

The Tumultuous Middle East Grows More Chaotic Daily

If you thought the Middle East was confusing before, it just got a whole lot worse. Alliances are changing daily, borders are being redrawn, and countries thought to be allies of one side are becoming allies of the other.

ISIS or ISIL?

Just figuring out the real name of the bad guys is confusing. There has been a lot of speculation on whether the correct name to use is ISIS or ISIL, and what the difference is between the two. There is an easy explanation because both are translations of the original Arabic title of which the first three words are clear: Islamic State in Iraq. But, the translation of the last Arabic word *Sham* is much harder as there is no real English equivalent.

Sham was historically known as "Greater Syria" which is a vague area that encompasses modern Syria as well as Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and more. So to translate *Sham* as just "Syria" is very misleading because it implies that ISIS only wants modern day Iraq and Syria.

That is why another translation uses the English term "Levant," which is a vague but larger geographical area and is a better word than "Syria" to describe the territorial ambitions of the group.

Whereas ISIL is the better translation, most people use ISIS including yours truly. However, understanding the difference is helpful.

Is Islam Strengthening or a House Divided?

Another point of discussion taking place is whether Islam is

getting stronger or is a house divided that is destroying itself. At heart the situation in the Middle East is a violent Sunni-Shi'ite war that is redrawing borders in order to form a contiguous fundamentalist Sunni state in the Levant. ISIS is gaining territory and support for a number of reasons, including popular unrest against old regimes.

But ISIS is also exposing the true nature of Islam. While the West may debate the nature of Islam, the Muslim world knows that this jihadist Islam is based on the Koran and life of Muhammad and can be seen as the "pure Islam." ISIS is not doing anything that Muhammad himself did not do including beheadings and taking slaves as spoils of war. Therefore, they will gain the support of many Muslims.

But at the same time, some Muslims are beginning to speak out against this movement and advocate for a modernization of the Middle East with a more civilized society. Many are disgusted by this 7th century "pure Islam" and are seeking a better life. We should pray for them, that the Lord reveal Himself to them. May many find the Lord at this chaotic time.

The truth of the matter is that the divided house of Islam has already been weakening and this radical jihadist movement is a last-ditch attempt to return to the days of Islamic unity and glory by re-establishing the Caliphate (an Islamic state under one supreme religious and political leader, the Caliph, which is required in Shariah or Islamic law). It may look worse on the surface, but this movement is wreaking havoc on the house of Islam, and may be the violent earthquake needed to bring about much-needed change. The question is how long it will take and how many innocent lives will be sacrificed?

This process of change may take a very long time and be extremely violent, but it is very possible that Islam could lose its demonic grip on the minds and hearts of millions of people in the Middle East. We have seen this same phenomenon in Iran, a fundamentalist Islamic state, in which the younger

generation now wants to leave their 7th-century Islamic society and enter the 21st century. It is no coincidence that the underground church in Iran numbers over one million, and some estimate as high as five million, souls.

A Time For Prayer

While it is difficult to understand the chaotic politics and growing schisms in the Middle East, we always know to pray: for the safety of Israel, for the persecuted church, and for souls to be saved. Never has there been a greater need for prayer than now.

Israel is in an increasingly dangerous situation as jihadist forces are now on most of her borders. The only peaceful border is with Jordan and it remains to be seen whether Jordan will be able to keep its territory and sovereignty under an ISIS assault.

The Christian communities of Iraq and Syria are being driven from their homes and countries with nothing but the clothes on their backs. Those who have survived are in refugee camps facing a very cold and deadly winter. Worse yet is the betrayal they feel as the western Christian world sits silent.

The Islamic world is a house divided and jihadists groups are not only destroying the lives of Christians and other minorities, but also brutally killing any Muslim standing in their way. A mighty prayer movement could birth many souls into the Kingdom. but it takes Christians who are willing to give of their time and energy in fervent intercession as watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem.

