

What Happens When You Refuse to Bow Down to a Godless, Deceptive Culture

A man was healed. A testimony was given. God was glorified.

And for their effort, Peter and John were sent to jail.

After healing a lame beggar in Acts 3, Peter and John have the opportunity to share the message of Jesus with the astonished crowd that gathered. Peter reminds the crowd of their deplorable treatment of Jesus, but then declares in verse 16 ...

“And His name, by faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. And faith which comes through Him has given him perfect health in your presence.”

Because of their declarations of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the religious leadership opted to lock Peter and John up for the night. But not before, as chapter 4, verse 4 goes on to state, many more believed, and the numbers of believers increased.

To make a long story short, the next day, Peter and John were taken before the Sanhedrin, where they proceeded to continue to proclaim the name of Jesus, going as far as to declare that Jesus is “‘the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12).

Upon their release, Peter and John reported to their people (believers) what had transpired. What happened next was an impromptu prayer meeting, in which the people prayed, “Now, Lord, look on their threats and grant that Your servants may

“speak Your word with great boldness, by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be performed in the name of Your holy Son Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30).

These verses are an oft overlooked, yet very good lesson for all of us. In the contentious social climate in which we live, this is a model prayer of boldness in the face of threats and terror, a boldness that refuses to be bullied by the arrogance of men, popular opinion and political correctness. The Greek word for *boldness* that we see here is *parresia*, which means “freedom to speak.”

Just as Peter and John testified in the face of ugly threats by religious leaders, we are to stand up in the face of a godless and deceptive culture and respond to their accusations and threats with *signs and wonders* ().

Another interesting point is the word *behold* (). This word does not mean to simply “look at,” but “*God, You look at them and fix Your gaze upon them.*” How many times have you seen a child back down from some form of folly simply because of the disapproving gaze of a parent? This is basically saying, “God, stare ’em down!”

The message of the gospel is a tough message. While, yes, it is a message of love and hope in Christ, it is also a message of self-sacrifice, self-denial and isolation (*though none go with me, still I will follow*). These days, there is no shortage of those who would try to intimidate us into silence and isolation. For Christians to speak the truth, we face the backlash of public scorn and ridicule, threats from governmental entities (such as the IRS), or threats of physical violence from groups, organizations and religions that would terrorize us.

Yet we are not to cower in the face of opposition. We are not to remain silent during such threats. Recently, I wrote a book called ***The Unraveling of America***. I didn’t write it because I

was trying to make friends. I wrote it because the truth had to be told, regardless of how hard a truth that was.

So why should any of us take such risks? Why should we declare the truth? Because we are called to be salt and light. We are called to a life of faith, for it is only by faith that we can please God (Heb. 11:6). But we can also rest assured that, when we speak the truth, and live according to God's direction, He shows up. Look at verse 31 of Acts 4: "When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness."

God is not going to leave you hanging.

In Him is truth. In Him is power. In Him there is no lack.

That is Good News for me and you! {eoa}

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For the original article, visit .

What Happens When You Surrender Yourself Completely to the Holy Spirit

What would happen if every church in America closed down this Sunday, and all God's children had to do was sit and listen to the groans of the Holy Spirit? Shane Idleman says the residual effect would more powerful than anyone could possibly imagine.

“From what I see, it’s embarrassing, what the church has become,” says the pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Leona Valley, California. “It breaks my heart. We should be powerful people of worship, broken before the Lord and leaving church feeling so full of the Holy Spirit. There were such powerful moves of God 100 years ago, and you couldn’t keep people away from the churches because they were filled with the spirit of God. ... If Jesus Christ Himself needed the Holy Spirit, who do we think we are to continue to reject or quench or grieve His work?”

Watch this video to see what else Idleman says happens when we surrender ourselves to the Holy Spirit. {eoa}

Yanking Out the Toxic Root of Weight Gain in Your Life

I once heard a woman who has traveled the weight-loss journey say, “I fed my feelings. I sought comfort in food, not God.”

She acknowledged that she had attempted to meet her deep emotional needs by eating food. Many of us eat to manage the stress in our lives and to cope with our negative emotions. Do you?

The French philosopher Pascal once wrote, “There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only God the Creator.” Instead of turning to food to sooth any inner pain and uncomfortable emotions, consider turning to God in a deeper way for help.

