

Surrendering the Empty Space in Your Heart During the Holidays

It's the season to celebrate Christmas and the New Year. There is much to be done: shopping for gifts, putting lights on the house and tree and preparing food for friends and family.

Culturally, the holidays are thought to be times of joy, making memories and participating in family traditions. Yet for some of us, there will be an empty space.

The empty space may be a specific chair in the house that is now empty because of the loss of a loved one, or it may be a feeling of despair after a divorce. Whether it is the first year or the 20th year of the empty space, loneliness and depression can threaten to consume us. The empty space brings an unwelcome cloud that can separate us from the festiveness of the season.

During the holidays, the empty space may seem to hurt more than any other time of the year, because the holidays accentuate our loss. The empty space reminds us that the love and laughter enjoyed before is no longer present. It is natural to feel sorrow, grief, pain or anger, but it is what we do with the emotions around the empty space that can make or break the holidays for us and everyone else.

When the empty space interrupts my holidays due to tragic losses like that of my brother Elias in 2000 or my fellow Marines in Iraq (2007-2008) and Afghanistan (2009), I funnel my emotions through Jesus and turn the empty space in my heart into a place of prayer, knowing Jesus modeled this.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was in an empty space. From here He could look up and see the city of

Jerusalem and the Temple for which He was zealous.

Even so, in His loneliness and despair, knowing what lay before Him, He surrendered His emotions and feelings, praying to our loving Father God, saying, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Soon after, "An angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him" (vs. 43). This passage encourages me when I note the empty space where my loved one once sat, see a family picture from years ago reminding me of previous holidays or grieve the empty space in my heart. This text tells me that when I surrender my emotions and memories to God, He will strengthen me.

After surrendering His will to God's, Jesus prayed fervently from the empty space and "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (v. 44). He then walked the steps of the "Way of Grief" and suffered an agonizing death on the cross, where He not only took our sin and shame but also our sickness, pain and grief. He then rose from the dead and sent His Holy Spirit to fill our empty spaces.

If an empty space is holding you back from fully celebrating the holidays this year, enjoy your family traditions but also start new ones, being intentional to engage the season with other loved ones. There will be times when you may have to take time out to pray and read the Bible or to refresh and recharge, but also make a point to rejoice together, sharing stories or pictures of loved ones who have passed away or serving their favorite food of the season.

Honor their memory by writing their stories for your children and grandchildren to read so the legacy and lessons live on or by giving toward a scholarship fund or other cause they were passionate about. If you are separated because of a military deployment, send your loved ones and their buddies cards and care packages, speaking positively of them when around others and lifting them up in prayer.

During this holiday season, surrender your empty spaces to Him, praying His will be done in you and through you and asking the God of all comfort to strengthen you as you celebrate our Savior's birth and the New Year. Look forward to heaven where "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. There shall be no more death. Neither shall there be any more sorrow nor crying nor pain" (Rev. 21:4). {eoa}

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Resisting the Enemy's Tempting Opportunities

Whenever you decide to do something good in life, something is always going to happen to test you on your resolve. That is the basis for Step 5 of the Take Back Your Temple process: "Expect Tests and Be Prepared."

I started this journey back in December 2003, but I still get tempted occasionally to eat things I know are not good for me. Jesus was not immune to temptations either. Luke 4:13

says, "When the devil had ended all the temptations, he departed from Him until another time."

Did you get that? The devil tempted Jesus after His 40-day fast, Jesus resisted the devil, but then the devil still sought another opportunity to tempt Jesus again.

That's why Scripture tells us, "Be sober and watchful, because your adversary the devil walks around as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet.5:8).

This week, I faced a tempting opportunity. My husband, Mike, and I went to a neighborhood Christmas party. Mike brought some chocolate cake home.

The next day, I received a phone call with some bad news. Suddenly, I remembered Mike's chocolate cake in the refrigerator. That was the tempting opportunity.

Now up until that point, the cake had not tempted me. But I felt bad and I wanted to feel better. That's what the habits of my past would have dictated: run to food whenever I had emotions I didn't want to feel. It was my emotional painkiller.

But I remembered Ps. 46:10, in which the Lord says, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

This time, I just sat still and talked with the Lord: "Lord, my heart is heavy. I need your Holy Spirit to minister to my heart right now and give me peace about this."

I meditated on His Word and allowed the Holy Spirit to bring Scriptures to my remembrance that comforted me. He showed me a new perspective on the situation.

Learning to sit still with your feelings and allow your built-in Comforter to minister to you is a key skill in overcoming emotional eating. The enemy will try to convince you, "I can't

stand it. I must eat right now to escape this uncomfortable feeling.”

Emotional eating is a behavior of impulse. The enemy wants you to move fast so you don't think about what you are doing. He also wants you to focus on looking to the past rather than moving forward.

