

# 7 Meaningful Touches Every Husband Should Use When Reaching for His Wife

I recently called to check on my father, who wasn't feeling well. After talking for a few minutes, I asked about his wife (not my mother). They've enjoyed a wonderful relationship for 45 years of marriage. He said, "She is doing well, sitting here holding my hand."

I must admit, I thought of that as a Hallmark moment—a seasoned couple sitting in their cabin on a mountain in Arkansas, still in love and holding hands.

The human touch has amazingly powerful benefits to both parties—physically, emotionally, physiologically and even spiritually. Studies have revealed innumerable benefits. Unfortunately, some men have allowed their hands to withdraw from reaching for their wives.

Here are seven meaningful touches every husband should practice when reaching for his wife:

1. Reach for your wife first thing in the morning. It may be a gentle pat as you're getting out of bed or a hug when you first see each other, but reach for her before you get busy about the day.
2. Throughout the day, a text or quick phone call is a great touch of affection. A simple "I love you" or "Just thinking about you and looking forward to the evening" will go a long way in letting her know she is on your mind.
3. Write a note the old-fashioned way. We're so tech-savvy these days that sometimes an old-fashioned approach is more meaningful.

4. Whether your wife loves flowers, chocolate or shoes, sending these on “regular” days rather than typical celebration days will be a huge touch.

5. Save some energy so you can give your wife special attention when you return home. Embrace her warmly and greet her when you first enter the home.

6. Hold her hand at random times –while driving, walking or just sitting at home.

7. Give her a back rub.

### **Bonus Touch**

I want to add one more to the list that is a real standout and will take your relationship to another dimension: Lay your hand upon her and speak a blessing over her and her dreams while praying in agreement with her. This may take you out of your comfort zone, but I promise you this will be a game-changer in your spiritual walk and leadership with your wife and family.

Reach out and touch your wife. The benefits are immeasurable.

***FivestarMan** was founded in 2008 by **Neil Kennedy**. Kennedy has passionately promoted God’s Word for 25-plus years of ministry. He is known for practically applying biblical principles that elevate people to a new level of living. As a business, church, ministry and life consultant, Kennedy has helped others strategize the necessary steps to reach their full potential.*

*For the original article, visit [fivestarman.com](http://fivestarman.com).*

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# He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures

Just the sound of the word *inoculation* makes my heart pound and my palms sweaty. I hate shots. Period. Most people do. I am convinced, that that is because of how they give them to us when we are too young to have a say so.

Babies get them in multiples. No single inoculation. In fact, the pediatrician groups them by time frame such as 2 months or 6 months. There is no real name given. Just bring them in for the "6-month" inoculations.

Our grandson, Elijah, had this personality altering 6-month event. His mommy and daddy were out of town (by design I believe). So his Nanny took him. I asked her after the appointment if he cried. (Is that a stupid question or what?) She said he was very brave (so I would be a proud grandfather), but yes, he screamed.

That evening when it was time for him to go to bed, he was very fussy. He had been stabbed in both of those tiny precious thighs numerous times. He was running a slight fever (and this is *good* for him?). I took him to our bed and laid him down. Then I slid in next to him and tried to comfort him. He wasn't really crying, just soft moans. It was obvious that under those "Scooby -Doo" Band-Aids, both legs ached. No real tears, just overall discomfort. So I reached my arm around him and gently pulled him right up against my chest, very close. And I whispered to him that I would go have a talk with the mean doctor the next day.

I promised Elijah that he would feel much better after a good night's sleep. He could not understand any of the words. It was simply the sound of my voice. I slipped my thumb into his pudgy little hand. As he started to dose, something startled

him (maybe pain?). His eyes flew open and he looked over at me. I gently squeezed his hand and whispered to him. He actually sighed, relaxed and closed his eyes again. His Pappy was there, and he felt safe, secure, protected, loved.

Psalm 23:2 says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." In the original language, the concept is that the Shepherd *causes us to lie down and lean against* Him. Take a minute, close your eyes, and fill your mind with this picture. The Shepherd gently *makes* the sheep lie down. And then He doesn't walk away with a trite "hope you feel better." No. The Great Shepherd then *lies down* next to the sheep. He gets down in the plush green grass with one of His tired, hurting flock.

Then He goes a step further. He puts His everlasting arm around the sheep and pulls it against His chest. He whispers the sheep's name. Comforts it. Encourages it. Holds it firmly, but gently. And when that sheep is relaxed, secure and resting, assured of His protection and love, the Shepherd goes and finds another sheep in need of tender mercy. And the process starts all over again, sheep after sheep after sheep. Get the picture?

This week, as you journey in your Christ walk, you may need to *lie down* in His green pasture.

