

What True Brotherhood in Christ Requires

From the mid-1930s to the late 1940s C.S. Lewis met with a group of literary friends every Tuesday and Thursday in an Oxford pub to enjoy good beer and good conversation.

They discussed literature, writing and life. Their pub, the Eagle and Child, is still there today. It was in this environment within this circle of friends that heavyweight works like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* were forged.

C.S. Lewis and his friends made a habit of swimming in the deep. You can feel the depth of their encounters in his description of their friendship:

*"In a perfect friendship, this Appreciative love is, I think, often so great and so firmly based that each member of the circle feels, in his secret heart, humbled before all the rest ... Especially when the whole group is together, each bringing out all that is best, wisest, or funniest in all the others. Those are the golden sessions; when four or five of us after a hard day's walking have come to our inn; when our slippers are on, our feet spread toward the blaze and our drinks are at our elbows; when the whole world, and something beyond the world, opens itself to our minds as we talk; and no one has any claim on or any responsibility for another, but all are freemen and equals as if we had first met an hour ago, while at the same time an Affection mellowed by the years enfolds us. Life—natural life—has no better gift to give. Who could have deserved it?" (C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*)*

You can almost hear the crackling of the fire; you can feel the warmth of that room and taste the depth of their friendship. They made each other better when they were

together. That's what the wisdom of the Scriptures says in Proverbs 27:17, *"Iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend."* True brotherhood. Face to face. Man to man. Iron on iron.

How do you know if you are swimming in the deep of true brotherhood or just splashing around in the shallows? Here are two indicators to identify where you are now and two requirements to get you where you need to be:

Indicators

1. True brotherhood sharpens you. In other words, your friendships are making you a better man, like iron sharpening iron. Men need other men to challenge them and bring out the best in them. Men need environments where permission is given and understood—a circle of trust where advice and accountability are welcome. As men, we still need to choose our friends wisely. Proverbs 13:20 says, *"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed."*

It goes without saying that there are significant differences in male relationships and female relationships. Sociologists have observed that for the most part men's friendships revolve around activities while women's revolve around sharing. I don't need a sociologist to tell me that. Guys are action figures! We get stuff done! We don't need to "share." The less "sharing" we do, the better, right? But that's not true. Men were created for deep relationships with other men.

We cannot be the men we are designed to be if we are disconnected from other men. Left to ourselves we start writing our own rules. Left alone we can talk ourselves into anything. Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."* Isolated from other men, we won't know what hit us.

2. True brotherhood connects on a soul level. Jonathan and

David had that kind of connection. Both were warriors. Both had stepped up at critical times when the Israelites were bullied and intimidated by the Philistines. When the Israelites needed something to ignite their courage, Jonathan and his armor bearer walked right into the enemy's garrison and killed about 20 men in hand-to-hand combat. Later, David would stand up against Goliath and become one of Israel's greatest warriors. Jonathan and David had a connection so strong and deep that 1 Samuel 18:1 describes it like this: "*... the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, so that Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*" Do you have a healthy God-designed soul level connection with another man like that?

Requirements

1. True brotherhood requires honesty, trust and vulnerability. Most men settle for having a golfing buddy or a fishing buddy. They don't feel the need to be vulnerable. Guys can talk about cars, football, real estate and business but never connect on a soul level of honesty, trust and vulnerability. Some guys think they have to conjure up some practical reason for picking up the phone and calling another man. That's part of the myth that says, "I don't have any emotional needs that I can't handle by myself." Author David Smith writes:

"The message is clear. The independent man doesn't feel he needs the company of other men. Therefore, men must manufacture non-emotional reasons for being together. A business deal must be discussed or a game must be played. Rarely do men plan a meeting together simply because they have a need to enjoy each other's company. Even when men are frequently together, their social interaction begins and remains at a superficial level. The same male employees can have lunch together for years and still limit their conversations to sports, politics, dirty jokes, and comments about the sexual attractiveness of selected female workers in their office or plant" (David W. Smith, The Friendless American Male).

2. True brotherhood requires time and practice. Lots of practice! There is no such thing as microwave manhood. You can't just flip a switch or push a button. And no one will just hand you the time. Stop waiting on someone else to find you friends. Accept responsibility. Carve out the time, and put it on the calendar. Practice, practice, practice.

If you're married, practice sharing your emotions with your wife first. It will make your marriage better and prime the pump for soul connections with other men. Learn from others who already do it well. Read the Psalms of David and see how honest and vulnerable he was in the way he worshipped God.

Take off your floaties and leave the shallows. Discover true brotherhood in the deep end of authentic manhood. You can't *really live* without it.

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For the original article, visit .

Lessons You Can Learn From an Ancient Street Preacher

Do you read your Bible every day? Are you in the joyful and strengthening habit of opening the Word of God and reverently allowing the precious and eternal words to restore your soul?!

There is nothing quite like it ... just taking 10 or 15 or 30 minutes out of a busy day ... laying everything else aside ... and then opening the sacred and life-changing book called the *Holy Bible*.

