

How Art Can Make Your Body Healthier

“Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better.” –André Gide

Most people believe artistic talent is either something you have in spades or not at all, that you're either a Picasso with paints or someone stuck on stick figures and stencils, a Beethoven or a better-not-quit-your-day-job wannabe bass player.

But if you've ever wanted to express yourself creatively, why not go for it? There's nothing to lose. In fact, it turns out there's quite a bit to gain if you want a healthier body and a sharper brain! (That sentence was a poem, and therefore totally counts as art.)

An article from states that, “Many scientists agree that the arts can help reduce stress and anxiety, improve well-being and enhance the way we fight infection.” Music, for example, has been shown to activate the same areas of the brain as chocolate.

When we were infants, music, in the form of lullabies and our parents' cooing, was a tremendous comfort to us, chocolate for our ears, if you will. In Alzheimer's patients, lyrics and melodies are often the last to go when all other memories have faded; when a certain song is sung or hummed, associated images reemerge and the past is recaptured, if only for a moment.

Recent studies have found evidence that singing releases substances that serve as the brain's own natural pain-killers. Additionally, levels of molecules important for fighting infection can rise when we listen to music.

If you're like me, music accompanies many of life's daily activities. For instance, when I work out, I listen to upbeat praise and worship music, Christian rap or classic rock. When I sit down to work on my latest book project or article, I listen mostly to ambient or electronic music. And when I'm reading and relaxing, I prefer the likes of Gershwin, Tchaikovsky and Debussy.

From these three examples alone, you can see that music can be as motivating as it is emotive, and as stimulating as it is soothing. But music therapy is also sometimes used clinically, requiring a certified therapist to interact with the patient. To measure the effects of such therapy, one study showed how levels of an important brain chemical that relays signals between cells increased after four weeks of music therapy. The levels decreased after the therapy ended.

And a recent report from Finnish scientists showed that listening to music helps stroke patients recover both their memory and their focused attention. The researchers also found that music can reduce post-stroke depression and confusion. Other studies suggest that stroke patients may improve faster if they sing, rather than speak, as part of their rehabilitation.

Scientists are also studying how art therapy can help to ease pain and stress and improve quality of life.

When it comes to art, several small studies, some of which were supported by *News in Health*, have suggested that art therapy can help improve health status, quality of life and coping behaviors. It can improve depression and fatigue in cancer patients on chemotherapy, and help prevent burnout in caregivers. It's also been used to help prepare children for painful medical procedures, as well as to improve the speech of children with cerebral palsy.

According to Megan Robb, a certified art therapist at NIH's

Clinical Center, "When traumatic memories are stored in the brain, they're not stored as words but as images. Art therapy is uniquely suited to access these memories." She explained that once you draw or paint these images, you can then progress to forming words to describe them. This transports the trauma out of isolation and into a positive exchange with the therapist. This process, Robb said, gives you "an active involvement in your own healing."

Next comes writing (my favorite!). Expressive writing, which is defined as writing about traumatic, stressful or emotional events, has been shown to have a number of health benefits, from improving symptoms of depression to helping fight infection. Dr. James W. Pennebaker of the University of Texas at Austin has designed several studies to show the links between writing and health.

"Writing about emotional upheavals in our lives can improve physical and mental health," Pennebaker said. "Although the scientific research surrounding the value of expressive writing is still in the early phases, there are some approaches to writing that have been found to be helpful."

In a series of exercises, healthy student volunteers who wrote about traumatic experiences had more positive moods, fewer illnesses and better measures of immune-system function than those who wrote about superficial experiences. Even six weeks later, the students who'd written about what upset them reported more positive moods and fewer illnesses than those who'd written about everyday experiences.

In another study of students vulnerable to depression, those who did expressive writing exercises showed significantly lower depression symptoms, even after six months, than those who had written about everyday matters.

And if none of the above art forms are your cup of tea, perhaps dancing will suit your fancy! Arts that involve

movement, such as dance, can also reap health benefits. We already know that physical activity can help us reduce stress, prevent diseases, boost energy, sleep better and fight anxiety, so pull out your old tap shoes, tutu or Zumba outfit and dance like no one's watching!

Art doesn't have to be pretty. It has to be meaningful."
—Duane Hanson

And now for some of the incredible ways that penning a poem, scribbling a short story, painting a portrait or playing the piano can benefit your brain and mental health:

Art Kick-Starts Your Imagination

If you consider yourself an artistic person, you can enhance creative skills you already possess. If you think of yourself as more analytical, creating art will stimulate your creativity and imagination.

Art Makes You More Observant

Shakespeare wrote, "The earth has music for those who listen."

Creating art helps you learn to "listen" by concentrating on detail and paying more attention to your environment.

Art Enhances Problem-Solving Skills

Art encourages us to think outside the box and lets us devise our own unique solutions.

Art Boosts Self-Esteem

Hanging your latest work of art on the wall can instill you with the same feeling you had when your mom posted your art project or doodle on the fridge.

Art Reduces Stress

The arts comprise rewarding hobbies that can lower stress

levels and lead to an overall improvement in wellbeing.

Art Enhances Cognitive Abilities and Memory

The first half of this article speaks to this amazing gift of participating in artistic activities.

