

Bible's Desperate Widows Relied on Pure Faith

Some of the greatest men of faith and power in the gospels were not men at all, but women—often women in desperate situations.

There is the Canaanite woman, whose persevering faith led to deliverance for her daughter (Matt. 15:27), even though she had to humble herself like a dog licking crumbs under the table. Let us get the crumbs of deliverance and restoration for our children as she did.

There is the woman with the issue of blood (Mark 5:30), who touched the hem of Yeshua's garment. She pulled out of him the power of God for physical healing, while the rest of the disciples missed what was happening. Let us get the power for healing as she did.

There is the sinful woman who wept at Yeshua's feet, kissed them and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7:38). She touched His heart with a depth of passionate love that the religious leaders could not come close to. Let us touch Yeshua with the greatness of our love as she did.

There is the widow whose persistent prayer serves as a model for all generations to pray without losing heart (Luke 18:1-5). Let us learn to pray tirelessly as she did.

There is the poor widow who put two small coins in the offering, with greater faith than all the wealthy (Luke 21:2). Let us give all we have with the supernatural generosity she had.

There is Miriam (Mary) from Migdal who searched for Yeshua and clung to Him after the resurrection (John 20:17), while the apostles were hiding away. Let us have that same tenacious

faith to lay hold of the Lord in seemingly hopeless situations.

One of the secrets to seizing the power of God is to see ourselves in their position as desperate widows, focusing our faith 100 percent on Yeshua alone.

God Reveals Important Life Secrets In Advance

This is the first in a series of articles called "One Life," where Kenny Luck discusses the urgency that comes from having only one life to live. It provides insight on how God teaches us to live life better and to number our days by living spiritually, not carnally. We will explore three ways God teaches us how to live this one life with better priorities. This article talks about the first way that God teaches us to live better lives—He simply tells us in advance.

All of us have heard this expression: "You only live once!"

Usually, we use this phrase to convince ourselves to do something that is a little out of the box, or to seize the moment, or to take advantage of an experience that we might not otherwise have if we don't do it now. There's this sort of compressed urgency that we only have one life to live, and it's not a soap opera. When you have that resolution and you take advantage of it, usually there is a reward on the other end and you're glad that you did it.

A lot of times, we don't choose to seize opportunities that are in front of us—to live more meaningfully; to live better lives. We have to get shocked into it.

That's what happened to me when I was 27. At the time, I was the clinical pastor on rotation at Western Medical Center's cancer unit in Santa Ana, Calif. That's the year when God gave me glasses—my "One Life" glasses. The way He did this was by having me meet with men, women and couples who were diagnosed with cancer. I tell you, if you want to get shocked into living a better life, spend two hours a week talking with cancer patients.

What I learned was that trauma dissolves the trivial. Pain has a way of producing clarity of vision—not physical vision—but life vision.

Miraculously, God gives cancer patients "One Life" glasses too. They savor the moment. They realize the beauty of life. They glorify the majesty of life. They appreciate their relationships. They embrace reconciliation and forgiveness. They elevate the spiritual. They use words more carefully.

When God gave me these "One Life" glasses, he stopped me in my tracks. Instead of focusing on the peripheral things in life—many of them great—He moved me towards the central things in life.

What are the central things in life?

What bubbled into focus was how precious our one life is. You see, getting a cancer diagnosis—or any kind of life-threatening illness—changes a person's perspective. It creates urgency. Urgency creates new priorities. New priorities create new investments of time. Serious illnesses teach us to number our days.

When I was on the 7th floor of Western Medical Center, I watched cancer patients get real smart real fast about the important things in life. They get smart about relationships. They get smart about priorities. They get smart about the investment of their time. They get smart about their money. They get smart about planning.

For the followers of Christ, or even if you're not, the Bible encourages us to not use hindsight and trauma as a means to get us to live better. In fact, God's word encourages us to use foresight to be proactive, emphasizing the right priorities now.

Psalm 90:12, says: "*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*" The psalmist teaches us to live life more urgently.

How does God teach us how to live with better priorities—to live better and to number our days?

God teaches us to number our days and live a better life in three ways. The first way is that he simply *tells us in advance*. God tells us in advance that He owns the future, that God's will is what's going to get done, and that we can't presume anything. God is the architect of this universe. He owns it.

We can't predict ANYTHING with reasonable certainty. I think we learn that.

We learn it through natural disasters. We learn it through collapsing economies. We learn it through foreclosures. We learn it through circumstances where God sort of reminds us of this truth, and *tells us in advance*, and gives us the most notice and says: "Hey, don't presume upon the future. Seek the Lord's will. Be flexible and do the Lord's will, and don't anticipate or expect things to roll out."

In James 4:13-17, God *tells us in advance* how we should look at life:

"Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If

it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."

So God tells us in advance. You can't presume the future.

Watch one or more of the One Life Sessions where men's expert and pastor Kenny Luck helps you to learn how God's men are learning to live their "One Life."

Sign up now to receive Every Man Ministries' FREE Email Newsletter.

