

Practice Intentionality in Your Walk of Faith

Every Sunday we have an early morning prayer meeting at church. We pray from a psalm for 30 minutes (without asking for anything—a time purely for praise), then we walk the sanctuary in prayer for 15 minutes, and finally we meet back together to intercede for the services and ministry of the day.

Since we started this intimate time in 2007, we have never ceased to be amazed at how the Holy Spirit always meets with us. We never leave without a feeling that we have been in the sweet presence of Jesus.

One week, however, was a bit of a challenge. The prayer room is just off of the platform, and the praise team has practice at the same time that we are praying. That has never been an issue. In fact, the muffled music often adds a “worship” dimension to our time.

For some reason that week, the amp for the electric guitar had been turned and was not only facing the wall of the prayer room, but it was also right up against it. It was deafening! That is really the only way to describe it. The sound was decibels above noisy.

I’m sure there was a technical reason for it that someone who is tone deaf like me would never understand. However, it *felt* as if the amp was in the room with us. The walls shook. Our chairs vibrated. You could *feel* the “music” (I use that term loosely).

Amazingly, a wonderful thing happened: The distraction brought a new level of focus and diligence to our prayers. We moved in closer to each other. We became very intentional about concentrating on the prayers and praises being expressed by

others in the room. Our minds pressed in on the purpose for which we had gathered.

The apostle Paul knew about distractions. In Philippians 3, he shared that he was “forgetting what lies behind [good and bad] and straining forward to what lies ahead, I *press on* toward the goal”(vv. 13-14, AMP, emphasis added).

Dr. Tim Clinton often says that the “pain, pressure and pace” of life are issues that can make the wheels come flying off. When Jesus taught the parable of the seed and the sower, it was the “cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” that choked out the good seed (Mark 4:19).

Everyday activities distract us from an intimate relationship with our Father. Our endless pursuit to “get ahead” takes our *focus off of the real goal*. Even just trying to make ends meet—pay the weekly bills, put food on the table and gas in the car—causes such stress and mind-consuming anxiety that our time in the presence of Jesus takes a back seat.

The rush of other things always tends to obscure our needed concentration on God. The world has turned the “amp” toward the wall of our lives, and we too often struggle to hear God’s voice over the sound of the noise of the world.

This week in your Christ walk, focus. You will need to be intentional about this thing we call a Walk of Faith. It doesn’t just happen. Let other things (even good things) come and go as they may, but you keep your focus and never allow *anything*—or *anyone*—to obscure the life that is a result of an intimate, personal, vibrant relationship with your heavenly Father.

Never be hurried out of the relationship of abiding in Him. The most difficult thing in a believer’s walk is to learn to be diligent and consistent in worship and prayer—*personal* worship and prayer, a *lifestyle* of worship and prayer.

As you press in, seeking Him, drawing near to Him, you will sense and feel Him *drawing near to you ...* I promise.

Prayer Power for the week of May 19, 2014

This week, focus on the real goal of cultivating your relationship with God by spending time with Him in personal worship and prayer. Make this a priority above everything else, and thank Him for ordering your steps and empowering you to accomplish all He's ordained for you with others.

Remember those who are suffering through personal losses and pray for those ministering overseas and at home to spread the gospel and provide food, clothing and medical care where needed. Pray that we as believers would be constrained to fast and pray for our nation to fulfill God's purpose, stand with Israel and continue to be a blessing to the world (Phil.3:13-14).

What You Don't Know About Salt That Could Be Killing You

Have you seen the *Andy Griffith Show* episode where two prisoners trick Barney into freeing them? Knowing Barney is sensitive about the rinky-dink Mayberry jail, the convicts describe how guards at "the big house" conduct shakedowns to confiscate hidden weapons.

To prove his jail is worth its salt, Barney marches the men out of their cell to do his own shakedown, only to have them escape out the courthouse door.

Just like con men and concealed weapons, sodium can be sneaky. It hides in all kinds of food ingredients and additives. If we did a “sodium shakedown” of what you ate yesterday, would we uncover hidden salt with the potential to cause bodily harm?

Shakedown of the Typical American Diet

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans advocate eating less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (about one teaspoon of salt) per day. But the average American consumes 1/2 teaspoon more than that—about 3,400 milligrams of sodium per day.