American painter and teacher Robert Henri said that “The object isn’t to make art, it’s to be in that wonderful state which makes art inevitable.” I hope you decide to embrace and pursue “that wonderful state,” whatever it looks like for you, be it a composition notebook and a fountain pen or an old piccolo you haven’t picked up in decades, and let the thrilling creation of art bring peace, renewal and joy to your entire being. And above all, it’s my prayer that as you create and appreciate art, you will be inspired to give glory to the Artist who created us all.

“But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand” (Is. 64:8).

Stay fit; stay faithful.

Diana Anderson-Tyler is the author of *Creation House’s Fit for Faith: A Christian Woman’s Guide to Total Fitness* and her latest book, *Perfect Fit: Weekly Wisdom and Workouts for Women of Faith and Fitness*. Her popular website can be found at www.creationhouse.org and she is the owner and a coach at CrossFit 925. Diana can be reached on Twitter.

For the original article, visit www.creationhouse.org.

5 Dangerous Lies That Lead to Infidelity

When I was in college, I spent a summer working in a lock shop. My supervisor was an old, stocky African-American man named Rock with a raspy voice.

He was a hard-working man who had a nickname for everyone and was a great storyteller. One of my favorite stories he told was about a day he was asked to collect screws in the warehouse.

Apparently, the company was trying to save money and time for an in-house building project requiring screws. Rock's manager brought him into the warehouse and pointed to the high steel shelves. Then he asked Rock to remove all of the screws fastening the shelves to the walls.

Rock diligently got out a ladder and went to work, moving right to left. With each screw removed, the shelves stood in place. Finally, he ascended the ladder and removed the final screw on the last shelf. As he looked at the final screw in his hand, the last shelf leaned and crashed into the one next to it. The rest went down like thundering dominoes, discarding all of the contents in an enormously mangled mess.

The manager came running in to find a pile of destruction. Behind the debris was Rock standing sheepishly on a ladder holding one screw in his hand. They stared at each other until Rock broke the silence: "This is your fault."

Marital affairs rarely happen randomly. They result from believing and justifying lies. In marriage, believing lies is like removing the fastening screws. It is dangerous, causes bad decisions, and leads to broken marriages.

Exposing lies for what they are keeps us from falling into

their traps and knowing the warning signs of infidelity can keep the dominoes from falling.

Here are the dangerous lies that lead to infidelity. Although I am speaking to husbands, I believe these apply equally to wives as well:

1. My wife should make me happy/I deserve to be happy.

Marriage is actually not about happiness. It may be a part of it at times. The problem is that this attitude is selfishness, plain and simple. When this attitude is nurtured, spouse blaming becomes routine; bitterness is right around the corner. The list of negative qualities in the spouse gets longer and longer. All it does is attempt to justify the selfish attitude so the person is free to chase happiness or the greener grass. Marriage is about dying to self, giving and loving in good times and bad. That's why it's so difficult, but also so rewarding.

2. There's nothing wrong with a little flirting. It's exciting. When someone finds you sexually attractive it feels good, particularly when you feel the same way about them. No one wants to lose that feeling, they want it to continue. So they justify it by telling this to themselves accompanied by: *It doesn't mean anything.* It does. It's hurtful to the spouse because it trains the heart to wander. It's natural to have those feelings, but playing with them gives the wrong person an improper place in the heart. Flirting is like entering a river with a powerful current that ends at a large drop off.

3. What she doesn't know won't hurt her. This attitude can take root in the person doing something they know would make their spouse upset. They recognize it's wrong and probably feel guilty, but don't want to stop. In an attempt to make themselves feel better, they simply tell themselves: *It's not like I'm hurting anyone.* It does hurt. Secrets cause disconnection. Spouses can intuitively sense when there is

distance, no matter the degree. They may not address it, but they sense it. Believing a lie like this is just the beginning of allowing disconnection to enter the relationship. The distance just gets wider and wider until this person connects to someone else.

4. I have sexual needs. Food is a need. Sex is not a need, it's a desire. An attitude such as this one gives sexual urges too much power. It is also a subtle way to justify pursuing sex outside of marriage. Once it's justified in the person's heart and mind, acting on it becomes easier.

5. Our marriage problems are HER fault. Marriage relationships consist of two people. One person might be more responsible, but not completely to blame. This is a convenient way to avoid responsibility. Anytime a person avoids responsibility, blames others or justifies themselves, they become colder. Walls of defense get fortified and the separation begins. Note: There are occasions where one person is completely to blame, but those are rare.

Can you think of any more?

BJ Foster is the content manager for and a married father of two. For the original article, visit .

12 Mental Tricks to Beat Cravings and Lose Weight

Most of us have tried to lose weight at some point or another. It may have been for a special occasion, a lifestyle change or any other reason, but we're all aware of the dedication and hard work it takes to beat cravings and lose weight.

Here are some ways you can make the process easier and more fun:

1. Visualize an internal pause button. “If someone were to ask to borrow a lot of money, most people can stop and say, ‘I’ll think about it,’” said Coral Arvon, Ph.D., director of behavioral health and wellness at Pritikin Longevity in Miami, Florida.

However, when it comes to taking care of our bodies when faced with chocolate cake or a favorite treat, we no longer have that internal filter.

“Think ‘pause,’ and consider your decision for 10 minutes before making an actual decision,” Arvon suggested. If it makes the decision easier, visualize a big red ‘Stop’ sign or button that you can imagine whenever you’re tempted to go for another slice.