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How to Talk to Your Son About Pornography

Pornography is a powerful threat to our sons. It skews their view of sex, love, women and relationships.

Obviously when many of us were younger, access to graphic sexual images was not as easy to come by as it is today. A magazine belonging to friend's dad or a movie on late-night cable TV was our most common exposure. Even in those seemingly more innocent days, there were things I saw at a friend's house at an early age that were confusing. Quite frankly, they were damaging.

It felt wrong, but, fearing I'd get in trouble, I never told my dad what I had seen. I wish I had. With a palpable feeling of guilt, I was left on my own to try and figure it out. My dad didn't have porn in our house, so naturally, he assumed I hadn't been exposed to it.

Things are so different now. Having the Internet on so many devices inside and outside the house means the barbarians are perpetually at the gate.

We can be more vigilant and protective about what our children see. However, we can sadly assume that our sons will be exposed to it at some point. Maybe the silver lining in that assumption is that they will not be left alone in processing it. The best way to fight it is to prepare them for pornography—expose the ugly reality of it and its many dangers. It may be difficult, but here are 3 points on how to talk to your son about pornography:

1. A momentary thrill leading to dissatisfaction, emptiness

and addiction. An explicit image is stimulating and causes a scientifically-proven chemical release in the brain. That is why we are drawn to it like to the ring in Lord of the Rings.

However, when the viewing is over, we are left empty, unsatisfied and full of guilt. Our conscience is telling us that something wrong has taken place. Sex is not wrong. Sex outside of the right context is wrong or, at the very least, not what it was made to be.

The quickest way to deal with those feelings is to try and get another thrill, but when we return to porn, it gives a diminishing return of enjoyment. In the end, we need more to experience less, resulting in addiction and chains. In other words, it is a road to an addictive prison cell. Don't be enticed down this road; choose the path that is life-giving.

2. Living in isolated fantasy versus living in connected reality. A full life is found in relationships and shared experiences. Those things are built in reality, not fantasy. Porn is about entering a fantasy world. The more time we spend in that world, the more we become isolated.

In essence, our soul becomes intertwined with something that isn't real. There's no connection, just loneliness exacerbated by guilt. When we fill our lives with nothing, we are left with nothing. Porn doesn't provide anything; it takes everything. Strong men of character are ones that are firmly founded in reality and relationships. Live in the real world.

3. An example of diminished, one-dimensional sex. One of the biggest and most dangerous of all lies is that porn stars know how to have the best sex. Great sex is experienced when two people know one another in emotional and physical intimacy. True intimacy and knowledge of one another comes in commitment.

When women know we are committed, we create an environment where they feel safe to share their whole selves with us. It's

a multidimensional connection, like a high wattage of electricity. Porn turns sex into mere physical acts. It is one-dimensional sex and will always fall short of what it could be.

In fact, it even falls short physically. We are all uniquely made. Personalities and bodies respond differently. Sex for a committed couple that continues to grow closer in love and knowledge of one another will continually get more passionate. It's like becoming an expert at playing an instrument.

A guitar is held and played much differently than a violin. The best sex is between a committed couple who has learned well how the other desires to be loved. Glorified actors who are actually deeply degraded and hurting people will never be able to come close to sex that good.

Sound off: What age do you think it is appropriate to talk to a boy about pornography?

Huddle up with your kids and ask, "Is there anything you've ever seen that was confusing that you would like me to explain?"

Related Resource: [The Effects of Porn on Marriage](#)

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How to Be Content When Times

Are Tough

No one is going to be bubbly when times are tough, but neither do we have to be discontent. When I was in business, I was surprised to learn we can be content in the depths of suffering—even severe, agonizing suffering.

The issue? Our circumstances don't have to determine our contentment. Paul wrote, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through [Jesus] who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:12-13, NIV). If we are in the center of God's will for our lives, we can bear up under any amount of stress. He will be with you.

Even in my darkest hours, when it seemed the full force of my adversaries and my own sins would surely crush me completely, there was a peace and a knowing that I was in the center of God's will for my life. It didn't happen at first, but only when I humbled myself, confessed and redefined my ambition.

