Are You a Peacekeeper or a Peacemaker in Your Marriage?

Do you know the difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking?

Peacekeeping is about avoiding conflict at any cost. It's ultimately a selfish motive because the status quo is desired above all else. Peacemaking understands conflict can be a healthy steppingstone to an improved relationship. It seeks time and effort to resolve problems, not ignore them.

So are you a peacekeeper or peacemaker in your marriage? One leads to relational decline, the other to relational strength.

Give peacemaking a chance by following these 10 fair fighting rules:

1. Be kind. Kindness may well be the strongest card you can play in a disagreement. Conflict can be defined by hostility and contempt or it can be defined by kindness and respect. The choice is yours.

2. Use "I" statements. Take ownership of your feelings and actions rather than blaming your spouse. "I need some help because I keep getting confused about the kids' schedule," works better than "You're always late. I'm sick and tired of it."

3. Make an appointment. Try a loving handwritten note: *Let's talk about last night … I need to apologize… I'd like us to have a calendar planning session … There is something I need your help with … I've screwed up and we need to fix this …*

4. Stay on topic. Laying out an annotated history of your spouse's shortcomings is counterproductive and simply fuels the fire. When fighting, don't wander into other unaddressed

issues before the current one is resolved.

5. Resist the urge to keep score. Score keeping assumes a winner and a loser. The point of fair fighting is to promote the relationship. There are no losers when the relationship is strengthened.

6. Take the high road. Always respond gracefully, particularly in the face of disgrace. Returning fire is a shortcut to escalation. The high road is the first step toward reconciliation. It sees conflict as an opportunity to grow.

7. Never devalue feelings. It's OK to say, "I'm not sure it's helpful to accuse me of …" But it's always wrong to say, "It's stupid of you to be upset!" Acknowledge that she is upset. "I understand your feelings are hurt." The pain, hurt, anger, disappointment, and anguish are all real.

8. The only person you can change is yourself. It's difficult to be angry with someone who is humble. It's easy for anger to escalate when you only see shortcomings in your spouse.

9. Never use the children as leverage. Enough said. Quick note: It's important for kids to know that you have reconciled. It's perfectly acceptable, and perhaps healthy, for your kids to see you in conflict. However, they need to know the final outcome and how it got worked out, otherwise they will live with anxiety.

10. Have rules of engagement. Rules are helpful on so many levels. They recognize fighting as a natural part of the relationship. It formalizes the premise that you're not interested in playing the blame game and outline safe parameters for working out issues.

For the original article, visit allprodad.com*.*

20 Bible Verses on Giving

November and December are both months filled with the spirit of giving. We give not to get anything in return, but because Jesus gave his life for us.

Here are 20 Bible verses to chew on during this wonderful season.

1. Deuteronomy 15:10 – “Give generously to him and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.”

2. Deuteronomy 16:17 – “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.”

3. Proverbs 21:26 – “The righteous gives and does not hold back.”

4. Proverbs 3:27 – “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.”

5. Proverbs 11:24-25 – “There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, and there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered.”

6. 1 Chronicles 29:9 – “Then the people rejoiced because they had offered so willingly, for they made their offering to the Lord with a whole heart, and King David also rejoiced greatly.”

7. Proverbs 22:9 – “He who is generous will be blessed, for he

gives some of his food to the poor."

8. Proverbs 28:27 – "He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses."

9. Malachi 3:10 – "'Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.'"

10. Matthew 6:3-4 – "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

11. Mark 12:41-44 – "And He sat down opposite the treasury, and began observing how the people were putting money into the treasury; and many rich people were putting in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, 'Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on.'"

12. Luke 3:11 – "And he would answer and say to them, 'The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise.'"

13. Luke 6:30 – "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back."

14. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 – "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all

sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."

15. Luke 6:38 – "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

16. John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in Him wouldn't perish, but would have eternal life."

17. Acts 20:35 – "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

18. Romans 12:8 – "Or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

19. James 2:15-16 – "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?"

20. 2 Corinthians 9:10 – "Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." {eoa}

Jarrid Wilson *is a husband Juli, dad To Finch, pastor, author, blogger and founder of Cause Roast. He's helping people live a better story. For the original article, visit* jarridwilson.com.

The Inner Tug-of-War Many Men Experience

There is an inner tug-of-war in every man, a tension that drives so much of our outer life. Here it is: *We long to be known, and at the same time we're terrified of it.*

So many of our patterns of relating and our failures to love can be traced to this tug-of-war. Which side wins? It's usually our terror.

Hence the lifelong attempts to cover ourselves, only redoubling the power of that terror in our lives. We lock up our longing to be known in a dark closet, treating it as we would an abused child, hoping it will go away. But the longing remains and calls out to us, sometimes insistently, sometimes unexpectedly, and so the tug-of-war keeps yanking at us.