Has life pounded you? Are you worn out from trying to keep up with the "cares of the world"? Do you feel like you can't get your next breath? Money is tight. Troubles at home. Exhausted in the battle. Afraid. Worried. Not sure how or even if you can go another day.

Get your mind around this. *You* are His sheep. He loves *you*. He has not forgotten you. He knows where you are. The Great Shepherd *knows your name*. Intimately. Take some time to get alone and in the peacefulness of that solitude allow Him to *cause you to lie down, lean against Him*.

Feel that? It is His arm pulling you close. Stay there. Relax.

Breathe. You are secure, protected, loved. He will stay there with you. No hurry. Don't rush. Your times are in His hands. And that is a very good place to leave them.

### **Prayer Power for the Week**

This week, take time to get alone with God and in that solitude allow Him to pour His love and comfort on you. Be still in His presence and know that He is God and that you are secure in Him. Thank Him for the assurance of His faithfulness and that He'll never leave you nor forsake you. Then place your cares one by one into His capable hands.

Continue to pray that revival would ignite our churches, spread throughout our nation and around the world. Pray that God will send laborers into His ripe harvest fields and that many will heed the call. Pray for the families of those lost in the Malaysian 777. Include the Ukraine as you pray for the nations, and once again, remember Israel, our troops, the persecuted church worldwide, and our national, spiritual and civic leaders. (Psalm 46:10; Heb. 13:5; Psalm 23)

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## **Can Loneliness Cause Early Death?**

We all have heard of the saying that an individual can die of a broken heart, but how true is it? Did you know that being lonely could cause myriad health problems, including sleep disturbances and an increase in blood pressure?

Shocking as it may be, being lonely has twice the risk of causing premature death than obesity, and a recent study conducted by psychologist John Cacioppo supports this.

## **Who Are the Loneliest People?**

Typically, when a person retires from work, he or she experiences a disruption in his or her routine. When work used to take up five days of the week and eight hours or more of the day, having it suddenly stop could cause a lot of physical and psychological changes. The same thing happens if a person loses someone they have been with for a long time. It does cause the broken heart/loneliness syndrome.

## **What Effects Does Loneliness Have on Health?**

Recent research has shown that loneliness impacts health and causes early death as much as being poor does. The finding says that dying early has an increased probability of as much as 19 percent.

According to John Cacioppo, a psychologist and the director of the Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience at the University of Chicago, loneliness poses more risk for causing early death significantly more than having or engaging in poor health behavior. He further stated that it is unsafe to be lonely and that it is more than simply being unhappy when he discussed his research at the American Association for the Advancement of Science annual meeting that was held in Chicago last weekend.

## **What Are the Research Details?**

The research conducted by Cacioppo and his colleagues is designed to pinpoint reasons for the relation of loneliness and early death. To conduct the study, they reviewed the surveyed responses that they got from more than 2,100 adults aged 55 years old and older. It was a health and retirement study, wherein the researchers controlled for gender, age, objective social isolation, poor health behaviors and socioeconomic status.

## **What Were the Findings?**

Designed to know the underlying factors for the relationship of early death and loneliness, the research by Cacioppo and colleagues found out that being lonely and feeling isolated from other persons can lead to an increase in blood pressure, cause a less restorative and restful sleep, hike up the feeling of depression, cause an increase of stress hormone cortisol in the mornings and decrease the overall sense of living a life of meaning. The research also says that aging is hastened by poor sleep quality. It is like that not only does loneliness can cause early death, it can cause a person to age faster too.

### **More Research Findings From Cacioppo.**

Cacioppo says that while some individuals may be happy being alone, as humans, most thrive in social situations where rapport and support with others can be enjoyed. He also says that staying in touch with former colleagues, participating in family activities and maintaining meaningful relationships is how one can escape the clutches of loneliness brought upon by aging. He further states that good times with family and friends are oftentimes taken for granted or underestimated by people.

Another thing that Cacioppo says is that the challenges and stresses of life is more easily managed if a person enjoys companionship, protection and mutual assistance that one can obtain from high quality relationships, and these are the keys to longevity and happiness.

He identifies the factors for loneliness when an individual ages as loss of hearing, blindness and loss of mobility.

According to him, retiring in a warm place like Florida is not enough, but rather what counts is the new relationships that one forges in their place of retirement. The odds of having a long life increases when one has maintained engaging in meaningful activities with other individuals and has quality

relationships which he says is related to being able to handle things better and this resulting in less stress.

### **What Other Experts Say.**

Joe Burgo, a psychologist who is the founder of *afterpsychotherapy.com* and is the author of *Why Do I Do That?* agrees with how important feeling connected is for people. He says that as relationships end when one grows older and experiences death of family and friends, plus retirement, people not only feel lonely and grieve these losses but it also challenges an individual's sense of self.