This peace came even when I was still under the heavy hand of His discipline. But when we are out of God's will, then even unbridled success can taste sour and bitter.

The Holy Spirit teaches us all things and reminds us of everything Christ told us (see John 14:26). In a mysterious, unexplainable way, He tells us when we are in the will of God—even though our emotions may be overwhelmed with sorrow.

You've heard of "sweet" sorrow? The Holy Spirit is the author of sweet sorrow. In the depths of our calamity, pain, anguish and suffering, the Spirit of Christ ministers to us and tells us that what we are facing is part of God's plan for our life—a plan for good, not evil (see Rom. 8:28).

One of the most remarkable statements ever made by a human being was that of the apostle Paul when he wrote, "That is

why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Even when we cannot see a light at the end of the tunnel, and even though our emotions are frayed, we can know contentment in hard times by the inaudible voice of the Holy Spirit. "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings ... because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:3,5). We can delight in the fellowship that comes from sharing in Christ's sufferings. With a God so gracious as this, shouldn't we let Him be the boss of our lives?

You can trust Him. Seek His will. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Do not be faint-hearted. Delight in your circumstances. God is with you, He is good, and at just the right moment He will deliver you.

Until every church disciples every man ...

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10 Tips to Support Your Immune System

The idea of boosting your immunity is enticing for several reasons. The immune system is precisely that—a system, not a single entity. To function well, it requires balance and harmony.

There is still much that researchers don't know about the

intricacies and interconnectedness of the immune response. For now, there are no scientifically proven direct links between lifestyle and enhanced immune function.

However, here are some lifestyle changes you can make to help make things better:

1. Cleanse your colon. 70 percent of the cells that make up the body's immune system are found in the wall of the gut.

2. Oregano oil helps kill some of bad bacteria that may be dominating your digestive system. Take 200 mg three times a day.

3. Japanese mushrooms—enoki, shitake or oyster – are a great immune booster. They are loaded with ergothioneine, a powerful antioxidant, that does not get destroyed during the cooking process.

4. Support your adrenals. Take the adrenal fatigue quiz [here](#). If your adrenals are tired, get [Vitality Renew](#).

5. Fresh ginger. Include plenty of ginger in your juices and cooking. Ginger is a great source of zinc—a very important nutrient for the immune system.

6. Cleanse and support your liver. The liver functions as an organ of the immune system through the Kupffer cells that line the sinusoids. Kupffer cells play an important role by capturing and digesting bacteria, fungi, parasites, worn-out blood cells and cellular debris. This is why it is very important to do periodic liver cleansing along with liver support.

7. Juice everyday to get a variety of nutrients. Dark green, orange, red and purple vegetables are rich in antioxidants.

8. Take extra vitamin C to support your immune system.

9. Don't eat sweets including orange juice. Sugar of all types

depresses the immune system.

10. Get the amount of sleep your body needs. Powerful healing hormones are released when you sleep deeply.

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For the original article, visit juiceladycherie.com.

Part 2: The Roots of Messianic Judaism

One main factor in the survival of Pharisaical Judaism, which became what we know today as Rabbinic Judaism, was the surrender of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai. He opposed the war and would have been killed by the Jewish military leaders, mostly the Zealots, for treason, had he not been smuggled out of Jerusalem by his disciples in a coffin, where he promptly surrendered to the Romans.

“They carried the coffin to [General] Vespasian’s tent, where ben Zakkai emerged from the coffin. He told Vespasian that he had had a vision (some would say, a shrewd political insight) that Vespasian would soon be emperor, and he asked Vespasian to set aside a place in Yavne (costal city south of Tel Aviv) where he could start a small school and study Torah in peace.

Vespasian promised that if the prophecy came true, he would grant ben Zakkai's request. Vespasian became Emperor within a year, and kept his word, allowing the school to be established after the war was over" ([source](#)).