I am happy to say I did not eat that cake. So it is not tempting me anymore.

The bottom line: You will be tempted at various times in life until you meet Jesus face-to-face. So the wisest thing to do is shut the doors on the enemy to limit those “opportune times” whenever you can. {eoa}

*Once 240 pounds and a size 22, **Kimberly Taylor** can testify of God's healing power to end binge eating. She is an author and the creator of the Christian weight-loss website . Visit today for inspirational health and weight-loss tips.*

For the original article, visit .

Why Christians Should Stop Saying, ‘Everything Happens for a Reason’

I can't begin to explain how many times I heard the phrase, “Everything happens for a reason” while growing up, especially while surrounded by many people who would consider themselves Christians or people of faith.

And although I understand this statement is mostly used to

help comfort and console people who are in times of turmoil and uncertainty, I've had a hard time wrapping my head around its validity.

I come from a place where I believe not everything in life happens for a reason, but everything that does happen can ultimately be redeemed and used by God for a purpose. These two things are quite different if you begin to unpack their meaning and understanding.

We live in a fallen world, a world full of sinful people, people who are in need of the grace of Jesus. With this being said, we have to understand there are things in this world that are going to take place that aren't of God, His character or His doing. He may have allowed them to happen, but He didn't ordain them. Depending on their theology, many might disagree with my last statement, but I hold true to my belief that God does not have His hand in sin, darkness or anything contrary to that of good as it states in 1 John 1:5, 2 Cor. 5:21 and 1 John 3:5.

When someone uses the phrase, "Everything happens for a reason," what they could be saying is this:

- "Your father died of cancer for a reason."
- "Your son got hit by a drunk driver for a reason."
- "Your child was stillborn for a reason."
- "You were abused as a child for a reason."
- "You were raped or sexually assaulted for a reason."
- "You are struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts for a reason."
- "Your spouse cheated on you for a reason."
- "Your friend was murdered for a reason."
- "Your house caught on fire for a reason."
- "Your friend committed suicide for a reason."

And so on.

When you begin to examine some of these statements for what

they are, the phrase, “Everything happens for a reason” seems to make a lot less sense and sound a lot more misleading. But what doesn’t change when looking at these phrases is the fact that God can bring redemption to each of them, use them for a purpose and allow the testimonies that come out of them help further His kingdom. That’s who He is. That’s what He does.

We have to be careful when using lofty statements and responses that sound good for the moment but can actually be harmful in the long run—especially as it pertains to our views on God and His hand in our lives. If we really believe everything happens for a reason, we also have to ask ourselves whether or not we believe God would have His hand in circumstances and actions contrary to that of His Word and character. {eoa}

Jarrid Wilson is a husband, pastor and author relentlessly sharing the love of Jesus. For the original article, visit [.](#)

Rekindling Your Loyalty to Royalty This Christmas

The holidays are around the corner, with all the festivities and traditions we participate in. It’s a time of year where I like to look again at what the Bible says about Jesus, as there are some things our culture takes for granted or espouses that may not align with what the true story of Christmas shows us.

The Magi came from the east with a large caravan, asking, “Where is the new king of the Jews?” This alarmed the city, as well as King Herod and the Jewish religious leaders, who were aware of the written prophecies concerning the Messiah (Matt.

2:3).

These wise men acknowledged Jesus as King and were theologians and astronomers, aware of the signs that would be revealed when the Messiah was born. Coming from the East, they were perhaps from the discipleship lineage of Daniel, who prophesied about the Son of Man, who was given dominion and glory and an everlasting kingdom, in Dan. 7:13-14.

These kings more than likely had the Torah in their possession and possibly correlated Num. 24:17 to the star they saw from the East. With the Scriptures they had and knowing the prophecies of Daniel, upon seeing the star, they embarked on a long journey that led them to Jerusalem, where they were provided more insight on where they were to find the Christ child as the chief priests and scribes quoted Mic. 5:2 (Matt. 2:4-12).

Then the Magi, with their caravan, saw the star above a house in Bethlehem and with great excitement, they entered Jesus' home, giving Him gifts fit for a king and worshipping Him. They did not bring gifts for Herod, who was appointed king by Rome. Their gifts to Jesus were not in the gift boxes we see in the traditional nativity scenes, but were instead extravagant gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, carried by camels and servants and perhaps set up for display after they arrived in Jesus' home. The gifts were representative of the nations coming to Jesus and were an abundance.

Jesus was born king, and near the end of His ministry, He acknowledged his royalty. Luke 23:3 shows Pilate asking him, "'Are you the King of the Jews?'" and Jesus said, "'You truly say so.'"