Kenny Luck is the founder of Every Man Ministries and the men's pastor at Saddleback Church. His 20th book, *Sleeping Giant: No Movement of God Without Men of God*, is the proven blueprint for men's ministries, and was recently released through B&H Publishing. Watch and read more of Kenny's teaching at . Follow Every Man Ministries now on Facebook, Twitter (@everymm,) and YouTube.

Happiness: The Residue of a Holy Life

Not long ago I heard a speaker give an impressive message in which he attributed our moral free fall to the pursuit of happiness instead of holiness. It was a great message.

You have no doubt heard someone say, "God doesn't want us to be happy; He wants us to be holy." I understand the point.

But why do they have to be mutually exclusive? Since the Bible regularly talks about happiness, how can it be evil? To

explain “holiness” by trashing “happiness” is just plain lazy. Some people are quick to spoil one concept to make another look better.

I think a better solution is to describe the correct relationship between happiness and holiness.

All Men Want Happiness

Pascal said, “All men seek happiness. This is the chief motive of every action of every man—even of those who hang themselves.” Wanting to be happy is part of what it means to be human.

What do you ask your spouse at the end of the day? “Did you have a good day?” Or, “How was your day?” Our common goal is to answer, “I had a great day.” Translation: I’m happy.

To be happy is normal, natural and healthy. The issue is not whether or not a man wants to be happy—we all do. The issue is how we go about pursuing it.

The BeHappyTudes

The worldly way to pursue happiness emphasizes attributes of strength and power. They might look like this:

- Blessed are the rich, for they don’t need to depend on others.
- Blessed are the powerful, for they get to make the rules.
- Blessed are the famous, for people will respect them because they’re well-known.
- Blessed are the strong, for they get to control others.
- Blessed are those with a beautiful home, for theirs is the praise of men.
- Blessed are those who have well-behaved teenagers, for they are the envy of their friends.
- Blessed are those who marry well, for they will have

someone to care for their needs.

- Blessed are the beautiful people, for they get invited to the best parties.
- Blessed are those considered experts and exalted for their talents and accomplishments by being put on a pedestal. They should rejoice and be glad, for that kind of glory is the greatest reward.

The Problem

The reason people continue to pursue the BeHappyTudes is because they do lead to happiness—at least a type of happiness, and at least for a while. The problem, however, is that it's *a happiness of the fleeting kind*.

It is happiness that starts big, but shrinks over time. Everyone knows a man who got everything he wanted, only to end up miserable.

And if worldly happiness is a man's idol, he will cling to the shrinking remnants of his happiness and, in the process, become a bitter, angry person. At the end of the road, happiness without holiness is hellish.

The Great Reversal

When we lived as worldly men, we all believed the same lies—the BeHappyTudes. Jesus understood this, which is why He made a counterproposal. His words in the Sermon on the Mount describe how we can find a different kind of happiness—a happiness of the lasting kind.

In fact, the word “blessed” means extreme happiness, great fortune, and transcendent joy. This kind of happiness starts small, but grows over time—think mustard seed, or yeast. So 40 years later, when happiness of the fleeting kind has shrunk to almost nothing, kingdom happiness will be in full bloom.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the

kingdom of heaven.

- Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matt. 5:3–12)

This is the great reversal of all human values. It is nothing less than the description of a holy life. Happiness, it turns out, is the residue of a holy life. The sure path to a happy life is to lead a holy life of obedience under the power of the Holy Spirit.

My wife, Patsy, struck up a friendship with a 90-year-old woman who lives down the street from us. Patsy has been dropping in on her from time to time. She's a cheerful person. She spent her working years as a bartender and waitress.

One day the woman wasn't feeling too good so Patsy asked, "Would you like me to rub your feet?" So now Patsy rubs the woman's feet on occasion when she drops by.

Patsy caught wind that the owners of the bar where the woman had worked (until not that many years ago!) were planning to throw her a 90th birthday party. Patsy said, "Oh, you must be so excited."

"I am, but I don't think I'm going to go."

"Why not?" asked my wife.

"My hair is just such a mess. I don't feel very good about myself."

Patsy arranged for her own hairdresser to make a house call and do all the girly things you can do to a woman's hair. Our 90-year-old neighbor loved the results, and it lifted her spirits enough that she decided to attend her birthday party. Patsy and I went, too.

It was touching to see all the people who she loved and who obviously loved her, too.

Patsy was simply being obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. It was, for her, how she could live out the Beatitudes—how she could express her faith in a holy life.

And the result? Extreme happiness—happiness of the lasting kind.

- So the world says the way to happiness is, "Be rich," but Jesus says, "Be poor in spirit."
- The world says, "Be powerful," but Jesus says, "Mourn."
- The world says, "Be famous," but Jesus says, "Be meek."
- The world says, "Be strong," but Jesus says, "Hunger and thirst for righteousness."
- The world says, "Have a beautiful home," but Jesus says, "Be merciful."
- The world says, "Have well-behaved children," but Jesus says, "Be pure in heart."
- The world says, "Marry well," but Jesus says, "Be a peacemaker."
- The world says, "Be beautiful," but Jesus says, "Let yourself be persecuted for righteousness."

