

3 Ways to Simplify Your Christmas

The Christmas blitz has hit full stride and you're overwhelmed. Maybe your to-dos are longer than a 4-year-old's Christmas list, and you have no idea how—or when—they'll get done.

Is your Christmas shaping up to be more of a hassle than a Christ-centered holiday?

What can you do to cut the stress and find the joy of Christ this season?

1. Get organized. You don't have to do everything. And shouldn't. Try these tips to make things easier on yourself:

- Make a list of everything you'd like to do before Christmas. It might include decorating and wrapping gifts. Maybe it's baking or attending a Christmas concert. Whatever it is, write it down. Now look at your list again. Do all the things you've written down *really* need to be done? Which things can you do without? Which ones can you delegate to others? Don't be shy; go ahead and cross some things off.
- If the mere thought of Christmas shopping makes you want to crawl in a hole till the new year, don't do it. Skip the crowds (and gas money) and try finding your gifts online. You might even ship them straight to your friends and family. Many online retailers even let you include a written message with your gift.
- Giving gifts can become more of an obligation than a joy. Do you have a family you're shopping for? Give one family gift instead of individual gifts. If it's your own family, find an activity to do together instead of exchanging gifts. You might even suggest giving to a

charity of each person's choosing in lieu of traditional gifts.

- December means holiday parties. And *that* means you'll probably be asked to bring something. That's right, another dish for another party. Knock out all the cooking at once by making more of one dish, then divvying it up among parties. Here's another tip: make something simple!
- Maybe you're the one having guests over. If you're hosting a couple of events, consider scheduling them close together so all your cooking and cleaning efforts can be combined.

Don't try to be a superhero. Know your limits, and do yourself a favor by staying within them. You might even have to say no to a few things. Don't feel guilty about it. Christmas doesn't have to be about overextending yourself.

Read more: How to make Christmas a less stressful, more spiritual time.

2. Find joy. There's a lot of buildup to Christmas, but maybe it's a burden for you, and you'll be glad when it's over.

"For many, the Christmas season is filled with worry and stress," Billy Graham once said. "But, of course, it shouldn't be this way. Christmas should be a time of joy and thankfulness, for it celebrates the greatest event in human history: the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. On that night over 2,000 years ago, God stepped down from heaven's glory and took upon Himself our humanity, so we could come to know Him."

Think about that for a second: Christmas celebrates the God of the universe who came down to our level in the form of Jesus Christ so we can know Him in a deep, personal way. That's why, when Jesus was born, angels praised God, saying, "Glory to God in the highest!" (Luke 2:14). How can we not find joy in such

a selfless act of love toward us?

Don't let this season slip by without making a concerted effort to keep Christ at the heart of Christmas. You might even start with this Advent devotional from Billy Graham to focus on the meaning of Christmas. (Check back each week at [for more Advent devotionals leading up to the holiday.](#))

Listen to this 1-minute clip about how one woman's joy was restored in the midst of a challenge.

You've heard the song, but what's the story behind it? Take a look at the meaning behind "Joy to the World."

3. Rest. Nonstop Christmas ads and the overload of all things glittery and bright can wear you out, and who wants to start the new year exhausted? We already talked about simplifying, but rest goes a step further.

Rest isn't just cutting back; it's taking a break.

Billy Graham has given two reasons to set aside time for rest: "If we work all the time, not only will we wear out physically, but we'll also neglect our relationship with God."

It can be hard to justify taking a break with such a busy season upon us, but it's crucial for both our physical and spiritual well-being. Here are some suggestions to find the rest you need:

- Turn off the radio and TV and consider taking a break from social media for a certain period of time. Use that time instead to pray or read the Bible.
- Plan out brief times of rest—start with a couple times a week—and stick to it. Work, spouses, children and unforeseen circumstances may disrupt this scheduled time, but try your best to stay with the plan.
- Staying up late can be tempting but can also lower your energy the next day. Set an alarm for yourself at night

to remind yourself it's time for bed.

Burnout is real. Take a look back at this article from BGEA's summer series: 5 Ways to Replenish a Burned-Out Soul.

Matthew 11:28 says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." It's a kind of rest that goes deeper than a good night's sleep.

Listen to a message from Billy Graham on the rest that endures.

For the original article, visit .

What Your Friends Don't Want to Hear When The Devil Is Attacking

I've been in a season of spiritual warfare since I stepped into the editor's role at *Charisma*. I've had strange ailments attack my body. Two of my teeth randomly broke over the course of as many weeks. People around me are having emotional meltdowns for absolutely no logical reason. I've been accused, cursed and persecuted.

Of course, this is really nothing new. Although I experience seasons of rest from warfare, I do tend to withstand plenty of onslaughts as I co-labor with Christ to advance His kingdom. Besides writing hard-hitting columns and books that stir up antichrist spirits in the world and Jezebel's puppets in the church, I'm also building the Awakening House of Prayer, launching AwakeningTV and running hard with the New Breed Revival Network to stoke the flames of revival in the nations.