After His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and sat down at His rightful throne, as Hebrews 1:3 says, "He is the brightness of His glory, the express image of Himself, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had

by Himself purged our sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

This Christmas, we can be assured that Jesus was born king and is king, who reflected the glory of God and holds everything together. Our loyalty is to royalty, knowing that He fulfilled over 350 prophecies and is the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5b).

Over the holidays, meditate on these Scriptural truths:

1. Jesus is seated at God’s right hand, and our affections are to be on Him. Col. 3:1 says, “If you were then raised with Christ, desire those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.”

2. We are seated with Christ in heavenly places, and our loyalty is to royalty. Eph. 2:6 says, “And he [God] raised us up and seated us together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Who we are is determined by whose we are; we are children of the king, seated with Him.

3. Jesus is coming back as King. Upon His return, Rev. 19:16 says, “On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

This Christmas, rekindle your loyalty to royalty, and celebrate Him as king with your friends and family. {eoa}

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The Best Time for Men to Make Disciples

Something happened to me when I hit 35—I just didn't want to live the old way any more.

I wanted to change my life. So I spent the next 2 1/2 years reading the Bible, looking for insight.

Clarity came at the age of 37, and I wrote in the front of my Bible, "I want to live the rest of my earthly life for the will of God," and meant it. I still do.

That was the day I stopped being a cultural Christian and became a biblical Christian. That was the day I stopped seeking the God I wanted, and started seeking the God who is.

So many men have told me similar stories.

Apparently something happens to men around 35 years of age. For example, Reuben Greenberg, former chief of police in Charleston, South Carolina, wrote in his book *Let's Take Back Our Streets!* that most criminals rehabilitate when they reach the age of 35. He wrote:

Rehabilitation comes from inside the former criminal himself. The change takes place in his head. He decides not to be a crook any more, just as he decided to be one. No one can say exactly what triggers this change; all we can say is that it happens around the age of 35. At that point the number of felons re-arrested and sentenced to additional prison terms drops to almost zero.

The change is astounding, really. These men who scorned working take jobs that once they would have spurned. They

become taxpayers. They begin to raise families.

Keep your eyes open for 35-year-old men who are ready for a change. Because the best time to make a disciple is when a man wants to become one. {eo}

Patrick Morley began teaching a weekly Bible study to a handful of men on Friday mornings in March 1986. This group grew to the 160 men who meet weekly in Winter Park, Florida. Since 2000, Internet technology has enabled thousands of men from around the world to participate each week by viewing or listening to the study. Pat is the author of *The Man in the Mirror*, a landmark best-seller for men drawn from Pat's own search for a deeper relationship with God. For more teachings by Morely, go to [this link](#), or visit his ministry online at [this link](#).

For the original article, visit [this link](#).

A Letter About Christians and Defeating Bulimia

In the more than 10 years I've had online, I recall few messages from people suffering from bulimia.

I've received messages from two individuals who described symptoms of this eating disorder this week. I don't think that is a coincidence. So I knew I had to write about Christians and bulimia in case you are having the same issue.

Bulimia is a disorder in which a person overeats or binges on food, but then vomits the food up, starves themselves or abuses laxatives in an attempt to "undo" what they just did. This behavior sets up a self-destructive cycle in which

the person feels trapped.

I'm writing this letter in response to a comment posted publicly on the TBYT website:

"Kimberly, thank you for your article on temptation and the way our Jesus dealt with them.

May I ask if any of your members have a problem of beating oneself up with guilt and try to clean up a past guilt indulgence with excess exercise, fast or laxatives?

God bless you and your ministry in Christ Jesus." –MC

I've meditated on this issue from a biblical perspective and decided to write a letter to MC. Since the comment was public, I'm making the letter public, too.

I pray this letter helps to set those who suffer from this issue free:

Dear MC,

Thank you so much for your question. I'll start by answering it directly first, and then I am going to give you information for which you didn't ask.

So please forgive me in advance if I'm stepping out of bounds.

The answer to your question is "Yes;" I'm not aware of many TBYT members who have suffered from bulimia; however, a few have admitted to past struggles with this.

I say "admit" because there are probably others who have practiced this habit but don't admit it. Bulimia is a disorder in which upholding secrecy seems an essential part of maintaining the cycle.

In public, the person appears in control, pulled-together. But in private, in the bathroom, they are falling apart.

The Lord does not want any of His people living that way.

Gal. 5:1 says, "For freedom Christ freed us. Stand fast therefore and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

You did not ask how you get free from this. So I am not sure if you are ready for freedom at this time or would like to remain unchanged.

I do know that anorexia, bulimia and binge eating are points along the same destructive line. It does not matter if the results of the habit are visible, as in obesity. It is the same bondage. The habit still causes the body harm.