The world says, "Blessed are you when you are accomplished and people praise you," but Jesus says, "Blessed are you when people wrongly accuse you."

When a man says, “I want money, fame or power,” is that what he really wants? I don’t think so. I think what he really wants is the feeling he thinks he will get from those things.

True happiness, however, is not the result of money, fame or power. Instead, it is a gift from God for those who adopt The Great Reversal of human values.

Teach men that the BeHappyTudes can make them happy, but only with happiness of the fleeting kind. To lead a holy life—the kind of life described by Jesus in the Beatitudes—brings happiness of the lasting kind.

Teach men that happiness is the residue of a holy life.

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[Click here for the original article at .](#)

10 Pressures Your Teens and Preteens Are Facing

Dealing with pressures and stress in middle school and high school can be difficult. The pressure to make friends, earn good grades, excel in sports or other activities, deal with hectic schedules, and navigate an occasionally difficult home

life can feel overwhelming at times. Help your kids through these preteen and teenage years with patience and guidance.

1. Image. Kids are beginning to worry about their body image at younger and younger ages. Everywhere they turn, they are presented with the “ideal” person. All of the girls are impossibly skinny and the guys look like they have had six packs Photo-shopped on. Your kids need to know that it is very unlikely they will ever look that way. And they shouldn’t. Instead, they should strive to eat healthy and exercise.

2. Acceptance. People want to be liked. At the preteen/teenager age, this is even truer. Your teens want to make friends and have people accept them. Help your kids to realize to accept themselves first and be confident in who they are.

3. Opposite Sex. Your kids may feel like everyone their age is having sex. Someone may use that to pressure them and they may give in to get accepted. Present your kids with the statistics; most kids their age are not having sex. Also, warn them of the dangers such as teenage pregnancy and STDs.

4. Drugs and Alcohol. Movies and music glorify drugs and alcohol and hide all of the ugly after effects. Teach your children about drugs and alcohol. No matter how much you try to shelter or protect them, they will end up in a situation where they are present. The best way to fight temptation is to understand it.

5. Bullies. This age group can be very insensitive and mean towards each other. Bullies will often pick on others to make themselves feel better or to make themselves appear “cooler.” Today bullying doesn’t just occur in the schoolyard, but also on social media sites, text messages, blogs, and instant messaging. There is no escape for victims. Make sure that your kids know that they can come to you if

they are being bullied, so you can help.

6. College. More and more people are going to college now and it is becoming tougher to get in. High school students face pressure to keep their grades up every day. They are in a competition with their peers to be the best and the brightest in everything. Grades are not enough though; their resumes have to include extracurricular activities and volunteer work. Between the three, students find themselves with very little down time. Another pressure connected to college is money and the stress of having enough to pay for the education.

7. Driving. Being behind the wheel of a large powerful vehicle can be terrifying in the beginning. Your kids will feel the stress of driving to your standards, not wrecking the car, and learning quick enough to keep up with their peers. Then once they pass the driving test, new stress arrives with figuring out how to get somewhere, avoiding speeding tickets, and not getting in an accident and getting the car taken away. As a parent, you can help make driving less stressful for your kids by not yelling at them while they drive and being patient with them.

8. Athletics. So many youth are engaged in sports now. As kids get older, the pressure to improve and win increases dramatically. Remind your kids of their passion for the sport and help them not to get caught up with winning and to just give it their best.

9. Finances. Financial stress begins for your kids when they are preteens and teenagers. Some of the stressors include: gas money, college, paying for dates, hanging out with friends, name brand clothing, music, athletic gear, school dances, etc. As their parent you can offer them chores around the house to do or help them find a job.

10. Growing Up. During the teenage years, your kids will feel

the pressure to grow up. No longer will they be able to act like a child and not worry about responsibilities. Suddenly, they will be juggling responsibilities and being presented with adult temptations. Your job as a parent is to help them make this transition from a child to an adult and teach them to make wise decisions. Prepare them for the world ahead of them and don't let go completely at once. Gradually let the growing up occur.

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 , 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 fathers can join the highly engaged All Pro Dad social media communities on **Facebook, Twitter, YouTube** and **Instagram**.

Follow These Spiritual Strategies for Conquering Stress

You can begin to manage stress by developing a new belief system that sees God as the One who is in control of your life. The Bible says, "See ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). God will add to your life the peace, happiness and control that you need when you give Him first place.

How do you do this? You must abide in the vine. In other

words, you must learn to see Jesus Christ as the complete and total source of your life. When you do so, you will be walking in the Spirit. Galatians 5:16-17 (NIV) says:

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

Your mind acts like a referee choosing how you will receive and perceive the events of your life. Will you feel overwhelmed by them, or confident and in control no matter what happens? If you get your mind on the side of the Spirit by filling it with God's Word, you will rise above every negative, harmful and stress-producing emotion.

Removing the Roots of Stress

The Word of God is very powerful. It has the power to reprogram the way you think, causing your thinking to line up with God's way of seeing things. When you renew your mind with God's Word, you begin to pull out stressful ways of thinking by their very roots. The Bible says, “We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5, NIV).