That extra 1/2 teaspoon doesn't sound so bad until you learn the second part of the recommendations. Only 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day are suggested for:

- Anyone with hypertension (high blood pressure)
- All people over 40
- All African-American adults

Two out of three Americans fall into one of these “salt sensitive” groups. So for most of us, the typical 3,400 milligrams of sodium is *more than double* what we should be consuming.

Why Is Salt a Problem?

For many people, greater sodium intake is directly linked to higher blood pressure. When your blood pressure goes up, so does your risk of stroke and heart disease.

Where's the Sodium?

Let's do a shakedown of your diet to find hidden salt. Believe it or not, your saltshaker is usually not the culprit. According to the American Heart Association, more than 75 percent of our sodium intake comes from salt added during manufacturing, such as processed foods and mass-produced restaurant meals. The rest comes from the natural salt content of foods and what we sprinkle on while cooking and eating.

Studies show that when consumers eat reduced-sodium foods, they usually don't add salt at the table to compensate. So the best way to cut your sodium intake is to make changes before the food comes to the table—what you buy and how you prepare it. Steering clear of processed foods and not using salt in cooking are a great start.

Here are substitutions that will lower your total sodium intake:

INSTEAD OF . . .	CHOOSE THIS
canned vegetables	fresh or frozen veggies
dill pickles	sweet pickles, cucumber slices
canned soups and broths	low sodium broths and soups
seasoned rice or pasta mixes	plain rice or pasta flavored with herbs and spices
sauces, marinades or salad dressings	make your own or choose lower sodium brands
pepperoni or sausage on pizza	plain ground beef or ground turkey cooked with spices
processed meats (cold cuts, hot dogs, bacon, etc.)	roasted meats like turkey breast, chicken, pork loin or roast beef
frozen entrees (lasagna, mac & cheese)	homemade entrees made with herbs & spices
flavored or microwave popcorn	air-popped popcorn: spray with cooking spray and season with herbs & spices

pretzels and flavored nacho chips	unsalted pretzels and plain potato chips
salted or dry roasted nuts	unsalted or raw nuts
salt in cooking	fresh or dried herbs, spices, citrus juices, cooking wine
salt shaker	Mrs. Dash or other salt-free seasonings, pepper shaker or mill

When in doubt about a food's sodium content, check the amount of sodium per serving on the nutrition label. Remember, eating two servings will double your sodium intake. In processed foods, you'll see oodles of additives and preservatives on the ingredient list that contain the word *sodium*. That's your signal to put the box back on the shelf.

Limiting sodium while eating out can be tricky. Many menu items at fast food establishments and sit-down restaurants are loaded with salt or monosodium glutamate (MSG), a salty flavor-enhancer. When ordering at restaurants, always request that your meal is prepared without salt and MSG.

What About Potassium?

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans also recommend that we eat potassium-rich foods, such as fruits and vegetables. That's because getting enough potassium may help counterbalance dietary sodium and lower blood pressure. The recommended potassium intake for adults is 4,700 milligrams per day. To see a chart of selected foods and the amounts of potassium they contain, click [here](#).

Good sources of potassium include:

- Fruits (especially apricots, avocados, bananas, cantaloupe, honeydew, grapefruit, kiwifruit, oranges, mangoes, papaya, prunes)

- Vegetables (especially beets, greens, potatoes, pumpkin, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes)
- Legumes, nuts and seeds
- Milk and yogurt
- Whole grains

Salt substitutes that replace some of the sodium with potassium are available, but can be harmful for some people, especially anyone with kidney problems. Always check with your doctor before using products containing supplemental potassium. Getting potassium from foods is your best bet.

The Bottom Line

Too much sodium can adversely affect your health. Conduct your own shakedown to nab sneaky sources of hidden salt and get rid of them. Stick to a diet that emphasizes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and low-fat dairy products as a prudent approach to increasing potassium and other minerals necessary for good blood pressure control.

To read the chapter on sodium and potassium from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, click [here](#).

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Why Married Men Must Dump

Their Secret Crush

Oh, you don't know who the secret crush is in your life? Well, maybe that's because you have become too comfortable with looking forward to seeing the daycare girl, the grocery girl, the after work girl or even the church girl. Still not following?

Here's some background ...

My buddy told me a story the other day about a married friend of his who had a "daycare girl," and, yes, it was at the church daycare. Each time this married man would show up to church, he would gladly take the kids over to the daycare.