This reminds me of the man of the country of the Gadarenes, who was possessed and lived among the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones. Wicked spirits bound this man (see Mark 5:1-20).

Now, I do not believe demonic possession is possible for a Christian. After all, the Holy Spirit seals us for the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30). However, I do believe that Christians are subject to demonic influence if they believe the enemy's lies above God's Word.

One of the things the Lord provides to set His children free is His Word. When we know, believe and live His Word, no demon in hell can bind us.

Another situation in the Bible that bulimia reminds me of is the case of the Pharisees. They were the religious leaders of the day. They looked good on the outside, but their insides did not match. Jesus said of them: 'Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of *dead men's bones* and of all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27).

I just noticed a connection between the man of the Gadarenes

and the Pharisees. Did you notice that the word “tombs” is mentioned in both stories?

Tombs signify death. Death is the signature of the enemy's handiwork. Jesus described him as a thief who only comes to steal, kill and destroy.

With bulimia, is the enemy making you live among the tombs, among dead things? Does he constantly remind you of the past ... your pain, the things you suffered back then?

The Lord is calling you to life. The Son of God has saved you. He specializes in resurrection!

Jesus wants to make whole that which is broken in you, the part of you that is drawn to dead things and living among tombs.

Your healing requires submitting your heart to Jesus in this area, because He is the only One who can fix it. According to Prov. 4:23, the heart is where all life issues originate, not our body size.

The foundation of freedom is knowing who you are and to whom you belong. Knowing who you are determines what you do!

Here is a personal example:

For years, I saw God as angry with me. I could only see Him through my past sins.

Even though I said the prayer of salvation, I had no interest in having a daily relationship with God. I said the prayer of salvation only because I saw it as my “Get out of Hell Free” card.

I saw myself as a rebellious teenager—going against her strict Father's rules. But back in 2001, everything changed. The Lord revealed His love for me in a unique, special way. He touched my heart, and I have never been the same.

Once I knew who I was in Jesus, I grew in love for the Father. I saw myself through the blood of Jesus, not my sins.

God loves me apart from my appearance and performance. I am a royal daughter, joining her Father in the family business. Because of the Father's love, I wanted to obey Him. My motivation for obedience is wanting to do those things that please Him.

That is how my "want-to" changed. It was not about willpower or duty. The Holy Spirit revealed to me God's love, gave me a hunger to study His Word and the power to walk out what I learned.

Here is a good Scripture to memorize regarding this issue:

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever who comes to Me shall never hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst'" (John 6:35).

During those moments in which you are tempted to binge and purge, you are hungry for something, likely love, acceptance or comfort.

Jesus invites you to come to Him at that moment. Come to Him every morning to start your day. Come to Him in the evening to review your day. Come to Him as often as you like. His extends His hand to you: "Come"

Next, He asks you to believe in Him. Believe He can heal you of this. He is no respecter of persons; what He has done for others, He will do for you.

Learn what the Bible says about God's love for you. This is where freedom begins.

To get free of anything that has you bound, you must believe that the Lord loves you right where you are. You don't have to jump through hoops or over hurdles to make Him love you. This belief is critical for victory. We love the Lord because He

first loved us (see 1 John 4:19).

Without loving Him, we will only obey Him out of duty or legalism. And that eventually brings rebellion.

The healing sequence goes: God loves us > We love Him > We obey His Word.

Without love, this sequence does not work.

Galatians 5:6 tells us: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith which works through love."

Love is required for faith to work.

I do hope this was helpful to you, even though you didn't ask for advice. I am praying for your complete deliverance. It's available if you want it.

If you want to know more about overcoming binge eating (and bulimia is in that category), feel free to check out my online course, *How to Stop Binge Eating*.

Over 1,000 people have taken the course, so you are not alone.
{eoa}

*Once 240 pounds and a size 22, **Kimberly Taylor** can testify of God's healing power to end binge eating. She is an author and the creator of the Christian weight-loss website . Visit today for inspirational health and weight-loss tips.*

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2017 Prophecy: The Lord Is Releasing the Angels of Abundant Harvest

This is one of the most profound prophetic words I have ever received, second only to what the Lord told me in 2007 about a Great Awakening coming to this nation. In September, the Lord spoke these words to me:

An abundant harvest is at hand. I am releasing angels of abundant harvest into the nation. You will reap what you have sown. This is a double-edged sword.

Where the enemy has resisted your harvest in years past, you will see a multiplication effect of blessing in your life. Doors will open unto you that no man can open. Opportunities will come your way that you never dreamed, imagined or even thought to ask for. Provision will enter your life from unexpected places.