A Fatal Blessing

In the year 80 CE, Ben Zakkai was succeeded over the school in Yavne by Gamaliel II—grandson of the Gamaliel we see in Acts 5.

Gamaliel II will be remembered for one primary act. Despite the fact, as we will soon see, that the Messianic Jews had at least one synagogue of their own, it is believed many Jewish believers still attended traditional synagogue. Gamaliel wanted them out; so he added a 19th benediction called the *bircat haminim*, a blessing against heretics (more like a curse), to the *Amidah*. Interestingly the other name for the *Amidah* is the *Shmoneh Esre* (the 18 [benedictions]), but it should be called the *cha esre* (the 19 benedictions) for the one that was added. It was as if they wanted to quietly insert it without drawing attention.

The fact that it was placed at number 12 and not 19, adds some credence to this suspicion. It was intended to weed out Messianic Jews, who were being more and more considered heretics by Pharisaical Judaism.

Religious Jews recite the *Amidah* thrice daily and when they do, one of the prayers is directly aimed at Jewish believers, Nazarenes (as we were called then):

“For the apostates let there be no hope. And let the arrogant government be speedily uprooted in our days. Let the *nozerim* [Nazarenes] and the *minim* [heretics] be destroyed in a moment. And let them be blotted out of the Book of Life and not be inscribed together with the righteous. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.”

The Messianic Jews certainly could not pray a curse upon themselves that declared them apostates and heretics to be destroyed and blotted out. It is likely that Messianic Jews in large numbers ceased to attend traditional synagogue. However, over the next generation, with the decline of the Jewish wing, if you will, of the body of Messiah, church fathers began to claim that the Jews cursed Christians in their prayers. Action was taken to clarify this.

Without exception, the word *nozerim* was expunged from all Jewish prayer rites, and in many, substitutions were made for *minim* (heretics) and *meshummadim* (apostates), as in the accepted opening in the Ashkenazi rite: “may the slanderers (*malshinim*) have no hope.” ([source](#))

Prayer Replaces Sacrifice

More than anyone else, Ben Zakkai was responsible for the survival of Pharisee/Rabbinic Judaism. In Yavne, he birthed a school that became the worldwide center of Jewish learning. He reformed the Sanhedrin there with the blessing of the Romans. Without a Temple, Judaism would decline.

Unlike today, first century Judaism aggressively sought to expand through converts. Ben Zakkai realized that converts would not be attracted to a Temple-less Judaism and would instead flock to Yeshua (and they did). The focus of Jewish life had been the Temple and the sacrifices. It would have been great if he interpreted the falling of Jerusalem as judgment (as Yeshua predicted) and understood that in light of Yeshua’s death, the Temple was no longer needed. The writer of Hebrews said a few years before:

“By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear” (Heb. 8:13).

Bible teachers have wrongly interpreted this passage as God rendering the Torah, the Writings and the Prophets, obsolete.

For two reasons this is impossible. First, Yeshua said He did not come to destroy the Torah (Matt. 5:17). Second, almost all New Testament theology is based on the Hebrew Scriptures. Paul constantly quotes them, as do the gospel writers. What was obsolete, however, in light of the death of Yeshua, was the *sacrificial system*. Yeshua was the once-for-all-time and all-sin sacrifice.

Sadly Ben Zakkai could not see this and sought to create a *new Judaism*—a bloodless, sacrifice-less, Temple-less, Judaism. He convinced the newly established Sanhedrin to replace the need for sacrifice with prayer, quoting Hosea 6:6, “*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*” There would be no need to rebuild the Temple. Before this, sacrifice was central to Judaism.

“Temple ritual was replaced with prayer service in synagogues which built upon practices of Jews in the Diaspora dating back to the Babylonian exile ([source](#)).