Enter Jesus. Take the story of how he dealt with Levi, the tax collector (Mark 2:14-17). Here was a man despised as a traitor by his fellow Jews. Tax collectors not only worked for a pagan government, but they also made their living by overcharging the required tax, as much as they could get away with.

As a result, they were excommunicated from the synagogue, and their families were held in disgrace. They were so mistrusted that their testimony in court was not considered reliable. Yet Jesus chooses this despised man to be His disciple. But the story gets even better.

Levi throws a party and invites the only friends he has, other tax collectors and low-life. What do they do? They eat together. Eating in that culture required a certain physical intimacy, as they reclined together on couches. It also

implied an emotional one, as hearts were shared over the food. The text in Mark even suggests that Jesus was the real host of the party.

Imagine the impact on Levi and his friends. They had been despised and shamed much of their lives, and now a famous rabbi and teacher wanted to be close to them. Jesus just saw them so differently than they saw themselves. He longed to know them and be with them, and it began the dismantling of shame. We don't know what happened to Levi's friends after the party, but we do know what happened to Levi. He was so revolutionized by Jesus that he eventually penned the Gospel of Matthew.

This same revolution can happen inside each of us. How does shame get healed in our lives? How do we allow ourselves to be known? It comes as we allow Jesus to re-image how we feel about ourselves as men. The binding power of shame is that it ends up defining us, but the truth is that only the Father knows who we really are. He says that we are His beloved sons (Gal. 4:6), and His only Son is not ashamed to call us His brothers (Heb. 2:11).

I've watched this happen in the lives of other men, but especially in my own life. To deal with the nagging disconnection I grew up with, I buried the longing to be known and turned to substitutes. One of my main ones was an addictive cycle of running and eating.

Unlike the Mark story, I had no experience of feeling connected to others as I ate. It was simply a drug I used to feel some sense of aliveness. Running did the same thing, and the two together worked in a cycle to keep my longing buried and my heart frozen. But with the Father's help and some minor hip arthritis (forcing me to quit running), I am slowly learning to see myself through His eyes.

When we learn to do this as men, we will find shame yielding

to glory, and we'll experience the wonder of being known—and being enjoyed—all at the same time. It's the beginning of the end of the tug-of-war.

Finally.

Bill Delvaux *is a graduate of Duke University and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and has served as a pastor and a high school Bible teacher. Presently, he leads Landmark Journey Ministries as a speaker, small group coach, and author of Divided: When the Head and Heart Don't Agree* and *Landmarks: Turning Points on Your Journey Toward God. Bill and his wife have two grown daughters and reside in Franklin, Tennessee. Follow Bill on Twitter @BillDelvaux.*

Why All Churches Should Address Depression and Anxiety

It's no secret my past was riddled with mental health issues—ones that kept me from wanting to live for much of my teenage life. I'm very vocal about this truth, and I will continue to be as along as my story may have an impact on others who need to hear it.

And while I do believe today's church is doing better at addressing the issue that is mental health, I believe there can be so much more done than what is currently taking place in regards to depression and anxiety. *Let me explain.*

I never tried to take my own life in my younger years, but I frequently found myself googling *painless ways to commit*

suicide, and really had no remorse once finding what I was looking for. It was a sad state to hold myself. The reality is that my life was infected with the burden of depression and anxiety, and the only places I could find reliable information from were not churches in my local area.

Why? It's because mental illness wasn't really talked about much.

I felt as if all the *"Christian"* resources were outdated, and really didn't address the fact that taking medication was okay in the eyes of God. There really wasn't much information at all. It was as if all the answers I was finding were suggesting that I just needed more faith.

Seriously? The last thing someone contemplating suicide wants to hear is, *"Just have faith."* I understand that Jesus has the power to conquer anything that comes in my way, but please don't throw Christians clichés at me. I wanted real, authentic and practical information, and I assume there are millions in this world who would want the same. It's what Jesus would have done.

I really wanted to find help in the church, but there were no ministries or non-profits working within the walls of local congregations that I could reach. All the counseling and help I received came years after I actually needed it, and it was found in the secrecy of a local medical facility, not a church—where it should have been all along.

Mind you, the church has come a long way since my teen years in regards to helping those with mental illness, but I believe we can still do a lot more.

Some Statistics

1. It is reported that 1 in 10 Americans are affected by **depression.**

2. Over 80 percent of people who are **clinically depressed** are not receiving treatment.

3. The number of people diagnosed with depression increases **by 30 percent every year.**

4. An estimated **121 million** people around the world suffer from depression.

5. In 2013 41,149 suicides were reported, making suicide the **10th leading cause** of death for Americans.

6. In 2013, someone died by suicide every **12.8 minutes.**

We Need The Church

"Cast all your care on Him, because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7, MEV).