Why? Because he wanted to see his "hush" crush. In other words, he looked forward to seeing a woman that worked there that hit all the right points in him. Something about her drew him in, in the worst way. I can't verify if it was her look, her fragrance, her long or short hair, or just her personality. It was something though. That something was slowly destroying his marriage and he couldn't even see it.

Personally...

I can't sit here and type and say that I have never struggled in this area. Early in my marriage and before I truly understood the consequences, I would somehow spot a beautiful woman. If I was at work, I'd get distracted with one woman in particular. If I went out with friends to a restaurant, a particular waitress might catch my eye and, you guessed it, I'd keep going back for looks.

It required no communication between the two of us, the looking and wondering was enough. These innocent occasions became a primary contributor to the decay of my marriage. At the time, "I didn't know or understand," was a convenient excuse. But now I know and NOW I take action to protect my

marriage. Oh, and by the way, NOW you know TOO! Keep reading...

Who might not understand?

First off, the newlywed man might not get what I'm saying. Why? Because when marriage is new and fresh, his bride is every bit his crush. In most cases, both spouses have attempted to be at the top of their game for each other. And there is very little history to make you want or think you need another woman.

Hear my words newlywed men, do everything you can to protect your marriage right from the start. Understand that looking at other women with lustful eyes will only damage the view you have for your bride. No matter what, do everything you can to make her the only woman gaining your affection. If you find yourself being brought into the beauty of another woman, do what you can to control your emotions, get out of the situation and if needed [refer to these 5 tips](#).

The second type of man who might not understand is the man in denial. Typically, this will be the man who has been married for some time. The years have maybe taken its toll on the marriage and there is plenty of history to use as excuses. He might have one woman in particular he likes, or he might have multiples set up at different areas.

Hear my words, men. "Stop, look and listen. Are you in denial about the habits, thoughts and actions that are threatening your marriage? Are you blatantly permitting your marriage to be destroyed? Just because the years have rolled on, a nuclear argument had occurred, or the communication has dried up, doesn't permit us to fix our issues by finding someone else.

Find help now! Get out of your comfort zone and talk about your marriage concerns with a trustworthy and stable married male friend or pastor. Hiding your problems will only seek to force you out of your comfort zone in a much more costly way. Let him know what has been going on in your marriage and

seek to find a resolution to your problems. Whatever you do, do not seek advice on how to fix your marriage from one of the women you secretly (or openly) like. [More on that topic here.](#)

If you think your situation is different or requires more specialized attention, please use [this contact page link.](#) Let's talk it out.

What does the Word say?

A great section of verses for this type of scenario can be found in Mathew 19:1-10. The Pharisees are doing their classic test questions against Jesus about the topics of marriage and divorce.

Jesus responded with some critical information for them and for us. Having a secret crush is plain out sexual immorality. This is one of the only reasons it is acceptable to entertain divorce. Another important thing to note is that husbands are to cleave to their wife. Husbands are to become one with *their wife*, not their secret crush. Dig in and read the rest of this verse section if you haven't yet. Start praying now that if you're in this scenario, God would bring closure and clarity to your situation.

What's the Bottom Line?

Your wife should be the only crush you have in your life (other than Jesus). She is the one you chose to say your Vows to and she is the one you swore your love to for the rest of your life. To seek a crush elsewhere would question your very integrity. It would violate the very laws of what it means to be a good and faithful husband.

In case you didn't read the above paragraphs and need to know why your secret crush could destroy your marriage. Here are 3 reasons why you need to stop seeing her and 3 ways to help you

in the future:

Why you need to stop seeing her now:

1. Because you're are a one-woman man, and your wife deserves your all.
2. Because a secret crush will destroy you and your marriage (matter of time)
3. Because Jesus has made you one flesh with your wife. To betray your wife would be to betray Jesus.

3 tools to help you in the future:

1. Open up and be honest about your situation with a friend now. Confess it, explain it, seek forgiveness and start working past it.
2. The next time the opportunity comes up to see her. Man Up and either get in and get out or request that your wife handle the situation or duty at hand.
3. Get humble and start praying for your wife and your marriage. Make your focus more on Jesus and your wife. It will change everything.

What are some ways you're able to avoid distractions and stay focused on your marriage?

Manturity is a blog built on establishing spiritual maturity in today's man. The goal is to assist men in building better marriages and help them in grow in maturity and explore different aspects of manhood. Manturity.com features new weekly blog posts, daily social media updates and a powerful resources page. Stay up to date with the Manturity blog communities on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/manturity) and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/manturity).