Whenever God condemned sacrifice, it was not because He is condemning the very system *that He Himself established*, but rather He is condemning the people for forsaking Him while still offering sacrifices. In the context of the Hosea passage, this is clear. He continues the verse about desiring mercy, not sacrifice with, “*and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*”

God was not against sacrifice, but was seeking to confront hypocrisy; He was seeking relationship with His people.

Sadly one of the main arguments that Orthodox Jews use today to try and refute Messianic Judaism is that prayer and repentance are enough to atone for sin. Of course, this was not the Jewish view until after the Second Temple was destroyed.

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Lev. 17:11).

Even in the Babylonian Exile, the dream was always to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. We see in Lamentations a broken-hearted prophet, lamenting over Jerusalem's demise. Ben Zakkai's response is the opposite. He cared not for Jerusalem nor the Temple, but preserving the traditions of the elders, the Oral Law. It was successful and practical, but not the biblical response that we see after the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

"If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget *its skill!*
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy" (Ps. 137:5-6).

After Ben Zakkai, there is virtually no movement in Judaism to rebuild the Temple. Even those today who seek it are considered extreme.

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For part 1 of this series, click [here](#). For the original article, visit [messiahsmandate.org](#).

4 Ways to Create a Closer Family Bond

A closer family bond is the solution to many of the trials and tribulations life throws at the family. Those moments are inevitable, and the way to survive and conquer them is the same as it is for any other storm—create a solid foundation.

That foundation comes from strengthening the family bonds tightly so that they will not come un-tethered when the hard winds blow. This requires effort and intelligence because it's not an easy task.

So, what are the building blocks to help build a closer family bond? Practice effective communication, live unselfishly, lead with determination and pledge loyalty to the ones who depend on us. This is difficult and it requires true commitment.

There are a number of influences that can pull us away from leading our family in the ways that are most effective. So with that, let's take a look at the four ways to create closer family bonds.

1. Effective communication. Our children are not our friends. There is a distinct line of authority that must remain present in the relationship between parent and child. However, we not only must expect their trust and openness towards us but also work to earn and keep it.

Solutions to troubles always stem first from effective communication, and that requires a steady effort of trust building. We want our children to willingly inform us of the important matters happening in their lives. For more information on communication, check out our [10 Tips for Great Communication with Your Kids](#).

2. Live unselfishly. Problems arise when we put our own needs

above those of the family. Leadership, first and foremost, requires sacrifice. We have to become the anchor that all the others can depend on—without fail. If we do not do this, the family takes note, and it puts a crack in the family foundation. The family begins to drift apart into separate interests, weakening the bond until it becomes nonexistent.

3. Lead with determination. There is nothing simplistic about parenting in the 21st century and beyond. We, as parents, face an onslaught of voices and images attempting to take our authority and shape our children to their own desires. It takes fierce determination to stay true to the foundation we have put down for our family. We can't succumb to influences we know in our gut will work to tear our family apart. Stay flexible enough to know when you are off course; but otherwise, be uncompromising and courageous in fighting back those things that seek to weaken us.

4. Pledge loyalty. Pledge to your family that you will remain loyal to them through the highest and lowest moments. Even as the world may spin out of control around the family, you will remain a constant. This one action alone creates the basis of multigenerational families that endure the test of time.

Sound Off: Do you feel it is important that a family has close bonds and meaningful communication to be healthy? Huddle up with your family tonight and ask each member to tell you one thing they need from you they aren't getting.

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Is Your Marriage Contributing to Your Weight Gain?

Researchers have discovered that having a long history of depression and marital issues can contribute significantly to weight gain. These two factors alter the way your body processes fats, thereby, increasing body weight significantly.

The study population included women and men with high depression arising from marital wrangles. They showed a series of metabolism problems after eating food rich in fats, specifically, their bodies poorly burnt calories. After the meal they tested their blood versus that of people who did not bear these risks and realized it had higher levels of insulin and triglycerides.

In seven hours, depressed people with marital problems burn 188 calories less than those with flourishing marriages, and this can translate to gaining 12 pounds annually. These two problems significantly increase the risk of developing Metabolic Syndrome, a condition in which one has at least three of the five factors that significantly increase risk of hypertension and heart disease.