Here's the thing. I understand that there is importance to seeing what many would call a "professional" in the field of mental health issues, but this doesn't mean that the local church shouldn't be prioritizing leadership roles and ministry efforts to help those who deal with these issues. I understand that not all churches lack in this area, but I bet there are more who do than don't.

My wife and I have met with and counseled dozens of young people over the past year. All shared with us the brutal battle that is taking place within their souls. Suicide attempts, cutting, depression, and anxiety are just the beginning of what these young people were facing.

We NEED the church to step up in its efforts to be more vocal in regards to mental illness. Whether that is through a sermon series, free resources, creating non-profits or even a cultivating a designated year-long ministry. Regardless, the church should be on the front lines of this battle. People need a safe place where they can be honest and transparent with what they are going through.

There is nothing wrong with admitting you are depressed, cutting, have attempted suicide or are even contemplating it. There is nothing wrong with seeking medical attention and being prescribed medication to help you along the journey. And, there is nothing wrong with admitting you need help.

A Few Resources

1. **Heart Support.**

2. **My Broken Palace.**

3. **To Write Love On Her Arms.**

4. **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.**

If you or someone you know is struggling with depression, anxiety or has even thought of suicide, please give them the resources above and do not wait another minute.

What are your thoughts? Leave a comment below. {eoa}

Jarrid Wilson *is a husband to Juli, dad to Finch, pastor, author, blogger, and founder of Cause Roast. He's helping people live a better story. For the original article, visit* jarridwilson.com.

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25 Silly Things Church Members Argue Over

It began as an innocuous Twitter survey. But then it blew up.

A lot of church members and leaders were eager to share about fights, schisms and conflicts in their congregations. They were likewise eager to point out the absurdity of these

issues. There were the ones we've heard often: temperature in the worship center, color of carpet, order of worship and color of walls.

The fights shown below, however, are a bit unusual. Indeed, most of them are downright absurd. I picked 25 of my "favorites." They are listed in no particular order. The parenthetical commentary is my own.

1. Argument over the appropriate length of the worship pastor's beard *(I think I saw a verse in Scripture that indicated it is to be no more than 1.5 inches longer than the pastor's beard.)*

2. Fight over whether or not to build a children's playground or to use the land for a cemetery *(I'm dying to know the resolution of this one.)*

3. A deacon accusing another deacon of sending an anonymous letter, and deciding to settle the matter in the parking lot *(The church could have sold tickets to this event and raised a lot of money.)*

4. A church dispute of whether or not to install restroom stall dividers in the women's restroom *(I'm calling unfair on this one. The men should have their stall dividers too.)*

5. A church argument and vote to decide if a clock in the worship center should be removed *(I think this one is a timely argument.)*

6. A 45-minute heated argument over the type of filing cabinet to purchase: black or brown; 2, 3, or 4 drawers *(This one is an official cabinet meeting of the church leadership.)*

7. A fight over which picture of Jesus to put in the foyer *(I just want to know who took the pictures.)*

8. A petition to have all church staff clean shaven *(No church planters are allowed.)*

9. A dispute over whether the worship leader should have his shoes on during the service *(I vote for shoes, shirts and pants.)*

10. A big church argument over the discovery that the church budget was off 10 cents—Someone finally gave a dime to settle the issue. *(I have to admit this issue is 10 times more important than the church missing a penny.)*

11. A dispute in the church because the Lord's Supper had cran/grape juice instead of grape juice *(Of course it should be grape juice. It's right there in Hezekiah 4:11.)*

12. Business meeting arguments about whether the church should purchase a weed eater or not. It took two business meetings to resolve *(Wow. This fight was really whacky.)*

13. Arguments over what type of green beans the church should serve *(I could have resolved this conflict quickly: none.)*

14. Two different churches reported fights over the type of coffee. In one of the churches, they moved from Folgers to a stronger Starbucks brand. In the other church, they simply moved to a stronger blend. Members left the church in the latter example *(Perhaps they started a new church: The Right Blend Fellowship.)*

15. Major conflict when the youth borrowed a crock-pot that had not been used for years *(I bet it was a bunch of crocky old adults.)*

16. An argument on whether the church should allow deviled eggs at the church meal *(Only if it's balanced with angel food cake for dessert.)*

17. An argument over who has the authority to buy postage stamps for the church (*The members were licking their wounds over this issue.)*

18. A disagreement over using the term "potluck" instead of

“pot blessing” *(I get it! The concept of luck contradicts the theology of a sovereign God. This issue is very serious. Good luck trying to resolve it.)*