It is God's missive to His children. It is heaven's love letter to those who are stationed in an outpost far, far away. The Bible is a how-to manual, a blueprint for life, and an extraordinary and miraculous peek into the heart of God.

Who wouldn't want to read their Bible?

I have been completely undone recently by the book of Ezekiel. First of all, who reads Ezekiel for insight and wisdom? Surely, the Proverbs or the Psalms of David would be a more likely source of hope and joy. However, I am discovering that the Holy Spirit is well able to use the words of a street preacher who lived nearly 3,000 years ago to speak life into my weary ministry and discouraged heart.

The message of Ezekiel echoes through the centuries and finds a welcome home in the heart of this woman whose chief desires in life are to obey God and to proclaim the Word of God. I have found that Ezekiel and I have much in common.

God asked Ezekiel to do some pretty crazy things! Ezekiel positioned himself on his side for 390 days and during that time ate only one meal a day that was cooked over manure! You've got to be kidding me, God! This prophet by the name of Ezekiel shaved his head and his beard in a prophetic demonstration and also refused to prolong his grief over the death of his beloved wife. Ezekiel heard intimately and in detail the instructions of the Lord and then faithfully obeyed.

I can do no less.

I am committed, like Ezekiel, to fearlessly preach the Word of God and to obey God, whatever He asks of me.

When God asks me to go to India ... I will go.

When God asks me to write a book ... I will do it.

When God asks me to share my faith with the agnostic sitting next to me on the plane ... I will willingly do it.

When God asks me to encourage the young mom in line at the grocery store ... I will do it.

When God asks me to pay for the elderly person's lunch at a restaurant ... I will do it.

When God asks me to take get out of my safe boat ... I will do it.

When God asks me to write a letter to someone who needs encouragement ... I will do it.

When God asks me to produce a daily radio show ... I will do it.

When God asks me to walk by faith and not by sight ... I will do it.

When God asks me to pray for healing for a person I encounter at the drug store ... I will do it.

God told Ezekiel that when he obeyed the voice of the Lord that Ezekiel would then know that God was truly the Lord. I am learning from Ezekiel that obedience clarifies our vision of who God is capable of being in one ordinary person's life.

Obedience to God's voice also sets into motion the timing of God's plans for an individual's life. When I choose to obey the personal message God has spoken to me, God will move heaven and Earth to set His plan into action!

As I read my Bible this morning, the message of the Lord to Ezekiel was the message of the Lord to me, "*None of my words will be prolonged anymore, but the word I have spoken shall be done, says the Lord God*" (Ezek. 12:28, MEV).

My heart cries out, "Yes! Amen!" to the words that God spoke to Ezekiel almost 3 millennia ago. I deeply desire for the plans and purposes of God to hit the assigned mark in my life. I am done with delays and disappointments. The time is now for God's promises to come to pass in this ordinary girl's life! The word that God has spoken to me will be performed! The appointed time is now! {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 .

How Columbine Victim's Bold Faith Inspired 'I'm Not Ashamed' Title Track

Abigail Duhon prays she is never put in the same life-or-death situation Rachel Joy Scott faced 17 years ago at Columbine High School.

Should the same circumstances ever arise, however, the

Christian artist/actress is confident the Holy Spirit will give her the courage to make the same choice Scott made.

On April 20, 1999, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold calculatingly walked onto the school campus in Littleton, Colorado, and, in cold blood, mercilessly murdered 13 people, including Scott, who was eating lunch with friend Richard Castaldo on the lawn outside the library. Reports, including those from Castaldo and Rachel's brother, Craig Scott, say Rachel was murdered for her faith in Christ.

The FBI claims the faith conversation never took place between Scott and the shooters. However, in the upcoming film *I'm Not Ashamed* (Pure Flix Entertainment), in which Duhon plays a small part and sings the title song (Dream Records) from the soundtrack, shows a scene where Scott did not waiver from her faith in the face of death.

"It's a question that all believers have to consider," says Duhon, who, at 16, is a year younger than Scott when she died. "What if you had a gun pointed in your face and asked if we believe in Jesus. It's happening every day in other countries. I know my life is not my own. I've already died to myself, and He has taken my entire life. Nobody wants to die, but if I did die in that situation, I would get to see Him and there would be no more pain.

"Her decision impacted me. I believe I would be led to do the very same."

When Duhon and her father, Troy, the executive producer of the smash hit *God's Not Dead*, heard a faith-based movie about Columbine was in the works, they requested a meeting with producer Chuck Howard. During the meeting, Howard offered Abigail a significant part but, because of her busy schedule, she declined.

Instead, Abigail, who played Abby Wheaton in *God's Not Dead*, accepted a smaller part and, after reading the script, was

encouraged by father to write a song for *I'm Not Ashamed*.