Knowing God is the first step in Warren Wiersbe’s model of how

one can enjoy an abundant life. An abundant life includes a healthy life. The primary way in which we can get to know someone, including God, better is to communicate with them.

Two ways we communicate with God is through prayer and by reading and studying the Bible. God speaks to us through His Bible and we speak to Him when we pray. As we study the Bible, we learn about the nature and character of God. Let's see what the Bible has to say about the spiritual exercises of praying and Bible reading that might be relevant to this issue of emotional eating.

What the Bible Says

In Matthew 4:4, Jesus told His disciples "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" In Psalm 63:5 David writes to God saying, "My soul will be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth will praise You with joyful lips."

In Psalm 145:15-16, he also writes, "The eyes of all wait upon You, and You give them their food in due season. You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." In just these few verses, we have insight that our deep needs are to be met by knowing God and by receiving His love that flows from getting to know Him personally.

What the Research Says

Studies consistently show that prayer and study of the Scriptures is correlated to improved health and well-being. "Keeping the lines of communication open between whatever or whomever we conceive God to be is among the healthiest things we can do," says Jeff Levin, Ph.D., in his book *God, Faith, and Health*.

In one study of over 2,000 African-Americans, frequent prayer led to greater life satisfaction and happiness. In another study of 1,000 people conducted by Duke University

researchers, frequent private worship, prayer and devotional reading was associated with less agitation, loneliness, life dissatisfaction and greater ability to cope with tension.

In a three-year study of cancer patients at Duke, researchers found that frequent prayer, meditation or Bible study led to a happy and contented mood. The bottom line—private religious worship leads to positive emotions, which can then lead to improved health.

What You Can Do

By reading the Bible, we get to know God better. Try to get in the habit of a daily devotion time that you spend alone with God. I find it helpful to do this in the early morning, and I start this time by reading a printed devotional that is accompanied by related Scripture. For years I have read a booklet by Charles Stanley, *In Touch* magazine. Another devotional I often read is from Oswald Chambers' *My Utmost for His Highest*. To go deeper into a specific area, consider completing a more in-depth Bible study. Christian book stores will have numerous studies on a variety of topics and books of the Bible.

Prayer is simply conversation with God. He hears us when we speak to Him. As we spend more and more time alone with Him, we can hear Him as He speaks to us, often in that soft voice deep inside. When you pray, praise Him, give Him your thanks, tell Him your concerns and cry out to Him in your distress. And when you pray, know and believe that He hears you.

So what's the connection between knowing God better and weight management? Part of an abundant life is being healthy and part of being healthy is managing our weight. The nourishment God can give us through Bible reading, prayer and a resulting deeper faith is so much richer and more satisfying than food. As you get to know God better, you'll experience His love more deeply. You'll have a greater sense of hope and inner peace

and be able to manage your emotions in a healthier way. Additionally, His power will give you the ability to make healthier choices.

I think Pascal was right. We do have a vacuum, a hole, deep in our spirits that was designed by God to be filled by knowing Him and experiencing His love. Instead of eating to fill this hole, allow God to fill it. The more we grow in personal relationship with God, through the spiritual exercises of praying and reading the Bible, the healthier we will be. {eoa}

Dale Fletcher is the executive director of Faith and Health Connection. For the original article, visit .

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The Simple Cure for Spiritual Anemia

Are you living in a weakened condition of who you were actually created to be? Does your life smack of weariness, lethargy and general malaise? As my grandmother used to say, "Has your get up and go got up and gone?"

A reasonable solution to your lack of energy might be that you need to change your eating habits or increase your exercise routine. Maybe you need to sleep longer or better. Maybe a vacation would you to recharge your emotional batteries.

Or maybe ... just maybe ... what you need to do is to reconnect with God the Father! Perhaps you need to energize your quiet time and find out what the Bible has to say about strength.

Moses was called to do a mighty big job on planet Earth; his

assignment was exponentially larger than anything that you or I have ever been or will ever be called to do. If there were ever a man that needed strength, it was this man, Moses. He was called to lead a group of whining, complaining, impatient and disobedient people to the life that God had for them. (No, I am not describing the people at your church! We are talking about Moses here!)

Where did Moses find his strength? Did he find it in easy days and in a vacation villa on the Jordan River? Did he find it in eating five-course gourmet meals rather than the manna that everyone else ate?

"The Lord is my strength and my song!" Moses triumphantly declared in Exodus 15:2. Perhaps you could learn something from the life of Moses and began to sing with gusto, "The Lord is my strength!"