For the original article, visit manturity.com.

9 Ways Worship Has Changed in 10 Years

If you were attending a church worship service in 1955 and then returned to the same church in 1975, the changes would be noticeable but not dramatic. Churches were slow to change over that 20-year period.

If you, however, attended a church worship service in 2000 and then returned to that same church in 2010, there is a high likelihood you would see dramatic changes had taken place in only 10 years.

What, then, are some of the most significant changes? Please allow me to offer some trends from anecdotal information, church consultations and objective research.

As a caveat, some of the data-based research comes from an excellent study, "[The National Congregations Study](#)" by Duke University. This study, fortunately, is longitudinal, so it is able to look at changes over many years. But the study is also dated, with the latest data reported in 2007.

From these multiple sources, I have assembled nine changes that have come at a rapid pace in many churches. Please note my perspective. I am offering these from the perspective of a researcher; I am not making qualitative assessments. Also, with every trend there will be thousands of churches that are exceptions to the norm. But these are the changes in the majority of churches in North America:

1. Choirs are disappearing. From 1998 to 2007, the percentage of churches with choirs decreased from 54 percent to 44 percent. If that pace holds to this year, the percentage of

churches with choirs is only 37 percent.

2. Dress is more casual. In many churches, a man wearing a tie in a worship service is now among the few rather than the majority. While the degree of casual dress is contextual, the trend is crossing all geographic and demographic lines.

3. Screens are pervasive. Some of you remember the days when putting a projection screen in a worship center was considered a sacrilege. Now most churches have screens. And if they have hymnals, the hymnals are largely ignored and the congregants follow along on the screens.

4. Preaching is longer. I will soon be in the process of gathering this data to make certain the objective research confirms the anecdotal information.

5. "Multi" is normative. Most congregants 20 years ago attended a Sunday morning worship service where no other Sunday morning alternatives were available. Today, most congregants attend a service that is part of numerous alternatives: multiservices, multicampuses, multisites and multivenues.

6. Attendees are more diverse. The Duke study noted the trend of the decrease in the number of all-white congregations.

7. Conflict is not increasing. [In a recent post](#), I noted the decreasing frequency of worship wars. The Duke study noted that overall church conflict has not increased over a 20-year period.

8. More worship attendees are attending larger churches. Churches with an attendance of 400 and up now account for 90 percent of all worship attendees. Inversely, those churches with an attendance of under 400 only account for 10 percent of worship attendees.

9. Sunday evening services are disappearing. This issue has stirred quite a bit of discussion the past few years. I plan to expand upon it in one of my next posts on my blog. Stay tuned.

I have tried to present these changes from a research perspective instead of injecting my opinions or preferences. Obviously, I have my own, but I would rather hear from you.

Do you see these trends in your local congregation? What would you add?

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For the original article, visit thomrainer.com.

Solving the Galatians 3:16 Mystery

Replacement theology hangs its hat on one verse primarily in order to say that all of God's promises to Abraham's seed were to one person only—the Messiah.

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Messiah” (Gal. 3:16, NIV).

This is part of a series we are doing exposing the problems in fulfillment theology as was taught specifically by Dr. Gary Burge in February 2014 at the “Christ at the Checkpoint”

conference in Bethlehem.

Burge and other adherents of fulfillment theology argue that the promise was never to Abraham's descendants but to Yeshua alone. In Him, they say, all the promises of Abraham are fulfilled.

Israel's Calling—One Big Joke?

Does not such a theory make the entire calling of Israel, 400 years of slavery, the Temple, the sacrifices, the exiles and the judgments one big joke?

They base this primarily on this one verse in Galatians while ignoring others that clearly contradict their interpretation. Again, I refer to Dan Juster's statement in rebuttal to Dr. Burge, regarding the need of the Old Covenant to understand the New. Dr. Burge takes Galatians 3:16 as if it is floating alone on its own, without any connection to the rest of the Bible. This is a dangerous exegesis—form of interpretation. Galatians must not only be seen in light of the Old Covenant, but in light of Paul's promises to Israel in Romans, written several years later!

Is vs. Was

Clearly, Paul was not referring to seed as *singular* in every aspect, as he affirms the calling on ethnic Israel *even in unbelief* (Rom. 3:1-4, Rom. 11:29). In Romans 9, where Paul intercedes for Israel—to the point of being willing to trade his salvation for theirs—he says:

“Theirs *is* the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs *are* the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised!” (vv. 4-5, emphasis added).