Clearly, I'm a target—and I am sure you are too. Anyone doing anything to forward the gospel message is on the devil's hit list. If you are raising up your children in the way they should go, you're a target. If you are sowing seeds of truth in your workplace, you're a target. If you are making intercession in the secret place, you're a target. You get my point. Every believer is in the army of God—and that brings warfare.

We Don't Need Job's Friends

Last week, I wrote an article about the enemy's onslaught—how sometimes it seems the devil is coming at you seven ways from Sunday in an attack that's touching just about every area of your life and working overtime on your mind. I wrote about how sometimes the good fight of faith doesn't seem so good.

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At times like that, people around you will be tempted to tell you what you've done to open the door to the enemy in your life. Many times, they will act like Job's friends. You know what I mean. Eliphaz comes over to your house to tell you how it's all your fault because you have some hidden sin in your life (Job 4:7-8). After he leaves, Bildad calls to confirm Eliphaz's poor prophecies (Job 8:20). Finally, Zophar acts as a third witness to condemn you in the battle (Job 11:14-17).

Indeed, we all have plenty of friends who like to judge us when life isn't going our way. The enemy uses those close to us to add fuel to his fiery darts when what we really need is someone to stand in the gap for us. Of course, we should all examine our hearts when the onslaught comes to make sure we don't have any open doors, but too many well-intentioned Christians give pat answers and platitudes that do not reflect God's heart in the midst of our battle.

Cut Out the Platitudes

Spiritual platitudes—banal, trite and stale remarks—are not as painful as pious calls for repentance for sins you haven't thought about committing. But spiritual platitudes are unhelpful at best and admittedly annoying. Let's face it, pat Bible answers—"cast all your cares" and "those whom He loves He disciplines"—that really don't apply to your situation are anything but a word in due season.

When people are going through hell and back, most people don't need to play patty cake with verses about not growing weary in well doing, fighting the good fight of faith, standing and withstanding or counting it all joy. That may be helpful for baby Christians, but mature warriors usually don't need to be told what is obvious: Have faith in God; only believe; the battle is the Lord's.

Yes, we all need encouragement in the warfare and sometimes we need correction. Proverbs 25:11-12 (MSG) says, "The right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry, and a wise friend's timely reprimand is like a gold ring slipped on your finger."

The key is helping your friends in times of warfare is to be led by the Spirit. Unfortunately, many times we're not sensitive to the dilemma of our friends. Many times we don't understand their pain. Often we try to sympathize, but we really can't empathize. We don't have any idea what it's like to walk in their shoes. We can't see things from their perspective. We aren't enduring the battling coming against their mind. We just don't get it.

Pray Without Ceasing

When people close to you are going through trials, facing serious battles or otherwise struggling, the best thing to do is to be slow to speak and quick to listen (James 1:9). After all, the Bible says there is a time to keep silent and a time to speak (Ecc. 3:7).

Job's friends offered him plenty of reasons to feel guilty and condemned. His wife went so far as to tell him to curse God and die. Thank God for Elihu, a younger man who witnessed Job's trials and his friends' response. Elihu declared, "I am full of words; the spirit within me compels me" (Job 33:18). Unless we can say that, we shouldn't open our mouths to give counsel.

Ultimately, Elihu pointed to God's justice and reminded Job that our righteousness is in God alone. Elihu proclaimed God's majesty in the midst of the storm—and suddenly God showed up on the scene, spoke to Job, led him to repentance, stirred him to pray for his judgmental friends, and restored everything the enemy took seven times.

If you want to help a friend facing intense spiritual warfare and trials, the wise thing to do is to lean into the Spirit and let Him inspire your words and actions. That may mean proclaiming the opposite of what you see and hear coming against them, sharing a prophetic word that edifies, comforts and exhorts, or keeping your mouth shut altogether and just being with them—and it always means prayer.

When your friends are going through spiritual warfare, God is watching how we respond to them. Will we respond with pious condemnation and spiritual platitudes that make our friends feel like failures, or will we be Spirit-led and pray without ceasing? Selah.

4 Questions to Help Husbands

Deal With Their In-Laws

Your mother-in-law is on the phone asking if she can visit. She sounds excited, but you feel sick even thinking about it.

You get a bad vibe from one of the uncles on her side of the family, and you don't like how he talks to your kids. Every time you get together with your wife's family, you notice that nobody says anything real. It's just surface or sarcastic or passive-aggressive, and you're tired of it.

Does any of this sound familiar? The old joke is that you didn't just marry your wife; you married her whole family. And family dynamics, particularly when dealing with the in-laws, can get complicated in a hurry. How do you know when to speak or what to say? When to say, "Yes," to a visit and when to say, "Not this time?"