When my patients come to me with physical and emotional symptoms that are rooted in stress, I prescribe scriptures to help them renew their minds along with a prescription to strengthen their bodies. Here's how it works:

If your mind tells you; “You'll never amount to anything,” you can reprogram your mind with God's Word by responding as follows:

God tells me in Deuteronomy 28:13, “The Lord will make me the head, not the tail. If I pay attention to the commands of the Lord my God and follow them, I will also be at the top and never at the bottom.”

Practice Forgiveness

Many people harbor hidden anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, resentment, fear, hatred, abandonment, shame and rejection, and aren't even aware of it. What about you? Do memories of old wounds and hurts surface in your thoughts when you encounter certain people? Have you been hurt in the past and simply buried the hurt? Feelings buried alive never die.

Holding on to unforgiveness doesn't punish the individual who wronged you. It only destroys you through the roots of stress. Mark 11:25-26 says, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive your sins (NIV).

Divine Forgetfulness

No only do you need to forgive those who have hurt and offended you, but you also need to forget it. "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:13-14, NIV).

Learn to Love

First Corinthians 13:8 says, "Love never fails" (NKJV). Are you in a political battle at work? Do you have strife in your family? Have you been hurt by your spouse? Love truly never fails—and it will not fail you!

Fear rules the lives of many people. The Bible says, "Perfect love expels fear" (1 John 4:18). You can live free from fear as you increasingly understand the power of God's love for you. Mahatma Gandhi said that the whole world would accept the Christ of Christians if the Christians would only act like Christ.

Build and maintain the ties of relationships. Relationships with those who love you are gifts from God. Never take them

for granted!

Learn to Laugh

The Bible says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine (Prov. 17:22). If you are stressed out, why not take a prescription for laughter? When you’re down or stressed, pick up a wholesome, funny video and watch it. A good belly laugh can actually massage your internal organs. Author Norman Cousins actually used the healing power of laughter to help him overcome a serious disease.

Laughter releases tension, anxiety, anger, fear, shame and guilt, and it can transform your attitude and outlook.

Note: This is an excerpt from Don Colbert M.D.’s book, *The Bible Cure for Stress*.

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.

Danger to Israel: Hamas’ Covenant With Death

This is part one of a three-part series on the tension between Hamas and Israel.

I remember our own brief history with rockets in Tel Aviv. In 1991, Saddam Hussein lobbed exactly 39 Scud missiles—mostly into the Tel Aviv area—and 39 times we had to run for our lives. Once we and our two kids, ages 13 and 11, had just

gotten into our car to go to a national prayer conference in Jerusalem.

We had driven only 100 meters from our house when the sirens went off. We left the car in the middle of the road, doors ajar, and raced towards the house. That was the end of the prayer conference for us.

After that, our two children absolutely refused to wear pajamas to bed. For years, they went to bed fully clothed because during that short period of 41 days, numerous times they had to jump out of bed in the middle of the night and race to our safe room, waiting for the "boom." What was crazy about the whole thing was that if a day or two passed without a Scud, tension began to build as the city waited for the next Scud to hit.

Now imagine: In the south of Israel, since 2001, more than 12,800 rockets and mortars have been launched by Hamas and their affiliates from Gaza. That's about three rockets every single day for 11 years. ()

But Hamas' rockets don't fall according to an orderly timetable. There may be quiet for three or four days or a week or two, and then out of the blue, the sirens wail. The heart stops, the adrenalin kicks in, and the mind focuses on finding the closest safe place to hide. On any one day 10 or 20 or 50 rockets can explode as adults and children race over and over and over to their shelters or somewhere.

Children from southern Israel explain that as they walk down the street they are always checking out which building near them might have a strong wall facing away from Gaza in case they are caught on an open street. Today, 1,000,000 Israelis live in the line of constant fire.

Natal, a trauma center for victims of terror and war, says that 70 percent of the children in one town are suffering from post-traumatic stress, while many have trouble functioning at

all due to anxiety. Those who have the resources have moved away. The poor have no other place to go.

When Israel retaliated with a major offensive twice in the last five years, Israel was forced by U.N. members to agree to a ceasefire before she could dismantle the terrorist network meaning that the day will come when it will happen again.

Israelis are far from perfect. But after living here 45 years, and understanding the dynamics, I am convinced that Israeli soldiers are as moral as any army in the world. The well-known British journalist Melanie Phillips wrote: No other army in the world goes to such lengths to avoid civilian casualties. Yet no other army in the world is accused by western commentators as is the IDF, of targeting not just civilians but babies and children.

Who are the Gazans?

To trace how this irreconcilable situation evolved, let's take a cursory look at Gaza's modern saga. Britain conquered the Gaza strip along with the rest of the Holy Land seizing it from the 400-year rule of the Ottoman Empire in 1917. But only 31 years later, Britain pulled out of the Holy Land, totally disgusted with the unsolvable Arab-Jewish conflict, and left it for the UN to figure out what to do.

The U.N. decided to divide the tiny strip west of the Jordan River between Arabs and Jews. Jews said "yes." Arabs said "no."