In all these statements, as Dan Juster pointed out, Paul uses

the present tense “is” and “are” as opposed to “was” and “were.”

Paul Continues to Be an Israelite

And look what the apostle says in Romans 11:

“I say then, has God cast away His people (Israel)? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, *of the seed of Abraham*, of the tribe of Benjamin (v. 1, emphasis added).

Paul emphasizes his continued life as a Jew based on being part of the *natural seed of Abraham*. It cannot be argued here that Paul is referring to the spiritual seed of Abraham or Abraham’s children by faith. The context is clearly natural Israel. He uses his natural heritage to make the claim that God has not repudiated his people and that God has a future plan of salvation for Israel.

But Paul is not saying something new in Romans 11. He is affirming the promises of Abraham and Moses, because already in the middle of the first century, hardly two decades after the Resurrection, Gentile believers were already dismissing the nation of Israel. Paul speaks to Dr. Burge and others prophetically in Romans 11, warning them not to turn against Israel. (See verses 17-24.)

Stars of the Sky

In order to embrace Burge’s view of Galatians 3:16, we must rejected large portions of the Bible.

“[God] took [Abram] outside and said, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” (Gen. 15:5) (The Hebrew word for offspring, *zarah*, is the same Hebrew word that Paul was referring to when he writes *seed*.)

And to be clear, the word seed in Hebrew, *zarah*, when referring to offspring, is singular and plural in the Hebrew,

just as *deer* or *fish* in English. It makes absolutely no sense to assume that Paul is intending to say that seed is singular when it refers to the stars of the sky.

Then there is Genesis 22:17: “I will surely bless you and make your descendants [zarah] as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.” One may say that it is not referring to Jews, but future believers—Abraham’s spiritual children. Read the next verse: “through your offspring [zarah] all nations on earth will be blessed.”

Let me make that clearer. Burge says that Abraham’s natural seed was referring to one person only—the Messiah. How can one person be described as the sands of the seashore or the stars of the sky? It’s not logical.

So, if we can easily conclude that the promise to Abraham was to his physical descendants, plural, what in the world was Paul doing in Gal. 3:16? We will answer that in the next blog.

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

Could a Mediterranean Diet Ease Your Health Woes?

According to recent analysis, it has been found that people coping with Type 2 diabetes show slower progression of the disease while adhering to the Mediterranean diet that comprises of fish, olive oil and whole grains, as compared to cutting down on the consumption of fat.

The trial conducted on diabetics for more than eight years concluded that people who followed the Mediterranean diet were found to wait longer before taking their medication. Also, many of these people went into remission from their diabetes, as compared to people who were on a low-fat diet.

According to Dr. Leanne Olansky, an endocrinologist at the Cleveland Clinic, there are many factors that determine the Mediterranean diet as being useful for people suffering from diabetes and metabolic syndrome. However, this trial was controlled and proved that it was the diet that was helping people manage Type 2 diabetes.

These types of trials are done to find the effectiveness of medicines for certain diseases. Olansky says that it is a common notion that fats are bad for your health; however, now it is clear that it depends on the kind of fat you are consuming.

Katherine Esposito, a researcher of diabetes at the Second University of Naples in Italy, says that people having diabetes should consider including healthy foods in their diet, and a Mediterranean diet is a nourishing alternative. It is essential to cut down the consumption of calories to maintain optimal health, and restricting the consumption of fats is a good way to keep a check on the amounts of calories you intake daily. However, it is also vital to ensure that you

are taking good amounts of healthy fats too.

Esposito says that one of the main features of the Mediterranean diet is the minimum percentage of fat that one should consume daily, and it is around 30 percent of your daily calories. According to the Mediterranean diet, the main fat should be strictly monosaturated and should come from olive oil.

What's the Study?

Esposito and her colleagues continue to examine people included in a previous study where participants who were diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes were divided into two groups. One group followed a Mediterranean diet and the other group followed a low-fat diet. Both diets were specifically created to keep the symptoms from getting worse and for maintaining optimal blood sugar level without the use of medicines for as long as possible.

Researchers ensured that women consumed only 1,500 calories and men consumed only 1,800 calories per day on both diets. The participants in the group who followed Mediterranean diet were allowed to eat an abundance of fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Red meat was not allowed and was replaced by fish and poultry.