All of the strength that you need for your journey is found in partnering with God. Any strength that will sustain you comes from an ongoing, day-to-day friendship with the God of the universe. Strength is not at the gym, in a pill or at the beach. All strength that really matters is found in the presence of your Savior and Friend.

Isaiah needed strength, too, for his calling one Earth. Isaiah was called to confront compromise and to prepare a people for the coming of the Messiah. Where did Isaiah find his much-needed strength?

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (Is. 30:15).

Worry will drain you, but trust will strengthen you! Fretting will weaken you, but quietness will fill you up! Sin will destroy you, but repentance will restore you!

And then there was Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been called to do a gargantuan job! He was called to build up the broken down and

weakened walls of Jerusalem. The gates of Jerusalem were in sad disrepair and the task to rebuild them fell to the assignment of Nehemiah. He was burdened with this great task and with the frustrating challenge of working with government hierarchy and halfhearted workers.

Where did this chosen man, Nehemiah, discover strength for God's purpose for his life?

"Be not grieved or depressed for the joy of the Lord is your strength!" (Neh. 8:10).

Nehemiah had discovered a deposit of strength that others had not yet tapped into. Nehemiah came upon a vein of strength so rich and rare that we are still talking about it thousands of years after its discovery! Nehemiah knew that when he decided to embrace the joy of the Lord that it was at that moment when he was at his strongest. So rather than whine, murmur or throw in that infamous towel, Nehemiah lifted his hands in worship and let the joy of the Lord flood through his body.

If you are suffering from spiritual anemia today, why not learn a lesson from Moses, from Isaiah and from Nehemiah? Run to where your true strength lies—in the presence of Him who is able to keep you from falling and who is able to sustain you in all seasons and challenges of life! {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 .

Why Understanding Your Wife's Heart Is Critical for Your Marriage

As a husband, it is not just my role to work and provide for my wife; I am also tasked by God to explore my wife's heart and assist in leading her to live out her heart's desires.

I don't do this on my own, though. I do this mainly by faith and intentional effort. In other words, I need to be actively asking God and praying that He shows me how to take care of my wife's heart. I must be actively looking for an understanding of it by watching her and learning tips from strong marriages that have gone before us.

Tending to my wife's heart is really a twofold act on my part. It requires me to learn what her needs are and strive to meet them every day. This would include "female-specific" things such as loving, cherishing, pursuing, nourishing, embracing and so forth. And on the other side of the spectrum, I must be working to live out my "male-specific" things in the relationship, such as strength, support, reason, security, direction and leadership.

When it comes to loving your wife well, to keeping her spirit alive, you must provide both masculine and feminine support. Simply put, the husband who chooses to live by only one or the other won't provide the necessary strength to make his

marriage survive and thrive.

It's easier said than done. Well, I know that might be what you're thinking, but it's really not. If you're a husband who made vows to a wonderful woman, than you made a choice to figure this out. You made a choice to change your entire way of thinking in order to love this woman to the best of your ability!

I'm not saying you forget how to be a man; I'm saying you learn how to become a stronger man by living out your strengths and learning hers. In a sense, you are still a lion, but you must learn the strengths of the lamb.

The Strength of Your Nature

I'm a builder. I'm a slow and thoughtful decision maker. I'm problem solver. I'm typically not emotional. I work in harsh, fast and typically male environments. I work a lot and typically have a hard time stopping.

The paragraph above explains me. It not only tells you what I am interested in, but it also provides you with an in-depth look into my heart. Some of the things might sound bad to you, or some of them might relate directly to you. It depends on the strengths of your own heart.

The Strength of Learning Her Nature

My wife, on the other hand, has very different strengths, strengths that are not weaker, but different. She is a designer. She is able to process and make decisions much more quickly than me. She is more likely to discuss problems, and when she does, she has little interest in hearing my solutions. I know many of you can relate to that one. She is much more emotional. She spends most of her days around a boy toddler, and the other days are spent around people that work for our church.

As a husband, learning the strengths of her nature is important to me. It's essential for me to be aware of her differences and embrace them. Her strengths are not weak; they are different. It's not my job as a husband to change her, it is my job to recognize her differences and applaud them. The differences in her strengths has not only allowed me to learn from her, but it has allowed me an inside look in how to love her better!