"I really cried because the movie script touched me so much," said Duhon, who has released three albums since 2012. "It made me realize what one person can do when they stand up for what they believe in. The timing of this film, God's timing, is really perfect.

"I wondered what kind of song I could come up with. But then they gave me one of Rachel's diaries, and I began looking through the book and reading all of the prayers she wrote down. God began showing me what to do and we began to put the lyrics together."

The opening lyrics reflect Rachel Scott's unwavering courage:

"Every life has a time they reach the moment, when they have to choose what they believe. I hope and pray that I will have the boldness, to say Your name when it's my time to speak. No matter what may come, Your love will remain. You will be my strength and I will say, 'I Am Not Ashamed,' because You have given me life. I am not afraid, because You've opened up my eyes. Whatever stands before me, I know that You will hold me. I am not ashamed, no, I am not ashamed."

Abigail has herself shown tremendous courage throughout her life. In 2006 at the age of 6, her family's home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. In the coming couple of years, the family moved from place to place, each a makeshift dwelling that never really felt like home. During that time, her mother suffered through two miscarriages, but Abigail's faith began to build.

"It was not a great time for us," says Abigail, who has known and loved Jesus from an early age. "It was extremely hard on everyone. But it was then that I wrote my first song, 'Because of You.' We were in a little townhouse, and it was a song about God providing. It's where I started my journey to becoming a Christian artist. And I'm hoping that the songs

that God has blessed me with will impact people, especially considering what's going on in the world right now."

As a teen growing up in a chaotic society—one where school shootings have become commonplace and biblical morals are largely ignored—Abigail is well-aware of the incredible pressures young people face. It's a big reason why she wanted to be a part of *I'm Not Ashamed*, and her hope is the film will help turn the hearts of those who have become apathetic and desensitized to the Holy Spirit during these dark times.

"I am so honored to be a part of this project and, through this movie, to let people know how much God really loves them," she says. "I am really praying that it opens the eyes of teens and young adults especially. Our culture is so used to following the path everyone else takes. It's time for us to turn the other way and run toward Jesus. That's when people get saved, and that's when He does amazing things in our lives.

"Rachel Scott struggled wanting to be light and to be different, and I believe she really made a difference in her school and beyond. For me, that's exactly where I am. I want to be that person of hope. When they see me, I want them to see Jesus.

"That's why I am endorsing the I AM HOPE Movement of youth across the country inspired by the movie. Beginning Sept, 28 at the "See You at the Pole," we launch a 4-week I AM HOPE App that includes my "I'm Not Ashamed" music video, designed to engage youth and provide outreach to the millions of unchurched teens in our nation, culminating with the release of *I'm Not Ashamed* on Oct. 21."

The song "I'm Not Ashamed" will be available on iTunes on Sept. 2.

How Your Weight Loss Journey Can Morph Into Spiritual Warfare

I am going to say something that may be controversial: I don't believe that weight problems are just weight problems; I believe they are a small part of a life management problem.

Some of your daily health choices are not working for you. Why do I say that?

A big clue is when you don't have peace about your health choices. That is where the enemy loves to attack. He wants to steal your peace.

But God desires that you live in His peace. Do you have peace about your health choices?

That is why I am sending you these spiritual warfare articles. I believe that you can overcome the mental and physical obstacles to weight loss once you attack the issue from its source: the spiritual.

"And having your feet fitted with the readiness of the gospel of peace" (Eph. 6:15).

Feet are used for walking, of course. We are to walk worthy of God's call upon our lives (Col. 1:10). But we aren't called to walk barefoot! We are called to put on equipment that is suitable for walking first: shoes.

A shoe is worn for protection and comfort. However, you can be hurt or ineffective if the shoes you are wearing don't match your activity.

For example, you put on running shoes when you run; you wear sandals in the summer; you wear boots during the winter and to go hiking, and so forth. Can you imagine trying to run a marathon wearing sandals or flip-flops?

To carry the gospel, you also need specialty shoes—shoes of peace.

You need shoes of peace in your weight-loss journey too. My belief is based upon the story of David and Solomon and how the ancient temple was built.

Even though building the temple was King David's idea, God would not let him build it because he was a man of war with others (1 Kings 6-7).

However, God said that would allow King David's son, Solomon, to build it. God said that Solomon could build it because he would have peace from his enemies.

I believe that same principle is true today. To build healthy bodies, we must learn to pursue peace. From that place of peace, we can think more clearly and make wise decisions that support our health.

There are three areas of peace that I recommend you pay attention to: your peace with God; your peace with yourself; and your peace with other people.

1. Believe that you have peace with God. Romans 5:1-2 makes this point clear: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and so we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Jesus makes all the difference! The gospel's good news is that God's wrath against mankind's sin was poured out on Jesus Christ. His sinless life and sacrifice on the cross paid the

penalty for our sin for all time.

Therefore, God is no longer angry with those who declare Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Jesus' blood covers us. That is cause for celebration!