Nutritionists conducted monthly sessions with them and ensured that less than half of their calories were derived from carbohydrates and at least 30 percent from fat, specifically olive oil.

On the other hand, low-fat diet limits the consumption of fats and sugary snacks. Participants were allowed to consume only less than 30 percent of their daily calorie intake.

The Result

It was found that after a period of four years during the

study, most participants in each group still had not required medication for diabetes. After a period of six years during the study, mostly all the participants who were consuming a low-fat diet required medication. And finally, after eight years, all participants who were consuming the Mediterranean diet needed medication to control the disease.

The results published in *Diabetes Care* indicate that a condition termed as “diabetes remission,” where people have healthy blood sugar levels with no symptoms of diabetes, was seldom found in both groups. However, it was more common in participants who consumed Mediterranean diet as compared to those who were on low-fat diet.

Olansky says that restricting the consumption of saturated fat, particularly that found in red meat, is beneficial for diabetics. She further states that it is still not clear why the Mediterranean diet helps to control blood sugar level; however, many believe it is from the healthy sources of unsaturated fat and protein that comes from fish and olive oil, less red meat, and more amounts of fibrous diet.

Esposito says that the Mediterranean diet is an effective way to include healthy and tasty foods in your diet. Most of the participants continued to add Mediterranean foods in their diet even long after the study was completed.

Olansky states that people easily lost excessive weight while on the Mediterranean diet, as compared to a low-fat diet, since it is easy to follow. She further says that patients often ask about the changes they can make in their lifestyle and diet besides medication to fight diabetes. According to Olansky, suggesting lifestyle and diet modification to control disease is beneficial advice a doctor can give to his patients.

Don Colbert, M.D., is board certified in family practice and in anti-aging medicine. He also has received extensive

training in nutritional and preventive medicine, and he has helped millions of people discover the joy of living in divine health.

For the original article, visit drcolbert.com.

With Middle East Pastors Targeted for Death, 200 Christian Leaders Demand US Government Intervention

More than 200 Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant leaders, as well as several secular leaders, joined forces to call on the U.S. government to take action to protect Middle East Christians and other minorities under threat from extremism.

“We, as Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant leaders, have come together in this joint pledge to speak up for our fellow Christians and other threatened religious communities in the Middle East,” their joint statement says.

The grass-roots campaign, which is not spearheaded by any particular organization, was launched Wednesday by U.S. Reps. Frank Wolf, R-Va., and Anna Eshoo, D-Calif.

“We are compelled to take this action by the grave dangers that confront the churches of Egypt, Iraq and Syria, in particular,” the statement says.

“In a siege that has accelerated over the past decade, Egypt, Iraq and Syria—the three Middle Eastern countries with the largest Christian communities remaining—have seen scores of

churches deliberately destroyed, many clergy and laypeople targeted for death, kidnapping, intimidation and forcible conversion, and hundreds of thousands of believers driven from their countries," it adds.

The statement also urges the U.S. government to take action in several specific areas, including appointing a special envoy on Middle East religious minorities, reviewing foreign aid and other assistance, and providing direct assistance to refugees in the Middle East.

"While the fate of Christians in the Middle East is unquestionably important to Christians, it should be emphasized that the continued presence of Christians, along with other religious communities, is in the national interest of that region's countries and it is in America's own national interest," the statement says.

For the original article, visit jns.org.

5 Ways to Stop the Marriage Death Spiral

The kids are in bed and the chaos subsides for another night. The TV flips on as they both collapse into their usual spots. He's in a recliner, and she's curled tight on the couch. He goes to grab some chips and asks her if she wants anything. She replies, "No thanks. I've already got a yogurt."

Not another word will be spoken for the next hour as the onscreen drama they are watching "together" plays out. At 10 p.m., she pecks him weakly on the lips to say goodnight and he responds, "Be there in a bit," as he flips the input over to

the video game console. This scene repeats night after night.

In the modern marriage and family, it is extremely difficult to maintain the special connection between two people that first brought them together. It's not malicious in intent by one partner or the other; it is simply the path of least resistance and where many marriages wind up. While that bond slowly fades away, other things will begin to fill that void. That is the marriage death spiral.

How can you detect if your marriage is going down a dangerous path? Here's how to stop the marriage death spiral:

1. Put faith in the center. The No. 1 way to keep a marriage together is to always keep your shared faith in the center of your relationship. Marriages that are committed to a relationship with and a commitment to Jesus Christ will build foundations strong enough to withstand all the storms life is surely going to bring.