What Combining These Strengths Will Do for You and Your Marriage

My wife needs me to be who I am. She needs the lion in me to be alive and present. She depends on it every day. But she wants me to know her needs. She needs me to be aware of the lamb-like qualities in her and embrace them. By embracing them, I empower her to be fully woman, which in return will empower me to be a stronger lion and better man.

Your role as husband is not as difficult if it is done with an open heart. A heart that allows you to be who you are, but also allows your wife to be who she is. Your marriage will thrive because you will be living according to your nature, the way God set it up to be. {eoa}

is a website written by men, for men. The goal of the site is to build more mature men spiritually and in their everyday circumstances. Please understand that the majority of the content written for Manturity is directed toward men. On rare occasions there will be articles written by women. These articles will be written in the context of helping men better understand a woman's point of view and perspective.

For the original article, visit .

How You Can Climb Out of the Pits of Life

Are you in a rut in life or even worse—in a pit?

One of my favorite writings is *An Autobiography in 5 Chapters* by Portia Nelson, because it relates to how we practice addictive behaviors:

Chapter 1

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But, it isn't my fault.
It still takes me a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in. It's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.

Many people get stuck living out chapters 2 or 3. They keep falling into the same old pits.

We all fall into pits in life at times. That is not the problem. The problem is that we don't get out.

Once we recognize we are in a pit, we are responsible for seeking the way out—and taking it.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter if someone threw you into the pit, like Joseph in Genesis 37, or if you put yourself into the pit.

What matters is that make up your mind to get out because you don't belong there.

Unfortunately, some try to make the pit their home. They believe the lie that they are meant to live in the pits. So they decide to settle and get comfortable.

But that is not the best God has for you. He never intended for His people to live in dark pits:

Again, Jesus spoke to them again, saying, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"* (John 8:12).

And in another place, He says:

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a candle and put it

under a basket, but on a candlestick. And it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

Our purpose as believers in Christ is to serve as a light to others. So if one of us chooses to live in darkness, then the kingdom is dim in that specific place, affecting those who reside near it.

So what are some steps to take to get out of a pit?

1. Never get comfortable in pits. As God’s child, your place is as a “city on a hill,” a place where His glory in you is clearly seen. You are not meant to live in a pit. However, you will remain there unless you can see where you are meant to be. Put your mental focus on how to get out of the pit rather than how to get comfortable in it. To get out, you must want to get out.

2. Ask for the Holy Spirit’s wisdom to get out. When you accepted Jesus as your Savior, the Holy Spirit came to live in you as a Helper (John 14:26). He is the ultimate source of wisdom, strength, and power in a believer’s life. If you do not know how to get out of your particular pit, then ask Him. Many times, the problem isn’t that we don’t know the answer of how to get out of the pit, it’s that we don’t like the answer! So we don’t do it because we don’t like it. However, freedom is on the other side of the answer and that fact won’t change.

3. Identify mental resistance to getting out. I read a story once about a man who negotiated freedom for two women caught up in prostitution. He paid the price for their freedom. Yet when it was time to go, one of the women ran back into the place of her bondage because she forgot her cell phone! She refused to leave unless she had it. Many refuse to leave the pit because they have been deceived into thinking the pit has something they need to live. If you are resisting getting out

of the pit, then ask the Lord to show you the source of your resistance so you can deal with it.

4. Take the first step out. Once the way out is revealed, fear or feeling overwhelmed may try to convince you that it is safer to stay in the pit. Once again, remind yourself that the pit is not your home. Some people may not leave the pit unless they can see the entire path out first. However, you don't need to see the entire path to get moving; you just need to be faithful, stand up and take the first step you do see. Once you stand up, you can see more than you could just sitting there.

5. Get assistance from someone who has found the way out. In our culture, we celebrate an independent, go-it-alone, I-did-it-my-way attitude. But that is not God's way. God's way is that we live in interdependence with other believers. Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, "For if they fall, then one will help up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has no one to help him up." We have a support group in the Take Back Your Temple program because we recognize that we all fall sometimes. To make progress, we need others who can encourage us and assist us in getting back up.

Remember this freeing mindset: "This pit is not my home." Refuse to make living in pits your normal way of life. Take the place that God has prepared for you.

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may declare the goodness of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

Get out of that pit and proclaim His praise! {eoa}

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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This Technique Can Help You Stay Out of the Dangerous ‘Tension Triangle’

If you often deal with stress, anxiety or any tension-related emotion, this may be one of the most important stress-relief techniques you’ll ever learn for how to deal with it.