If you have sown to the Spirit, you will reap from the Spirit. If you have sown into My kingdom business, you will see a return on the investment of your time, your finances and your relationships. Reinforcement will come to support the work of your hand. You will find that lack is no longer in your language. You will see blessings chase you down and overtake you. You will find that I am leading you and guiding you with greater precision. You will hear My voice and dream My dreams and see My visions. You will rest in Me and have confidence and faith in me that defies the enemy's plans for your life. This is a year of abundant harvest.

Be warned, though and be ready because the other side of this double-edged sword is a harvest of the enemy's agenda for those who have refused My mercy and have not heeded My voice. I am calling you to repent now before that day of reckoning

comes. I will not be mocked. Whatever a man sows he will reap. There are laws of the harvest and they are in effect.

If you have been holding back what belongs to Me, release it. If you have been muzzling the ox, loose him. If you have been sowing seeds of discord among My children, go to them in humility and make it right. If you have been defying My will, get in alignment with me now. Right now.

If you have been sowing to the flesh, you will reap from the flesh if you do not repent quickly. You will begin to see a trickle of the rotten harvest spring forth in your life if you do not choose My ways. My ways are higher than your ways. But there is still time to repent. There is still time to choose mercy over judgment. There is still time to push back the enemy's work. Yes, there are consequences for your choices, but you can start planting new seeds now to reverse the curse of sin.

I am releasing the angels of abundant harvest. They will minister blessings to the heirs of salvation. They will bring provision and protection from the enemy's sword. I am releasing the angels of abundant harvest. Make your choice. Choose this day whom you will serve with your whole heart. I am a God of justice. I am also a God of mercy.

You have put Me to the test in the last season, and a season of abundant harvest is coming into your life. Prepare your hearts now to receive what is in store for you and repent for the poisonous seeds you've sown so you can escape the snare of the fowler. I am Your God, and I love you with an everlasting love. I am releasing angels of abundant harvest. {eoa}

Charisma House has raced to publish a teaching book based on this prophetic word so that you can apply biblical principles in cooperation with the angels of abundant harvest. Visit to learn more and read what James Goll and others have to say about this teaching.

More Godly Principles to Steer Your Marriage Clear of Sexual Disaster

Last week, I shared with you that, during my 25-year career, I have counseled thousands of men who have traveled the road of the young man in Proverbs 7—the road to trouble and sexual disaster. It's a road that has been traveled by millions of men over thousands of years in every culture.

It's sad, and it's discouraging. But men, there is something you can do about it and stay pure in your marriage.

I also shared six principles to keep you off this road, ones should share with your wife. Here are five more:

1. Praise and touch. In counseling men for more than 25 years, I can say without any reservations that the vast majority of men feel loved and appreciated by being praised and physically touched. If you're like most of us, this will be an issue you will have to address, or it can leave you vulnerable as a single or married man.

If you're married, talk to your wife about your need to be touched a few times a week. Now if you ask for sex every time she tries to be affectionate, you must take responsibility if your wife holds back from touching you because she doesn't always want to have sex. So separate the need for touch and sex. It's totally acceptable to ask for touch, but separate this so your wife feels safe in touching you.

There are women who find touch challenging even within marriage. They may be abuse survivors, have had unaffectionate parents or feel their husband is overly needy to desire so much touch. She may also be an intimacy anorexic which we will talk more about later. In that case, she is intentionally not touching you because she knows you like it, and it would bring you closer to her. Intimacy anorexics desire a certain amount of distance in their marriage, so they won't touch you.

If you appeal to your wife, and she refuses to meet your desire for touch, get help. Go together to a pastor, mentor couple or counselor. If she is starving for intimacy because you don't pray or share your heart, give her a safe place to vent. If, however, it is her issue, it offers her a place to grow.

Praise is also important to men. I would say before you ask your wife for praise that you first ask yourself how often and what type of praise you are sowing into your wife's heart. Are you praising who she is or only what she does? Are you giving praise with enthusiasm or in a monotone? Think about this first before you ask for praise.

Take a moment. Where do you hear words like "Great job, you're smart, kind, creative, hardworking"? If this happens mostly outside of your marriage, talk to your wife. You might want to do what Lisa and I do: we give each other two praises a day. This keeps our needs for praise a priority in our marriage.

Single guys, also be wise about the women you let praise or touch you on a regular basis. Women know that men like praise and touch, and some will use this knowledge for their advantage to seduce you.

A rule of thumb for me is that if a woman is praising me, I am cautious. If it continues, I am very cautious, because deep down, I know I'm not that amazing. If a woman touches me, especially if it's on a regular basis, I set definite

boundaries so she understands not to do so.

2. Respect. Respect is a core issue for men. Wives are told to respect their husbands (see Eph. 5:22), but to be honest, some men make that difficult. If you don't keep your word, keep up with home projects, pray with her, do the dishes, laundry and try to love her the way she wants to be loved, then it will be hard to respect you. Ask yourself if your behavior around the house and toward your wife is truly respectable. If the answer is no, you are creating a very difficult environment for your wife to respect you.