War ensued with the Arab nations intent on destroying the new Jewish state. But the Arabs failed and Israel's poorly equipped and undertrained army succeeded in gaining another 60 percent of the land in dispute. The U.N. demanded a ceasefire. Lines were drawn where the armies stood. Suddenly, Gaza became Egyptian.

In 1948 Gaza was a backwater area of some 60,000 to 80,000

poverty-stricken peasants living in the most primitive of conditions. Unfortunately, Egypt had little interest in the 25 mile by 5-6 mile strip along the Mediterranean and did nothing to build up its infrastructure or its economy.

Egypt was more interested in wiping Israel off the map, and after blockading Israel's shipping in the Red Sea (an act of war) once again its President Gamal Abdel Nasser stated his plans to throw the Jews into the sea. War ensued again in 1967. This time, Gaza became Israeli, as Israel pushed all the Arab states that had invaded her back to their own capitals and conquered the entire area west of the Jordan River.

[Click here](#) for the original article at . [Click here](#) and scroll down for excerpts from the Hamas Charter.

Recovery: Double Meaning for Super Bowl Legend

Former New Orleans Saints football player Chris Reis didn't grow up, as many little boys do, wanting to be just like his father, Mike. Ironically, it was Mike who wanted to spend the rest of his adult life emulating his son's.

As the two detailed in their very poignant collaborative book, *Recovery of a Lifetime*, released in January (FS Publishing), Mike Reis was far from the ideal father or husband. He was rarely around for Chris' formative years, and he struggled with alcohol and sexual addiction that threw even more wedges into their relationship.

Chris Reis, raised mainly by his mother and famous for his recovery of the "Ambush" onside kick in Super Bowl XLIV that

led to a New Orleans victory, became a Christian at the age of 18 and went on to play football at Georgia Tech University. After being drafted by the Atlanta Falcons of the NFL, Chris spent four seasons playing for the Saints, from 2007 to 2010, including a Super Bowl championship in his final year.

During that time, Chris' relationship with Jesus grew stronger, which caused his father to take notice.

Mike accepted Christ into his life in October 2005, and thought he was finally on the right path. However, he didn't completely surrender his life—or alcohol, still one of his main vices—to the Lord.

It wasn't until his arrest on a DUI charge, three weeks after Super Bowl XLIV, that Mike Reis drew the line. Enough was enough.

"Here I was, attending church and professing to be a man of God, but I was still behaving like one who didn't believe in God at all," Mike wrote in *Recovery of a Lifetime*. "I felt incredible shame and low self-respect. Once again, I had blown it. My son had just made the most famous recovery in Super Bowl history. Now I needed my own recovery—a recovery from my addiction to alcohol, sex and a life filled with bad choices and poor decisions.

"Little did I know how that play would change both our lives as father and son forever. Chris would be there again when I needed him most, and together we would make a recovery of a lifetime."

The idea for the book came following Super Bowl XLIV. The ambush play, which shocked many—including the Indianapolis Colts—came at the beginning of the third quarter and helped spark the Saints to the victory. Having never been a starter, the play launched Chris into sports stardom for a short time.

Much more than that, however, Chris realized that God had a

plan, and that he would be able to use the famous play for His purposes.

“I felt like God was calling me to use it as a platform,” Chris said. “I wasn’t sure where to go with it, but God gave me the title for the book. A couple of weeks later, dad got arrested for DUI, and I talked to him about doing the book with me. I believe that God gave us this vision to impact the world. It’s definitely a calling.”

A Rebellious Life

Mike was successful in the corporate world and had provided for his family. But, he was a failure at his most important relationships, including with the Lord—and with his two sons.

“Literally, I have had a very long and lucrative business career,” Mike said. “But when you come to realize that means nothing, it’s a very empty feeling. I cannot begin to fathom the hurt and pain that I put Chris, my other son Mike, and my family through, and I can’t take that back. I went through marriages, divorces, sex addiction, alcohol—you name it.

“After the DUI arrest, I finally realized that I couldn’t do it on my own. I—and God—had to do something.”

Mike grew up the son of an alcoholic father and a teenage mother. Forthright about his past in *Recovery of a Lifetime*, he was abused sexually by his grandmother and discovered sex at a very early age.

Mike learned the art of deceit in business from his father, James, at an early age. He recognized dishonesty, having learned right from wrong from his mother, Lois. He never knew what it meant to have self-esteem, having been ridiculed by his father and grandmother constantly as a child and teenager. His father “favored gambling and drinking to seeing his family.”

When he discovered sex, women simply became objects of his desire. By the time his junior year of high school rolled around, "I felt like I could do anything I wanted," Mike wrote in the book.

Those attributes remained prevalent in Mike's personality throughout high school, through his college years at Georgia State University in the mid-1970s and through his marriage to his first wife, Stephanie, Chris' and Mike Jr.'s mother. It didn't take long for marital infidelity to rear its ugly head, and it didn't come with any remorse.

Although he became successful in the business world, Mike flunked out when it came to caring for his family. Mike and Stephanie later divorced, and he ended up divorcing his second wife as well.

Road to Recovery

While he could pass the buck and chalk those things up to generational sin, Mike chooses not to. The decision to collaborate with his son on a book so revealing and transparent wasn't an easy one, either.