Not only that, but I’ll show you how this technique can even help you deal with procrastination or binge eating.

I only discovered this technique a couple of days ago myself. I was rubbing my forehead up and down with my fingertips and was disturbed to feel how sore the muscle beneath was. Then I rubbed beneath my collarbone and my upper chest. The muscles were sore there too.

What could be going on?

If you are feeling anxious or stressed, where do you tend to hold it in your body? Do you feel it in your forehead or temples, in your throat, in your upper chest?

Whenever you feel tense, it usually shows up physically in the “tension triangle.” Imagine drawing a triangle with your forehead as the top/tip of the triangle and a line from each shoulder as the bottom/base.

If you spend a lot of the day in the tension triangle, it

could be having a disastrous effect on your health. Many people practice addictive behaviors simply because they've learned that they relieve tension in the short term—even if they are destructive in the long run.

All they care about at that moment is getting out of pain.

But the techniques I'm going to teach you will show you how to get out of that triangle in a healthy way:

The stress-relief technique. Pay attention to your body right now. Are your shoulders raised up or tilted forward? This stressful posture is comparable to a cat that arches her back up when she feels threatened. So pull your shoulders back and down right now. This simple act alone makes it more difficult to stay tense.

Are your legs or arms crossed? Uncross them if they are.

Are you breathing deep—from your belly?

Take a moment and breathe in through your nose, allowing your lungs to fill with air, counting from one to 10 mentally. Then breathe out through your mouth, deflating your abdomen, counting down from 10 to one mentally.

As you breathe, meditate on the following Scripture:

- “The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty has given me life” (Job 33:4).

When I think about the breath of God flowing through my lungs, it makes me feel calm and centered. It also helps me to become present-minded. Most of the mental pain and stress people experience come from either fear of the future or rejection and regrets from the past.

But controlling your breath and meditating on God's Word help prevent that self-defeating tendency to “time travel.”

- “Brothers, I do not count myself to have attained, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead” (Phil. 3:13).
- “Therefore, take no thought about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take thought about the things of itself. Sufficient to the day is the trouble thereof” (Matt. 6:34).

With these practices, you stay present and engaged in your life right now. You have confidence that God is with you, and His grace is sufficient to help you deal with any challenge life throws at you.

How to stop procrastination with stress relief. This technique also can help if you procrastinate a lot. Have you ever noticed that the things you procrastinate on usually are things that are most good for you to do in the long run?

When you procrastinate, ask yourself the following two questions:

- What pain am I imagining that I’ll experience if I take action?
- Could I breathe through that?

Question No. 1 is based the time-travel tendency—you likely are imagining future pain. When I procrastinate, my pain usually comes from imagining the future tension I’d feel from the tension triangle.

However, now I think of this mental resistance as like birthing pains. Typically, the thing you are procrastinating on is about giving birth to something new—it could be a healthier you physically, more financial responsibility, a cleaner house, or a more organized office.

Whatever it is, there is going to be tension between the way things are now versus the way you want them to be.

I've learned that I can short-circuit that "birthing pain" through the simple techniques of exiting the tension triangle. I do the task I've been putting off, but I use the stress-relief technique to release muscle tension.

If my shoulders try to raise themselves up or tilt forward in tension, I lower them and pull them back.

I keep my breath even and use the "one to 10, 10 to one" breathing pattern throughout the activity. I meditate on my Scripture, imagining God's breath in me, empowering me to do what needs to be done.

Before I know it, I am finished! If you do this right, not only will you experience the satisfaction of a completed job, but you will benefit your body too.

How to stop binge eating with stress relief. If you find yourself eating a lot when you are not physically hungry, check your body to see if you are tense:

- Where is your shoulder position?
- Where is your breathing?

Here is a little-known fact: Opening your mouth and/or chewing is actually a tension-relieving activity! So eating is likely your unconscious attempt to get yourself out of the tension triangle.

In fact, open your mouth right now and let your jaw go slack. Lower your eyebrows. You'll look like you are screaming or yawning. Sometimes, I'll even stick my tongue out. It makes it more fun!

After a few seconds of this, you will feel tension draining away from your face and jaw—all without eating anything.

In addition, bring your shoulders back and down. Do the "one to 10, 10 to one" breathing pattern while meditating on Job 33:4.

