our grandbabies on our knees—were shattered the day he chose to leave the life we had built together.

As a woman, I felt rejected, betrayed, devastated, afraid and terribly alone.

As a mom, I felt overwhelmed with grief and worry about how this situation would scar my children's hearts permanently and helpless as to how ease their pain.

As the sole provider, I worried about having enough money to take care of my children's needs and keep us afloat. As weeks turned into months, bills were going unpaid, debt was piling up and the home we'd lived in for over 20 years was in danger of foreclosure. It seemed spiritual warfare was fierce, and bizarre things kept happening to me and my children. I perpetually felt overwhelmed and hopeless. Crippling fear,

worry and stress became my constant companions. The weight of all I was facing seemed almost too much to bear. I wondered if my heart would ever mend, if the hurt would ever lessen, if the loneliness would ever feel less lonely, and if I would ever feel strong, stable and secure again.

I constantly grappled with the hardest question of all: *Would I ever be able to love life again?*

I spent every day consumed with despair and worry. I began to spend more time at home, depression sinking in, avoiding the emotional energy it would take to interact with people in public. I stopped doing many of the things I loved like playing tennis, shopping and hanging out with friends. I took a sabbatical from doing ministry as my heart tried to heal. And I even stopped going to church to avoid the obligation of awkward small talk and a fake smile. Happiness and laughter seemed to be things of the past.

For the first time ever, I began keeping an extensive journal. I quickly realized that it was a safe, private place for me to vent and pour my feelings out to God. Little did I know that this journal would become one of the things He would use to heal my heart and provide me with evidence of His work in my life.

On March 19, six months after my husband left, I wrote this entry:

Spent an hour in prayer this morning after waking up crying, again. Feeling so overwhelmed with sadness and grief that I couldn't get a grip on my emotions. I just wish my life were different. It's not what I wanted it to be, for me or my children. I wish my family weren't broken. I wish I could make everything better, but I just can't change or fix anything. I can't make my husband love me or want to be a part of our family. I can't heal my children's hearts. I can't ignore all the problems that cause me angst and worry.

I'm tired. Tired of the stress and the emotional drain of this unfamiliar life. Tired of the heartache and pain. Tired of the fear. Tired of dealing with life. Physically, emotionally and mentally tired. I try to put on a good face for the kids when they're home, although there are days when it's impossible to hold back the tears. And I try to be strong around others, but I feel like I'm losing who I am. I don't understand why all this has happened.

Lord, I don't want to be broken anymore. I want to be whole again. I want to feel whole and complete, even if my marriage is over. Even though my heart is broken, I don't want to be a broken woman. I don't want to be a broken soul. I don't want to feel broken anymore. I want to enjoy life again. Fill me with joy, peace and rest in You. I'm tired; give me strength. Restore to me the joy of my salvation. The ache in my soul is so deep, please lessen the ache. I don't understand why this has all happened and how it is all going to turn out. But I want to love my life again, right now, no matter what it looks like. Help me love life again, even while life is hard. Amen.

One day after writing that prayer, I read a devotional that reminded me not to let my desire to understand why I was going through this painful journey distract me from experiencing God's presence. God could equip me to get through each day victoriously; I simply had to choose to let Him be the source of my joy, even in the midst of less-than-joyful circumstances of life.

Upon reading that devotional, I finally stopped letting my circumstances dictate my love for life. Over the many months that followed, I walked closely with God and implemented the steps I've outlined in this book. I have stumbled in my efforts more than once, but each time, I picked myself back up and started the next day afresh. I came to realize that it was not only within my reach to love my life again but also 100

percent within my control.

Friend, loving life is a choice, and we all have the power to choose to love our lives. Our own happiness is up to us. No person or circumstance has the power to take away our happiness or love for life without our permission. No matter what situation you find yourself in today, happiness is within your reach too.

If you're in a fragile, lonely, disheartened or fearful place today—whatever that place looks like—please stick with me. I have learned that it is possible to love our lives, despite what's going on or how much life has changed. My deepest prayer is that you will discover it is possible for you to love your life again too.

But just maybe you're reading this and thinking that nothing big, dramatic or life-shattering has happened to derail your life. In fact, life is the same as it has always been. Same ol' circumstances, different day. And therein lies the problem. You're bored and frustrated with life in general and often find yourself thinking, Surely there has to be more to life than this. It might seem as if everyone else's life is more exciting, more rewarding, easier, or simply better than yours. You feel let down by what life has given you or how it's turned out, and you're discontent. Maybe you even feel let down by God.

The truth is, regardless of which situation we find ourselves in, we all want to be excited about our lives. We know we should appreciate life even when life is hard and that good is always present even during bad times, but it's a challenge to think that way when our hearts are heavy. We know we're supposed to be content, but we still get caught up striving for more or resenting what is not to our liking. And when life seems boring and routine, we often overlook the blessings God has given us because we're more focused on what we don't have than on what we do.