You need respect, but if you are not giving respect by serving well, you will create a woman who has to nag and be critical, and you will feel less respected.

Firstly, work on the respect you're giving to your wife as well as your behaviors around the house. Then, define for yourself what respect would look like. If you think it's obedience, you are too immature to be respected. So try again, and discover for yourself how you would feel respected. Then talk to your wife about that. If you get nowhere, talk to a mentor couple, pastor or counselor to have this issue resolved so that respect is a common commodity in your marriage.

If your respect needs are primarily met outside of your marriage, you are vulnerable to a female's respect. Please address this issue, so you don't find yourself walking down the road to trouble.

3. Daily Declaration. I find making a daily commitment to stay on the right road and avoid the road to trouble is helpful. I accept that I am at war, not just with the devil and this very sexual culture, but I am also at war with me. James 1:14 says we are drawn away by our own lust.

That means left to myself, I could lust, I could think higher of myself than I should, or feel entitled to a better wife, life or something else. I am like you in a battle of my own

flesh. Here is something I have learned to do to declare war on my flesh.

As part of my prayer in the morning, as I stated earlier, many times before my feet even hit the floor, I declare a few commitments to the Lord. One of those is to love and protect all women today, to hate all lust of all women in my heart or my mind and to recognize all women are made by God, for God and will go back to God.

This daily declaration has put a stake in the ground so deep inside me that I can't explain it. It's as though I've told myself how the day is going to be. If I am tempted to look twice at a woman, a voice inside will ask me, *Are you protecting her?* This daily declaration tells my flesh that today I am focused on winning any battle that comes up in this area. I make this declaration even if I'm just going to be hanging out at home with Lisa all day. It's become part of what I do when I wake up.

4. Prayer and the war. Prayer is a critical part of staying off the road to trouble. Praying daily as a Christian man is essential, whether you pray on your knees, in your truck, with hands up or down. Connecting to God, praising Him and listening to Him are critical in order to walk in any spiritual strength.

Reading, memorizing, listening to and meditating on the Bible is important to stay strong. I not only read the Bible, but I like to listen to it on CD on my drive to work. Revelation from the Word is sweet and strengthening. When we fear God in a respectful manner, we want to pray and read His Word.

I am so saddened by men who only hear, "I have to pray and read my Bible?" when I talk to them. These men have no clue that as Christians we have the honor of praying and gleaning wisdom from the Bible. As a lost person, I had no desire for these behaviors. As a believer, I know it's a privilege to get

to pray and read the Word.

5. Hero in one story. Most of us men love a good hero epic story. You know the classic theme: Good guy gets into some conflict or trouble. He then meets Merlyn, Mickey Mouse or gets the magic power, gem or formula and fights the good fight, defeats the foe of some kind, gets the beautiful woman and obtains the kingdom.

These are hero epic literature themes, and most guys love these stories. In the real world, heroes are limited to one story each. There are millions of maidens in distress (note to single guys—they are in distress for a reason).

You and I can only be a hero in one woman's story. You guessed it: the story of our wife or future wife. I can't be a hero to the single mom, single woman, woman in a bad marriage or divorced woman, rich or poor. No matter what situation a woman may be in, I am not able to be her hero. That job belongs to God and a man who can commit his whole life to that role.

I can only be a hero to Lisa and my children, and you can only be a hero to your wife and family. If I want to be a hero, I will work through my marriage and family issues. I die to myself, serve well, get scars and stay off the road to trouble and on the clean road God has marked out for me to travel.
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The Gift Jesus Wants From You This Christmas

The songs of Christmas pronounce the very meaning, the genuine heart and the vivid story of this holy season. The carols that have grown so vibrant throughout the decades embrace the heartfelt message of Christmas in every stanza—in every melody—and in every word.

More than the food of holiday parties, the songs of this season fill all the ravenous places in humanity.

More than the lights on every home on every street, the hymns of Christmas light up the darkness with His presence.

More than the mountain of gifts under the family Christmas tree, the joyful and hopeful anthems of Advent give generously to a world awash with expectation.

“A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices!”

Into our weariness came a Savior. The tired travelers of life are now rejoicing because of hope. The weary ones, the discouraged ones and the empty ones are joining the chorus of the angels because of the song that only hope sings. Do you hear the song of hope? Is hope singing in your world today?

“Mary, did you know that your Baby Boy has walked where angels trod?/When you kiss your little Baby you kissed the face of God?”

Mary—the virgin who was no more than a girl herself—kissed the face of God. Oh! To be there that night when the angels sang and the shepherds danced. Oh! To watch this young mother fall in love with heaven’s darling.