No answer is going to fit every family and every situation. For example, there is a big difference between interacting with in-laws who are annoying but harmless and those who are abusive or dangerous.

Consequently, different circumstances require different choices.

Here are four questions—in order of priority—to help you think it through. Balance these elements, and you'll be on your way to a better discussion and better decisions.

1. What serves your wife? At All Pro Dad, we have made the point that your wife comes first. Good husbanding is about loving and serving your wife. So what serves *her* best as you think about her parents? Does she need protection or distance from an abusive father? Does she long for closer connection with her mom? Does she flourish when she's back home for the holidays? Rather than thinking about your own interests and agenda first, what serves your wife's needs and

desires the best?

2. What serves your family? Next, consider your family unit: your wife, your marriage and your kids. Wise husbands know they have spheres of responsibility that spread outward. Do your kids prosper around their grandparents? Is there something unique happening in the life of your family that means it is best not to have more stress in your household for a season? When answering this question, it is critical that husbands not make unilateral decisions that will leave their wife behind, nursing hurt or alienated feelings. Instead, have an open discussion together that balances your competing priorities.

3. What serves your in-laws? Wise husbands also consider the needs of their in-laws. Is what you want to say *for their benefit* or is it just to vent your frustration? Have you considered the ways your family might be able to bless them with access to your household? Are there ways your wife legitimately needs to care for the needs of her aging parents? If you have kids of your own, one day *you* are likely to be the in-law parents. How would you like to be treated when the time comes? Go and do likewise.

4. What serves your needs? You are an important part of your family. Self-sacrifice is important, but so is self-care. Some husbands are overly domineering, but some don't speak up enough. Is it hugely draining for you to be around your in-laws? Have you spent every vacation for the last 10 years with her family, and now it's time to try something different? Are you trying to encourage a healthy relationship that moves beyond familiar passive-aggressive dynamics? Choose your words with care and love, and then speak. It's a vital part of caring for yourself and your family.

The answers to each of these questions are important. Every family and every decision will require different balance. But answering these questions in order can help you navigate your

priorities.

When was a time you wished you handled things different with your in-laws? {eo}

For the original article, visit .

Tabata Can Help Remove Those Extra Holiday Pounds

While January may be filled with New Year's Resolutions, December, I have found, is often teeming with "End of Year Excuses." With all the holiday parties and preparations, errand-running and gift-getting, workout schedules commonly get pushed to the back burner until January rolls around and damage control goes into full effect.

Now, I would be totally sympathetic if exercise, for whatever reason, could only be done within the confines of a gym and with lots of fancy equipment. It's true that getting to the gym in December isn't easy. But the fact is, exercise can be done *anywhere*, and the only necessary piece of equipment is *yourself*.

A few weeks ago, I gave you all an intense lower body Tabata-style workout that I did while vacationing in the mountains over Thanksgiving. Today, I want to give you an *upper body* Tabata routine that can also be done in less than a half-hour. (For a refresher on what "Tabata" is and why this workout style is beneficial, check out my post on it [here](#).)

I encourage you to stay committed to your fitness this month, and if you aren't committed yet, why wait until

January? **There's no time like the present** to begin making changes and forming habits that will strengthen your body, clear (and destress!) your mind and glorify God!

"What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own? You were bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor, 6:19-20).

WARMUP

- 40 Jumping Jacks (get the blood flowing!)
- 40 Butt Kicks
- 40 High Knees
- 40 Russian Twists (warm up that core!)
- 20 Superman
- 40 Small Arm Circles each direction
- 20 Push-Ups (or wall push-ups if you cannot do traditional floor push-ups)

WORKOUT

8 Rounds Tabata Pushups (*Rest 1-3 minutes*).

8 Rounds Tabata Russian Twists (*Rest 1-3 minutes*).

8 Rounds Tabata Plank Up-Downs (*Rest 1-3 minutes*).

8 Rounds Tabata Bicycle Crunches

If you're new to high-intensity training, or if you're in a rush, perform four rounds of each exercise, but whatever you do, *don't skip the warmup*—doing so could result in injury.

EXERCISE INSTRUCTIONS (in order of appearance):

Jumping Jacks

- Stand with your feet together and your hands down by your side.

- In one motion jump your feet out to the side and raise your arms above your head.
- Immediately reverse that motion by jumping back to the starting position.

Butt Kicks

- Begin by jogging normally, either in place or traveling for a short distance.
- Then begin raising your heels up toward your bottom as you jog, using rapid, forceful movements. Again, you may either do these in place or traveling.

High Knees

- Begin jogging, either in place or over a short distance.
- Drive one knee up toward your chest and quickly return it to the ground. Follow immediately with the opposite knee.
- Continue alternating for the given number of repetitions.