2. True and total commitment. Albert Einstein said, "Only one who devotes himself to a cause with his whole strength and soul can be a true master. For this reason mastery demands all of a person." It takes just that to make a marriage last until its golden anniversary. There can be no halfhearted attempts. That's what's known as a covenant marriage.

3. Open and honest communication. Keeping the lines of communication open in relationships and giving to them honestly is probably the most-used advice given at allprodad.com. There is almost no problem, outside of physical health, that can't be solved when people are honestly communicating their thoughts and feelings.

4. Limit television and all devices at home. We are a wired society now, and it becomes more difficult to unplug with each day that passes. But we must continue to fight the distractions that take us away from our personal connections. If your wife is on Facebook and you are playing video games or

watching a game for the one to two hours you get alone at night, the relationship is going to keep sinking like a rock. Keep a tight limit.

5. Purposeful romance. The longer a marriage goes on, the more challenging romance becomes. It's all been done, and it's all been said. This is why people start to stray as they seek out the magic that came with the newness of the relationship and the wonderful feelings it brought way back when. Make it a top priority to set aside alone time together to date or just simply connect. It's hard and it takes a dedicated and purposeful spirit, but it is worth it.

Related Resource: "[5 Strategies to Find Unity in Your Marriage](#)"

Huddle up with your wife tonight and discuss where your connection is and where it needs work.

All Pro Dad is Family First's innovative and unique program for every father. Their aim is to interlock the hearts of the fathers with their children and, as a byproduct, the hearts of the children with their dads. At [AllProDad.com](#), dads in any stage of fatherhood can find helpful resources to aid in their parenting. Resources include daily emails, blogs, Top 10 lists, articles, printable tools, videos and eBooks. From [AllProDad.com](#), fathers can join the highly engaged All Pro Dad social media communities on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#).

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Are You Setting Your Kids Up for Obesity?

As you know, Sunday was Mother's Day, and you might have noticed that from sunup to sundown, Facebook and other social networking sites were being plastered with pictures of beloved moms and their doting children and sentimental sugar-sweet statuses counting blessings received and lessons learned from good ol' Mom.

No doubt most of you visited your mom with a card and flowers or called her up on the phone if she lives far away. And while you talked with her, you were likely reminded of all the selfless acts she's done for you, all the unconditional love she's shown you, the grace and forgiveness she's extended toward you, the tear-filled nights when she prayed with you, the mornings when she led you by the hand to your Sunday school classroom.

I got to thinking of some of the greatest ways in which my mom and dad have impacted my own life. After reflecting upon how marvelous their spiritual influence has been, the first thing I listed was their example of physical activity. I truly believe that the emphasis they placed on playing sports and spending time outdoors, their long, regular walks together, my mom's Proverbs 31-style arms (super-strong and never idle!) and my dad's nightly weightlifting sessions in the garage instilled in me the principles of health and fitness that I carry and share each day.

At our house, playing video games was kept to a minimum; TV was limited to an hour a night with the family (typically spent watching *Wheel of Fortune* and sitcoms like *Home Improvement*), and as for smartphones and iPads? Well, those weren't a problem because they didn't exist.

If you are leading a sedentary lifestyle and maintaining an unhealthy diet, it's important you realize that your choices are affecting more than just yourself. Here are a few ways how:

1. Children will watch more TV if you do. ScienceDaily.com posted a study revealing that children are more likely to watch high levels of television if their parents do. The study found that higher parental TV viewing was associated with an increased risk of high levels of TV viewing for both boys and girls.

For girls, the relative risk of watching 4+ hours of TV per day was 3.67 times higher if the girl's parent watched 2-4 hours of TV per day, when compared to girls who watched less than two hours of TV per day. For boys, the relative risk of watching 4+ hours of TV per day was 10.47 times higher if the boy's parent watched more than four hours of TV per day, when compared to boys who watched less than two hours of TV per day.

Dr. Mike Knapton, associate medical director at the British Heart Foundation, succinctly said, "Parents and children rooted to the sofa watching over four hours of television each night paints a worrying picture of kids' daily habits."

2. Obese parents may have obese children. According to an article published by the University of Rochester Medical Center, obesity is the most common health problem facing children today. Twenty-two percent of children and teens are overweight, and over 15 percent are obese.