But many Christians believe that God is still angry with them. They think the Lord is disappointed with them when they make mistakes. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Romans 8:1 says, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."*

God is about restoration, not condemnation. He wants to lead you and guide you in the way you should go. As you submit to the Holy Spirit, who lives in you, you learn how to walk in love, being imitators of God as a dear child. You seek after and receive His wisdom as to how to take care of your body and all of your life circumstances.

You trust God to direct your path as He promises in Proverbs 3:5-6: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will direct your paths"* (Prov. 3:5-6).

2. Pursue peace with yourself. Jesus makes us a promise in John 14:27: *"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."*

You cannot be peaceful when you allow a troubled, fearful heart to dwell within. The phrase "let not" means you have a choice in this matter. The Bible gives clear prescriptions for troubled hearts:

Matthew 11:28: *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest."*

1 Peter 5:7: *"Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for*

you.”

Some people won't take these prescriptions because they don't want to go to God. They stay away because of lack of trust or believing that God is angry or disappointed in them (see point 1).

Pride is also a common reason. You see, many people take pride in how others view them. In some cases, pride makes them feel important by holding onto burdens so others give them admiration. After all, they are so strong in carrying such a heavy load!

In the past, I have been guilty of that one.

In other cases, pride makes the person feel victimized in holding on to their burdens. Their “reward” is having others feel sorry for them because of their heavy load or they get attention from a woe-is-me attitude.

Either way, pride robs God of the glory that rightfully belongs to Him through carrying your burdens.

God wants to be your strength, your shelter, your fortress, your power—whatever you need. So when you are victorious, you can give Him all the glory and not try to take it for yourself.

Humble yourself under God's mighty hand and let Him exalt you in due season. He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

3. Peace with others. Hebrews 12:14-17 gives direction in this area: “Pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord, watching diligently so that no one falls short of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness spring up to cause trouble, and many become defiled by it, lest there be any sexually immoral or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For

you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected. For he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.”

If you tend to be an angry, argumentative person, other people will tend to shut you out and avoid you. They will not listen to what you have to say, even if you want to share the good news of the gospel with them.

Proverbs 18:19 tells us: *“A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.”*

Now, a word of warning: Pursuing peace with all people does not mean giving into the dictates of our culture. This Scripture tells us that we are to pursue peace *and* holiness.

As God’s people, we are called to live according to God’s Word. When the culture makes decrees that are clearly not in line with God’s Word, we must speak the truth. However, we do so in love and humility.

If someone tries to argue with you or cause contention, do not engage them. An old saying goes, “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

You can maintain your peace and stand on your beliefs, knowing that the Lord is your defender.

In closing, take 1 Peter 3:11 to heart: *“Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.”*

Seek after those daily decisions that bring peace. Health decisions are a great training ground for this. Turn away from those decisions you know are not good for you. It is not always easy to do that, but afterward, you can expect a reward:

“Now no discipline seems to be joyful at the time, but grievous. Yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of

righteousness in those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11).

So put on those shoes of peace and share the peace that God has given you with others!

Kimberly Taylor is the author of *The Weight Loss Scriptures and many other books*. Once 240 pounds and a size 22, she can testify to God’s goodness and healing power. Visit and receive more free health and weight-loss tips.

For the original article, visit .

2 Simple Ways to Put Some Zeal Into Your Prayer Life

“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

I resonate with the request that the early disciples made of Jesus. There’s a certain amount of humility any time you ask someone to teach you something. The acknowledgment behind the request is one of inadequacy: I don’t know how to do this, and I need you to teach me how. Like the early disciples, I often find myself floundering and blundering through the practice of prayer, ending up with the same request again and again: “Teach me how to do this, Lord.”

In response to their request, Jesus did indeed teach them how to pray, giving them what we refer to as “The Lord’s Prayer” or “The Model Prayer” today:

“Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for

we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:2-4, MEV).

As others throughout history have pointed out, this prayer is a teaching tool. Jesus demonstrated the themes and requests that should dominate the prayers of one whose heart is aligned with the heart of God. It’s focused on the glory and honor of God, first and foremost, praying that the kingdom of God could come.

Longing for the Kingdom of God

Here’s the thing, though—if this isn’t meant to be merely recited but expanded on in a million different ways, all stemming from a heart that reflects these kind of themes, then I’ve got a problem. The problem is that when I look to my own heart, I find that the dominant desires I bring to God don’t start with His glory and kingdom, but instead my own. My comfort. My good. My needs. I find myself “wanting to want.”

I wish that I longed for the kingdom of God to come so much that its coming is a heartfelt and genuine request from the deepest recesses of my soul. But I don’t.

Is there, then, something I might do in order to grow my desire for the kingdom of God? Perhaps there is, and perhaps it’s not as complicated as I tend to make it. Here are two such active ways you might grow in your desire for God’s kingdom and improve your prayer life.

1. Say it. With any of the spiritual disciplines, including prayer, we must make a fundamental decision regarding our feelings. Of course, it would be perfect if we woke up and felt like reading the Bible, or if we felt like fasting. And it would be incredible if we always felt like praying, and praying for God’s kingdom to come.