Here are some other Scriptures I've meditated on as well:

- Psalm 150:6: "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!"
- Isaiah 42:5: "Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it."

After you release the physical tension, then shift your attention to another activity, preferably one that you've been putting off. Breathe through it as you do it.

I challenge you to pay attention to your body today. Make it a game. Can you catch yourself in the tension triangle? Share your experience in the comments.

Make a conscious effort to get out of the tension triangle throughout the day, every day. Your body will thank you for it!

*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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3 Common Idols Hindering God's Blessings in Many

Churches

Hezekiah is affirmed in Scripture as doing “what was right in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 18:3). The next verse details what Hezekiah did: “He removed the high places, broke down the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and crushed the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the children of Israel had made offerings to it” (2 Kings 18:4).

Surely people understood a strong, spiritual leader removing the idols (the high places and the Asherah poles) that grabbed the hearts of the people and stole worship from the Lord. They would expect their spiritual leader to insist they stop worshipping other gods. But what Hezekiah did next must have been really unexpected and really controversial.

He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses made—intentionally. Not by accident. Not “I was carrying it and it fell.” To break bronze takes some effort.

Eliminating pagan idols is one thing, but “that was the snake Moses made!” It was the bronze snake God told Moses to make, the one people looked at to be delivered from their snakebites (Num. 21).

Hezekiah broke the snake because the people were burning incense to it. They were worshipping a bronze snake. Tools for transformation can become objects of worship. In our sinfulness, we can make an idol of just about anything. In our sinfulness, we tend to make idols of things that are important to us. Thus, a bronze snake that God used to bring healing, held by the leader of God’s people during their liberation from slavery, became an object of worship.

Today is not altogether different. God’s people still struggle with taking tools for transformation and making them objects of worship. Here are three common idols in churches:

1. The place. Because the Lord does a great work in the hearts of His people when they gather, the places of gathering can move from a tool for transformation to an object of worship. Thus, if a leader mentions “relocation,” the leader is essentially threatening to cut a bronze snake into pieces. We must remind people that the building is not the church, that God’s people are the church. God does not live in the place where we gather; He lives in the hearts of His people.

2. The past. Because the Lord worked in amazing ways in the past, the past can become an idol where people long for the past more than they long for the Lord. Being grateful for the past is one thing, and worshipping it is quite another. If “former days” were great, they were only great because of the Lord.

3. The programs. Because God changed lives through a program or event, people can elevate a program to an unhealthy place. Programs can become ends in themselves and not tools used in a church’s discipleship process. When this happens, they exist as modern-day bronze snakes.

How can leaders be like Hezekiah? How can modern-day bronze snakes be removed?

Leaders must constantly point people to the person of Jesus. Only He is worthy of our worship and only He can transform hearts. When we help people see the greatness of Jesus, idols look less attractive. As we turn our eyes on Jesus and look full in His wonderful face, the things of this world—place, past and programs included—grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Leaders must also continually remind people of the purpose of the church. (Yes, I know it is another P, but it fits.) A church exists to make disciples. When a church embraces the mission of making disciples, programs are viewed as tools and not as ends in themselves. When making disciples is what a

church is all about, the place is rightly seen as merely a place to help make disciples.

Though the Lord instructed the snake to be made, the Lord affirmed its destruction. And of Hezekiah, the Scripture says, *“He trusted in the Lord God of Israel. Afterwards, there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah or among those who were before him” (2 Kings 18:5).* {eoa}

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For the original article, visit .

Why Marriage Doesn't Heal Your Lust Problem—and What Can

I saw a pornographic magazine for the first time when I was in the fifth grade. A friend's dad worked for the company that printed the industry's leading periodical at the time and had a massive collection at home.

So we attempted to educate ourselves in human sexuality

entirely apart from parental direction or biblical principles. We were clueless, curious boys entering puberty, trying to figure out what all the fuss was about.

Now, I've talked to countless men my age who had the same experience. We were exposed, because of the sin and carelessness of our parents' generation, to images that warped our understanding of human sexuality and male-female relationships. By age 10 or 11, most of us (primarily men, but some women as well) were getting a simple message etched into our brains whether we understood it or not: The human body is here for your entertainment. It's an object, not a soul.

Since then, the pornography industry has exploded with growth, thanks to the internet. Our standards of decency have eroded in this area as well. And our society is just now starting to learn the damaging consequences of our collective choices in this area. Finally, the world around us is waking up to the harsh reality that we've taught an entire generation of people to sexually objectify one another. Just browse for five minutes for a massive education about why this issue matters so much.