Studies of shown that children whose parents are overweight or obese are at higher risk for becoming obese themselves. The *Journal of Pediatrics*, for instance, identified five independent risk factors for childhood weight gain and obesity, the main one being parental weight.

Poor eating habits are often established during childhood,

says the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). More than 60 percent of young people eat too much fat, and less than 20 percent eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. By the time a child reaches adolescence, his or her obesity, rather than the parents' obesity, is the most important predictor of being obese in adulthood.

Nearly 65 percent of obese adolescents will still be obese as adults, even if neither parent is obese.

The activity level of children and teens has dropped. They spend much of their leisure time watching television, playing video games or using a computer, and, as a result, their weight has increased.

For children who are predisposed to gain weight, prevention is critical, says the CDC. Obesity increases the risk for other health problems, including Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, breast cancer, colon cancer, gall bladder disease and arthritis.

3. Our generation is the most sedentary. An analysis of studies on millions of children around the world finds they don't run as fast or as far as their parents did when they were young. On average, kids today take require 90 more seconds to run a mile than children did 30 years ago.

Grant Tomkinson, an exercise physiologist at the University of South Australia, led the new study. Researchers analyzed 50 studies on running fitness—a key measure of cardiovascular health and endurance—involving 25 million children ages 9 to 17 in 28 countries from 1964 to 2010.

The studies measured how far children could run in 5 to 15 minutes and how quickly they ran a certain distance, ranging from half a mile to two miles. The researchers concluded that today's kids are about 15 percent less fit than their parents were, researchers concluded.

Not surprising given these findings, heart-related fitness has declined 5 percent per decade since 1975 for children ages 9 to 17.

“It makes sense,” says Dr. Stephen Daniels, a University of Colorado pediatrician and spokesman for the American Heart Association. “We have kids that are less active than before.”

Health experts recommend that children 6 and older get 60 minutes of moderately vigorous activity accumulated throughout each day. Today, only one-third of American kids meets that standard.

“Kids aren’t getting enough opportunities to build up that activity over the course of the day,” Daniels says. “Many schools, for economic reasons, don’t have any physical education at all. Some rely on recess [to provide exercise].”

While it’s true that schools have a role to play in educating students about the importance of health and ensuring that they receive plenty of physical exercise, ultimately the responsibility to inform, instruct, nurture and guide our nation’s children rests on parents. Through your example as a health-conscious mom or dad who strives to care for your body as a precious temple of the Holy Spirit, your children will learn to behave similarly. And they will rise up to call you blessed.

“She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed” (Prov. 31:27-28, KJV).

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 dianafit.com, and she is the owner and a coach at [CrossFit](#)

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

Franklin Graham Implores Evangelicals to Support Israel

“I support Israel,” Franklin Graham said last Thursday during the 13th annual Israel Solidarity Event at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C. “I support Israel not only because I worship a Jew but because of what the Bible says about Israel and the future of Israel.”

The solidarity event was part of the National Day of Prayer activities, and Graham was asked to speak about why evangelicals support Israel.

Before Graham presented his message, Israeli ambassador Ron Dermer addressed the evangelical leaders in attendance.

“To be Israel’s ambassador to America is to be the ambassador to the friendliest country on earth to Israel,” Dermer said. “And the anchor of support for that friendship in America is you. You are the anchor of that support.”

Graham pointed to God’s promise to give Israel the land of Canaan; God’s choosing of Israel to be a people for Himself; God’s instruction to pray for the peace of Jerusalem; and especially God sending His Son, Jesus—a Jew—to bring the hope of eternal life to those who turn from their sin and put their faith in Jesus.

Graham told the story of Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. "In the past," he said, "there were many wicked, evil men who in the name of Jesus Christ used this story to persecute the Jews. To kill the Jews. They called them 'Christ-killers.'

"But it wasn't the Jews that killed Christ. It wasn't the Romans that killed Christ. It was each and every one of us. Because the Bible says, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' [John 3:16, KJV]. You see, God sent his Son on a rescue mission, and Jesus Christ voluntarily went to the cross to take your sins and my sins. It was you, it was me, it was all of us that nailed Him to the cross. ... And I thank God that He loved me enough to send His Son to take my sins and to die on the cross for me."

Graham concluded, "Mr. Ambassador, we love Israel, and we love you, and we thank God for your country. And I can't speak for evangelicals, but I can just say for me, I'm going to support Israel."

For the original article, visit billygraham.org.