He further says that it is critical for every person to remain engaged and active in their world by forging new ties and tending to old ones plus participating in activities that connects with other people.

### **Summary**

Premature death risk is increased by 14 percent in older people who are lonely. Even when one is not elderly, a consistent feeling of being lonely also poses an increase of 14 percent chance of dying early.

Loneliness has as much impact as being very poor and not having access to some privileges.

Staying in touch with friends, families and colleagues can lead to a longer life.

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For the original article, visit [drcolbert.com](http://drcolbert.com).

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# How Your Faith Can Make You Fitter

I watched an interesting documentary a few weeks ago on a subject I cannot entirely recall. All I know for certain is that it was hosted by the illustrious Mr. Morgan Freeman and featured a fascinating study on self-control that involved scrambled sentences, a disgusting cocktail of orange juice and vinegar, and monetary rewards. (More on that in a bit.)

The findings of this experiment are truly remarkable. According to the 2012 paper published by the Queen's University researchers who conducted the study, religion replenishes self-control and increases our ability to endure discomfort, delay gratification, exert patience and refrain from responding impulsively.

As a CrossFit coach and personal trainer, I am well acquainted with myriad forms of "discomfort":

- Discomfort during 5K runs and rowing sprints that test the mind's willpower far more than the body's ability.
- Discomfort during heavy sets of back squats that pull us out of our comfort zone with every all-out rep.
- Discomfort during workout sessions in which your sole objective is to face an exercise foe—that is, a skill that needs improvement, such as overhead squats, double-unders, handstand push-ups or kipping pull-ups.
- Discomfort during deep stretches and intense foam-rolling sessions that, ironically, are encouraged because they in fact *soothe* tired muscles and *relieve* joint pain.

As both a committed CrossFitter and a follower of Christ, I

was naturally intrigued by the notion that my faith could make me stronger both inside and outside of the gym, both in spiritual and physical endurance races.

In the experiment that I watched unfold in the aforementioned documentary, the psychologists asked participants (college students) to complete a scrambled-sentence task in which they were to unscramble the sentence and remove the excess word. For those in the neutral priming group, the excessive word didn't bear any religious connotations. In the religious priming group, however, the excessive words did contain religious themes and undertones, like *divine* and *spirit*.

After this priming portion of the experiment, the participants were confronted with a task that presented a bit of gustatory discomfort. On a table were 20 one-ounce cups that held a repulsive mixture of orange juice and vinegar. The psychologists told the participants that they would receive a nickel for every cup they drank. The more stomach-turning concoction that was consumed, the greater the display of endurance fueled by self-control.

Those primed with religious concepts drank significantly more than those who'd formed value-neutral sentences.

I later learned that in a follow-up experiment, researchers told the same participants that they would receive monetary compensation for their earlier participation; they could go to the lab within the next week to pick up five dollars, but if they waited a week or later, they would instead receive an additional dollar. Sure enough, there was a statistically significant difference between the religiously primed group (who waited) and the neutral group (who did not wait).

This research, as I stated earlier, got me thinking about both some very practical real-world applications, from how we as faithful followers of Christ respond graciously to the bitter orange/vinegar cups we're handed to how we persevere through

tough workouts and abstain from junk food (most of the time!) knowing that the gratification of having a healthier body is well worth waiting—and fighting—for.

I'm blessed to be able to train men and women who are also spiritual brothers and sisters to me. Nearly every day, something they do or say while pushing their bodies through the "discomfort" or burpees, squats or box jumps points to their dependence on a greater Source of strength than a pre-workout shake or shot of espresso.

For example, during one rowing workout (nearly three miles worth of intervals), one of our athletes scrawled Philippians 4:13 in yellow chalk on the floor beside her rower. Every athlete who came in that day to face this particularly daunting workout had the opportunity to be motivated by the words "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

On another day, as we were working on double-unders (a jump rope movement in which the rope must pass under your feet twice with every jump), one woman looked down at the faint red lines the rope had left on her arms and began to cry. When I asked her what was wrong, she gave a shy, embarrassed smile and whispered, "I'm sorry. It's just I see these superficial lash marks on my arms and think about Jesus! The sting that I feel when the rope hits me is nothing compared to what He endured for me."

I started to tear up too.

Two weeks ago, all it took was an upbeat Mandisa song to give my class a second wind halfway through a 30-minute conditioning workout. During a CrossFit competition last Friday, it was my friend's reassuring words—"God is with you!"—that seemed to send a surge of energy up through my heels and into my back as I lifted that 185-pound barbell off the floor six more times.