Russian Twists

- Sit on the floor. Lift your feet off the floor a few inches and cross your ankles.
- Keeping your core tight, twist to one side, bringing your hands toward your hip. Repeat on the opposite side.

Superman

- Lie face down on a soft surface with arms extended overhead. Keep your neck in a neutral position.
- Keeping your arms and legs straight (not locked) and torso stationary, lift your arms and legs toward the ceiling as if to form a "U" with your body.
- Hold arms and legs a few inches off the floor for 1 to 2 seconds and gently lower.

Arm Circles

- Stand in a neutral position with feet hip-width apart. Your arms should be straight out to the sides so your body forms a “T.”
- Begin making slow circles in a forward motion with your arms, then gradually make larger ones and complete the given number of repetitions.
- Repeat in the opposite direction.

Pushups

- Get into a plank position on the ground: hands and feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart.
- Keeping your core (abdominals and back) tight, slowly lower yourself in a straight line. Make sure your neck stays neutral, naturally aligned with your spine. Don't let your hips pike up in the air or your lower back sag.
- Continue to lower yourself until your chest touches the mat or floor or, for beginners, your arms form a ninety-degree angle.
- Keeping your spine rigid and abdominals pulled in, press your hands into the floor to return to start position.

Note: Think about *exploding* powerfully from the bottom position to increase the intensity to this movement.

Wall Pushups (if needed)

- Face a wall, standing an arm's length away. Feet are slightly apart, legs straight with weight in your toes.
- Place your hands on the wall so that hands are just outside shoulder width and are even with your chest.
- Bend elbows about 90 degrees and lower body toward the wall without touching it.
- Straighten arms and return to the starting position.

Note: To make this more difficult, move your feet further away from the wall.

Plank Up-Downs

- Assume a push-up position.
- Lower yourself to your elbows.
- Raise the right side of your body by pressing your right hand against the floor and straightening your arm.
- Raise the left side of your body in the same manner.
- Lower yourself back to your elbows, first with your right arm, then with your left.
- Keep your body straight and core tight during the entire movement.

Note: Lead with the right hand for Tabata rounds 1-4, then switch directions for rounds 5-8.

Bicycle Crunches

- Lie flat on the floor with your lower back pressed to the ground (pull your bellybutton in).
- Put your hands behind your head, then bring your knees in towards your chest and lift your shoulder blades off the ground, but be sure not to pull on your neck.
- Straighten your right leg out to about a 45-degree angle to the ground while turning your upper body to the left, bringing your right elbow towards the left knee. Make sure your rib cage is moving and not just your elbows.
- Switch sides, performing the same motion on the other side.

For 100+ at-home workouts, check out my book *Perfect Fit*, available for Kindle and in paperback!{eoa}

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For the original article, visit www.dianatyler.com.

Star Wars: God's Grace and Redemption

I was 11 when the first Star Wars movie, *A New Hope*, came out in 1977. You can do the math on my age.

I instantly fell in love with the film and the ones that followed. Although I was 17 by the time the third one—*Return of the Jedi*—premiered in 1983, I hadn't grown out of it. They were all riveting, especially when we discovered that Darth Vader turned out to be Luke Skywalker's father and Leia turned out to be his twin sister. It was high drama at its best for a kid like me.

But oh how the years have passed quickly. With the stresses and responsibilities that come in life—marriage, children, bills to pay and so on—I sometimes feel as though I completely lost touch with my inner child a long time ago—in a galaxy far, far away.

Shed no tears for me, however. It's my son who has paid the price. He's now 11 years old and, through all of these years, I have not allowed myself to connect with him on his level. I can't begin to tell you how sad that is and how much I deeply regret it.

With God, however, it's never too late to repent. It's never too late for redemption. "In Him we have redemption through His blood and the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7).

With the release of this weekend's newest adventure in the Star Wars saga, *The Force Awakens*, I have been afforded an opportunity to redeem myself with Joshua. He loves all the

Star Wars movies, and he's still young enough to be smitten with Star Wars Lego. He has built many things—but that's another story.

This past weekend, Josh and I sat down and watched five of the first six Star Wars movies together. We had watched some together previously, and I had taken him to a Star Wars convention three years ago. But the excitement for me faded away. This, however, was a great time for us to bond and for him to ask me questions about the movies concerning things he didn't quite understand. I did my best to enlighten him.

Josh's passion for the Star Wars movies is obvious, but Josh is also a very godly young man, and he is aware of the biblical parallels between good and evil. We talked about how Satan wanted to be like God and how God expelled him from heaven, similar to Anakin Skywalker wanting to keep his wife from dying—something only God can do—in episode three. Anakin couldn't have those powers, so he turned to evil.