"Generational curse, or whatever you want to call it, is not an excuse," he said. "You still have a choice as to what you are doing. God has called me to shine a light on that sin. On a personal level, I struggled a lot with it.

"My biggest fear is that I had to tell Chris some things that a father shouldn't tell a son. I was afraid he wasn't going to love me. It as very difficult, humiliating and embarrassing, but Chris was very supportive and loved me anyway."

If Mike was going to stop drinking, he knew he couldn't do it alone. He turned to his family, including his third wife, Celia, and he went cold turkey. He attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. He hasn't had an alcoholic drink since February 20, 2010—the night of his DUI.

Mike began to dive into God's Word, with the help of his friend, Larry Roberts. And after a two-day stay in jail (one of the penalties for his DUI), his faith in God, his marriage and his sobriety were all intact. Although he later lost his job at ConAgra Foods, he found another one at age 52.

"I kept plugging away, day by day, week by week, striving to live intentionally for God and do the right thing each and every day," Mike wrote in *Recovery*.

Mike has since earned professional coach certifications in addiction recovery and Christian Life, and leads a Self-Management and Recovery Training group in Cumming, Ga.

Chris' NFL career ended in 2011 when the Saints cut him. "I was OK with being cut because I was thankful to God that he had put me in that role for so long," Chris said. "I wanted to be a pro athlete for longer, and it was hard to give it up. But God has called me to do something else now."

Chris now travels the country speaking to men's groups, churches and religious organizations, rotary clubs, youth groups and corporations, inspiring others by sharing his story of living a faith-based lifestyle in an egocentric culture. He is grateful for his faith, but he is also most grateful for the healed relationship with his father.

"It's the best it's ever been," Chris said. "The relationship we had before simply was on the surface level because he wasn't around. He had no roots to me or my brother. Our relationship has done a complete 180-degree turn. It's worth everything we've been through to get to this point.

"I hope that, by people reading *Recovery*, there are fathers and sons out there that will experience the same healing. That, however, will only come by the grace of God."

For more information on speaking engagements for Chris, visit his website . *Recovery of a Lifetime* can be purchased online

at and on .

Going Vegetarian Could Lower Heart Disease Risk

Vegetarians are one-third less likely to be hospitalized or die from heart disease than meat and fish eaters, according to a new UK study.

Earlier research has also suggested that non-meat eaters have fewer heart problems, researchers said, but it wasn't clear if other lifestyle differences, including exercise and smoking habits, might also play into that.

Now, "we're able to be slightly more certain that it is something that's in the vegetarian diet that's causing vegetarians to have a lower risk of heart disease," said Francesca Crowe, who led the new study at the University of Oxford.

Still, she noted, the researchers couldn't prove there were no unmeasured lifestyle differences between vegetarians and meat eaters that could help explain the disparity in heart risks.

Crowe and her colleagues tracked almost 45,000 people living in England and Scotland who initially reported on their diet, lifestyle and general health in the 1990s.

At the start of the study, about one-third of the participants said they ate a vegetarian diet, without meat or fish.

Over the next 11 to 12 years, 1,066 of all study subjects were hospitalized for heart disease, including heart attacks, and 169 died of those causes.

After taking into account participants' ages, exercise habits and other health measures, the research team found vegetarians were 32 percent less likely to develop heart disease than carnivores. When weight was factored into the equation, the effect dropped slightly to 28 percent.

The lower heart risk was likely due to lower cholesterol and blood pressure among vegetarians in the study, the researchers reported this week in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Meat eaters had an average total cholesterol of 222 mg/dL and a systolic blood pressure—the top number in a blood pressure reading—of 134 mm Hg, compared to 203 mg/dL total cholesterol and 131 mm Hg systolic blood pressure among vegetarians.

Diastolic blood pressure — the bottom number — was similar between the two groups.

Crowe said the difference in cholesterol levels between meat eaters and vegetarians was equivalent to about half the benefit someone would see by taking a statin.

The effect is probably at least partly due to the lack of red meat—especially meat high in saturated fat—in vegetarians' diets, she added. The extra fruits and vegetables and higher fiber in a non-meat diet could also play a role.

"If people want to reduce their risk of heart disease by changing their diet, one way of doing that is to follow a vegetarian diet," Crowe told Reuters Health.

However, she added, you also don't have to cut out meat altogether—just scaling back on saturated fat can make a difference, for example. Butter, ice cream, cheeses and meats all typically contain saturated fat.

Men, Towel Up and Bless Others

In the three years that they had been together, the disciples had watched Jesus feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes. They were in the boat when he walked on the water and when he calmed the storm. They had seen him heal the sick and raise the dead, even cast out demons.

On the night of his arrest, they shared a last meal together. In the next 24 hours, their lives would be turned upside down in the shadows of his crucifixion. But, in the days ahead, God would begin to use them to turn the world upside down as they would stand in the power of his resurrection.

Jesus Showed What Love Does

Jesus was about to do something very personal, something they would never forget. Around the intimacy of this table he showed his disciples not just what love is, but what love does. He used one of their customs, something they could relate to.