I could go on and on, but I think I've made my point. There seems to be a direct correlation between faith and endurance of every sort. This is the kind of faith with which Moses, unafraid of Pharaoh's wrath, "kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). This is the kind of faith with which the Israelites marched around Jericho for seven straight days before the walls started trembling (v. 30).

When we feel unprepared to face a day we know will be mentally taxing, emotionally draining and in every way uncomfortable, we know that praying and immersing ourselves in Scripture are two surefire ways to restore confidence to our souls and replenish peace in our minds. But what would happen if we applied these spiritual disciplines to our physical fitness?

What if, when trying to psyche up for a CrossFit workout, a cycling class, a personal training session, a half marathon or a full buffet, we prayed to God for strength, for a positive attitude, endurance and self-control, and equipped ourselves with invigorating verses to wield when our willpower begins to run low?

My unplanned personal experiences as well as research produced by academia's stringent scientific method connect faith with fortitude, confidence with capacity, and belief with breakthroughs. I challenge you to see what can happen to your fitness, your perspective, and your strength inside and out when you carry faith into the gym with you.

***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](http://dianafit.com), and she is the owner and a coach at [CrossFit 925](#). Diana can be reached on [Twitter](#).

For the original article, visit [dianafit.com](http://dianafit.com).

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# 5 Things Every Married Man Should Do Around Single Women

A wise man once told me that when I find myself around single women, especially when I find them attractive or interesting, I should mention my wife and family early in the conversation. I have found this advice to be very useful on many occasions.

Fellow husbands, I have found the above advice and the other tips at the bottom to be essential in keeping my marriage healthy and strong. I want my marriage to be strong and healthy, and so should you! In fact, it's one of the biggest responsibilities in your marriage.

So let's dig deeper into this subject. Where are some common places that you might run into this scenario? For many of you, it could easily happen at work. You could be starting a new job and find yourself around a lot of nice, new women. When this happens, you have to make the choice to embrace their attention or extinguish it in a friendly way by mentioning your beautiful wife and family.

For some of you, you have been working around the same women for some time. You might have chosen many times to engage in flirty conversation or to go out with co-workers after work. If this is you and your wife is at home waiting for you, then it's time to step back and assess your position as the husband and leader. Take the necessary steps to make your relationship with your wife the most important one again and don't forget it. Lead, gentlemen, lead!

Even though those were only a couple of quick examples, I know there are a few of you out there who need to step up your role as a husband. Those examples don't apply to you? Then consider

who you know and talk to at your gym, the grocery store, the local hangout or wherever. These “simple” places could produce difficult relationships that will harm your relationship and love with your wife. Man up and do what needs to be done for your marriage!

Now that I have your attention, here are five things every married man should do around single women:

**1. Keep your ring on.** There are very few exceptions for when that ring needs to be off, like when operating heavy machinery, swimming in shark-infested waters and the like. If you are about to enter a situation that makes you look at your ring and consider if you need it on or not, leave! Run! Get away from there! Seriously, get out of that situation; your vows, marriage, children and more depend on those important decisions. (Read Luke 16:10.)

**2. Hang up pictures of your wife at work.** A married man in this position would be wise to pick out a couple of great and fun photos of him and his wife and keep them displayed at his office or place of work. Pick a time that was fun for two reasons: It will remind you why you love her so much, and it will make for a great conversation tool when others, especially women, ask about it. Update the image as needed to keep the people around you knowing your relationship is continuing to grow. Get that picture up this week and extinguish those flames. (Read Psalm 119:37.)

**3. Keep eye contact simple and short.** Don't read this the wrong way; I'm not saying to be rude. I'm saying to be careful where your eyes travel and how long they travel when you are in the presence of an attractive single woman. You know that once you engage in the first serious look, you have signed the dotted line for more eye trouble. ([Read more about that “first look” here.](#)) Keep it short, keep it decisive, and move on. Get back to that image posted at your desk. Go! (Read Matthew 5:28.)

**4. Keep conversation general and professional.** If you work around single women, there is no question that conversation will come up. It's up to you on how you decide to speak with her. You can choose to keep it short and general, you can choose to keep it professional, or you can choose to keep it off of those and allow it go places it shouldn't. Be polite but very intentional in your conversations. If needed, again, always be ready to bring up something about your wife or family. Pull the pin, aim, and extinguish. Safety first. (Read Romans 6:13.)

**5. Talk about your wife and family often.** Did I mention anything about talking about your wife in conversation yet? I believe I did, but this last point brings the idea to a firm home. The single women you engage with each day, if you have to, should be no match to your wife and family. Your family should be your first priority wherever you are and with whomever you encounter each day. Yes, each and every day. Keep it short, keep it simple, and mention your beautiful wife. Now pat yourself on the back and keep it up. (Read Ephesians 5:25-33.)