As a result of being sexualized at a much earlier age than previous generations, we're surrounded by marriages now suffering from the harmful effects of unbridled lust. Don't misunderstand ... lust has been around since the beginning of humanity. It's nothing new. Peruse the Old Testament and you'll discover the raw stories of mostly men and a few women given over to the harmful results of lust. The fire of lust has burned since sin entered our race, but modern technology, both print and digital, have thrown massive amounts of fuel on that fire.

In the context of modern marriage, I've noticed a particular theme among young men who have grown up in this sex-saturated culture of ours. They struggle with lust, and they get married with an incorrect assumption: She'll fix my lust problem. I

say “struggle” because I’m referring primarily to those guys who *want* to be pure, but keep finding themselves addicted to pornography, masturbation and lustful thoughts.

Why Marriage Doesn’t Heal Your Lust Problem

Getting married doesn’t give you victory over lust because singleness isn’t what causes lust.

Lust doesn’t come from a magazine or a website. And while Satan instigates our culture toward brokenness and certainly orchestrates temptation, he isn’t the root cause of our lust, either. And lust has nothing to do with the attractiveness of your spouse. This is why I always cringe when I read something from a Christian leader who encourages women to improve their personal appearance to help their husbands curb their lust problems.

First of all, if that’s the solution, single men are hopeless. Second of all, men with wives the world may define as physically attractive still have lust issues. And third ... you’re just wrong! And it’s an often painful burden you place on the hearts of hurting women.

Where does lust come from? It comes from *within*. James put it this way:

“But each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and when sin is finished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14-15).

That’s right. Lust is an out-of-control *desire*. Desire, in and of itself, isn’t sin. Neither is temptation. Being attracted to someone isn’t sin either. But when temptation comes and awakens my desire and I, in the power of my flesh alone, choose not to escape, lust is born and gives birth to death.

Don’t blame your wife, your computer or Hollywood for a lust

issue. Blame your own flesh, your own mind and your own heart. Does that mean you're a terrible dirtbag? No. It means you're human. You're a sinner. And it can sometimes mean that you've been hurt and victimized in ways that weren't your fault, such as sexual abuse or early exposure to pornography, both of which wire your brain in unhealthy ways.

Is Victory Over Lust Possible?

Yes. Victory over lust is possible. Some guys argue that it's an out-of-reach goal, but the Bible says otherwise. Scripture is clear that we are "more than conquerors" through Jesus. Sin has been put to death in the death of Christ on the cross. You can absolutely win over your lust problem.

As a married man, you'll need your wife's support in the form of prayer, encouragement and even some measure of accountability. But she can't fix you, and fixing you is a burden that will likely crush her under its weight.

So how do you win over lust for the sake of your spiritual and marital health? Here are the basics:

1. Own the responsibility for your choices and agree with God about the sinful nature of lust. Confess it and claim the forgiveness God promises in 1 John 1:9.
2. Take an inventory of your past for sexual abuse or premature exposure to sexually explicit material and ask God to give you peace and break the bondage those experiences still hold on you.
3. Open up to a godly friend—one who will love you without judgment but also be honest with you without reservation. Confession to God brings forgiveness, but confession to others is required for healing.
4. Talk to your spouse. Whether it's an affair, a pornography addiction or out-of-control lustful thinking,

she deserves to know. Intimacy is the goal of marriage, and it's impossible without honesty and transparency.

5. Get counseling and/or coaching depending on the severity of the problem. There is never shame in seeking the healing help of others.

6. Commit to purity. Repeatedly. Claim the freedom and victory that are yours in the atoning sacrifice of the cross, in the power of the resurrection and in the company of the Holy Spirit.

7. Take the escape. God promises in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that He will never allow more temptation than you can, in His power, withstand. And, He will always make a way for you to escape. Always.

8. Run away from sexual temptation. Don't fight it. Don't subject yourself to it or open the door for it. Run away! You're strong only when you lean into God's strength, and He delivers you by providing a route of retreat.

9. Cultivate a softened heart toward people, especially women. Re-humanize the women you encounter by remembering they are souls, loved and cherished by the Father.