We’re on a journey with Christ to the time when our feelings,

too, are redeemed, and we want exactly what God wants. Until then, though, we battle with those same feelings, warring between what we know and what we feel.

So, do we begin to pray, and pray in this fashion, even though we might not feel it, or do we wait until we do, bemoaning the fact that we don't? One of the practical ways we can grow in our desire is to actually start doing the thing we want to desire. Simple as it sounds, we grow in our longing for God's kingdom to come by simply praying that His kingdom would come. And as we do, we follow it up with an honest plea for our hearts to long for it more and more.

2. Look around. The next action we can take to grow in our desire for the kingdom is to look around us. When we do, we'll be confronted with a thousand examples of the fact that things on Earth aren't as they are in heaven.

The world is broken, and we can see the visible evidence of that brokenness all around us: poverty, homelessness, divorce, misshapen sexual values, war, drought, floods, tornadoes and a host of other things will meet our gaze as we look around. All of them are tangible evidence of a creation groaning for its redemption, of the world longing for its redemption when the kingdom is fully consummated.

When we see all those things, we can complain about the state of society; we can get angry at economics or the government or whatever; or we can recognize the brokenness of the world that can only truly be fixed by the rightful reign of King Jesus. What we see can be a conduit to move us into prayer for the day when all will be well once again.

We look around, and we pray for the kingdom of God to come.
{eoa}

Article courtesy of HomeLife magazine via .

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For the original article, visit .

This Ancient Treasure Can Help Believers Change the Course of Our Nation

In less than three months we will elect a new president. This choice will shape our nation for decades to come.

Some people have said this is the most bizarre election season they have ever witnessed. And day by day it seems to get worse. Against this election backdrop we've watched the news in horror. Cities have burned amidst racial divide. We've wept for those killed and wounded in our nation.

We've watched in disbelief at the moral decline, and the destruction of marriage and family. We may be tempted to give up—to sink into apathy, depression or fear, thinking there is nothing we can do.

Rather than wringing our hands or discussing how bad things are, we can use a mighty tool, an ancient treasure that has changed circumstances and nations throughout history. Fasting and prayer is a time-honored discipline, but not something many people practice today.

Yet God is calling us to fast now. No one can afford to sit

this one out. Millennials are needed. Generation Xers are needed. Baby Boomers are needed. Seniors are needed. And the GI Generation. Though children should not do a strict water or liquid fast, no one is too young or too old to do something. It's time for the church to arise!

This election is perhaps one of the most crucial elections in our history. Our vote for president is also a vote for two to three Supreme Court Judges. Do we sit back and just watch? Do we speak of defeat or despair? Or do we, like the people of the great city of Ninevah, do something now?

God's plan was to destroy Nineveh because of their wickedness. But in His mercy He sent the prophet Jonah to warn them. The people and the king listened and all of Nineveh had the good sense to act on the word they were given. They fasted and turned from their evil ways. Then God changed his plans (Jonah 3:5-10)

King Xerxes issued an edict to destroy all Jews in the land. It looked inevitable that they would perish. But Queen Esther stood in the gap and led her Jewish nation in fasting and prayer. The unimaginable happened! The Jews were spared, and Haman, who set up the evil plot in the beginning, was hung on his own gallows that were meant for her Uncle Mordecai. This allowed the Jewish people to enjoy a new level of influence in Susa.

It takes work to participate with God. We are summoned to be change agents in our nation. But we must do our part. We can watch this ship sink or we can stand up and say, *I am joining the prayer and fasting initiative to take back my country starting with this election.*

How We Can Put on 'Sackcloth and Ashes'

Does this Old Testament practice of donning sackcloth and ashes mean we rustle up a burlap shirt and cover our head and face with ashes from our barbecue or backyard fire pit and

then run into the street weeping and wailing like Mordecai? Have you ever tried to picture beautiful Queen Esther with black ashes all over her head and face? The act of putting on sackcloth and ashes was an outward demonstration of the condition of the heart—a demonstration of repentance and humility before God.

It is with humility and repentance that we can put on *sackcloth and ashes* today. As we humble ourselves before God, repent and pray, we will see circumstances change. God is raising up Joels, Gideons, Daniels and Esthers who will humble themselves and fast for this election and this nation. We may feel inadequate. So did Gideon and Moses. Edith Stein said, “I am a poor Esther” but “I believe God has called me on behalf of my people.” God is calling each of us on behalf of our people to bow before Him with repentant hearts.

You Can Do This

Have you thought you simply can't fast, simply can't go without food? In an article for Charisma News online, Jennifer Eivaz says, “I love the idea of going on an extended fast, but I'm pretty sure that I will die if I do! Fasting is something I struggle with. I just happen to be one of those kind, loving individuals who turns into a monster if they do not eat regularly. Hopefully you hear my humor in that statement, but to a certain extent, it's true. People with a sensitive physiology and low-blood sugar problems can take on a certain form of crazy when they haven't eaten on time.”