In addition to identifying the contribution of chronic stressors to developing obesity, the findings also point out the essence of treating mood disorders. Jan Kiecolt-Glaser, the director of the Institute of Behavioral Medicine Research at The Ohio State University and head of the research, said that having good mental health as well promotes physical fitness.

Kiecolt-Glaser, who is also professor of psychiatry and psychology, was quick to note that the findings may underestimate the potential health risks because it dealt with a single meal, yet most people take meals at intervals of 4-5

hours and often with their spouses. Since meals create chances for disagreements in unhealthy marriages, there may be a long-term pattern of metabolic damage arising from hostilities and depression.

Kiecolt-Glaser made the announcements in the company of Martha Belury, who is professor of human nutrition attached to The Ohio State University's nutrition department, at the New Horizons in Science Briefing that took place at ScienceWriters2014, a popular conference hosted by The Ohio State University once a year.

The research was discussed during their presentation "Metabolism: A new link between marital stress, depression and health."

The researchers used a sample of 43 healthy couples aged 24-64 years, and whose marriage had lasted at least three years. During the study the participants had to complete a series of questionnaires including assessment of depressive syndromes, past mood disorders and marital satisfaction.

The study lasted for two days in which participants ate biscuits, eggs, gravy and turkey sausage totaling 60 grams of fat and 930 calories. The researchers designed the meal similar to the usual fast-food; its calorie and fats content matched those of MacDonald fries, a Big Mac or a Burger King double whopper.

Two hours post-meal, the couples were to discuss and try to settle at least one of the issues that the researchers predicted could be source of their marital conflicts. The topics revolved around communication, money and in-laws.

The researchers carefully videotaped all the discussions before leaving the room, and later on categorized them as hostility, psychological abuse, withdrawal or distress-maintaining conversations.

After taking the provided meals, the researchers tested the participants' energy expenditure 20 minutes per hour until the seventh hour. The data was obtained by measuring using special equipment the exhaled and inhaled airflow of carbon dioxide and oxygen. They drew several blood samples after the meals and measured insulin, triglycerides and glucose and compared them to the baseline levels.

When the results were analyzed and released, participants with unhappy marriages and a history of mood disorders burned around 31 fewer calories every hour and their blood had approximately 12 percent more insulin than participants with happy marriages at first measurement. The level did not match those of participants with lower levels until after two hours of eating. Insulin plays a great role toward fat metabolism and storage.

For people with hostilities, the level of triglycerides reached the peak in the fourth hour. A high level of triglycerides increases potential for cardiovascular disease.

According to Belury, insulin increases appetite for food and accumulation of fat tissues in the stomach; this combined with significantly lower energy expenditure increases the chances of being obese. Elevated triglycerides also lead to heart disease, alongside high levels of insulin; the high levels of triglycerides are indicative of impaired fat and sugar metabolism. They are the major contributing factors to developing diabetes and heart disease.

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For the original article, visit drcolbert.com.

14 Skills for Being a Real Man

With some food, shelter and minimal nurturing, 95 percent of males will grow up to become 18- to 21-year-old adults. Unfortunately, time alone doesn't make a real man.

The real measure of a man is what he does and the decisions he makes every day. Manhood is about skills, not age.

From my personal shortcomings and through my professional education and experience, I have learned that as one walks with God, 14 skills and characteristics help make a real man.

1. Vision: Know your place in the big story. Your story is a small chapter in God's grand narrative. God is the Creator, Author and Authority. You aren't God and aren't as smart or powerful as God. Make Him, not you, your Lord and let His instruction manual be your life's guide.

2. Power in the mind of Christ: In 1 Corinthians, Paul teaches us that we have the mind of Christ, so let's use it. When tempted in the desert or persecuted before His crucifixion, Jesus used His mind to control Himself, submit to and understand His Father's will and fight temptation. You are in a war, and the battlefield is your mind. Absorbing God's Word, engaging with God regularly and exercising your mind by making godly decisions is powerful.