"Hallelujah! Oh, how the angels sang! Hallelujah! How it rang!/And the sky was bright with a holy light! 'Twas the birthday of a King!"

His birthday was a night when the darkness of a world in pain exploded with rare and glorious colors. The night Jesus was born was a night when the voices of an angelic choir roared in victory. That night!

"Oh come to my heart, Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee."

I am my own innkeeper, and I must decide if there is room for Him or not. Will I cast away other interests and distractions in order to make a place in my heart for Him? Or does my heart embarrassingly declare, "No Vacancy"?

And we dare not overlook this triumphant theological treatise that fills the canyons of our frightened world with joy explosive:

"Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!/Light and life to all He brings, Risen with healing in His wings./Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die;/Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth;/Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!"

Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, left the glory of Heaven so that you and I would not have to experience the pains of death. He was born so we could be born again. No wonder the angels sang.

My heart joins in the Christmas anthem that resounds through eternity. I can't stop singing the melodies, the lyrics and the hymns that declare Christmas.

One of the greatest miracles of Christmas is that the entire world joins in the proclamation! Christmas has a singular and

dynamic song that cannot be stilled and will not be silent. Christmas awakens each one of our hearts to hope ... to joy ... and to the light of the world.

Don't let the pain of the past year silence your song or stifle your joy. The song of Christmas is a song that resounds over the mountains and the valleys of life. The anthem of this season echoes triumphantly over human pain and in spite of deep disappointment.

The joyous carols of Christmas have the intensity it takes to boil away the distractions of the season and help us to focus anew on why He came. He came for you. He came for me.

That's what Christmas is all about. He came.

He came so we could sing.

He came so we could hope.

He came so we could live.

My deepest prayer is when you sing the songs of Christmas this year, you will be reminded of the matchless and glorious miracle of Christmas. This Baby—the little boy in the manger—changed everything for you and for me.

"What can I give Him poor as I am?/If I were a shepherd, I would bring Him a Lamb/If I were a wise man, I'd sure do my part/So what can I give Him? I'll give Him my heart

"I'll give Him my heart, Give Him my heart/What can I can give Him but all of my heart?/I'll give Him my heart, Give Him my heart/What can I give Him but all of my heart?

"What can you give Him? What can you bring?/What can you offer that's fit for a King?/Bow before Jesus that's where you can start/What can you give Him? Just Give Him your heart/Give Him your Heart! Give Him your Heart!

“What can you give Him but all of your heart?/Give Him your heart! Give Him your heart!/What can you give Him? Just give Him your heart!” {eoa}

Carol McLeod is an author and popular speaker at women's conferences and retreats, where she teaches the Word of God with great joy and enthusiasm. Carol encourages and empowers women with passionate and practical biblical messages mixed with her own special brand of hope and humor. She has written five books, including *No More Ordinary, Holy Estrogen!*, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart* and *Defiant Joy!* Her most recent book, *Refined: Finding Joy in the Midst of the Fire*, was released last August. Her teaching DVD, *The Rooms of a Woman's Heart*, won the Telly Award, a prestigious industry award for excellence in religious programming. You can also listen to Carol's "A Jolt of Joy" program daily on the Charisma Podcast Network. Connect with Carol or inquire about her speaking to your group at .

6 Principles to Keep You Off the Road to Sexual Disaster

The road to trouble is well-traveled and well-known. It has been traveled by millions of men over thousands of years in every culture.

Solomon wrote of a young man's road to trouble in Proverbs 7 where a young man "finds" a woman and is seduced by his lust and her skills. Over my 25-year career, I have had the unique experience of counseling thousands of men who have traveled this road to trouble and sexual disaster.

Here are six principles to keep you off the road to sexual

disaster. I will share more of these on Monday in Part 2 of this two-part series:

1. Fear God. God is love, and He is to be ultimately respected for creating you and giving you the blessings in your life. It is God who is to be feared. When we fear God, we hate evil (Prov. 8:13). Hating evil is a result of fearing God. When you were a teenager, there were certain things you knew not to do because you knew your dad's stance, and you knew he would implement consequences.

Today in the luxury of our lives and churches, we don't hear much about fearing God and respecting Him. I, in fact, can't think of the last time I heard a sermon on fearing God. I highly recommend at some point you do a word study on the fear of the Lord. There are so many benefits for a heart that fears God. One of these is that you would run from evil, not entertain it or be entertained by it.

2. Be honest. Being honest about your sexual past can bring healing to it. Also, when you review your sexual past, you learn about cycles that can help you to break patterns in your life now. Being honest is essential if you want to avoid going or staying on the road to trouble. Honesty can get you off this highway or keep you from ever getting on it to begin with.