*Important note:* No matter what you have done with your current relationships with single women, these steps can and should be started at anytime. Your wife's feelings are and will always be more important than the woman you need to take these steps with. Get on it!

I challenge you to take these bold steps for you, your marriage and your family. Again, it's your responsibility to lead!

List one of your own tips below, and let's help out our fellow husbands.

**Maturity** 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](http://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](#) and [Twitter](#).*

*For the original article, visit [manturity.com](http://manturity.com).*

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## How Dads Should Build Leaders

Do you consider yourself a leader, dad?

You may or may not be in a leadership position in your career, and you may or may not be naturally wired that way. But I believe you are leader if you're a father. It's a leadership position, for sure.

I want to help equip you for that, with help from my close friend Wayne Gordon, pastor at the Lawndale Community Church in Chicago. What has happened in that neighborhood under Wayne's leadership has been called a miracle: A blighted community has been transformed into a place of progress, purpose and hope. I had the privilege of serving there with Wayne for five years during the 90s.

Wayne's book, [Real Hope in Chicago](#), talks about the principles that helped to transform this community. His insights on leadership are especially valuable, and I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't pass them on to you—with my own added emphasis on fatherhood. After all, fatherhood is about leading today and raising up leaders for tomorrow.

**1. See 15 years into the future.** The little children you see today—or even the teenager—will grow and mature. Even if things seem difficult right now, don't give up! Your

investments in your children's lives will make a difference, even if you can't see it for weeks, months or even years.

**2. Make them feel important.** That's how gang leaders build closeness and loyalty, and it works even better in families. When your child knows that he is precious to you and has a contribution to make in your household, he develops the confidence to develop into a leader.

**3. Don't go anywhere alone.** Future leaders need to get out in the world, experience life and become familiar with its problems and mysteries. And they need to see how dad handles those issues. So include a child when you go to the hardware store, to the weekend softball game or to the church service project—and sometimes, if you can, even the out-of-town business trip. That's how you share your life with your children, strengthen your relationships and give them a vision for the world.

**4. Be accessible.** Our children need to know that they are among our top priorities, and one way we communicate that is by being available—even when it's not convenient for us. When a child knows they can get your full attention in a time of need, suddenly they gain a confidence to reach beyond themselves.

**5. Expose them to other role models.** Give your kids opportunities to learn from gifted youth leaders, caring coaches and teachers, and other positive influencers. As we're sharing the best of ourselves, we also need to share others with our children.

**6. Let them fail.** It's hard to stand by and watch your child fall short of a goal. But that's often when the most growth occurs. At times, we may need to take a few steps back to allow our kids to move forward through the process of making mistakes and learning from them.

**7. Love, love, love.** Love is empowering for a child; it gives

confidence and security so she can try new things or recover when something has gone wrong. And I know you already know this, but dads, our love needs to be expressed in actions and in words.

Dads, it's inevitable that our children will grow up and eventually be out on their own. Let's make sure we're equipping them to be responsible leaders who really make a difference.

Dad—please share your thoughts: What leadership principles have you seen at work in your fathering? You can join the conversation either below or on [our Facebook page](#).

### **Action Points for Dads on the Journey**

- Tell your children your heartfelt dreams for each of them.
- Include at least one of your children when you run errands around town and, if you can, take one on an occasional out-of-town business trip.
- Talk to your children about a coach, boss or other leader who has been influential in your life. Share about what made him such a great leader.
- Give your child opportunities to make some decisions as he becomes more responsible and refines his leadership skills.

**Carey Casey** is the CEO of the National Center for Fathering, a nonprofit organization dedicated to changing the culture of fathering in America by enlisting 6.5 million fathers to make the [Championship Fathering Commitment](#).

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

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# Dads, Here's How to Turn Chronic Failure Into Success

This world we share can be cold and unforgiving. It can leave us feeling beaten down and like we are failing way too much.

A cynic would say, "That's life," and scoff at our frustration. But as the fine Sinatra song by the same moniker states, "Each time I find myself flat on my face, I pick myself up and get back in the race." It is our determination inside that will eventually determine our outcome.

- Fact: Life is difficult.
- Fact: Parenting is difficult.
- Fact: There is no magic pill to make this easy.

Struggle is the foundation of growth, and that puts you in an excellent position to move forward.

In 1862, while at the end of his rope in the middle of an uncharted Africa, having lost his wife and several team members to malaria, legendary missionary-explorer-doctor David Livingstone summed up his predicament this way: "I am prepared to go anywhere, provided it be forward."