It's challenging to be content in today's world. In fact, contentment seems to have become a lost art. We are constantly bombarded with images of newer, bigger, and improved items that will supposedly make our lives happier, fuller, and more satisfying. We scroll through social media and feel discontent with our home, spouse, car, kids, vacations, clothes, shoes and everything else because we think others have it better. We watch love stories on television and begin to feel unhappy with our own relationships as we compare them with those of fictional characters, or maybe even with real-life relationships that seem better than our own. It's tempting to compare our lives with others' or think "if only ..." but these thoughts open the door for discontentment, allowing it to sink into our hearts and minds and choke our joy. Discontentment sabotages our happiness.

Hebrews 13:5 says, "Don't be obsessed with getting more material things. Be relaxed with what you have" (MSG). This verse instructs us not to look for happiness in money or material things. We are to be satisfied with the present and with what we have been given. To be content with where God has us in the present moment. Period. {eoa}

To learn more about how you can begin experiencing this transformation in your life too, purchase a copy of Unsinkable Faith: God-filled Strategies for Transforming the Way You Think, Feel and Live by Tracie Miles.

**These 2 Key Elements Will
Help You Rekindle Your**

Marriage's Holy Fire

The best way for couples to keep their marriage in a place of vibrant growth is by keeping their hearts engaged with what the Bible calls "first love." There is nothing as deep or dynamic as a vibrant and unhindered Jesus-centered union—divine embers in the heart, from which all other fires catch their flame. One of the ways I understand it is this: *The more beautiful God looks to me, the more beautiful my spouse looks to me.*

The concept of *first love* is set among a series of exhortations given by Jesus to the church in the city of Ephesus (Rev. 2:2–4). In attempting to define exactly what first love is, we may gain some insight by looking at what God's Word gives as a solution to regaining it.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen. Repent, and do the works you did at first, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your candlestick from its place, unless you repent (Rev. 2:5).

There are two key elements here: One is to be able to sense a conviction and awareness—that I have fallen from the first love I once had, and then to make repentance a priority. Two is to take action—remember what I did before, and do some facsimile of it again.

Two applications on the restoration of first love: One is clearly stated in the text—the manner in which my love was first awakened to God. The other is how I initially felt when I connected with my life partner. Both of these relationships are the most important ones in life. They correlate to the first and second of the great commandments—loving God first and then our neighbor (Matt. 22:37–39).

Two action phrases come to mind: staying thirsty and staying

attracted.

O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh faints for You, in a dry and thirsty land with no water. ... Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise you (Ps. 63:1-3).

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I will seek after—for me to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to see the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple (Ps. 27:4).

Staying thirsty and staying attracted are vital components that draw me closer to God and to my spouse.

Not everyone encounters Christ in the same way, thus, first love will have many variations, combined with the fact that when experiencing a renewal of first love you are not the same person you once were. Truth is, however, that God desires every person to experience a manifest enjoyment of who He is. When I first committed my life to Christ, I was thirsty, parched for fulfillment in life. My experience was not lacking in emotion, as I experienced love in a way that I never had before. Likewise, when I first met my wife, I marveled at her beauty, both inside and out. I was thirsty as well, yearning for a life partner to journey with and raise a family.

Repent and re-engage—that's the process to regain first love, with God and in your marriage. For me, on the heels of experiencing Christ for the first time, I recall spending long hours caught up in Bible meditation and study (Matt. 4:4). I could feel the sustenance of God's Word nourishing my soul. I loved listening to worship music— anything that connected me to God's heart. Six years later, I met a woman who was running in tandem with my heart, and the phrase that we chose as the banner over our marriage was "harnessed together for the kingdom." Covenant partnerships, both Godward and in a

marriage, are sustainable when vision and vows are renewed. Find the “restart” button that is most familiar to you and keep pressing it!

I have found that hard times hinder devotion, but when I push through and embrace the working of my faith-muscle, I am able to offer a sacrifice of joy (Ps. 27:6). There are times when this may feel mostly fake and insincere, but we cannot expect every sacrifice and offering in life to always *feel* good. One chapter in the Bible that is the epitome of hard times is Matthew 24, where Jesus discusses the coming destruction of the temple and the intense testing of believers.

Then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. Many false prophets will rise and will deceive many. Iniquity will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved (Matt. 24:10-13).

Standing firm includes two elements: not being deceived by false teaching, and making sure that your love does not grow cold. The church in Ephesus was excelling in the first but failing in the second. Some believe that John wrote Revelation just prior to these intense times coming to pass (Rev. 1:1). I’ve walked with many couples through an “end-times” scenario in their marriage and family. I am thankful for the fact that there is mercy, grace, forgiveness and continuing life vision, even after a divorce and family fracture. I am more thankful for the couples who refused to give up and persevered into the “resurrection resources” available in God.