Don't worry. You don't have to go without all solid food to fast. There are many types of fasts besides the very strict water fast. You can choose the Daniel Fast, Garden of Eden Fast, Juice Fast, Liquid Diet (juice, smoothies, bone broth), or the Sugar Detox Fast (omitting all sweets, refined flour products, treats, coffee, alcohol, junk food, fast food). Everyone can do something.

Instead of watching the polls, pundits or the news, which can be very discouraging, take action in prayer. On fast days, if you eat solid food, eat smaller amounts. Hunger is to remind us to pray. Eat simply. Use the extra time you save from preparing food to seek God.

Are you ready to see miracles happen? The next couple of months can be the most exciting time we have experienced as we see the hand of God at work in our nation.

There is a condition to see change: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14, MEV). The first and second chapters of Joel direct us to fasting and prayer, and what follows? We will receive the "early rain and the latter rain" and our "vats will be filled with oil and wine." Oil and wine symbolize prosperity and healing.

God will not leave you out of the blessings. You will receive personal breakthrough. Physical breakthrough, financial breakthrough, spiritual breakthrough, emotional breakthrough—these are just a few of the things that many people have experienced when they fasted and prayed. It's part of the overflow of blessing. Fasting and prayer changes us.

A Time to Fast

Our limitations are God's port of entry. You may be experiencing a lot of angst over this election and the state of the union. Many people are. Perhaps the candidate you wanted didn't get the nomination. Or maybe the one you want is stumbling. Perhaps you're so discouraged you've decided not to vote. Listen. God has a plan in all of this. We will see it arise as we pray and fast. I'm inviting you to our prayer and fasting initiative and our gathering place online. It's imperative that we join together now to see his kingdom come

and his will be done. in this election, in our nation and in the world.

As my husband and I met with Cal and Michelle Pierce, Directors of Healing Rooms International to work on our Garden's Best Project, God began to speak to us about the urgent need to fast and pray for America. The Fast America Initiative was born. We just completed a video for the call to fast and pray; it posted on YouTube. Please join us online. I will send weekly guided prayers for everyone who wishes to receive this. Just go to and sign up.

Cal and Michelle are fasting every Tuesday and Thursday. Fr. John and I are fasting every Wednesday and Friday. You can join us on these respective days to fast and pray for this election and for America. Or you can fast for 10 days or 21 days like Daniel. Or you can fast the whole time until the election. And it's not about just giving up TV or shopping. That's good, but it's giving up food that constitutes a fast. As we join in corporate fasting and prayer, we will see his kingdom come and his perfect will be done.

Cherie Calbom, MSN, CN, is author of *The Juice Lady's Guide to Fasting* (Charisma House, January 2017). She is the leading authority on juicing for health and detoxification. Known as *The Juice Lady*, TV chef, and celebrity nutritionist, she has helped pioneer the fresh-juice movement around the world. A graduate of Bastyr University with a master of science degree in whole-foods nutrition, Calbom is the author of 31 books. Cherie has helped thousands of people restore their health through her juicing and cleansing programs. She has worked as a nutritionist with George Foreman and Richard Simmons and has appeared on numerous radio and TV shows and in scores of magazine articles. She and her husband offer *Health and Wellness Juice and Raw-Foods Retreats* throughout the year. Success stories of people who healed their bodies through juicing are available on her website, .

Why Comparison Is the Enemy of Self-Worth

There are a lot of things in my life I feel I do well. But for every skill I think I've mastered, there is always another person I think does it a little bit better than me. In some cases, this may be true, but in others, it's due to a helping hand of comparative insecurities I hold so dear to my heart.

I discovered the hard way that comparing myself to the accomplishments and life of others has a way of making you feel inferior, no matter how untrue this fact may really be. And for most of my life, I let the infectious disease of comparison dwell within my heart, destroying my self-worth and confidence from the inside out. It's not a great place to find yourself in, and I wouldn't recommend you travel down the road of comparison anytime soon. Easier said than done. I know.

Comparison brought my insecurities to a level they had never been before, and instead of being the guy who was willing to try and accomplish anything that was thrown his way, I became so wrapped up in the negative thoughts I had toward myself—so much so, that I eventually reverted to not trying anything new at all.

I became stale and stagnant in life—uncharacteristic of who I really was inside. And when you already suffer from severe depression, having the mentality of “Why even bother?” added as the icing on top is just a recipe for disaster. I was being pulled around like a dog on a leash, and the insecurities I encountered due to constantly comparing myself to others were all leading me further and further away from my worth and value in life. I was journeying through a dark and dangerous

tunnel that would lead me to nowhere of love.

The lies of comparison will suck the life out of you, yet so many of us do it on a daily basis. We compare our looks, our relationships, our kids, our talents, our social status, our houses and even our job titles. Some of us do it while we are shopping at our local grocery store while others do it scrolling through the thousands of photos and status updates made by people we know nothing about.