Forward, for an All Pro Dad, means looking at strategies and solutions that work. If you are feeling down or at the edge of failure, we suggest the following "5 Ways Dads Can Turn Chronic Failure into Success":

**1. You're not alone.** Successful parenting is about team work. If you're married, make sure you and the wife are on the same page and working in concert together. If you're a single dad, be part of a support group that meets weekly and is willing to "do life" together. This is not optional!

**2. Be an encourager.** A teacher we know has a sign on the wall: "Research says it takes seven positives to counteract one

negative—I say why risk it?” In other words, focus on what’s right more than what’s wrong. Negativity is a vortex that always moves in a downward spiral. Believe us, you will find a lot of hope when you look for it.

**3. KISS (Keep it Simple, Sir).** Okay, we admit to changing that last word to *sir*. But seriously, we’re not calling anyone stupid around here because no one is. One dad said, “Don’t try to fix everything in one day. Have four or five key rules, work for mastery, and move on from there.”

**4. Don’t beat yourself up.** Be positive and be confident. Being an encourager includes encouraging yourself. Do the best you can in this moment, pull together all the resources you have, pray, and then move on to the next moment.

**5. Be grateful.** Wake up every morning and say this prayer: “God, thank You for the gift of my children. Thank You for life. I am grateful for this opportunity to help my kids grow. Please give me peace and strength. Amen.”

Related Resource: “[10 Ways to Know if You’re a Successful Father](#)”

*For the original article, visit [allprodad.com](http://allprodad.com).*

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## Here’s How to Discover a Thinner, Healthier You

We have an excuse for every poor choice we make today: “I had bad parents”; “No one told me the truth”; “It’s just the way I am.” The sad fact is, we think it will justify our actions.

When it comes to our choices at mealtime, we are finding it’s

more about harboring bad habits than an inherited or environmentally stimulated bad behavior.

True, we can inherit poor eating behaviors from our parents or past eating patterns, but we have so many options today to eat healthy. If we want to change where we are going, it starts with the choices we make today. I know there are conflicting words of advice everywhere you turn, and knowing what to do can be very complicated. So here is an offering of simple tips to help you make positive health choices.

**1. Start eating at the dinner table.** Our tendency today is to eat on the run, on the couch or out of a bag. The result is we eat more. Why? Because we are eating whatever is convenient, eating larger amounts, and sometimes eating directly out of the pots—no portion restriction. It's a free for all!

If you take the time to sit at the table, you are more conscious of your portions. You can unwind with the family, not race to get done. Go over the events of the day, and if you like, you'll have the opportunity to put on some background music to make it a more relaxing enjoyable time.

**2. Exchange lunch plates for dinner plates.** This is one I have used many times. When you use a smaller plate, your eyes see more food—it's true! If our eyes *are* bigger than our stomachs, why not fool them? I was brought up with the mindset that you eat everything on your plate because someone somewhere is starving. This led me to eat past the full line, and the result was more calories than I required. So today I use smaller plates and feel full, not stuffed.

**3. Slow down the pace.** Do you find yourself eating just to get something in your stomach? More than likely you eat fast because eating has become a function, not an experience. I can hear it now: "Linda, my life is too hectic for me to experience my food!" Granted, we do live fast-paced lives, but it's the fast-paced eating that is driving us to an early

grave.

When we choose to take 15-20 minutes to eat a meal, we find ourselves satisfied with less food. Setting your fork down between bites while you savor the flavor of your meal will allow your mind to catch up with your stomach, and the full sensation will be recognized earlier. Taking the time to actually chew your food instead of inhaling it will help in the process as well.

I am the worst at eating for function instead of experience. But I have found that over the years, if I actually think about what I'm eating (not in an obsessive way) and relax as I do it, the digestion process is enhanced as well. Nothing causes an upset stomach like gulping down food on the run.

I guess this means we need to make time, not just take time to eat. What a concept! Even if you are one of those who chooses to eat smaller meals six times a day, slow down and enjoy it.

**4. Palms up for portion size.** If you set everything in place but choose to pile on the food, you miss the boat altogether. Portion size is the key, and the easiest way to know where to begin and end is to look at your own palm. Opened-faced minus the fingers—this is your portion. Whether we are talking meat, veggies or bread, this concept will keep us in the ballpark of proper portion size.

Once again, make it fun! When your children are filling their plates (the younger you can get them started, the better—of course, use common sense here), remind them to look at their palms and see how close they can get to measuring a portion. Keep in mind that as your children are growing, you don't want to limit their diets as you do adults.

You can use the palms-up method with your family and encourage them to place color variety on their plates as well—veggies, salads, lean meats, pastas, sweet potatoes and, yes, macaroni and cheese even has a place at this setting. Look for balance.