2. Substitute junk food with healthy foods that resemble junk food. We are attracted to colorful candies and foods with interesting textures. When healthy foods resemble our favorite junk food, we are more tempted to substitute it. For example, for the crunch and salt of potato chips, you can make or buy crispy kale chips. Frozen yogurt and iced smoothies are a great substitute for ice cream. Over time, our taste buds and brain will adjust and learn to like these healthier options.

3. Imagine yourself eating. Thinking about eating a bag of candy makes it more likely you’ll eat less of it when you actually start eating it, according to a 2010 study by Carnegie Mellon University researchers. Study participants who visualized eating 30 M&Ms before indulging in a bowl of the candies ate fewer M&Ms than two other groups who imagined eating only three candies or no treats at all.

4. Tell yourself you can have anything. Diets where you are supposed to go hungry or eat a minuscule amount of food are never, ever successful. Putting yourself in control of a diet

where you can are free to have whatever you like but choose not to is more powerful.

Amy Goodson, RD, sports dietitian for the Dallas Cowboys and co-author of *Swim, Bike, Run, Eat: The Complete Guide to Fueling Your Triathlon* says that “You want to make changes you can do for the rest of your life. The key is to eat what you want, but not everything you want,” Goodson said. “You can still enjoy one to two splurges during the week as long as you stay on track the rest of the time.”

5. Go back in time. Goodson offers another helpful tip to stay healthy: Portion off your snacks like you are back in preschool

“Many people get in trouble with snacking because they eat too much. So trick your mind into eating less by portioning your snacks in small baggies. This helps you feel as if you’re eating ‘all’ of something, which satisfies your brain.”

6. Plan your junk food. Planning and control are the two major factors that lead to a successful diet. There is no reason that you can’t have your favorite junk food once in a while, if you are able to control and plan your junk food intake.

“Instead of waiting for a temptation to strike and only then trying to handle it, plan to have one indulgent or “junk” food a day, preferably after dinner,” says Judith S. Beck, Ph.D., president of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Philadelphia and clinical associate professor of psychology in psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania. “It’s easier to resist cravings during the day if you know you are going to have your favorite food that night.

It also helps to have healthier junk food such as nuts and trail mix around instead of waiting till you’re really hungry and grabbing the first Doritos bag or chocolate bar you see.

7. Create a Top 10 list of distractions. Sometimes we eat out

of sheer boredom instead of actual hunger. Create and write down a list of your 10 favorite things to do so that the next time a craving strikes, you can pick an activity from the list instead. List down things you enjoy, such as playing a video game, calling a friend, meditating or surfing online.

8. Fool your eye. Usually, people feel full when they see an empty plate. Essentially, you can 'fool' your eyes and your brain into thinking that you ate a lot by using smaller plates. Visual satisfaction leads to feeling satisfied with what you ate.

Another way to feel full is by focusing on the meal instead of the TV or your phone. Eating in only the kitchen or dining room—not in front of the TV—can also help you lose weight, according to a Cornell University study.

9. Train your resistance muscle. Along with the 'Pause' button, visualize a resistance muscle that you exercise every time you restrain from eating something unhealthy. Like every other muscle, it makes it more likely that the next time you have a craving you'll resist it.

10. Set your phone to send you motivational messages. Nowadays, we're barely ever without our smartphones. You can use your phone to set a reminder or show messages that encourage you to stick to your diet: "I could eat whatever I want, OR I can lose weight and be healthier," or "If I eat food I haven't planned to eat I'll get momentary satisfaction but I'll feel bad later."

Observe yourself during the day to see at what times you usually get hungry. It may be that after lunch slump or after dinner if you stay up late working. Set messages for that time to remind yourself to snack healthy.

11. Stay clear of TV while eating. Two groups of women were studied while they snacked with or without TV. One group was offered one type of snack, while the other group had the

choice of four snacks. Everyone ate more while watching the tube.

You might notice that you finish a bag of chips or junk food while you were watching your favorite episode. Your brain concentrates on the TV instead of the food and you inevitably end up overeating.

12. Use the “apple trick.” Are you hungry enough to eat an apple? This is the core of the ‘apple trick,’ when you can figure out if you’re genuinely hungry or just tempted to eat something you see around.

“When you crave a salty or sweet treat, ask yourself if you’d eat an apple,” Goodson said. “If the answer is yes, you’re hungry and it’s OK to have a small snack. If not, drink some water, because you’re not really hungry.”

If you are looking to lose weight and keep it off, join Dr. Colbert’s 42 Day Can Do Weightloss challenge by signing up for free at .

Don Colbert, M.D. *has been board certified in Family Practice for over 25 years and practices anti-aging and integrative medicine. He is a New York Times best-selling author of books such as The Bible Cure Series, What Would Jesus Eat, Deadly Emotions, What You Don’t Know May Be Killing You, and many more with over 10 million books sold. He is the Medical Director of the Divine Health Wellness Center in Orlando, Florida, where he has treated over 50,000 patients.*

For the original article, visit .

Prophetic Strategy: Praying Out the Prophecies Over Your State

Prophetic strategies are vital to seeing awakening manifest in this hour. Although I believe 2 Chronicles 7:14 is the foundation for transforming revival, there are specific strategies God will give to build on top of this foundation.

One of those strategies is praying out the prophecies over our states. That's what Florida intercessors started doing in April. The Lord gave this prophetic strategy to Linda Milligan, co-director of Key of David House of Prayer in Fort Myers, Florida, and she asked me to help lead the charge every Thursday night.