19. A church member was chastised because she brought vanilla syrup to the coffee server. It looked too much like liquor. *(Beth Moore confessed she was the culprit who brought the syrup. Don’t you know, Beth, we Baptists cannot have vanilla syrup at anytime? Chocolate is fine though.)*

20. An argument in church over who has access to the copy machine *(I think a calendar should be made where every church member has at least five minutes access to the copy machine each year. You can have a business meeting to vote on each five-minute increment.)*

21. Some church members left the church because one church member hid the vacuum cleaner from them. It resulted in a major fight and split. *(Thus the Second Electrolux Church was born.)*

22. An argument over whether to have gluten-free communion bread or not *(I thought gluttony was a sin.)*

23. A dispute over whether the church should allow people to wear black T-shirts, since black is the color of the devil *(Are you sure he’s not red? That’s what I’ve heard.)*

24. A fight over whether or not to sing “Happy Birthday” each week *(I’ve got an idea. Alternate it with the doxology.)*

25. An argument over whether the fake, dusty plants should be removed from the podium *(Just give them a little water. They should be fine.)*

Yes. These issues are silly; many are absurd. But they are all distractions from what we should be doing in our churches. In that sense, they are really great distractions from the Great Commission.

Let me hear your stories!

Thom S. Rainer *is the president of LifeWay Christian Resources. For the original article, visit* thomrainer.com.

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5 Reasons You Shouldn't Cohabitate Before Marriage

Are you single or dating someone you think may be the one? Or do you have kids who are dating and may be thinking wedding bells at some point?

If so, you may want to consider the importance of marrying before moving in together or of teaching your kids about the pitfalls of shacking up.

More and more couples are choosing to move in together before marriage. One reason is to save on rent. Yes, saving on rent. Saving on rent is not, and should not be, a reason to live with someone who may or may not become your spouse. In fact, it is a really bad reason. Below are five reasons shacking up is a bad idea:

1. No blessings from God. The Bible considers shacking up the opposite of a legitimate marriage. A legitimate marriage consists of a union between a man and woman who have made a covenant and commitment. Shacking up involves neither. Marriage was a union created by God and is a union God blesses.

2. Your relationship will probably end. An article on *examiner.com* states that 80 percent of shacking-up relationships end before marriage or in divorce after

marriage. So, it is 80/20 against you getting married or staying married to that person. One reason is because there is not a commitment when you move in before marriage. A relationship without commitment will not last, and marriage is the biggest commitment you can make in life.

3. Your children will be negatively affected. To the parents who have children, your kids are three times as likely to be expelled from school or get pregnant, five times more likely to live in poverty, and 22 times more likely to be incarcerated—all because you choose to live with someone you're not married to.

4. It makes you lazy. As a married man, I know that once dating ends, the relationship changes. Living together removes the "being your best" part of your relationship. Kind of like most job interviews—you wore the suit to the interview, but once hired, you show up in khakis and a polo. And if you're living with a woman and getting some of the "benefits" of marriage—sex, having someone to help around the house, sharing the bills—you can also get lazy about taking the next step in your relationship.

5. Saving on rent. Mentioned above.

Related Resources:

- **10 Guidelines When a Young Adult Child Moves Back Home**
- **Adolescence Talk**
- **Waiting for Sex Talk**

How will you educate your adult children about the dangers of shacking up?

All Pro Dad *is Family First's innovative and unique program for every father. Their aim is to interlock the hearts of the fathers with their children and, as a byproduct, the hearts of the children with their dads. At* **allprodad.com**, *dads in any stage of fatherhood can find helpful resources to aid in their*

parenting. Resources include daily emails, blogs, Top 10 lists, articles, printable tools, videos and eBooks. From ***allprodad.com****, fathers can join the highly engaged All Pro Dad social media communities on* ***Facebook****,* ***Twitter****,* ***YouTube*** *and* ***Instagram****.*

When You Don't Feel Especially Thankful

We're in a season of giving thanks. Thanksgiving Day is set aside for giving thanks for the blessing of the harvest of the year before. Yuletide joy over the birth of Christ follows.

But what if it doesn't? What if you don't feel especially thankful this Thanksgiving? What if you don't feel particularly joyful this advent season? What if you are going through trials and tribulations that have you spinning in circles, struggling to maintain your faith, and avoiding prayer like the plague?

During this season when many are celebrating Christ, singing Christmas carols and counting their blessings, there are many going through divorce, grieving over deaths, and watching the enemy work to steal, kill and destroy their children. During this time when people are jolly, jingling bells and telling holiday jokes, there are many fighting depression, despair and death.

What to Do, What to Do?

So what do you do when you don't feel especially thankful? What do you do when your emotions are on a roller coaster? What do you do when nobody seems to understand or care what

you are going through? What do you do when you're tempted to blame God for your circumstances?