**5. Out of sight, out of mind.** The final step is to remove the temptation of foods that cause you to binge. As the adult, you are in control of what is available in your home for your family to eat. Slowly start to substitute good choices for not-so-healthy ones. Keep fresh fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator. Replace your white bread with one containing grains. Limit the amount of salt, sugar, caffeine and alcohol you have on hand.

Encourage healthy living with your younger set by allowing them to help you purge the pantry. Go through things you eat on a regular basis and check the label. If the first ingredient is sugar—out it goes! This might be too shocking to the “family system,” so take it slow; start with one or two items at first. Purge and then replace with something healthy. Let the kids choose the healthy items—if they are part of the process, they will be more likely to embrace the change.

Small steps to a healthier you are easily accomplished if you keep your eye on the source of your strength. I constantly pull on the sleeve of my Savior Jesus Christ for discernment and direction; He is one guest you should always invite to your table. Happy eating!

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# Spiritual Nitpickers: Usually Self-Gratifying 'Rotten Apples'

Certain types of people won't shut up *and* won't put up. I call them spiritual nitpickers.

Spiritual nitpickers are usually rotten apples who spoil the entire bushel. With one pluck of the key "Submit," their reactions begin errant conversations online while they grin with a misplaced self-satisfaction and belief they are actually helping build the kingdom of God. But they are giving Christians a bad name.

From dark rooms, they sit in front of glowing computer screens with keyboards, awaiting belligerent rampages to be posted, tweeted or commented under the cloak of anonymity. Today's social media environment has created mobs of spiritual nitpickers searching for material they can lob grenades of fury at, satisfying a pent-up need to display their version of righteousness in a public forum.

Much like modern-day Pharisees, spiritual nitpickers hide behind veils, the law and their interpretation of the Bible. Yet they are revealing a bigger issue. In fact, compared to the gnat, it is camel-sized.

When Jesus walked the earth, he confronted Pharisees directly with grace and truth. They would fire curveballs, and Jesus would knock them out of the park, boggling their minds with a mirror.

But don't listen to me. Listen to the red letters in the Bible, and study Jesus' response to the Pharisees' verbal grenades:

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have *practiced the latter, without neglecting the former*. You blind guides! *You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel*” (Matt. 23:23-24, emphasis added, NIV).

I italicized the point here. The Pharisees preferred making public displays of minor obedience to the law rather than living a life of major obedience with justice, mercy and faith. They were the first to throw stones, and today they are the first to lob grenades from the keyboard.

When Paul encouraged us to “fight the good fight of faith” in 1 Timothy 6:12, he wasn’t referring to spiritual nitpicking. He knew the difference because he had been a spiritual nitpicker himself. You have to read the previous verse to find what we should be fighting for: “Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (v. 11).

### What the “[Good Fight of Faith](#)” Really Looks Like:

1. [Love God](#). With a world and priorities competing for our attention, we have to fight to love God. It’s a moment-by-moment decision to seek Him first, give Him your time to soak in a relationship, and sacrifice your money according to what is taught.

2. [Love others](#). The most important commandment, Jesus said, is twofold: Love God *and* love others. This is counter-cultural because we live in a dog-eat-dog world with everyone fighting for themselves. But to love others as yourself, you have to develop empathy and put yourself in someone else’s shoes before seeing opportunities to reach out a helping hand. That takes courage. It’s a battle out there, and love is our weapon.

3. **Live the message.** Instead of lobbing grenades from behind a

keyboard, step outside your door in faith, and connect with what matters to God—people. Our mission field is all around us, starting with our family. A God's man will lead his family, shepherding their faith and growing closer to God himself. From there, your actions will speak louder than your words, and your mercy, compassion and integrity will do the talking.

**4. Look in the mirror.** Before nitpicking about a spiritual gnat, keep a mirror handy and take a minute to look at yourself. A God's man will see a man who sees good intentions, encourages others, and finds ways to help, love and share God's hope. There is good and bad in this world, even among Christians, but it's not our responsibility to lord theology over people. Ultimately, that's God's domain. Our domain is to fight the good fight of faith in our lives.

Spiritual nitpicking is not a spiritual gift. So, before you find fault in someone else, remember these words:

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you” (Rom. 12:3).

**Kenny Luck**, founder of Every Man Ministries and the men's pastor at Saddleback Church, provides biblically oriented teaching and leadership for men and pastors seeking relevant, timely material that battle cultural, worldly concepts threatening men and God's men. Follow Kenny and [Every Man Ministries](#) now on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) (@everyMM) and [YouTube](#).

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# When You Should Sail Outside Your Comfort Zone

Wikipedia defines *comfort zone* as “a behavioral state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral neutral condition, using a limited set of behaviors to deliver a steady level of performance, usually without a sense of risk.”