This is Scriptural. One way we fight the good fight of faith is to wield the Sword of the Spirit—and sometimes that means wielding the prophetic words of God: “This charge and admonition I commit in trust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with prophetic intimations which I formerly received concerning you, so that inspired and aided by them you may wage the good warfare ...” (1 Tim.1:18, AMP).

An Arrow in the Quiver

Toward the end of our first prayer call, I had a vision of an arrow being put into a quiver. The Lord told me that these prayer calls—these calls in which we pray out the many prophecies that have been declared over our state in the decades past—are an arrow in our quiver.

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In other words, it's a new weapon for the season in which we

find ourselves. This arrow in the quiver is a prophetic strategy that can be used to hit our prayer target. Our prayer target is awakening. We want to see Florida, widely known in the nation as the Forerunner State or the First Fruits State, fulfill its destiny.

That said, we recognize that these calls are not the end all. They are but one arrow in the quiver—one strategy that Lord has given us. But I believe it's a strategy that will lead to a tipping point to bring revivals in cities from the Panhandle all the way down to the Key West. And I believe it's a prophetic strategy that intercessors in other states can use to see their destinies come to pass.

God's Hands is on Our Hands

After the vision, the Holy Spirit took me to 2 Kings 13. Here we find the prophet Elisha sick with the illness from which he would eventually die. King Jehoash of Israel came down to meet him and the prophet gave him a prophetic strategy:

“Take bow and arrows. And he took bow and arrows. And he said to the king of Israel, ‘Put your hand upon the bow.’ And he put his hand upon it, and Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands. And he said, ‘Open the window to the east.’ And he opened it. Then Elisha said, ‘Shoot. And he shot.’ And he said, ‘The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria. For you shall smite the Syrians in Aphek till you have destroyed them’” (2 Kings 13:15-17).

When I read this Scripture, the Holy Spirit impressed on me that as we pray out the prophecies, His hands would literally be upon our hands. The Holy Spirit will labor with us to release the prayers. The angels of God will hearken to the voice of God's prophetic words to wage war in the heavenlies against the principalities and powers that are delaying the prophetic promises (see Psalm 103:20). This is powerful!

Strike the Ground!

That wasn't the end of Elisha's instructions to King Jehoash and it's not the end of this prophetic strategy, either. Let's review Elisha's next instruction to the king:

"Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, Strike on the ground. And he struck three times and stopped. And the man of God was angry with him and said, 'You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you had destroyed it. But now you shall strike Syria down only three times'" (2 Kings 13:18-19).

We're praying out the prophecies over our state but this is not a one-time prayer call. This is a strategy that brings victory through consistency. On the call I declared that we would not stop striking the ground but we would strike and strike and strike and strike and strike—and keep on striking until we see God's will manifest over our cities and in this state.

I believe this is a strategy for the body of Christ in this hour. Intercessors, I urge you to pray into this and see if God would have you implement a similar prayer call in your state and corporate prayer meetings in your city. General cries of repentance and prayers for awakening are important but God is breathing on this strategy to pray out the prophetic words over your cities, regions and states.

Pockets of true revival are breaking out across America. Want to know more about the next great move of God? Click here to see Jennifer LeClaire's new book, featuring Dutch Sheets, Reinhard Bonnke, Jonathan Cahn, Billy Graham and others.

Jennifer LeClaire is senior editor of Charisma. She is also director of Awakening House of Prayer in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and author of several books, including *The Next Great Move of God: An Appeal to Heaven for Spiritual Awakening*; *Mornings With the Holy Spirit*, *Listening Daily to the Still*, *Small Voice of God*; *The Making of a*

Prophet and Satan's Deadly Trio: Defeating the Deceptions of Jezebel, Religion and Witchcraft. *You can visit her website here. You can also join Jennifer on Facebook or follow her on Twitter.*

This Dangerous Sugar Ominously Flies Under the Radar

By now you've heard about the dangers of sugar, particularly added sugars. It's a genuine health crisis.

The average American consumes about 22 teaspoons of sugar a day. That's drastically more than our bodies are equipped to handle. As a result, this excess sugar literally destroys our bodies in nearly every way imaginable. We're just not designed to process that much sugar.

Experts now know that heart disease is caused by inflammation, as are a whole host of other health problems. Inflammation is caused by a diet too high in sugar. Too much sugar leads to obesity, which in turn puts us at high risk for a myriad of other health problems, such as cancer, diabetes and arthritis.

As a result of increased education about the dangers of sugar, more people are trying to steer clear of the stuff. That's good. However, there is a certain type of sugar that is flying under the radar. People are eating it thinking it's healthy, but it's not. Far from it. In fact, it's worse than regular sugar.

It's called fructose.

Fructose is what makes fruit taste sweet. Fructose, which comes from fruit, is different from glucose, which is in table sugar. Our bodies react to fructose and glucose in different ways, and as you'll see, fructose is usually worse.

For starters, our body metabolizes fructose differently than glucose. Fructose goes straight to the liver, where it is promptly converted to stored fat, particularly belly fat, which, because of its close proximity to vital organs, is an especially dangerous type of fat, as opposed to fat in the hips and thighs.