10. Stay close to Jesus. When you draw close to God, He will draw close to you.

By the way, it's entirely possible that your lust is toward other men. Everything I've said still applies. The desire and attraction, even for someone of the same gender, isn't sin in and of itself. But when the temptation comes to dwell or to act on those thoughts, take the escape and stay committed to transparency with the people close to you who will love and protect you.

A Word to Wives

Wives are, more often than not, taken by surprise when the

lust issue comes up. Most women think differently than most men and your initial reaction will likely be a question along the lines of, *Is this my fault?* I understand why you would ask that question. It's easy to feel that it's a comparison issue. But it's really not. So hear this from the heart of a man—of a husband who has had this very tough conversation with his own wife ... **It's not your fault.**

It's not about how you look. It's not about how much sex you have or don't have. Again, if this were the problem, single men are toast. It's about *his* choice to allow *his* desires to grow into lust.

While it is **not** your fault that your husband struggles with lust, you can help him, if you choose to show grace (and I hope you will). How?

1. Listen to his confession.
2. Hurt. It's OK to hurt. Don't ignore it.
3. Be honest about how it all makes you feel.
4. Set some boundaries with sexual intimacy to protect your feelings while you work through it.
5. Talk to someone—a female friend or a counselor.
6. Ask God to heal you, over time.
7. Forgive him. Not for his sake, but for yours. And remember how much God has forgiven you.
8. Forgive him again when the resentment creeps back in—and it will.
9. Expect honesty and transparency. Expect him to be accountable for his behavior.
10. Love him unconditionally. This is the hardest part, but it's what you must do if your marriage is going to make it.

The conversation about sexual lust brings most marriages into valleys and shadows for days, weeks or months. It's not easy. It won't be solved by this blog post, but maybe this is a starting place. As you walk through the valley remember this: There is hope. There is always hope. There is a Savior. His name is Jesus. He died for the sexually impure and His grace makes us clean and whole again. Keep running to Jesus!

Because my church, Grace Hills, treats lust and pornography addiction as such an important issue, we put together a church "porn" page of resources. Check out . {eoa}

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For the original article, visit .

A Prayer of Deliverance From Destructive Habits

Destructive habits. Fear. Pride. Selfishness. Self-pity. Feeling like a victim. I have struggled with all of that and I get sick of it. When I feel that way, I just want to cry out, "Lord, deliver me from me!"

Here is a recent example. I was meditating on Psalm 131 in which King David says that his heart is not haughty (prideful). But pride is a struggle for me at times.

I like that feeling of being strong, independent and self-sufficient. So when I come face to face with my weaknesses, I

get reminded for the 1,000th time that without the Lord, I can do nothing!

I wrote this prayer to help when I need the Lord to give me a reality check. I pray it helps you too:

Gracious heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus,

You are my God. You are He who was, who is and who is to come. There is none like You, none who can compare to Your beauty, Your strength and Your holiness. You are worthy to be praised and so praise You I do!

I am thankful that You called me out of darkness into Your marvelous light. You did not have to do it, but You did. I am eternally grateful and look forward to the day when I will be with You forever.

However, until that day I need Your help, Lord. I want to reflect Your glory to a world that needs to see the hope I have in You. But I feel hopeless at the moment. I see the perfection in Your Word, compare it to my weakness and think, *How will I ever live up to His standard?* I just want to be what You want me to be.

Ah, thank You, Lord. I see the problem now! I am making this issue about me, not about You. I am thinking it is a work I have to do. However, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21, it is a work that You have already done.

Your Word says "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

I come to You on the basis of Jesus' righteousness, which He has given to me. As He is, so am I in this world. So I yield myself to Your Holy Spirit so that He can work out the righteousness that is within me.

Open up my spiritual eyes so that I may see Your righteousness revealed from faith to faith. Help me to believe Your Word

even when my flesh insists that I must feel it before I believe it!

Lord, I believe Your Word even if my feelings are contrary. I can't trust them when they originate from lying thoughts. I exalt Your Word above my feelings. Your thoughts are higher than my thoughts, and Your ways are higher than my ways.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. I want my daily relationship with You to be as if I am a little child at peace in my Father's arms.

Thank You Lord, that you are my Jehovah Shammah–You are always there. I praise You, Lord, that You are my Jehovah Shalom–You are my peace. So whenever my heart is overwhelmed, let me seek the shelter of Your arms. I receive Your peace and contentment. Let me be still and know that You are God. Everything I have or ever need is found in You. {eoa}

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