Most people, save for the adrenaline rush-chasing risk-takers, both loyally love and devoutly defend the warm, cozy bubble that encompasses their comfort zone. When something or someone challenges us to burst that bubble, our automatic response is often to rapidly generate plenty of bubble-protecting excuses that we believe justifiably exempt us from ever venturing outside our blessed safety zones.

It may serve us well to recognize that moving into a discomfort zone, if you will, presents several advantages that I believe can help coax us from our comfy, status quo cottages:

- 1. You'll have increased productivity.** Our comfort zones are enemies of productivity because without the sense of unease that accompanies deadlines and freshly made goals, we tend to procrastinate, do the bare minimum of work required at our jobs or in our homes, and remain trapped in the land of “What if?” We lose the drive and ambition to learn new things, adopt new hobbies or hone a new skill. We also begin to fool ourselves into thinking we're being productive simply because we're keeping busy with, well, busy work. This sort of work is, of course, nearly always a hollow excuse given to prevent us from ever exiting our homey bubble. Pushing our personal boundaries can refresh us mentally, sharpen us intellectually and stimulate us emotionally, leading us to get more done more quickly and with more joy.

## **2. You'll be better prepared to cope with unexpected change.**

Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston, explains that one of the worst things we can do is pretend that uncertainty and fear don't exist. Indeed, we are in for an unpleasant surprise if we think our self-built bubble fortresses can fend off unwelcome and unexpected intruders forever. By taking risks and challenging yourself to things you normally wouldn't do, you can experience some of that uncertainty in a controlled, manageable environment. Learning to live outside your comfort zone when you choose to can prep you for life changes that force you out of it.

## **3. You'll be able to push past boundaries more easily in the future.**

Once you start stepping out of your comfort zone, the leap becomes easier and less intimidating over time; you'll grow accustomed to what researchers call "productive discomfort." Armed with a newfound acquaintanceship with the unfamiliar and uncomfortable, you'll find yourself more willing, more eager, more at peace with the idea of pushing farther and climbing higher.

Our lives are filled with the situations that beckon us outside our bubbles. Whether it's deciding to cut out sodas and sugar to lose the extra weight, go to the gym consistently, leave the job we hate, start a job we love or even to join a Bible study with, dare I say, *strangers*, we regularly come within inches of crossing the threshold of our comfort zones—but we hesitate. We turn back because we're afraid, because we lack the faith to move our feet forward.

One day Jesus was teaching along the Sea of Galilee when He decided to hop into a nearby fishing boat and make the rocking vessel His pulpit. Perhaps He noticed that the boat in which He sat was fishless, because after His seaside sermon, He told Simon the fisherman to move into deeper water and cast his nets there. Having had no luck all day, Simon responded reluctantly, but respectfully:

“Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5, NIV).

What do you suppose happened next to the fishless fisherman? The next verse tells us:

“When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break” (v. 6).

Not only did the nets start to break, but another boat had to come to their aid, and then *both* boats began to sink—and perhaps *stink*—with fish!

This snippet of Scripture speaks directly to those times in our lives when we find ourselves frustrated and forlorn, yet simultaneously unwilling to move past our comfort zones toward deeper, more promising waters. We feel like fishermen sitting idly in an empty boat. Like Simon, James, and John, we’ve done all we can with the talents, time, and tools we have. We’ve awoken before the break of day, set our sails, cast our nets, watched the moonrise and the stars appear, and returned home without having “caught anything.”

What do we do? To be completely honest with you, when I don’t catch the fish, so to speak, that I desire after an all-out effort and hours at sea, my first impulse is to return to the harbor and trade in my fishing nets for a new line of work altogether. The *last* thing I want to do is go into even deeper water and try again. I love my comfort zone too much! But that is exactly what Jesus asked Simon and the other fishermen to do. Despite his better judgment, Simon trusted and obeyed this captivating “Master” and was richly rewarded with a hardly containable catch of fish.

The Lord wants to do the impossible in our lives. But to do so, He asks us to trust him completely and to obey His word without conditions or complaints.

It is natural to have doubts and reservations and a hundred reasons why, to the “reasonably minded,” nothing will happen if we obey God and follow His guidance. But it takes *supernatural* faith, one that holds little regard for what the naked eye can perceive or the educated mind can rationalize, to venture out into deeper waters, believing fully in God’s ability to let men walk on waves or fill empty nets with an astounding surplus.

Ephesians 3:20 declares that God is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.” Simon and his fishing buddies saw this to be true, and so can you. You will leave behind emptiness and sail into waters of abundance when you simply listen to and obey the word of God and the whispering of the Holy Spirit within you.

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