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In short, you obey the Word. The Bible says, "Give thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). The bottom line is that even when bad things are happening into us, even when we're experiencing gut-wrenching pain that makes us want to withdraw from everyone including our Comforter, God is still worthy of our thanks.

Romans 8:28 is still true. God really is working all things together for good—even the things that are tragic. Ephesians 1:11 is still true. God really does work all things according to the counsel of His will—even the things that defy His will. God's will is good, perfect and acceptable and He's going to turn it all around in due season.

God Has Not Betrayed You

Satan will do anything he can to drive a wedge between you and your loving Creator. He points a finger at God when tragedy—or even just circumstances you don't like—strikes. He suggests God doesn't care about your problems. He blames God for not healing your sick loved one or saving your children.

Although God never does anything wrong and never needs forgiving, we can sometimes feel like God has betrayed our trust. We stood on His Word, believed with all our heart, waged spiritual warfare, prayed in tongues for hours, and still didn't see good come to pass. That can leave us resentful, bitter and unforgiving.

I've shaken my fist at God once and been furiously angry with Him at least one other time. I can tell you this: He would much prefer you talk to Him about it than shut Him out. If you

communicate with God, even if you are angry, He can reach you, help you and heal you. God never betrays us, but our emotions do.

Managing Your Emotions

We are all emotional beings. God gave us emotions—and God Himself has emotions. Think about it for a minute. Sometimes we feel joyful; sometimes we grieve. Sometimes we feel bold; sometimes intimidated. Sometimes we feel triumphant; sometimes completely and utterly physically and emotionally exhausted.

Our emotions can be a great motivator at times and a great enemy at other times. In fact, Watchman Nee, author of books like *Spiritual Discernment*, *Secrets to Spiritual Power* and *Let Us Pray*, once said that emotions are the believer's number one enemy—not the devil, but our emotions.

If we give God the reins of our heart, we'll find stability—but we have to give Him all the reins or we are in danger of pulling in the wrong direction as we run our races. If we pick and choose which emotions we will submit to God and which ones we'll allow free reign in our souls, we'll wind up unstable—and wound up. We'll find ourselves holding on tight as the emotional roller coaster turns us upside down and leaves us spinning in circles.

Give God the Reins

We need to align our emotions to the Word of God. Yes, I know. That's easier said than done. Believe me, I know. But if David did it so can we. It's not a matter of putting on a soldier face and keeping a stiff upper lip. David poured out his emotions to God—the anger, the disappointments, the hurt, the confusion—but he didn't wallow in those emotions. He submitted them to the one who could stabilize his soul.

Yes, there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to love and a time to hate,

as Solomon shares in Ecclesiastes 3. But it’s always time to rejoice in the Lord—not in our circumstances but in the Lord. I believe choosing to rejoice in Him as an act of our will is one of the most strategic ways to submit our emotions to Him—to give Him the reins of our hearts.

So what do you do when you don’t feel especially thankful? Intentionally find something to thank Him for—and there’s plenty. I assure you, there’s plenty. Whatever we face in this life, it’s only temporary and, like Kathryn Kuhlman used to say, “No matter what happens to you, as long as God is still on His throne and there’s an answer to prayer. Just so long as your faith in Him is intact, you cannot be defeated.” Amen.

Fitness and Thanksgiving: Declarations of Thanks for the Works of Art We Live In

Thanksgiving, as the name makes clear, is a day to reflect on the blessings we’re most thankful for. For the Pilgrims back in 1621, they gave thanks for an abundant harvest.

Over 100 years later, George Washington made the holiday official, proclaiming it “a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God.” Today, surrounded by good company and a great feast, we typically reserve a few moments before the big meal to recognize the major “favors” of God in our lives, namely our freedom, our family, and our friends.

But what about our bodies?

Being in the fitness industry, and having researched and written about health and wellness for over 10 years now, I am convinced that our bodies are, sadly, among the things for which we are *least* thankful. Think about how much we hear ourselves and others groan and complain about the way we look, the way we feel, the way we don't look and feel like so and so. Think about all the TV programs we watch, books we read, and gear we buy, all in hopes that they will be the golden ticket that will thrust us through the door of sky-high self-esteem and sunny satisfaction. Think about the fact that the cosmetic industry rakes in $55 million annually.

I wonder what would happen if we were to, this Thanksgiving, consciously think of and give thanks for the things we appreciate about our bodies.

It's a compelling notion, isn't it? It sounds good, doesn't it? But would we really feel genuine as we named parts of ourselves that we're fond of and not completely disgusted by or displeased with? Or would we feel like we're merely going through the motions, engaging in a fruitless exercise that will leave us no more thankful for the present state of our bodies than we are for the rowdy crowds of Black Friday? There's only one way to find out.