Unlike glucose, fructose doesn't raise leptin. This is very bad because leptin is a hormone that tells us when we're full. That feeling of fullness, the feeling of satisfaction is called "satiety." It triggers your brain that you've had enough and you don't want more. Fructose does not activate that trigger, so you just want more and more of the stuff. There's no "off" switch! Fructose does not tell your body that it's satiated.

Fructose also can lead to insulin resistance. Like leptin, insulin is a critical hormone (actually all hormones are critical!) that, when working improperly or not at all can cause chaos throughout your entire system. Insulin is necessary to lower the impact of sugar in our blood. Another drawback to fructose is that it goes through a negative process called glycation, much more than glucose. The result is advanced aging.

By now you are probably thinking, "Wait, if fructose, the sweetener from fruit, is so bad, why do all these health experts tell us to eat fruit?"

When people advise eating fruit, they are talking about fresh, whole, fruit or fresh-frozen, whole fruit. That's the only kind of fruit we should be consuming. That's because the negative impact of the fructose in fruit is offset by the

wonderful fiber in fresh fruit. Fiber is the “meaty” part of the fruit ... the pulp, if you will, that is so good for us. Fiber slows down the digestion of the ultra-sweet fructose. Fiber is absolutely necessary when consuming fructose, and that fabulous combination is found only in fresh fruit. Also, fresh fruit contains all kinds of wonderful vitamins, phytonutrients, antioxidants and minerals.

Still, even with all the benefits of fresh fruits, most nutrition experts advise limiting the amount of fresh fruit we eat because of the negative impact fructose has on the body. If you are trying to lose weight, stick to no more than a cup of fresh fruit. Remember, you can still get fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients by eating vegetables.

Different fruits have different amounts of fructose. Berries and cherries contain the least amount. Therefore, when you choose to eat fruit, choose those kinds if at all possible. Fresh fruits that are high in fructose are pears, grapes, bananas and apples.

So that’s fresh fruit. It’s not so terrible. But what truly is terrible is fruit in any form but whole, such as fruit juice and fruit concentrate.

These items have all the negative aspects of fresh fruit, namely fructose, without any of the added benefits of fresh fruit such as the fiber and nutrients. Fruit juice and fruit juice concentrate have been stripped of the fiber and nutrients. And, as the name suggests, not only is fruit juice stripped of everything good, it is also concentrated fructose. So, for example, you could eat one apple and get a fair amount of fructose that is balanced by fiber and nutrients. That’s no so bad. On the other hand, you could drink apple juice, which has virtually no fiber and nutrients, but the fructose of several apples. The same thing goes for fruit juice concentrate. It contains the fructose of many

apples and none of the benefits.

The bottom line is, if you are eating any fruit product other than fresh, whole fruit, you are getting tons of fructose and very little if any fiber and nutrients.

As you can see, fruit byproducts are very harmful to our health. However they are marketed as healthy foods. Food manufacturers know that most people do not understand the health hazards associated with fruit juice and concentrated fruit juice. The people who make fruit juices and all the hundreds of fruit products from fruit roll-ups, to gummy fruit to breakfast bars know full-well that if you put the word, "fruit" on a product, people will mistakenly think it's healthy. Don't be fooled!

Don't fall for their other trick: "No Sugar Added." Super-sweet concentrated fructose, such as the kind in fruit juice, does not contain added sugar. But the fructose itself, in its stripped, concentrated form, is worse than sugar!

Check the list of ingredients. If you see any type of fruit syrup, fruit concentrate or fruit juice, put it back. Parents, if you think you are doing your kids a favor by feeding them fruit leathers or fruit snacks (there are a million of them in the grocery store, all marketed like health foods) you might as well just give your kids candy. Their bodies react to them the same way.

The bottom line is this: Stay away from all fruit juices and other fruit byproducts. The food manufacturers try to make us think they're healthy, but the only type of healthy fruit is fresh, whole fruit or fresh-frozen whole fruit. And even then, we should eat that sparingly.

For the original article, visit .

Successful Marriages Follow This Conflict-Resolving Plan

Most of us try to avoid conflict; however, a friend of mine actually picked a fight with his fiancée at that time, now his wife. Prior to asking her to marry him, he did his very best to cause a conflict between them.

Unlike most of us during those dating years who try to avoid conflict at all costs, he knew marital conflict was inevitable. He was not trying to get her to end the relationship, but he wanted to learn how they would handle conflict once they got married.

Every single relationship you have will experience some sort of conflict, especially your marriage relationship. That is not a bad thing when handled properly. Here is a three-step method to handling conflict that will give you a successful marriage:

1. Discuss the impact. When you are at a point of conflict, whether it is over something that was done, not done, said or not said, move the focus to the impact it's having on you and your spouse. This goes both ways. Don't just share your concern and how it impacts you, but allow your wife to do the same. Be quiet when she is sharing. This will allow you both to see it from the other person's perspective.

2. Discuss the desire. After you've expressed your concern and how it impacted you, what do you want to happen? What does your wife want to happen? Allow your wife to share what she desires. How would she have liked this situation to play out or what result would she like to receive? You share the same from your perspective with her.

3. Discuss the action. Now that you've discussed your concern, the potential impact, and your desire to make it right or better for you both, it's now time to discuss what *you* are willing to do. You didn't like how things played out, and you shared with your wife a better way to resolve the conflict. Now you must be willing to take action to create the outcome in your marriage that you both desire that will lead to success.