3. Gratitude: When life is going well, we often get proud and arrogant, which leads to mistakes. When we are prideful, we do

things on our own and forget God's power and wisdom. When life is going well—and when it's not—be humble and thankful and acknowledge God.

4. Godly character in adversity: Adversity shows your true colors. When adversity strikes, show godly character. Be a clear thinker and a problem-solver; don't generate more problems with your attitude or instability. Your response to adversity shows whether you are just a hearer of the Word or actually a doer of the Word.

5. Courage: When you see injustice, stand up for what is right. Don't cave to the opinions, power or influence of evil. Regardless of the repercussions, be a clear protector of truth and right—with an attitude of love.

6. Servant's heart: Especially amid differences of opinion, put the other person's needs in front of your own, unless the request is psychologically and spiritually unhealthy for them or for you. Be a servant to the people whom God has put in your life.

7. Relational mind: God wants our relationship more than our obedience. He doesn't make us clean ourselves up before we can be adopted by Him. Obedience without relationship makes a robot. Value relationship above obedience.

8. Leadership: True leadership requires having godly influence, often by serving, never by overpowering or controlling. Be a godly influence to those around you. Doing the right thing with the right attitude in the right relational way will influence others positively and prevent them from influencing you negatively.

9. Being a light: Shine in this dark world and during dark storms. Be positive, thankful and encouraging. Share God's blessings with others.

10. Trustworthiness: Be diligent and focused on the everyday

tasks God gives you, as these little tasks prepare you for bigger tasks. As you pass the smaller tests, God gives you bigger opportunities.

11. Being a clear communicator: Just like a good parent communicates instruction and expectations by working within a child's surroundings, God does the same by orchestrating our daily circumstances. Our communication involves the decisions we make in those circumstances, stating (and living), "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done," not, "My kingdom come, my will be done."

12. Self-reflection: Always evaluate what you do and why you do it. Continue what you are doing well; correct the rest.

13. Teachable humility: Always remember that none of us is perfect and we each have areas to improve. Accept God's guidance, conviction and correction directly or through others, rather than fighting to prove that you're right or better than others.

14. Emotional self control: God gave us negative feelings as a warning system, alerting us when something is wrong or potentially dangerous. Problems arise when we let emotions rather than facts become our decision-making system. Don't give small events super-sized importance and emotion. Enjoy your feelings, but control their amplitude and influence; don't let your emotions control you.

Nobody scores a perfect 100 percent on all of these skills, but score yourself and commit to intentional activities to raise your numbers even higher in the future.

Remember, decisions determine your life, so choose well.

Dr. Karl Benzio is the founder and director of Lighthouse Network and a Christian psychiatrist. He has helped thousands of individuals discover freedom from addictions and emotional stress. In addition, he has worked with people around the

world to enhance their personal growth, conflict resolution and decision-making skills.

4 Ways Parents Discourage Their Kids

Most parents want to encourage their kids and motivate them to be the best they can be. But in attempting to do so, well-meaning parents sometimes end up discouraging their kids instead.

Here are 4 ways you can discourage your child:

1. You offer too much help. So, your child wants to learn how to rollerblade. You wisely bundle him up in a helmet and pads and walk with him outside. At that point, he wants to try on his own. But you start shouting suggestions, walking along beside him and instinctively reach for him every time he falters. To you, this is just safety 101. To him, it's you showing that you don't think he can do it on his own.

The same thing can happen when your child is working on a paper for school, trying a new hairstyle, or learning a new skill. You see all of the ways to make their task easier and more efficient and you tell them all of your ideas. Unfortunately, your offer of help sends the message that you don't believe in them. Your child will either say something like, "I can do it myself!" Or, they'll give in to your suggestions, do it your way and miss an opportunity to grow.