"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it" (Ps. 139:13-14, NLT).

I took some time recently to consider what the Psalm 139 passage above means when it describes us as "wonderfully complex" and "marvelous." Afterward, I was amazed by just how short those two terms fall of adequately describing these unparalleled machines we do life in! Words utterly fail to convey the beauty and precision, the awe and delicacy, the majesty and genius with which our bodies were created. It's my

prayer that somewhere within the following paragraphs, you begin to feel grateful for your body and moved to praise the One who knit it together and called it to life.

"The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4, MEV).

Before I get started with my Declarations, let me ask you this: What are you doing right now?

If your answer is "nothing," you are mistaken …

Right now, even though you may appear to be idle, countless incredible events, each necessary for your survival, are taking place inside you. For one, your heart is beating. If you're in average physical condition, it beats between 60 and 70 times per minute, 93,000 times per day, 655,000 times per week, 34 million times per year, and 2.4 billion beats in the average lifetime. What's so mind-blowing about this is that, most of the time, the heart fuels itself, paces itself, repairs itself, and alters itself in response to lifestyle changes, with no conscious effort on your part.

In addition to your heart, right now your liver is detoxifying your blood, your brain is storing away information, cells are being formed while other cells are destroyed, and energy is being used and produced. So the next time someone invites you out and you really don't feel like going, you can honestly tell them, "Sorry, but I'm busy," ha!

I, for one, and am thankful for the following regarding the body God's given my soul to reside in:

1. I'm thankful for a wonderfully complex *brain*.

- The brain consists of approximately 100 billion neurons (nerve cells) which gather and transmit signals.
- Your brain, when awake, generates enough electricity to light a lightbulb.

- The brain does not feel pain because it has no pain receptors.
- There are about 100,000 miles of blood vessels in the brain.
- New neurons continue to be made throughout life in response to mental activity.
- Information can be processed as fast as 268 miles per hour.
- In a lifetime, your brain's long-term memory can hold as many as 1 quadrillion (1 million billion) separate bits of information.

American author and biochemist, Isaac Asimov, said that the human brain is "… the most complex and orderly arrangement of matter in the universe." As you read this, your brain is signaling your eyes to automatically adjust the focus and aperture. We humans are not the product of chance or haphazard construction. German-American rocket scientist and aerospace engineer, Wernher von Braun, stated, "Certainly there are those who argue that the universe evolved out of a random process, but what random process could produce the brain of a man or the system of the human eye?"

2. I'm thankful for a wonderfully complex *heart*.

In the time it took you to read the section above, approximately 1.5 gallons (6 liters) of blood passed through your heart. Did you know that the human heart's blood vessels are not just straight-through tubes? They are helical, meaning they have a slight twist to them. This gentle corkscrewing makes your blood flow more evenly, minimizing damage from turbulent flow. This smooth flow also encourages the production of health–promoting protective substances. God's attention to the human heart is nothing short of amazing!

3. **I'm thankful for wonderfully complex *cells*.**

- 300,000,000 human cells die every minute. Though this is

a large number, it is only a fraction of the cells that our body contains. Estimates have put the total number at 10 to 50 trillion.

- Our body produces 300 billion new cells each day. These are needed to maintain the body's functional "status quo" as well as to continuously repair and build new cells.
- If all of your DNA were stretched out, it would reach to the moon *6,000* times!

Your red blood cells, which *just happen* to be the ideal shape for transporting oxygen, are manufactured and destroyed at an incredible rate. Approximately 10 million red blood cells are made every hour, and an equal number are destroyed. If either supply or destruction becomes out of sync by as little as 1 percent, then life ends because blood gets so thin that oxygen transport is insufficient, or it gets so thick that it can no longer circulate.

Blood clotting is similarly complex. This process is a coordinated function of at least 11 chemical factors. Should blood clot too readily, or should clots which are formed fail to dissolve, you die. Should it clot too slowly, again, the result is death. Our body contains hundreds of complex feedback loops whose precision and reliability are vital to life.

We don't often take time to think about it, but we tread a very narrow path where the smallest error produces death.

Are you thankful yet for this brilliant masterpiece you live in?

4. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex *internal organs.*

- The surface area of a lung is approximately that of a tennis court. (This large surface area makes it easier for the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide.)
- Scientists have counted over 500 different functions of

the liver.
- The human body can survive the removal of the stomach or the spleen. It can survive the loss of 75 percent of the liver, 80 percent of the intestines, one kidney, or one lung.

5. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex *bones, muscles, and skin.*

- A block of bone the size of a matchbox can support nine tons (four times the weight that concrete can support).
- Ounce for ounce, our bones are stronger than steel, since a bar of steel of comparable size would weigh four or five times as much. A cubic inch of bone can, in principle, bear a load of 19,000 pounds, which is roughly five standard pickup trucks.
- And yet despite the fact that they're stronger than steel, 31 percent of our bones are composed of water.
- We use 200 muscles to take one step.
- Skin is constantly shedding dead cells and renewing itself. We shed about 600,000 particles of skin every hour.
- On average, we shed so much skin in a lifetime that by the time we turn 70, we'll have removed an entire small human (105 pounds), from ourselves.
- In addition to our five senses, we actually have an extra meta-sense known as proprioception, which combines our brains' knowledge of what our muscles are doing with a feel for the size and shape of our body so we can know where the parts of your body are with respect to each other. It's how you can close your eyes and still easily touch your nose.

6. I'm thankful for wonderfully complex *eyes.*

- If the human eye were a digital camera, it would have 576 megapixels. In comparison, the Mamiya DSLR, which has 80 megapixels, retails at a whopping $34,000.

- Experts estimate that the human eye can distinguish 10 million different colors.
- The human eye can only see a small fraction of a visual field at a time, so our eyes perform 2-3 saccades (quick, automatic eye movements) per second to complete a single complete picture.

7. I'm thankful that I'm *made in God's image.*

Genesis 1:27 says that God created us in "His own image." While evolutionary biology considers us nothing more than glorified apes, scientific research confirms that humans are vastly unique on many levels.

Only humans possess the ability to create and understand art. Man's capacity for abstract thinking also sets us apart from animals. By referring to unobservable events and changes, we are able to formulate explanations for *why* certain things are happening.

We are also set apart from all other creatures by our ability to make moral judgments. We can discern between what is right and wrong. No animal models exist for human pride, shame, or guilt. A dominant male chimpanzee does not punish or prevent another chimpanzee from stealing food from another. Humans are unique in that we recognize wrongdoing and seek redemption. This is because we were created in the image of a holy and righteous God.

8. I'm thankful that my body has a *built-in soul and spirit.*

Perhaps what I'm most thankful for is that when this wonderfully complex body dies, my soul and spirit will go on living. And they'll do so in God's presence.

"Truly, truly I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24, MEV).

I’m thankful that while some people don’t have eyes that see or ears that hear or hearts, cells, kidneys and brains that function properly, what is absolutely true and unchanging about every single one of us is we all have souls capable of being saved from sin and death.

The moment we confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be like the thief on the cross to whom Christ said, “you will be with me in Paradise.”

Our sins past, present, and future are forgiven. Guilt and condemnation have no place in our lives. Death has lost its sting. The grave is without victory. We are declared “more than conquerors” through Christ, and nothing can separate us from His love.

I don’t know about you, but those last thoughts alone provide me with enough thanks to fill an eternity of Thanksgivings, which leads me to a final declaration:

I’m thankful for a wonderfully complex *eternity* throughout which I will praise the One who gave His life to set us free. {eoa}

Diana Anderson-Tyler *is the author of Creation House’s* Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman’s Guide to Total Fitness, Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness, *and her latest book,* Immeasurable: Diving into the Depths of God’s Love. *Her popular website can be found at* dianaandersontyler.com *and she is the owner and a coach at* CrossFit 925.

For the original article, visit dianaandersontyler.com.

Do You Need an Idol Extraction?

In my teens, I frequently watched baseball games on television and my brother, Kevin, would walk by and spitefully berate me by informing me that “sports is my god.”

It happened quite often. I realized that he simply tried to foment a reaction from me, so I would shake it off and not give the chastisement—or him—a second thought.

Kevin is only 15 months older than me. I attributed his chiding simply to his age and his narrowness of mind.

But you want to know something? Looking back on the years between then and recent years before I surrendered my life completely to Christ, I realize Kevin’s pillory had unwittingly become correct. Indeed, for me, sports had become an idol.

And by the way, Kevin is preaching God’s Word in a small church in Du Quoin, Illinois, these days.

Sports had become my main focus in life, and it’s all I really cared about despite my mother’s diligent attempts to prompt me to read the Bible, pray and worship God. Instead, I was worshipping the “god” of Alabama football coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. I had made him and St. Louis Cardinal baseball players like Ozzie Smith, Keith Hernandez and Tommy Herr figurative “graven images.”

Rick Warren says the Bible “has a word for whatever we place our trust in rather than God. The Bible calls it an ‘idol.'”

We all know what else God’s Word says about idols, don’t we?

- “You shall not make for yourself any graven idol, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is

in the earth beneath, or that is in the water below the earth" (Ex. 20:4, MEV).

- "Those who follow vain idols forsake their true loyalty" (Jonah 2:8, MEV).