God is all about the canvas for His portraits. What better place to showcase a fiery first love than against the backdrop of an iced-over passion, in the midst of swirling winds of betrayal and resignation? May we repent and re-engage, that our love may stand firm to the end.

What can you do to repent and re-engage in your marriage and significant relationships? {eoa}

Mike and Anne Rizzo have been in pastoral ministry for over 30 years and currently serve as directors of Marriage and Family Ministries at the International House of Prayer in Kansas City. They carry a passion for personal mentoring, teaching and raising up marriages that exalt the name of Jesus. Mike and Anne have three grown children and one grandchild, and are the authors of Vertical Marriage: A Godward Preparation for Life Together and Longing for Eden: Embracing God's Vision in Your Marriage.

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How You Can Tell If Your Friendship Is Healthy

What is your inner circle of friends like? Are you in healthy friendships with the ones closest to you?

Are those who speak most into your life challenging you to be a better person?

Do those with whom you talk the most leave you feeling positive, uplifted and encouraged?

Or are those with whom you have the most contact filling your life with negativity, drama, gossip and discouragement?

“Rosilind, what do you think is the reason that you continue to date men who are not healthy for you?”

The question caught me off-guard.

Having just come out of a relationship where I had been emotionally and psychologically abused, I was told over and

over again that I wasn't to blame, that what had happened to me said more about my ex-fiance than it did about me.

And this was true. Very true.

A victim of abuse is never the guilty party. However, in my case, I had slowly and systematically walked from the frying pan into the fire. With each boyfriend, the poison was worse.

This time, it was almost deadly.

"I don't know," I said. "But I am on a journey to find that answer."

And that is exactly what I did.

I put a moratorium on dating for an indefinite period of time, until I was certain that I had discovered the answer.

While I learned much about myself during the next five years, it would take much longer to become healthy inside. Five years later, I began dating my husband, who has been essential in teaching me how to become a healthy friend and recognize healthy friendships.

5 Character Traits of Healthy Friendships

Learning how to spot those healthy friendships in our lives so we we can invest in them is crucial.

Equally crucial is learning how to spot the friendships in our lives that leave us feeling drained, defeated and discouraged, the friendships that continually bring us drama.

1. A healthy friend is forgiving.

One of my biggest hangups has always been forgiveness. I am a "stuffer," and my biggest battle to become healthy was learning to embrace God's grace so I could release it to those who had offended me. The worst part was that I didn't even know I was harboring bitterness. But I was, and I used past

hurts to trap me into a victim mentality. My default was self-pity.

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Most of all, I learned to understand grace in a whole new way. I had become a great receptor of grace and a generous giver of grace.

2. A healthy friend is authentic.

Authenticity is probably the No. 1 character trait I admire in people. A person who is comfortable with her own idiosyncrasies, limitations and imperfections is a person who is free to be authentic. They realize that to err is human, and that a mistake is only a cue to try again from a different angle.

But more than that, an authentic friend is a trustworthy friend. With an authentic friend there are no unwritten rules. You will not discover that this friend has harbored poor opinions of you or talked about you behind your back because they speak always in love.

3. A healthy friend is real.

A healthy friend owns up to his faults and blind spots and asks for prayer. She has learned the value of humility and does not assume she is above being needy from time to time.

A healthy friend has learned that we are all equal under grace: Whether we've been saved 30 years or three years, we were all equally lost, and we are equally forgiven. In inner-circle relationships, there should be a healthy exchange of needs, prayer and openness.

4. A healthy friend respects boundaries.

Every person has boundaries. Some prefer wider boundaries, while others are more comfortable with narrower ones. A healthy friend will recognize and respect those boundaries without feeling insecure or growing pushy.

A healthy friend has learned to surrender expectations in the friendship. Realizing that each party has her own responsibilities and obligations, she releases expectations and comparisons to other friendships.

5. A healthy friend communicates.

One of my blind spots (to which I am no longer blind) was

martyrdom. I would silently put up with a lot of stuff I didn't like until I could bear it no more and then explode on anything and anyone within any reasonable distance.

This is obviously very unhealthy!

My husband, early on in our dating relationship, taught me to immediately share what was bothering me rather than subjecting him to an indefinite "silent treatment." Silent treatments are unfair and cause insecurity to build in the relationship. A healthy friend will immediately communicate her dislike of a situation or comment or her need for understanding in a certain matter.

Without healthy communication, a relationship is stunted, because it can only be as healthy as the amount of communication that takes place. {eo}

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their two active boys, 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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