However, I like to believe that it was God who redeemed Darth Vader at the end of Return of the Jedi. Of course Darth Vader never professed Christ, but he realized the dark side (Satan's kingdom) could be overcome. It's never too late.

And you know the rest of that story.

Despite my past behavior, I don't believe that I am or have been a bad father. I won't condemn myself because Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." But I also know I could do much better.

With the rekindling of the Star Wars saga, I have been given a second chance to connect with my son and to get to know him better. I cherish the opportunity and can't wait to take him to see *The Force Awakens*. Who knows what surprises—and thrills—lie before us?

I believe it also gives me a chance to connect with Josh spiritually and to help him become even more of a godly young man than he already is. I am very proud of him for his openness to the Word and his voracity in following Jesus.

Has your relationship with your children waned? Are you struggling to connect with them? Ask God to help you find something—a passion of theirs—that you can share. Like a good friend, get to know your child all over again and revel in their company. It will melt your child's heart and bring lasting benefits.

“A wise son makes his father glad” (Prov. 15:20).

And as I always like to say, “there is that.” {eo}

Why Aren't More Men Leading Powerful, Transformed Lives?

Early in the history of The Man in the Mirror Bible Study, a Table Leader at one of our leader meetings presented a bizarre situation.

He told us about a man at his table who faithfully attended every Friday morning. But then on Friday nights he hit the topless bars and partied hard all weekend.

The aforementioned Table Leader said, “I would like to put together a group of Table Leaders, take this man to lunch and confront him about his behavior.”

My heart sank! As I was fumbling around, the Holy Spirit prompted these words. “I don't think we should do anything. God has called us to show men Christ, not to fix their

behavior. If we try to get him to clean up his act, it will probably drive him away.”

By God’s grace, everyone nodded in agreement. Chuck, the wild man, kept coming back each week. After attending for about three years, his daughter’s boyfriend one day put a pistol in her mouth and pulled the trigger. Chuck was completely devastated. He asked me to perform the funeral because he didn’t know who else to ask. Her friends wanted a rock ‘n’ roll funeral, but he insisted on a Christian service.

Through his daughter’s tragic death, God graciously brought Chuck and his son to faith and their lives were radically transformed by Jesus Christ. How frightening to think we might have driven him away by trying to fix his behavior.

That’s not to say behavior isn’t important. It is. But good behavior isn’t “sustainable” unless it comes out of the overflow of a changed, or transformed, heart.

Unsustainable Change

When you look around today, do you see many men leading powerful lives transformed by the gospel of Jesus? There are inspiring exceptions, but for the most part, we don’t. Most men lead tepid, lukewarm, defeated lives.

If I asked you, “Why aren’t more men leading powerful, transformed lives?” what would you say?

Because guys like to “fix things,” our answers gravitate to a list of things a man “ought” to do. You know the list, and you can no doubt add to it.

- You ought to be in a small group.
- You ought to read your Bible every day.
- You ought to be in an accountability group.
- You ought to be in church.
- You ought to go on a mission trip.

- You ought to work at the homeless shelter.
- You ought to stop smoking.
- You ought to stop drinking wine.
- You ought not to look at pornography.
- You ought to be more humble.

After working with men for nearly 40 years, I can say without hesitation that these may be great ideas, but they just don't work by themselves. Telling men what they ought or need to "fix" about themselves is not powerful enough to bring about authentic change. A lot of men get the impression that if they just do the "right things," then they will be OK.

Oh, it may work for a while—even for a few years. You can shame men or challenge men to live "better" for a time, but that lacks transformative power. Eventually, the man who relies on his own desire or effort to live up to his religion will fail. It's unsustainable. Unless a man is drawn to his disciplines and good deeds by a compelling desire to love, know and please his God, he will always burn out and fall away. It's an iron law.

Transformed by a Piece of News

Not long after our wedding, it became clear that my wife, Patsy, and I had an ambiguity of terms about what it meant to be a Christian. On the one hand, I was committed to a set of Christian values. I grew up in a religious home.

I was surprised to learn that my wife was committed to a person—to Jesus Christ. She spoke of a personal relationship with God. That was completely new to me. She was and is the best example of a Christian I have ever known. She radiates peace and contentment.

Since I am a determined person, I made up my mind that I would emulate her. You know what happened, of course. The harder I tried, the further away I strayed.

No matter what I did, no matter how many promises I made to myself, no matter how much self-discipline I exercised, my life constantly tumbled backward. I was miserable.

One day I pulled out my white flag and surrendered. I realized that no amount of desire or effort on my part would ever be enough. My life changed when I caught a glimpse of the unfathomable love of God the Father in the face of Jesus Christ illuminated to me by the Holy Spirit. It was the Good News that transformed me from darkness to light, from death to life.