We love to compare, but I don't think we realize the hurt we are doing to ourselves in the process. We're indirectly beating ourselves up by picking apart the flaws we have in comparison to the highlight reels of others. It's wrong. It's harmful. It needs to stop. It's not helping anyone.

The 4 Lies of Comparison

1. *"I'm not good enough."*
2. *"They are better than me."*
3. *"They have more to offer than me."*
4. *"Why even bother?"*

Don't listen to the lies of comparison. It's never a good idea. And it's always going to lead you down the path of insecurity. We must understand that everyone has a purpose in this world and that we were all made differently for a reason. There is no partiality in the eyes of God, and when your worth is found in Him instead of the opinions and comparison of others, you'll be surprised to see your lack of self-worth start to subside in your life.

Genesis 1:27 states, *"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* Nobody can steal this truth from you. You and I were created in the image of God, and that alone is something to be proud of.

Be who God created you to be. Everybody else is already taken. It's time to kill comparison and find your worth in God. {eoa}

Jarrid Wilson is a husband, dad, pastor, best-selling author and inspirational blogger. His articles have been viewed by millions, showcased on some of today's hottest talk shows and featured on national news stations worldwide. He is a dynamic speaker whose outside-the-box perspectives have gained him national recognition from some of today's most influential Christian leaders and pastors. His book, *Jesus Swagger*, is now available worldwide.

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

Secret Behaviors Teens Desperately Try to Hide From Their Parents

In 1999, a PBS Frontline special called *The Lost Children of Rockdale County* told the story about a syphilis outbreak in a wealthy Atlanta suburb. Health officials were shocked to discover that most of those involved in the outbreak were teenagers, some as young as 13.

Some of the young teens had literally dozens of sex partners and were engaging in every kind of risky sexual behavior, including regular group sex. For the most part the kids didn't come from broken families, nor were they abused or homeless. The majority came from what could be viewed as typical suburban families. Parents had no idea what was happening and never thought their kids would engage in such behavior.

Although the Rockdale County story is unique in some circumstances, teens definitely have their own underworld, in which adults, particularly parents, are unwelcome. Their secret lives are driven by a desperate need to belong and are kept hidden because they involve everything parents would disapprove of. If you think, *my kid would never...*, then you need to know that any kid is capable of anything. The following is a list of things a majority of teens are doing and don't want their parents to know about.

Hiding Friends

Teens will find a way to spend time with the people they want to be with, especially if there is a romantic interest. If you don't or they think you won't approve of someone they are hanging out with they will do it behind your back, either away from the home or on social media. They'll lie to you about where they are going and who they will be with when they go out. Never expect the problem to be solved by simply putting your foot down. It is always deeper, involving multiple conversations and reinforcement.

Social Media Accounts

Whether it is Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, or some other social media platform you haven't heard of, they will find one you aren't monitoring. Social media poses a lot of dangers. You can do your best to monitor their online activity (and should), but there is a lot you will never be able to see. Make sure you are having as much open dialogue as possible. Keep up with the latest social media trends so you know what questions to ask.

Currently, Snapchat is the most used; look for our article in several weeks discussing the trouble spots.

Sexually Active

If your teen has not been sexually active by graduation, they

are in the minority. Kids have a fear that they are not maturing at the same rate as their peers. The result is internal pressure coupled with a curiosity to have sex at a young age without considering its implications. While some of the latest stats show a decrease in teens having sex, it is important to note that the numbers are still high, especially among those engaging in oral sex. While it's good that the numbers are coming down, the fact is that most teens will engage in oral sex because they think it is without risk poses a major problem.

They Sneak Out

If it is midnight on a Saturday and your teen is home don't assume they are in for the night. Many teens will sneak out after their parents go to sleep to meet up with friends or significant others. Basements are a popular place for teens to meet up after parents have gone to bed. They will also tell you they are sleeping at a friend's house and then head to an all-night party.

When I would take teens to camp I would admit to the guys in my cabin that they could probably sneak out after I fell asleep without me knowing. But then I would ask them not to because it would hurt our relationship. Not because I wouldn't like them anymore, but because they would know for themselves that they did something deceptive and willfully disrespectful to me. In fifteen years of camping with teens, I never had a problem with sneaking out after having that talk. I don't know if that will work for you as a parent, but the more conversations you have the better.

Smoking Marijuana

Alcohol remains the most prominent feature at parties, but regular pot smoking is no longer relegated to a certain type of kid. That may not surprise you but something that may be the routine use of Adderall and other prescription drugs to

give them the energy to study during exam weeks. When thinking about and discussing teen drug use be sure to consider all kinds and motivations.

High schoolers today are under enormous pressure. Teens are looking for places where they can release their stress without being corrected or judged. The problem is that many of those places involve recklessness and can have devastating emotional and physical consequences. They are looking for a parent who will hear them.