3. Talk to your wife. The women God gives us to be our wives are amazing. In most cases, they are on our side. They want their marriage and family to work out and last a lifetime. They married us looking for the happily ever after.

In most cases, women respond well to truth, especially when shared early on. If you are hiding a secret porn life, it will hurt her, but not nearly as much as after your involvement with another woman.

No marriage is perfect. Talking to your wife about issues in the marriage is healthy and a sign that you also want the

marriage to work. If you run into issues bigger than the two of you can handle, seek out a mentor couple, a pastor or a Christian counselor.

Often the presence of another person can help clarify the issues currently on the table, and it also offers more minds to create solutions. Having others involved can have an element of accountability that “all by itself” can’t offer and can change the dynamics in a positive way to solve the issues at hand in a marriage.

4. Don’t believe in a secret. I am flabbergasted at how many men believe in secrets. They think that within a secret, the truth will magically remain hidden. This is like the dog that puts his head under his paws, thinking that because he can’t see us, we can’t see him. Jesus taught that what we do in secret will be shouted from the rooftops (see Luke 12:3).

Revelation 2:23 teaches us that God knows our hearts, thoughts and deeds. Hebrews 12:1 states we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. Let me tell you plainly: There is no such thing as a secret, period. You may have a season of lust and sin, but like a seed in the dirt, it will pop up.

I know some guys think they may be more clever than their wife or others. However, you are not brighter than God. He is very creative, and if you refuse to be honest, He can create circumstances that force the truth to be known. Trust me; for 25 years I have seen His handiwork. I have heard stories from wives having dreams of exactly what their husbands were doing, children finding dad’s pornography site or emails to girlfriends and the other woman repenting and seeking forgiveness from the wife of the man with whom she cheated.

I could go on for hundreds of pages of stories about how husbands who believed in secrets got caught. Sometimes they were big businessmen with hundreds of millions of dollars, professional sports figures, top ministry leaders,

politicians, doctors, lawyers, you name it, men at the top of their field who believed in secrets.

What I have taught my children is to believe you will be caught at every secret and every lie. Believing you will absolutely get caught is a better and healthier way to live and would keep every man off the road to trouble whether it is fornication or adultery.

5. Imagine the worst. I find this exercise helpful, especially for the guys who dabble with fantasy, pornography and masturbation and think they will never cross the line as they pave their way on the road to trouble. I say to them, let's just suppose you did fornicate or commit adultery. First, I have them list all the people it would affect if they found out. This list should include past, present and future. People you grew up with, friends, family members, children, grandchildren, coworkers past, present, and future, neighbors, pastors, church members, people you ministered to and so on. This list can easily get to a hundred people, especially when you recognize each of them will be telling their friends and hairdressers. If they didn't already list Him, I have them add Jesus and God to the list.

Then take each person and imagine two things. First, imagine how they would feel the moment they heard the news of your falling. They might feel sad, mad, disappointed, betrayed, defrauded, conned, insignificant and unimportant. Second, write down the consequences you might have in your life because of your behavior. Your consequences may be financial because your business was impacted, inability to go to college, loss of respect from your son, STDs or unwanted pregnancies.

That's the power of one man's decision. It's helpful to see the mega-impact your decision can have. Knowing that the impact of my fall would not just be placed on people close to me helps me desire to protect them from that pain and stay

away from the road to trouble.

6. Exit and entrance signs. Every public building you walk in has exit signs over the doors. Many, if not all states, require exit signs to be lit so they are easy to see. Many buildings will also have entrance signs on the door they want you to enter. The building may have many doors, but usually just one is marked entrance.

This is a very simple concept that most men can easily grasp. Every woman, except for your wife or future wife, is an exit sign. What do I mean by this? It's simple, if you move toward another woman in a sexual manner you are exiting God's best plan for your life. If you are married, you are for sure exiting God's one and only will for your life: your wife.

So when you're at the mall, department store, restaurant or even church and you find yourself looking at someone inappropriately, just imagine an exit sign over her head. So if you're objectifying or lusting after a brunette, imagine an exit sign at the top of her head so you know you are exiting God's best and moving into the ramp taking you to the road to trouble.

The entrance sign is just as important to understand as the exit sign. Your wife and only your wife, or future wife, is the entrance sign to all of God's blessings for you. Regardless of what mood she is in right now, she is the only entrance for your romantic and sexual expression. I know there are challenging days; remember, I am not only a psychologist, but I am also a husband and father of a daughter. People are not perfect, but you can be absolutely sure you are in God's will when being romantic and sexual towards your wife.

So the next time you look at your wife, try putting an entrance sign over her head. I find that this can even shift your mood that she is a gift to you for now and the future. You deserve God's best, and that is to stay on the road with

your spouse or future spouse with as good an attitude as possible. {eoa}

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