Indeed, I had forsaken what should have been my true loyalty, Jesus Christ. For most of my life, I have rabidly rooted for the Cardinals in baseball and for the Crimson Tide in college football. Until recently, they dominated by thoughts and conversation.

And forget about when either wins a championship. That's when money entered the picture and I would give into my flesh and spend hundreds of dollars on championship memorabilia—on credit. What a waste.

I made sports writing my profession, and it ruled my life for many years. Sports first, family second, and then God somewhere else down the list. I don't believe a job in the sports industry is idolatrous (I thoroughly enjoyed the perks for years), but it can be. There has to be a balance.

Ashamedly, sports stayed at the top of my list until God figuratively hit me over the head in the past few months and said to me, "Son, I've waited a long time. Don't do that any more. I don't like being second to something so trivial, and your family deserves better."

In essence, I needed an idol extraction. I wasn't being fair to my wife, my children and, most of all, God.

I prayed for God to help me put sports in its rightful place. Indeed, the Lord led me to a humbling revelation. My prayer life is better, my time in God's Word has improved drastically and my time with my family continues to increase.

And while I do still enjoy watching both the Cardinals and the Tide, they don't consume me, and they don't consume my conversations. Praise God.

It may seem like an innocent attraction, but such idols cheat not only God from His just due, but also your family. It takes away what should rightly be their time with you, simply because you can't tear yourself away from the television. And Internet technology certainly hasn't helped in that regard, either.

There are all sorts of things of which we can make idols. Our sports teams, playing golf, drinking, gambling, television, the Internet, video games, our jobs and, yes, even our families and church (we can chase things at church without chasing God). Anything we put before God is an idol. It is something we either must put away completely or severely scale down.

As our publisher, Dr. Steve Greene will write about on Friday, our society has deemed Black Friday more important than Good Friday. Sorry shoppers, that's an idol.

In Psalm 31, King David contrasted his devotion to God with the diluted worship offered by many Israelites by saying, "I have hated those who regard useless idols; But I trust in the Lord" (Ps. 31:6, NKJV). Obviously, a person who clings to idols cannot commit his spirit into God's hands. When we put today's idols (wealth, material possessions, success) first in our lives, we cannot expect God's Spirit to guide us. God is our highest authority and requires our first allegiance.

Is there anything in your life that an outsider might consider an idol? The pursuit may even appear harmless or even virtuous, but we must all take an honest inventory of our lives. If something steals an unhealthy amount of time out of our day from God and from our family, pray about it and ask God how He can curtail its importance in our life.

"So, my beloved, flee from idolatry" (1 Cor. 10:14, MEV).

And as I always like to say, "there is that." {eoa}

10 Reasons Millennials Are Sick of Church

There are literally thousands of articles online about why the millennial generation is disillusioned with church, church culture and church politics. And while I applaud the attempt to wrap one's head around the issue, I've noticed that most of the articles seem to be written by people who know nothing about the millennial generation. Weird.

I've talked with thousands of young people over the years who have told me, *"I'm just sick of church."* I've heard everything under the sun when it comes to one's reasoning for leaving, and I believe many of them carry a lot of heavy truth. Here are some of them …

1. "It's not authentic."

2. "It's too corporate."

3. "I don't like the political side."

4. "I feel like I can't be open about my struggles."

5. "I hate the cliques."

6. "It's too judgmental."

7. "Their attempt at being relevant comes off as cheesy."

8. "They don't spend enough time outside of their building."

9. "They aren't really welcoming of people who are different from them."

10. "They focus too much on what they know instead of whom

they are showing love to."

And while I believe not all churches deal with the complaints I mentioned above, it's safe to say there are many who probably do. That's why I'm writing this. This needs to be discussed.

Authenticity Is Key

If churches want to see more millennials walk through their doors, they need to stop trying to entice them with free stuff, and instead allow their spaces to be filled with authentic relationships and transparent conversations. The Acts 2 church was a perfect example of this.

"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers. Fear came to every soul. And many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common. They sold their property and goods and distributed them to all, according to their need. And continuing daily with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart" (Acts 2:42-46).

Some people say there is a decline in millennial church attendance, while others say they don't see much of a change at all. We must realize that just because millennials aren't showing up to church buildings doesn't mean they aren't part of a thriving community of believers, or are without a biblical relationship with God.

Millennials aren't looking for brighter lights. Millennials aren't looking for more free coffee. They want Jesus-founded authenticity, a safe-place to share burdens, real answers to real questions and a community of action. {eoa}

Jarrid Wilson *is a husband to Juli, dad to Finch, pastor, author, blogger, founder of Cause Roast. He's helping people*

live a better story. For the original article, visit jarridwilson.com*.*