Early 20th-century reformer J. Gresham Machen noted that Christianity is about a moral change, but it never comes about by telling men how they ought to live. He said,

The strange thing about Christianity was that it adopted an entirely different method. It transformed the lives of men not by appealing to the human will, but by telling a story; not by exhortation but by the narration of an event. It is no wonder that such a method seemed strange. Could anything be more impractical than the attempt to influence conduct by rehearsing events concerning the death of a religious teacher? But the strange thing is that it works. Where the most eloquent exhortation fails, the simple story of an event succeeds; the lives of men are transformed by a piece of news.

Clearing Up Men's Confusion

Men, and especially younger men, have become one of our largest neglected people groups. Men are confused about what it means to be a man, much less a man of God. How did they get so confused?

They've run the wrong race (Gal. 5:7). As a result, they've conformed to the values and customs of this world (Rom. 12:2). As a result, they've been taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophy (Col. 2:8). That yeast has worked its way through the whole batch of dough (Gal. 5:9). As a result,

they've exchanged truth for a lie (Rom. 1:25). And now it has become a crisis. How do we clear up this confusion?

Some men really *don't* know how to live their lives. They don't have the *knowledge* to grasp what it means to follow Christ—not really.

For others, they already know what they need to do; that's not the problem. Their problem is that they lack *power* to do what they already know they should do.

In Matthew 22:29, Jesus told some confused religious leaders, "The problem is that you do not know (*oida*) the Scriptures and you do not know the power (*dunamis*) of God" (paraphrased).

So why aren't more men leading powerful, transformed lives?

1. "*You do not know the Scriptures.*" One of the most practical things we can do is disciple men to understand (*oida*) the Word of God. The core reason men are so confused is that they have never been discipled in how to be godly men, husbands and fathers. They don't have a good "picture" of the ideal Christian man in their brains.

2. "*You do not know the power of God.*" We also must help men find power. How do we get the power of God to men? Jesus said, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power (*dunamis*) from on high" (Luke 24:49). And later, "But you will receive power (*dunamis*) when the Holy Spirit comes on you" (Acts 1:8). Of what benefit is this "power" to a man? "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you" (John 14:26).

A great opportunity stands before the church like an elephant in the living room. This is our moment. The cause is great. The stakes are high. The battle is fiercely contested. We must not fail.

Although they are still too young to know, my four grandchildren are counting on us to get this right.

Patrick Morley is chairman and CEO of Man in the Mirror. His book, *Man in the Mirror*, was selected as one of the 100 most influential Christian books of the 20th century. For the original article, visit .

For the original article, visit .

New Study Shows Biological Link With People Who Lack Motivation

Brain scientists have recently made a scientific discovery concerning apathy in healthy individuals. Apathy is seen in people who tend to carry an uncaring attitude along with a lack of interest in participating in various activities.

For some, it is the disregard for life showing physical symptoms of indifference and insensitivity.

A group of scientists studying apathy from Oxford University were unexpectedly greeted with strong biological evidence of a brain-based relationship in this area of study. There may be a strong connection that apathy is based on biology and not mere attitudes. This particular study was funded by a welcome trust; the scientists set out to see if there were any differences within the brain of those motivated versus those who were not. The age group used during this study were of the younger generation.

Physically Capable

Apathy is typically seen in individuals who have recently suffered from stroke. It is also commonly seen in patients with Alzheimer's. According to Dr. M. Husain (Prof. of Neuro. Science), many of the patients are capable physically to continue to take care of their personal needs, yet they are *highly unmotivated*. These same individuals who are capable to physically continue do not have depression, which is often thought of as the demotivating factor.

Surprising Results

A group of forty young individuals were provided with a questionnaire to score their motivational habits. Each were then provided a game to participate in with differing levels of reward. Physical efforts were used to earn the rewards presented. Some rewards required increased amounts of physical effort, while others were easier to obtain.

During the game play, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) was used to study the function of the brain. The surprising results seen was the "pre-motor" cortex of the brain differed in active response. The individuals who were more apathetic had an *increased amount of activity* in this area as compared to the more motivated individuals.

The pre-motor area of the cerebrum (brain) is where neuro activity takes place prior to movements of the body. The activity level in this area of the brain *significantly increased* when the non-motivated people decided to take part in the physical effort needed to gain the reward.

The True Meaning

The true meaning to this finding is the individual who has issues with being more motivated will have an increase in this area of the brain, *for a reason*. The reason seems to be it takes *much more effort* within the brain, for them to actual be involved in the physical activity. The brain has to *work much harder* to fulfill the same action of an individual who seems

to have no issues with motivation.

What does this mean for the future?

This finding is the *very first* of its kind in seeing differences within the brain of these two groups of people (healthy motivated versus healthy apathetic). This does not give us a solution for all cases of indifference, but it does give us clues in that *there are in fact differences involved* biologically.