2. You compare them to others. Sure, you're just trying to motivate them by pointing out the successes, or failures, of others. "Josh, I noticed that Caden stands with his feet a

little further apart when he's batting. You should try it too." Or, "Sophia, your sister had that project when she was in second grade. Let me find her old project for you to review."

Again, your intentions are noble, but by comparing your child to someone else, you're telling them that they are not good enough.

3. You always expect more. There is a time and place for everything. But when your child tells you they got a B on a really hard test, it is not the time to say, "That's great. Do you think you can make an A next time?"

Our children want us to praise them for their hard work and success without always looking for how to make them perform even better. So if your son tells you his coach thinks he's really coming along with his football training, don't jump in and suggest ways he can do even better. Let your child bask in the praise, minus any ideas for improvement you might have.

4. You minimize their victories. This can happen in a couple of ways. First, you just don't realize what a big deal it is to them so you offer half-hearted comments. To prevent this from happening, really tune in. If your child is soft-spoken, you might need to really listen to see if something is important to him. If it is, lavish him with praise.

The other way parents minimize their children's victories is by being too busy or distracted to fully join the celebration. This one can be tough. You've just walked in the door when your daughter wants to show you her 10-page project with a million details. As much as you want to put her on hold, give her the praise she's craving.

What are some other ways you find yourself discouraging your kids?

Mark Merrill *is the president of Family First. For the*

original article, visit markmerrill.com.

Share Your Plate and Lose the Weight

God gave me an idea a couple of years ago called "Platesharing," which can help Christian hunger charities and may help you lose weight at the same time. I'll give more details in a moment, but first let me tell you what re-sparked the idea:

A TBYT reader named Eileen shared a [powerful video](#) with me by author Lisa Bevere. In the video, Lisa mentioned the sin of Sodom. Now before you think, "I already know what it was," you may not know the whole story. Here is what Ezekiel 16:49-50 says Sodom's sins were:

"Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abomination before Me; therefore I took them away as I saw fit" (NKJV).

Did you catch the part about "fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy"? The people were so self-focused and concerned about their own comfort that they ignored the needs of the poor.

One of the things God put on my heart as I sought His help with my overeating was to take a portion of our food budget and start donating it to a hunger relief organization. I realized that the money I was spending on snack and junk

food for myself could be put to better use helping feed someone else that didn't have any food.

I once read a statistic that overeating costs the average U.S. family \$498 per year. That works out to \$41.50 per month!

If overeating is a problem for you, have you considered where is that \$41.50 going? Is it going to an over-full plate? Second helpings? Fast food? Pizza deliveries? Vending machines? Chips, cookies, crackers, candy, or sodas? Hey, I'm just naming where some of my money used to go.

Do me a favor: Examine your food spending, starting today. Your last four grocery receipts would be a good place to start. Simply review the receipt and see if you have any non-essential food items on there. Circle those items and add up the amounts spent.

Then, over the next month, keep a log of any additional food spending, such as the money you might spend on the vending machine, in a coffee shop, on fast food, etc. Add it up and see how much excess you have.

Finally, prayerfully consider donating the monetary equivalent or whatever amount God puts on your heart to a local food bank or hunger relief organization.

Here are three Christian hunger charities that I recommend because they are all registered with the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) and have high ratings at Charitynavigator.org, another group that measures financial accountability:

- [Food for the Hungry](#)
- [Samaritan's Purse](#)
- [Compassion International](#)

To help you deal with overeating habits as you are striving to share your food with the needy in the meantime, I recommend

you read the following articles:

- [The Secret Shame of Overeating \(the toxic thinking behind the habit\)](#)
- [The Belief Systems that Keep you Overweight](#)
- [Things to Do Besides Eating](#)

God bless you!

*Once 240 pounds and a size 22, **Kimberly Taylor** can testify of God's healing power to end binge eating. She is an author and the creator of the Christian weight loss website www.takebackyourtemple.com. Visit today for inspirational health and weight-loss tips.*

For the original article, visit takebackyourtemple.com.