Focusing your questions on how they feel and then showing empathy is your best chance at getting a glimpse of what is actually going on in their world. {eoa}

BJ Foster is the Director of Content Creation for All Pro Dad and a married father of two. For the original article, visit .

How You Can Receive the Gift of Dream Interpretation

Apostle Jane Hamon says your dreams are messages from God. She wants you to understand the language of dreams, and she has a supernatural gift that can help equip you to do it.

“Everybody dreams, but it’s a matter of whether or not we remember them,” Hamon told Sid Roth on a recent episode of Roth’s “It’s Supernatural.” “I like to train people to capture their dreams if they’re not remembering them; how to take the dream and interpret it. ... We have to remember we have the mind of Christ and we have the Holy Spirit inside of us. God is not giving us something that is too hard to do; it’s actually quite easy when we open up and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us

in that process.”

The co-pastor of Vision Church in Santa Rosa Beach, Florida along with her husband, Tom, Hamon’s ministry includes providing apostolic covering for the church and prophetic teaching.

For the full interview with Roth, watch this video. {eoa}

Win Your Wife Over Again by Doing More of This

Married men have gargantuan responsibility to provide, protect, lead, love, be available for the kids, shepherd the family faith and most importantly wear the pressure that accompanies these responsibilities and burdens.

In the midst of the battle, we also have the daunting assignment of cultivating and protecting that most mysterious marital commodity called I-N-T-I-M-A-C-Y. You know—that unspoken, life-giving connection with your wife that feels like Christmas morning.

When it comes to the issue of connection between husbands and wives I am reminded of the cell phone commercial that asked: “How many bars do you have?” Everyone gets it. The more bars you see displayed on your screen the better your connection. Now ask the same question measuring your connection level with your wife. Full bars? Two bars? No service?

The Number 1 complaint wives have about their men is, “he doesn’t listen to me,” because he’d rather “fix” the situation. “Listening” must not be confused with “hearing,”

that biological miracle that helps us interact with our environment. Listening is an acquired skill, a conscious effort to take in what is being said by another person. Keyword? *Conscious*—which means present, aware and concerned.

The issue women raise is that we men are more concerned about the problem than we are about them. Get that. For them the problem is never more important than the person. Great listening focuses on the person, not just the problem. That may or may not come up later.

In Romans 14:19, the Bible says we are to “*pursue the things which produce peace and the things that build up one another.*” Unfortunately, men often overlook the power of active listening, leading to mutual demolition rather than edification. That’s exactly what our enemy wants. He loves a bad listener.

Poor listening:

- Kills intimacy
- Creates resentment and contempt
- Increases vulnerability to sin

If you are struggling with motivation to work on your listening skills, consider this:

“Likewise, you husbands, live considerately with your wives, giving honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they too are also heirs of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered” (1 Pet. 3:7, MEV).

In this verse, God commands you to elevate your wife to a high position by honoring her, by appreciating her with understanding. Ultimately, God is evaluating husband’s efforts to connect with wives. If we do not, our prayers will be hindered. God’s point is crystal clear for husbands: Your connection with your wife will either *help* or *harm* your relationship with God.

Fortunately, the Bible also gives us the formula, which looks like this:

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to heart, slow to speak, and slow to anger ...” (James 1:19, MEV).

Quick + Slow + Slow = Understanding

Instead, we often are slow to listen, and quick to speak and quick to get angry.

Listening is not easy, especially when emotions are running hot and there's a lot at stake. So, it takes practice to overcome these barriers to good listening:

- Men want the bottom line, not the details
- Men's agenda suffers when stopping to listen
- Men want to feel in control and listening gives that away
- Men are distracted, i.e. ESPN
- Men are bad at dealing with feelings
- Men's fatigue reduces energy to listen
- Men are in a hurry

But husbands who win in their marriage will tune in. Here are a few quick pointers:

1. Create quiet. Don't allow chaos. Turn off the noise and distractions. Put the kids to bed and make an environment for conversation.

2. Turn and face. Don't talk into space. Turn your body and mind to face your wife and look into her eyes. Be present in the conversation, not just present in the room.

3. Repeat. Don't delete. Active listening involves hearing her words, interpreting them and saying them back to her to confirm you've got her intent. Don't dismiss what she says.

4. Act. Don't ignore. Demonstrate your understanding by taking

action, without announcing it. Listening followed by ignoring the conversation suggests you're manipulating her instead of honoring her.

Men need to earn a Ph.D. on their wives. Be a life-long learner about her so your marriage, and your relationship with God, will become more intimate. {eoa}

Kenny Luck is the president and founder of Every Man Ministries. As the former men's pastor at Saddleback Church in California and current leadership pastor at Crossline Community Church, Kenny has found the proven way to improve men's ministries around the world. *Sleeping Giant* is this blueprint, and gives men the tools they need to lead and understand their own men's ministry. Watch Kenny's teachings at [Every Man Ministries](#) and start your men's group today!

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