In the First century, the servant of the house would wash the feet of a guest. Everyone in the room knew that.

“ ... so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:4-5, NIV)

This was so unexpected, so provocative. It seemed ridiculous and inappropriate. Peter openly objected.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" (John 13:6-8, NIV)

Peter was all over the map! He really didn't get it, not until later. I think it caught them all off guard, but it took them to a place they had not yet been to help them experience the depth of God's love.

God wants us to do that—to take people to a place where they can experience the depth of his love. To go beyond what is expected and show others what the redeeming love of God looks like. Jesus did that with a towel and a basin of water. It was disarming and powerful. It left a mark.

The men in the room didn't deserve it. They would all scatter when Jesus was arrested. When he had Peter's feet in his hands, Jesus knew that he would deny him three times. He knew that Judas had already made up his mind to betray him.

What About You?

What about you? Who in your life has denied you, or deserted you, or betrayed you? If you were in the same room with them with a basin of water, would you throw it in their face? Are they less deserving than the disciples who deserted Jesus? Are they less deserving than Peter who denied Jesus? Are they less deserving than Judas who betrayed Jesus?

What about you? Do *you* deserve to have *your* feet washed by Jesus? If he was kneeling at your bare stinky feet right now

with a towel wrapped around his waste and a basin of water in his hands, would you be thinking: “Well, it’s about time. I deserve this.”

The truth is, by God’s standard, none of us deserve it.

“ ... There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” (Rom. 3:10-12, NIV)

If you compare yourself to someone else, you can always find someone who is worse than you! But, compared to God, none of us measure up. We are his church not because we deserve it, but because he went beyond what was expected and sacrificed his Son Jesus for us.

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8, NIV)

While We Were Still Sinners

It’s really important that we get that “*while we were still sinners*” part. God didn’t wait for us to clean up our act. He showed us what his redeeming love looks like “*while we were still sinners.*” **We stand on *his grace*, not on how good we are. We stand on *his promises*, not on our performance.** Someone said, “That oughta humble the hell out of all of us!”

As Jesus washed their feet he knew they would all initially flake out, but he also knew that eleven of the 12 would circle back and do great things in the power of the Holy Spirit. Most of them would die a martyr’s death. Washing their feet had a pretty good return on his investment. For all, but one—Judas. So, why did Jesus wash his feet? He could have skipped over him and called him out. But, he didn’t. He still demonstrated his love for Judas.

God offers his grace to everyone. Many will receive it. Many

won't. Our mission is to extend it to everyone with no strings attached.

"... love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:35, NIV)

Don't expect to get anything back, but your reward will be great? That's not a contradiction. Jesus is saying don't expect a reward from those you are serving. Go into it with no strings attached. Hold out for a greater reward—God's reward.

After Jesus washed his disciple's feet he said this:

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you ... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13: 15-17, NIV)

A Tremendous Blessing

He promised that if we take what we know and do it, then we'll be blessed. That's a promise; just don't turn it into a formula. The promise is "knowing + doing = blessing." Formula-based faith is "A + B = C" and "C" is a constant, a specific blessing that we have in mind. Formula-based faith reduces God to a personal need-meter or concierge.

If we practice what God tells us we can always count on his blessing. The blessing just may not come in the package we prefer.

If you've ever prayed for patience, you know what I mean! God doesn't hand it to you in a nice gift-wrapped package. The Scriptures teach us that our faith is strengthened through struggles. That's where some of God's greatest blessings are found.

Before you pick up a towel and start washing feet you should

check your motive. It's quite possible that your circumstances may not change. But, one thing is for sure. *You* will change. That's a blessing you can count on.

Towel up and look for ways to go beyond what is expected to those who don't deserve it, and expect nothing in return. It's provocative. It's unusual. But, when we do it right, it's disarming, and sometimes it's irresistible.

Adapted from *STAND*, a 4-Session Small Group Series by Tierce Green.

[Click here for the original article at .](#)

Tierce Green is the executive pastor of Small Groups at Woodlands Church in The Woodlands, Tex., where he speaks to over a thousand men each year in a seasonal gathering called The Quest. He is also a teaching pastor in the bullpen for his Senior Pastor Kerry Shook. Tierce spoke widely as a speaker and consultant for the 26 years before that and wrote curriculum for organizations like LifeWay and Student Life.

Good Fathers Make Sacrifices That Count

Remember the "golden days?" You were a man with youth on your side and full of idealistic dreams.

You were a sight to behold. Golf multiple times a week and a roaring social life. You had it pretty good, didn't you? As Bob Seger once sang, "you were like a rock."

Then like a powerful late summer hurricane, your life was transformed. You had not an ounce of resistance towards her.

She made you want to be a better man, a different man.

Now, you sometimes sit in your “man-cave” and reflect on how life has changed. Chucky Cheese is your nightclub. Changing diapers is your extreme sport. A soccer game where nobody is even keeping score is something you are psyched about all week.