Dr. Radka Stoyanova reminds us some people have motivation issues with fulfilling even *easy goals* like taking medicine, bathing, etc. This is often seen in many brain function disorders, but it can also vary among different groups within the populations.

Some people seem to be *naturally* more motivated compared with others, but now this study shows us some very interesting details which need further investigation.{eoa}

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For the original article, visit .

What Happens When You Let Love and Generosity Prevail?

In his apocryphal tale *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens paints such a clear picture of Ebenezer Scrooge that the word “scrooge” appears in the dictionary—defined as “a miserly person.”

The story is set on Christmas Eve when Scrooge is an old man. But Dickens gives readers a glimpse into Scrooge’s entire life, revealing that he was not always selfish. Though he had a knack for numbers and a frugal nature, he wasn’t born miserly.

So what happened? Scrooge never processed the painful experiences of his youth, and heartache hardened him. This, combined with the character flaw of greed, transformed his positive attribute of frugality into stinginess. Not only was he stingy, he was mean. (The two usually go hand in hand with age strengthening the bond).

One reason Dickens is considered a master storyteller is that his characters are so real. We can all relate to Scrooge because chances are, we know a couple. They might be relatives, neighbors or friends. In fact, if we’re honest, some of us are on our way to becoming Scrooge ourselves! Without question, misers don’t grow old very well, because generosity is a key component to graceful aging.

Take the example of Anna (See Luke 2:36-38). As an elderly widow, Anna likely didn’t possess great wealth. Nevertheless, when it came to blessings and favor, she was extremely rich! Anna was a teacher in the Old Testament, one of only a few women mentioned in the Bible with this gift. She came from the tribe of Asher, not the priestly tribe of Levi. However, despite her gender and tribal heritage, she was well

respected, even given a place to live on the temple grounds. Why so highly esteemed? Anna had a sacrificial spirit, giving her whole life to serving God. That is generosity in action.

Rest assured, her life wasn't trouble free. She spent the majority of her days a widow—her husband died after only seven years of marriage. While such painful circumstances might have hardened her heart, Anna let benevolence prevail. While she could have become a bitter old widow, she chose to live selflessly. And this selflessness led to exaltation, to the extent that her story is part of Scripture, written for all eternity. Anna personifies graceful aging. Her life bears witness to Proverbs 11:25: "The generous soul will be made rich."

If generosity leads to blessing, then why are so many people selfish? And why does this trait become more common with age? I see several factors:

- The fear some have of others taking advantage of them. In many respects, generosity is a state of vulnerability and carries with it the risk of "being burned." Once burned, some will shield themselves at any cost—even at the cost of becoming a miser. In addition, past experience will affect present behavior. When people lose money for whatever reason, a tight fist is a common reaction. In the economic crisis of 2008, people lost huge sums of money; it cost some their life's savings. Not surprisingly, the level of charitable giving dropped precipitously during that period.
- There is the issue of trust. Some people are misers because they have no faith. They won't give because they don't believe God's promises, or they don't think He is able to replenish their bank account—and certainly not increase it!—if they give money away.
- Others simply allow greed and a tendency to hoard govern their lives.

While there are many reasons for selfishness, none are justifiable. True love is manifested in generosity. One of the most widely known verses in the Bible gives proof of this: "For God so *loved* the world that He gave His only begotten Son ..." (John 3:16, emphasis added). Loving and giving are tightly linked. Love is the condition; generosity is the action.

In this season, let's remember the words of Paul when he wrote: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:16-18). Don't overlook the glaring truth of these verses that *gratitude is not conditional!* At all times and in all circumstances we have a reason to be grateful. Life's circumstances are always temporary, but God's grace toward us is eternal. If we focus on the big picture of grace, then gratitude naturally follows. Gratitude is not an emotion but a condition of the heart.

Examine the condition of your heart. Purge your heart of selfishness, and let generosity prevail.

✘ *Adapted from Timeless by Kara Davis, M.D., copyright 2015, published by Siloam, Charisma Media/Charisma House Book Group. This book is a comprehensive guide to progressing through the various stages of life. It will help you optimize your total health and improve your physical, spiritual and mental well-being. Timeless is practical, inspirational and a "must-have" road map for anyone facing the inevitable for themselves or a loved one. To order your copy, click here.*

Prayer Power for the Week of December 13, 2015

This week reflect on the goodness of God and His generosity toward us as He loved and gave His only Son for our redemption. Ask Him to direct your steps and give you divine appointments to follow His example. Pray, love and give to those less fortunate and be ready to share the gospel wherever you go. Continue to pray for revival in our nation and around

the world. Remember our military and their families, the persecuted church, and those suffering through loss of health, loved ones or provision. Pray for those persecuted for the cause of Christ and remember Israel as many travel there in this season (John 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:16-18).

When the Devil's Onslaught Comes at You 7 Ways

In spiritual warfare circles, we love Deuteronomy 28:7: "The Lord will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways."