Jackie Bledsoe *is an author, blogger and speaker. He is also a husband father of three that helps men better lead and love the ones who matter most.*

For the original article, visit .

Rare Painful Skin Condition Won't Keep Mom From Her Blessings

Mother's Day has past, but I wanted to share something to bless and inspire each of the incredible moms I know, as well as remind daughters and sons of the depth and breadth of a godly mother's heart.

Over the last couple of years, I've had the immense pleasure of getting to know a wonderful woman through our gym, CrossFit 925. Jennifer Kipp, whom you are about to meet, has a megawatt smile and a pair of sparkling brown eyes that absolutely light up a room. There is an air of sweetness and joy about her that is infectious and spirit-lifting. And she possesses a strength that far surpasses what she's trained her muscles to do at the gym with barbells and kettlebells. It's a strength that allows

her to thrive with a thorn of no small size that impacts not only her daily life, but her daughters' lives as well.

I've asked Jennifer to be my guest blogger today because I want you all to get a glimpse of a marvelous mom who has learned, as Paul did, to be content in any situation, to consider trials as joys, and to believe without question that God's grace is sufficient. I pray her transparent testimony and God-given wisdom inspire you to fight the good fight of faith, whatever your fight looks like, and to know that our Father is ever-faithful, infinitely gracious and unfathomably good; He is the Author and the Finisher of our faith, and has an amazing plan for each of His children.

Jennifer Kipp's Story

My name is Jennifer and I am 29 years old, and just a few weeks away from turning 30. I have been married to my best friend for six years and we have two beautiful girls, Madison (5), and Makailyn (3).

I've been a stay-at-home mom since Madison was born. Even way before I had kids, I knew this is what my heart desired. It was very important for me to be able to work from home somehow and be able to be involved in the little details of my kids' lives. Losing my dad at 4 years old and growing up with a single parent who couldn't be there made it further motivates me to do whatever I have to to stay at home. While I am a stay-at-home mom, I am very busy and active. I'm involved with my church, there are playdates, I own my own photography business, I participate in school activities, I do CrossFit and am involved with other workout groups, and spend time with friends and family.

My life can look rosy and carefree at times, I admit. But what most people don't know or understand is that I, and my girls, have a rare genetic skin condition called Epidermolysis bullosa, or EB.

While family members and lifelong friends have known about it my whole life, what they don't know is exactly how I deal with it. I grew up being extremely shy about it. I hated talking about it. While we have a very mild version of it, it can be very painful.

EB is a genetic skin disorder characterized clinically by the formation of blisters brought on by mechanical trauma. There are four main types with additional sub-types identified. There is a spectrum of severity, and within each type, one may be either affected mildly or severely. EB ranges from being a minor inconvenience requiring modification of some activities, to being completely disabling and, in some cases, fatal. Currently, there is no cure for EB.

I only have EB on the tops of my hands, elbows, from the knees down, ankles and the tops of my feet. It also affects my nails and toenails. I have to wear lace or mesh swim pants while at the beach. While they are cute, I would give anything to show my legs. To have "normal"-looking feet. I never can throw on cute shorts. I always have to plan what I can wear for the occasion. I can't wear certain shoes or cute flip flops. I wear pants when I work out despite the Texas heat. The crazy thing is that depending on the weather, my skin can look clear, but of course during the summer, it's more noticeable and red.

It's easy for me to get down. I have to constantly remind myself that God doesn't make mistakes. We are made in His image, and while He chose me—and my daughters—to carry this, He knew we were strong enough to do so. He knew He could shine through us because of it. He knew it would bring me closer to Him. I look at my husband and see a heart of gold for falling in love with my heart before noticing my skin.

My girls show it on some of the same areas, but not as noticeably. My oldest has fallen several times and completely skinned open several layers of her palm. Each time she cries

for approximately 15 minutes, and is then up playing and laughing again. Her strength amazes me. The hard part is holding her down while she's screaming because I have to change the bandage every day until it's healed.

People don't see or hear me talk about the "behind-the-scenes" much. The last time Madison really hurt her hand she said, "Mommy, why does God want me to hurt? Why did He gives us this?"

Imagine how my mommy heart felt in that moment. What do you say to something like that? I ask myself that very question. All I can do is trust Him; my whole life has been learning to do so.

For much of my life, I wanted to pretend this condition wasn't there. But that would soon change, only with the Lord's divine assistance.

Being thin growing up used to be so easy for me. I could literally eat whatever I wanted. But when I hit my 20s, got married, and had babies, that all changed. I felt like I had let myself go. I made a commitment to overhaul my diet, and dropped 40 pounds. And then, as someone who didn't enjoy working out, I started Zumba. Zumba was followed by running, and then running led me to CrossFit. CrossFit has now led me to be more open about EB, publicly.

My life has been modified because of my skin. My ankles and legs usually hurt 80 percent of the time. The throbbing doesn't go away, but I've learned to tolerate it and it doesn't bother me much. I began learning that taking care of my body is not just physical, but is spiritual, too. It has been freeing and has brought healing for me. I never used to show people my legs. My friends will tell you that and now I have a private EB album for anyone who wants to see and learn more about it.

I feel like being open about this is causing me to step into

what God has planned all along. At times, I do feel like my story has become tiresome and redundant, and that it seems like I'm playing the victim to my circumstances. I certainly don't want pity. I want to inspire and encourage others through what I wrestle with and face on a daily basis.