Isn't it beautiful? As good fathers, we sacrifice so that our family may thrive. The following list accounts for a few of the things we have put aside:

1. **The Lifestyle.** Jimmy Buffett would have been proud to know you. No responsibility was felt towards anything and your life revolved around the next bit of fun. It was a shallow existence, but you were just the man to make it rock. Eventually, last call always occurs. The lights come on and the party is over. You still slip out on occasion to catch Monday Night Football and see how many .50 wings you can down. But Margaritaville has long since closed. Nowadays, you sip ice tea and your wing man uses a sippy cup.

2. **Stepping Up To The Plate.** Sometimes you can't believe the words are coming from your mouth. “I sound just like my Dad” you think to yourself with a slight bit of fear. Then, you remember you *are* the Dad now and that a different set of priorities now rest at your feet. You are the responsible one now. Discipline and guidance have now been reassigned to your department. You step up to the plate and you deliver, because that is what a good man does.

3. **Tick Tock.** Time moves like a bullet train. Even Christmas sneaks up on you like a fleet-footed time bandit. There is always something else that needs done and somewhere else you need to be. Then, you see those big brown eyes staring up at you. The only place you know you will be is right where they want you to be. You slap the time bandit upside his head and you sit down and play Candyland. A good Dad knows the meaning

of the phrase “time well wasted.”

4. **Mean Green.** Sure, with your money you would love to upgrade the golf clubs. That 80-inch hi-def at Best Buy taunts you every time you walk by it. But you leave those items in your dreams. Or on a “wish list” that gets larger every month. You work hard so your family has the things they need. Luxuries are for them when possible. College funds, insurance and retirement plans are where you have your spending sprees now.

5. **The Sandman.** No, not the future Hall of Fame closer of the New York Yankees, but The Sandman who used to allow for a great night of sleep. He seems to be tardy in your life a great deal now. Remember sleeping past 10:00 am once upon a time? You are lucky to make it past 8:00 am on the weekends and 6:30 am during the week. Work starts early and ends late. Saturday morning arrives and before the sun can fully rise a little face is staring in yours wanting your full attention. Your first instinct might be to gently take your forearm and shoo her back to SpongeBob. But you don't. Thoughts of your Mom screaming “Are you going to sleep the whole day away young man?” race through your head. This while you eat your Frosted Mini-Wheats watching SpongeBob and your daughter explains who Mr. Krabs is. “No Mom, I'm apparently *not* going to sleep any whole day away ever again.”

6. **The Dream Job.** You work hard and you're talented. Naturally, opportunities arise. There is always a kicker though. This one moves the family across the country. That one requires that you travel three weeks a month. The money is incredible, but how much of your soul is required to take it? You come home and your son plops in your lap and tells you all about his day. His best friend across the street helped him make a skateboard ramp. At that moment, you realize you are just fine where you are for now. The corporate ladder only needed to be climbed just so far. Your dream job has already been realized and business is booming.

7. The Cool Factor. Nobody likes to think of themselves as a nerd. You have friends and people like you. You're cool right? No, sorry Dad, you aren't. You look ridiculous when you wear those hideous jean shorts your wife bought at Target. Your belly is chubby and your haircut long since went out of style. You wear plaid shirts and khaki pants on a daily basis for goodness sake. All you need is the pocket protector and you just got cast for "Revenge of the Nerds Part 8." No, you aren't cool, but there is a very positive trade-off. You are Superman in the eyes of a special little child. Superman trumps cool...always.

8. The Rabid Fan. Back in the day you had season tickets and never missed a game. You found the fact that some fans came late and left early nauseating. Come rain, sleet, wind or snow, you were going to the game and staying until the clock hit zero. You were the most rabid of rabid fans. One beautiful wife, two adorable children and a mortgage payment later, those tickets are long gone. Occasionally, you spend what amounts to a full car payment to take the whole family with you for a game. You arrive late because your daughter puked on the way. You leave early because your son's diaper is full and you forgot the diaper bag. You don't know the final outcome and, at this point, you don't really care. Then your mind drifts to this weekend's big game and you get excited once again. The big game between the Westminster Dragons and the Shady Oaks Tigers. Dreams of "scholarship" dance through your head as your daughter scores her third goal. Rabid fan reborn.

9. Coup d'état. A man's home is his castle right? Son, you've been overthrown by the Prince and the fair Princess. Tiger is finally playing like himself again and you would like to watch it on the big screen? Sorry Charlie. This is the final season of Veggie Tales on TV and every episode is "special." Think you might surf the Net a little bit and see what's going on in the world? Nope. The Princess is playing a game involving lots of furry animals, while talking to her friends on the phone

who are doing the same. Do you know who the low man on the totem pole is, Chief? In almost every instance, it's Dad. You just shake your head with a smile and go take a nap. That's what was going to happen while watching golf anyway. Life is good.

10. **Spreading Their Wings.** She just learned how to ride a bike and now she's backing your car down the driveway. A few days ago, she was playing with Barbies and now she has a date coming to pick her up. Yesterday, you were holding her hand walking into kindergarten and now the trunk is packed for college. The most difficult sacrifice for any great father is letting go. But we do. They spread their wings and off they soar. We taught them well and they are majestic as they fly towards the horizon with the sun at their back. Job well done Dad. Job extremely well done.