I can just hear some of you saying "amen" right now. But what if the devil isn't coming at you just one way? What if he's coming at you seven ways from Sunday in an onslaught that's touching just about every area of your life and working overtime on your mind? What if the good fight of faith doesn't seem so good at the moment?

What if you've done all you can do and you've been standing and withstanding, but feel like you can't stand much longer? What if you've resisted the devil and submitted yourself to God, but the enemy is just not fleeing? What if you have repented for any open doors, confessed the Word of God, decreed, declared, pushed back darkness, exercised the binding and loosing keys of the kingdom, commanded the enemy to cease and desist operations, praised your way through and you are still not breaking through?

Recognizing the Onslaught

Before you can conquer an onslaught, you have to discern it. It sounds simple, but it's not always intuitive. Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary defines "onslaught" as an attack; an onset; a furious or murderous assault; a bloody fray or battle. Merriam-Webster goes further and calls out "a violent attack; an especially fierce attack. It's a blitz, a charge, a raid, rush and strike.

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So again, what do you do when the onslaught is manifesting and you've done everything you know to do and none of it makes a lick of difference? What do you do when your shield of faith is getting too heavy to lift up, you've kicked off your shoes of peace and your sword of the Spirit seems too dull to cut through the witchcraft? What do you do when one isn't putting a thousand to flight and two isn't putting 10,000 to flight?

Once you've recognized the onslaught for what it is, you first have to refuse to tap into the spirit of fear that comes with attack. Second, you have to stop looking at the onslaught, stop thinking about the onslaught, stop talking about the onslaught and look at the Lord instead. Proverbs 3:25-26 (NASB) displays this truth: "Do not be afraid of sudden fear nor of the onslaught of the wicked when it comes; For the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught."

Paul's Strategic Advice

Paul the apostle was no stranger to the enemy's onslaught. Five times he was flogged with 39 lashes. Three times he was beaten with rods. He was stoned once and shipwrecked thrice. During his journey, he was often in danger from deep waters and robbers; he was often in danger in the city and in the wilderness; and he couldn't even count on his own countrymen to stand with him. Paul the apostle was often sleepless, often

hungry and thirsty, often cold and naked—and he still carried the burden of the church on top of it all!

Despite all of this, Paul's advice was clear: "Do not be frightened by your adversaries. This is a sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and this from God" (Phil. 1:28, MEV). See, Paul knew that faith in God was the only way through. He knew that trust in God's delivering power was the only way out. He knew that fear and faith cannot coexist in the same heart. He knew that God would ultimately deliver him if he just believed what God said. When Paul was on a ship that was sinking, he told his captors:

"But now I advise you to take courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And, look! God has given you all those who sail with you.' Therefore, men, take courage, for I believe God that it will be exactly as it was told to me" (Acts 27:22-25).

Refuse to Do These 3 Things

Fear came knocking at their door during the onslaught, but they refused to waiver. They refused to believe what they saw with their natural eyes, what they felt with their fickle emotions or what they heard in their imaginations. They chose to trust in God and keep pressing toward His will.

Essentially, an onslaught is the enemy coming in like a flood. So what do you do when the enemy's onslaught is coming in seven ways, attacking your mind, your health, your family, your finances, your physical property, your friendships and more? You hold on to these words from Isaiah 59:19 about our Warrior Lord who is fighting for us: "So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Yes, we have to repent, resist, declare, decree, command, bind, loose and stand, but ultimately the battle is the Lord's. We can reject the subtle voices of fear that try to rob our faith and trust Him to see us through to victory because He always leads us into victory in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14). Always. So keep standing. {eoa}

10 Signs That You Are a Good Father

Carrying a 60-pound backpack in Colorado's rocky wilderness is hard. If you are used to breathing air at sea level, the high altitude makes it even more physically grueling.

When our guides stopped and surveyed the land with a puzzled look, my heart sank. Something was wrong. We should have come to a creek that would confirm we were on the right track. But it wasn't there. We had taken a wrong turn. Eventually, we backtracked and found the correct path and the creek.

As fathers, we can sometimes feel lost. We can have self-doubt about how we are doing as dads. While we will never be perfect this side of heaven, if you practice the following 10 things consistently, you'll know you are on the right track to being a good father. You will know you are setting the example your children need.

1. When you help your kids with their schoolwork.
2. When you take an interest in their hobbies.
3. When you show affection to your wife in front of them.
4. When you advocate that they speak to you and each other

respectfully.

5. When you simply enjoy being with your children and they with you.
6. When your son or daughter comes running to you when they get hurt.
7. When your calendar is full of things to do with your children.
8. When you calmly and gently discipline your children without yelling or screaming.
9. When you tuck your children into bed at night and tell them: "I love you."
10. When you know their friends by first name.

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