CrossFit has been empowering for me, knowing that I can do this regardless of a small setback. Just because I'm susceptible to getting hurt doesn't mean I can't do it. Anyone can get hurt. Honestly, knowing that I can take a "battle wound" from a workout is the best part. I survived it. I did it without letting it stop me. CrossFit and working out in general have elevated my confidence to a whole new level.

I tell this story because our stories and life circumstances aren't for us to keep but for Him to use to bring healing for ourselves and others. My girls need me to be open about this because one day, when they are faced with the same things I was, they'll need to know they are stronger than they think. I want them to know they are beautiful despite their scars, despite what the world thinks or says is beautiful. I want them to be brave enough to tell their story and to share with others how EB has affected them and how they've overcome it.

My life is not perfect, and I struggle. My whole life has been a struggle, in fact. I used to care what people thought about me, but now I'm more focused on what my Creator thinks about me.

We cannot be fixed unless we are first broken before Him. He can take our broken pieces and use them in ways we can't even imagine.

If you are struggling with something, I encourage you to look past the struggle and see how God can change and use you. Never in a million years did I think someone like me would LOVE lifting weights. A girly girl such as myself who loves hot pink, fashion and so much more has no problem getting

roughed up. EB could easily stop me but I refuse to let it. Refuse to let your struggle stop you from doing what you want or love to do.

My life verse is Proverbs 3:5, and I'd like to encourage you with it:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding, but in all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths."

For the original article, visit .

Spiritual Judo: Using the Devil's Momentum Against Him

When my daughter was about 13, she was interested in taking self-defense classes. Because she was too young to go to the training center alone—and too old for the children's classes—we decided to take the training together.

We managed to work our way up to green belts before she ultimately lost interest. (For the record, we did not engage in any spiritual practices that are part of some martial arts training.) But I learned some mixed-martial arts lessons that apply to spiritual warfare—and those lessons have served me well.

Put another way, while I was practically learning sidekicks and roundhouse kicks and back kicks, I was also discerning new ways to put my spiritual enemies in strangleholds. Point-blank, I discovered how to use the enemy's momentum against him. Instead of wearing myself out, I learned how to wear the

devil out.

Learning What Wearies the Enemy

Daniel 7:25 says the enemy comes to weary the saints, but through my mixed-martial arts experience I learned what wearies the enemy. I stopped growing weary in well-doing when I discovered the enemy grows weary in wicked doing. In other words, if we don't give up—if we keep pressing in—we will eventually outlast the devil. We'll win the wrestling match against principalities, powers and the like (see Eph. 6:12).

James, the apostle of practical faith, tells us to submit ourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee (James 4:7). The Amplified translation tells us to “stand firm” against him. Sometimes I think there must be a line of demons in single file waiting to take a shot at me because the submitting and resisting doesn't always seem to work immediately—yet I know the word is true. If we keep submitting and resisting, we will eventually outlast the devil (or devils if they are indeed standing in line waiting their turn to strike).

It's almost like a staring contest. The devil will look away first when the glory of God is shining through you.

I learned the principles of wearing out the enemy through mixed-martial arts, especially judo. The object of judo is to throw down or take down your opponent, immobilize them and force them to submit to your authority. I'm spiritualizing a bit, but that's the gist of it. The enemy wants us to submit to his authority. God wants the enemy to submit to the authority in Christ that He's given us. God expects us to enforce His will in our spheres of influence, and that often means engaging in spiritual battle. Christ won the victory. We enforce it.

Balance Is Vitally Important

In our spiritual warfare, we must remain balanced in more ways than one. First, we don't want to get off into any extreme spiritual warfare strategies that are not grounded in the Word of God. We'll end up in a ditch, or worse—like the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:14). Second, we don't want to hyperfocus on the devil—we want to hyper focus on God. Nevertheless, we need to stay watchful. We cannot ignore the devil.

Judo puts a strong focus on balance. If your enemy can get you off-balance, he can throw you. 1 Peter 5:8-9 (AMPC) tells us to:

Be well balanced (temperate, sober of mind), be vigilant and cautious at all times; for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring [in fierce hunger], seeking someone to seize upon and devour.

Withstand him; be firm in faith [against his onset—rooted, established, strong, immovable, and determined], knowing that the same (identical) sufferings are appointed to your brotherhood (the whole body of Christians) throughout the world.

Don't let the enemy throw you off-balance with his fiery darts. Don't give your mind over to thoughts of defeat, discouragement or frustration. All of these things will throw you off balance. Instead, stand in the evil day (see Eph. 6:13) and know that God is able to make you stand (see Rom. 14:4).

Using Your Spiritual Momentum

In judo, you use your opponent's momentum against him. At some point in your spiritual battle, the enemy will rise up and charge at you. This is when you can use spiritual momentum by moving in the opposite spirit and watch him fall.

Sometimes your enemies are unseen, but sometimes the unseen

enemy works through a person. When people come against you, the carnal mind wants to strike back twice as hard, tell everyone who will listen what they did to you, and otherwise make them pay.

To stand there and take it, to give away even more than what someone is trying to force from your hands, to pray a blessing on the ones who are cursing you ... that, my friends, is called moving in the opposite spirit—and in doing so you use the enemy's momentum to your benefit. Those who live a Sermon on the Mount lifestyle receive all the blessings Jesus promised in His timeless message. When you move in the opposite spirit, you avoid the bondage that the one who strikes you, sues you, takes advantage of you, gives you a hard time or mistreats you in any way, is living in.

You walk free—you walk in power. And if it's a person the enemy is working through, your response might even set them free, too. We overcome evil with good (see Rom. 12:21). Now, you can't try to move in the opposite spirit, not really. You have to get the revelation of it and move by His grace alone. When we move in the opposite spirit of the ones who come against us, we are moving in the Holy Spirit. And we are using the enemy's momentum for his defeat and our victory. Amen.
{eoa}

How Many EGR People Do You Have in Your Life?

Recently, a friend introduced me to a new term: EGR.

I'm not sure who coined the term EGR, but it's used to describe difficult people. It stands for *Extra Grace*

Required because the EGR person tries your patience, tests your social skills, and drains your energy. Everybody has EGRs in their life. And, at times, everybody is an EGR to someone else.

You might be tempted to ask, *How can I avoid them?* You can't. Or *How can I fix them?* You won't. The best question to ask is *How can I deal with difficult people well?* Why? Because your response is the only thing you can control.

So here are some of the difficult types of people we all meet in our daily lives and how to handle them:

The Hammer

There's a saying about hammers: "If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." This person is hard on everything and everyone. Nothing seems to be enough. Their way of dealing with life is very established. Hitting hard has been the answer for them for a very long time.

How to deal with the Hammer

Don't take it personally. They probably treat almost everyone like they are treating you.

It's tempting to try to ignore this person because of the way they pound on people. Separate the way they communicate from the points they make; otherwise, you might miss some good feedback or information.

The Megaphone

This person makes conversation difficult. They like to talk and often try to talk you into submission, making it hard to get a word in edgewise. This person often sees information as a sign of power or intelligence and is often trying to show their own value or authority through their one-sided conversations.

How to deal with The Megaphone

Start by listening, but don't let them go on forever. Once you have the point, politely interrupt them. Confirm you heard them correctly by summarizing their points back to them.

Keep your comments simple and focused so you don't encourage more rambling. And if the conversation goes too long, don't be afraid to politely end the conversation.

The Bubble Buster

This person simply can't or won't see anything positive in the world around them. Have a great idea? Their response, "Nope. Won't work." Or you give them what you believe is an awesome presentation and all they do is punch holes in it.

How to deal with the Bubble Buster

Understand there is probably some baggage in this person's life that is coloring their world gray.

Be a patient listener. Thank them for their input and critique.

Try to turn the conversation into a positive one by asking them to share with you what they do like about the idea, product or presentation.

The Volcano

This person is the unpredictable, volatile ticking time bomb. You've probably come across this person. Recently, I was stopped in heavy traffic and I was accidentally blocking a car from getting onto the road I was on. Well, the guy in the car was a classic Volcano as he demonstrated with his horn, his voice, and his ... "salute." You're never quite sure when or how the Volcano will erupt.

How to deal with The Volcano

Be humble without being a doormat. A gracious response can be disarming to the Volcano, indicating you're willing to own your own actions.

Assert your feelings without responding aggressively, which will only make things worse.

The Clam

This person handles stress, conflict or social interaction by going into silent mode. It can be hard to figure out what's really going on in their mind and heart, much less to interact with them.

How to deal with The Clam

Be careful not to dominate the conversation, even unintentionally. Let them know you want to hear what they're thinking and feeling when they are ready.

Ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer.

Be patient with them; impatience will only encourage more silence. Give them time, especially if a conflict has triggered their silence. Create a safe environment for them to share with you.

The Nitpicker

The Nitpicker is cousin to the Bubble Buster. Like the Bubble Buster, this person is highly critical and seems obsessed with finding mistakes. Nothing is good enough. This person also seeks out and works hard to find every little thing that is wrong with you or what you do. Nothing will stop them from telling you what is wrong with everything.

How to deal with The Nitpicker

Insecurity is often at the root of their criticisms. At times,

this person is looking for things to criticize externally to distract them from the negativity they feel about themselves internally.

Try to sincerely build them up by pointing out the good you see in them.

Avoid being defensive. Defensiveness is oddly affirming to the constant critic.

Challenge them by saying, "I think you make some fair points, but I'd also like to know what you see as good and right about this too."

The Victim

This person is the constant whiner, letting everyone know how their troubles and trials are the result of the actions of others. It's hard for them to take responsibility because they don't do introspection.

How to deal with The Victim

Set boundaries. It's not wrong to hear them out, but enabling their constant complaining by listening without boundaries hurts both of you.

Keep reaffirming your concern and care for them, but don't try to appease the complaining. Like a child who whines to get what they want, if you give this person what they want all the time, you only encourage them to do it more.

Ask them, "What can you do to make the situation better?" This may change their focus from blaming everything on others to thinking about the role they've played in the situation and what they can do about it.

Have you dealt with any of these types of difficult people? How do you cope with them?

Mark Merrill is the president of Family First. For the original article, visit .

WATCH: An Open-Door Access to Heaven

Harvest Time Ministries International Founder and CEO Rebecca King recently appeared on Sid Roth's *It's Supernatural* to explain how she received a revelation from heaven about an invisible "cylinder of light," or open-door access to heaven.

In this video, King says your "Jacob's ladder" is always available, and that Heaven is waiting to hear from you: