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HONORING YOUR PARTNER

By Kit & Drew Coons

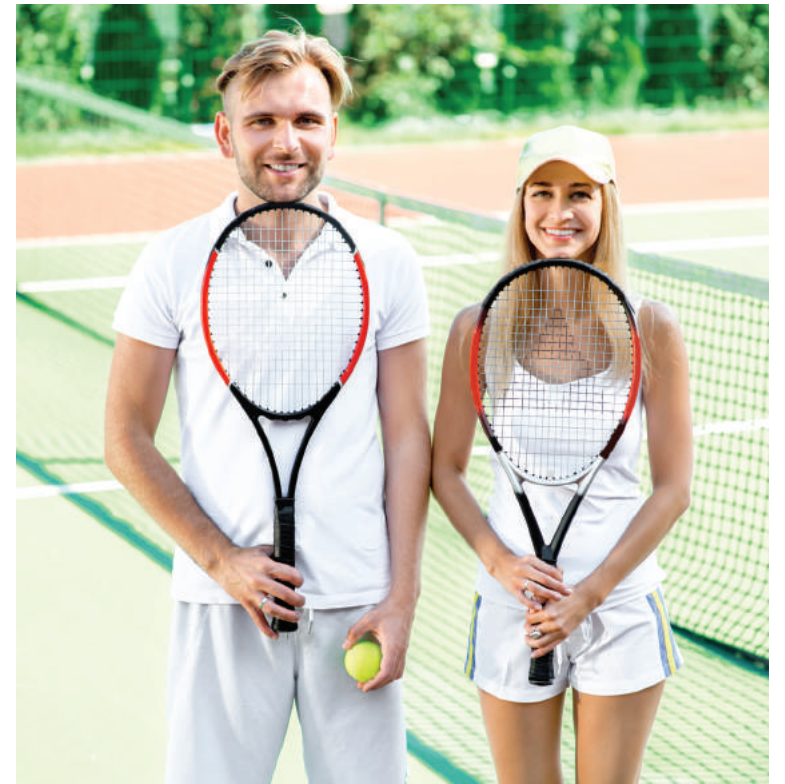
I PLAYED COMPETITIVE tennis for 20 years. My wife Kit took up the game as well and started to improve. Then she got an idea. We could play some doubles together against other couples. Now, there's a test of anybody's marriage. You know how they have engaged couples go through pre-marital counseling? I think they should make them play tennis together.

My attitude was that winning was everything. You play tennis for fun, right? Well, losers don't have any fun. Winning might not be everything. But losing is nothing, I felt. Wanting to win so badly, I started telling Kit some of the mistakes she was making and ways she ought to improve her game. She played worse and worse. As I was telling her everything she needed to do differently, she got so bad that every time she could touch the ball with her racket, it was a point for the other side. On one occasion, I told her, "Serve the ball and step off the court. I'll play them by myself." But I couldn't win doubles that way. Kit didn't literally leave the court. But she really was out of the match. Our opponents were passing me down the side line. I had to ask her to cover the line so that I could win. She did and we won.

That day I started to learn a lesson. The way Kit played tennis was directly related to the way I treated her on the court. Whenever I started to criticize her, she was awful. But when she was having fun, when she thought she was doing well, she was a great player. How she played tennis was directly dependent on the way I treated her, the manner in which I honored her on the tennis court.

Now, that's not as easy when you're playing with your wife as it might be playing with someone else. For example, you're partnering with another guy. He misses an easy shot at the net. You say, "Nice try, Bill. You'll get the next one." He thinks you really mean "nice try." But, what you actually want to say is, "If you do that one more time, I'm going to wrap this racket around your neck." Now you're playing with your wife. She misses an easy shot at the net. You say, "Nice try, Sweetheart. You'll get the next one." Unfortunately, your wife knows what you really want to say.

Therefore honoring your wife can't be faked. It has to be



genuine respect and encouragement regardless of their performance. After I learned this, Kit got better and better at tennis. She got so good that we played in a tennis league one summer where she was the only woman in the league. All the others were men who wanted to win as badly as I did. We played for a position on our team and won a starting spot. We won over half of our matches and had lots of fun together. I'd never had so much fun playing tennis as I did that summer with Kit. And it happened because I learned to honor Kit on the court.

Although this story came from tennis the principle is accurate for all parts of a relationship. The way you feel really affects the way you perform. Husbands, do you want a better wife? You'll have one, if you learn to truly honor the one you've got. The same is true for wives to husbands.



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LIVING IN FREEDOM EVERYDAY

“Who has ACCESS to your heart?”

That’s a question I’ve asked others who were seeking freedom from porn addiction. In fact, it’s a question I’ve had to answer myself.

Letting people in and giving them access means going beyond just “the ability to give an account of your actions.”

I mean, confessing sins over and over again gets old fast. (Trust me on that one.) Now getting to the heart of the matter and finding what I call “the Why for the What” is where freedom begins to take place. It’s going to the deeper and hidden issues of the heart.

Who knows the good, bad and ugly of your past, present and future?

Who knows both your victories AND your vices?

Who can celebrate YOU and WITH you?

Who are the people committed TO you and the formation of Christ IN you?

Letting People In and giving them access means moving from “casual” friendships to “covenant” friendships or rather fully “committed” friendships; the people who won’t get scared and run away no matter what. People who will fight for you in prayer and fight alongside you in the heat of the battle.

In other words, ‘Letting people in’ involves disclosure of the good, bad and ugly of your past, present & future. It’s allowing your heart’s hurts, hopes and vices to be known and covered by people committed to seeing Christ formed in you.

Let’s go beyond just giving an account....to giving others access to our hearts.

Freedom is waiting for you.”

By Richie Cruz
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WRITTEN BY MAGGIE FAIR



Single mother of four now adult children with the oldest one being severely challenged

“...you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.” John 16:22

When is the last time you had a good belly laugh? The earth shaking, can’t stop, snorting good fun? Let’s get over ourselves now...yes I did say that! Life is just too short to not enjoy our children and our time away from them! In this issue I want to counter some lies we believe that rob us of happiness and to provide you with some enjoyable resources on a limited budget.

Lie number one “I can’t afford to take time off.....

Time is a commodity it is true, but why not try a little bartering with a trusted friend. When I was raising my oldest daughter who is severely handicapped and I also had my second son who was about two at the time. One of the places I would take them to was the local river park. There were toys to play on for them and a view for me. One day I met another Mom there with her two, one also handicapped and one fast running two year old just like mine. We talked and then planned to make this event regular. As time went on we realized that we were both the best resources for each other for childcare around, so we began trading time away from our kids as well as enjoying our time together at the park once a week.

Lie number two: “I would be neglecting

my family to be away from them?

In order to enjoy all our relationships and to be healthy we need space to be ourselves. The old saying goes...absence makes the heart grow fonder. All good marriage vows include “let there be space in your togetherness”...for a reason. We need to enjoy who we are as individuals before we can really enjoy ourselves as part of someone else’s life. Some resources I could share that have helped me immensely that didn’t break the bank when I was struggling financially were joining support groups, such as Alanon (you don’t have to have an alcoholic or drug addict in your life to benefit from this), moms and babies groups through churches and through local parenting publications that list activities in our area. Good old fashioned counseling (offering a sliding scale) can also help in the case of having a non-supportive spouse or none at all. When I was young and married my husband didn’t know how to partner well. He grew up in a family where his Mom wore the pants so to speak, because of this he expected me to act like this also. Communicating our needs early in a relationship is a very important part of getting them met before trouble starts.

Lie number three: I cannot afford to spend money for relaxing when I can barely pay my bills...

I say you cannot afford not to. Why do I think this you might ask? Because money well spent on caring for yourself through things like getting massages reaps big rewards in not having to pay for doctors and medicine because we are so stressed out that we are sick. Massages can be bought from schools that are training new students. The cost is about half. You can request someone who is just about to graduate and so benefit from them having more experience. You can also request the gender of your Masseuse if this makes you feel more comfortable. Let’s not also forget that you can also get pampered there for a reduced cost by getting a manicure and or a pedicure. The

last manicure I got at the beauty school called “Marinello’s” downtown cost just seven dollars!

I hope that what I have just shared with you will help you to enjoy yourself, your time with your family, keep you in good health and save you some money.

God’s Infinite Love,
Maggie Fair

Photo of Abby Rose my 35 year old who has “Rett Syndrome”



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MY LIFE AS A ROLLER DERBY QUEEN

By Judy Arnold



ROLLER DERBY CAME INTO MY life when I was 13 years old. I first saw a game on TV and then had an opportunity to go to a live game at the Armory in San Francisco five blocks from where I lived. When I saw the banked track and speed of the skaters, I wanted to give it a try, never dreaming I would someday become a professional roller derby skater. I trained for almost three years and when I was 16 the San Francisco Bay Bombers asked me to skate with their team professionally – what a thrill for me! Skating became the love of my life and took me all over the USA, to Puerto Rico, Santa Domingo and Japan. As a result of my popularity I appeared on many TV and radio talk shows and had the privilege to double in the skating scenes for Raquel Welch in the 1972 movie Kansas City Bomber.

It was during the making of the movie and working closely with movie stars that I realized being famous and having lots of money was not the answer to life. I was searching for love in all the wrong places, never knowing that what I was looking for was the One that gave His life so I could have life. Another skater told me about Jesus and I gave my heart and life to Him in 1973. His love was and is the best thing that ever happened to me and from that day until now my heart's desire is to know HIM and make HIM known.

In 1975, at the peak of my skating career, I retired to attend Bible College in California. After graduation, the Lord opened doors and I taught Physical Education at a Christian School for 7 years. At the same time I ministered in the LA County Jail for Women every week for over seven years.

In 1985, I began traveling throughout the United States, sharing what the Lord had done in my life. My burden has always been to see others set free and healed of things that hold them back from being all God created them to be. As an evangelist I have ministered in prisons and pulpits - preached in schools, Indian reservations, and on many street corners. I have traveled, to Belize, Mexico and Argentina, where I was used extensively in street evangelism. Along the way I have appeared on TV and radio, including the 700 Club, and PTL. Over the years I have skated into many churches and events in my Warrior uniform and immediately have everyone's attention. I tell them, "I am a real Holy Roller"! God has done so much in my life. I love sharing His great goodness and love.

With the resurgence of Women's Roller Derby and leagues exploding all over the country, and the world, I have the privilege of encouraging and mentoring the local Roller Girl teams.

I currently reside in Redding California, traveling and speaking on a regular basis.



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By Dottie B. Collette

I LOVE YOU “now” MOM

HIS OBJECTIVE: PURE SELF GRATIFICATION at the expense of me. When I was about four years old, I remember the horrid feeling of being pulled from Mamma’s arms from where we had fallen asleep on the sofa. I will never forget the look in her eyes as she ignored my pleading to rescue me as she released me into the defiler’s hands. I still can see her eyes as she closed them and rolled over to go back to sleep.

As an adult, I opted never to have a relationship with my biological father; for the years of pain he had put me through with his abuse of all kinds, especially his sexual desires, was unbearable. In my early forties I received news my biological father was dying. I forgave him on his death bed. He said he was sorry for what he had done to me and I thanked him.

My childhood memories consisted of feeling sad and scared. I harbored anger towards my mother. I began to realize, I hated her. I hated her more than I had once hated the perpetrator himself. Mother should have protected me. I hated her for knowingly letting him impose himself on me.

As time went on, I would still visit mother. I was rude in my tone and sometimes yelled at her for things that I couldn’t even make sense of. I often would ask my self “Why did I still want to see her? Why was I continuously tormenting myself?” As a part of my healing process I really wanted an apology from her but mother refused. I would try to talk about “it” hoping to understand why, “Why would she let that sort of thing happen to me, her child? Didn’t she love me? All I ever heard from her was “I don’t want to talk about it!”, except once I got “It was your fault! You let him do it to you!”

When I was young, I was blessed by God to learn a little about Him from our neighbors. But becoming a better Christian was a struggle. I was stuck. I felt I couldn’t develop a relationship with Jesus, yet I could still feel He wanted one with me. I struggled to forgive myself for my sins, including hating my mother. It darkened my soul. It poured out of me into in my personal life and affected those close to me. I hated myself!

I eventually got help for my pain, and turned more and more to Jesus, accepting His Mercy and Grace. I continued to pray in hopes to forgive my mother. I prayed my heart would be soft-

ened and He would pull me near. I also prayed He would help me see my mother the way He saw her.

One day sifting through the Bible, I read: “...and do not ‘despise’ your mother when she is old.”

Mother was getting old and I despised her! And even though He still loved me, what a disappointment to GOD I must have been. I remembered my praying, this scripture is where the Holy Spirit had led me to.

Today I am 48, “Mom” is 78. I’ve forgiven her. She says she loves me. That’s something I’d “never” heard as a child. I see her more now and talk several times a week on the phone. As I’ve come to know and love her, she’s really quite smart. She reads daily and works on puzzles. I don’t have any expectations of an apology anymore, that way I can’t be disappointed. I did learn a couple of things about mom in some of our talks. When she was a child she had been molested by an uncle and once in her twenties she had been raped at knife point. Maybe I will never understand mom, but I wondered if she offered up her story as her way of indirectly apologizing to me. It has lifted a burden off me to have forgiven my mom. My bondage has been broken. I can forgive. I too am forgiven.

I once heard: “Forgiveness doesn’t mean the hurt never happened, it just means it won’t control your life anymore!”

Blessings and Healings!



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MIDLIFE

Career Change Just Ahead

by John W. Nichols

CONSIDERING A NEW CAREER at midlife can be frightening. Staying in a safe port is easier than sailing into uncharted waters, but an economic upheaval can force change upon us at any time. Work which once filled our days with excitement may grow humdrum and trigger a longing for fresh challenges.

The dictionary defines midlife as the period from age forty-five to fifty-five. Some view this decade as a time to think about slowing down. Others are vigorously planning next steps, forming goals, and mapping out their next twenty years. Certainly the question, “What am I going to be when I grow up?” has been replaced by another urgent query, “What am I going to accomplish in the remainder of my life?”

Changing careers at midlife is not a new phenomenon. In a rags to riches tale, Moses floated into royalty. At age forty he exchanged the privilege and opulence of the royal court for crash courses in wilderness survival and shepherding. At eighty he became a national leader and was instrumental in releasing the Law of Moses, a body of timeless legislation. Moses could be the poster child for midlife career change.

While Moses had a burning bush experience directing his career choice, I should not expect that as the norm. No one will knock on my door with a detailed plan. With discernment, I

must examine my personal situation and take informed steps. Consider these pointers.

LIVE EXPECTANTLY - Make pursuing a relationship with God top priority. Do not neglect prayer and Bible study. Block out time for meditation and contemplation. In your times of reflection consider passions and arising interests. Ask, “Is God illuminating a new opportunity through these?”

LIVE EAGERLY - Conduct studies into areas of interest. Foster the childlike curiosity that leads to discovery. If possible, volunteer to try out a new role before leaping into it. Speak with friends working in a similar career, and ask why they chose their line of work. Find out what they enjoy and how they prepared for the job.

LIVE RESPONSIBLY - Career choices affect our spouses who must be included in the decision-making process. If children are in the home involve them in the conversation. Family obligations do not disappear with a new career or the quest to secure it.

LIVE FRUGALLY - Develop a financial plan and discipline yourself to adhere to a budget. Exterminate debt. The perfect career choice may deliver satisfaction but at a reduced level of salary. Be creative about reducing expenses to facilitate a job change. Regulate spending with an eye on the future.

LIVE HEALTHILY - A dull body dulls the mind. Exercise and healthy eating habits are crucial to success at this stage of life.

LIVE EXCITEDLY - Approach career change as an opportunity to learn and grow. Be flexible, and be patient. Understand there will be unexpected turns as you master the responsibilities. Remember, life is always an adventure.

Avoiding the uncertainty of career change may seem the safest choice, but the costs can be staggering as we miss out on invigorating fulfillment. Perhaps a good motivating question is, “If I had one year left on earth, how would I spend it?”

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WHY YOUR FAT LOSS IS STUCK

IF YOUR SCALE WON'T BUDGE,
THEN THIS STORY IS FOR YOU.



JON GABRIEL WAS STUCK. At nearly 410 pounds, he had tried every diet imaginable – with no luck. No matter what approach he took to lose fat, his body would fight him, and he would inevitably end up heavier than before. Then one day he had a light bulb-over-the-head “ah-hah” moment: His body wanted to be fat, and as long as it wanted to be fat, there was nothing he could do to lose weight.

If you’ve struggled for any length of time with weight loss, then you know the frustration that Gabriel felt in that moment. He was at war with his body.

In the two years following Gabriel’s “ah-hah” moment, he lost over 220 pounds naturally, without surgery or

counting calories. His incredible journey is recounted in his book *The Gabriel Method*. One of the key components to his success was that he identified and addressed the mental and emotional reasons that his body felt safe being overweight. Once these issues were eliminated, the weight began to fall off.

The Real Reason You Can't Lose Weight

According to Gabriel, your body wants to be fat anytime it decides that being fat is the best way to keep you safe. Once your body understands that being thin is the best way to keep you safe, your body will want to be thin and the weight will fall off.

This all ties into our sur-

vival instincts to protect us from starvation, freezing to death or being eaten. In our modern world you have different worries than being chased by a lion, but even modern stress about paying your bills create the exact same chemical signals that are produced when you are starving or freezing. This convinces your body that you need to be fat in order to be safe.

When you approach weight loss from the outside in, you overlook mental and emotional threats that can confuse your body into thinking that being fat can help keep you safe.

Here are four threats that may be affecting you:

1. Fear of Scarcity: When you spend your time in fear that you don’t have enough money then you send a message to your body that resources are limited. The only resource that your body recognizes is food – and storing fat is how your body saves up.

2. Emotional Obesity: At a subconscious level you may have the association that being fat makes you feel safer, or that it is serving another emotional need. In this case your body is simply trying to protect you; it is making you feel safer emotionally.

3. Mental Starvation: Though your body only recognizes physical starvation, you can also be suffering from emotional or mental starvation.

This could be a desire for love, joy, fun, intimacy, or a deeper spiritual connection. Any mental or emotional longing can send the same chemical signals in your brain that physical starvation causes.

4. Dysfunctional Beliefs: If you believe that you were meant to be fat, or deserve to be fat, or if you view weight

loss as impossible, then your body will obey by refusing to lose weight. Change your dysfunctional beliefs first and then weight loss will become simple.

Exercise was a big part of Gabriel’s remarkable weight loss journey. Once he broke through the mental and emotional reasons for his obesity, his body craved activity.

Are you ready to begin your more fully alive wellness, fitness and health journey?

Accepting You

It is important that you come to a place where you feel comfortable with your body exactly as it is right now. By accepting your body just as it is – today – you are able to reduce the stress signals that are encouraging fat storage. Once you accept yourself as you are, you end the war with your body, and healthy fat loss becomes natural.

In my opinion, each one of us was created a unique way to be the authentic version of us that has never existed before in all of the history of the earth.

Once we are gone, no one exactly like us will ever again inhabit planet earth. Common sense I realize, but something to really consider when you think about how much time and emotional energy we waste comparing ourselves to others or wishing we weren’t who we are.

Mark Twain said that, “Comparison is the death of joy”. So, let’s take our invaluable bodies and lives and make the most of them for our own enjoyment of this life and to be fully able to help others do the same.



By Fred Schafer,
MS, CFT



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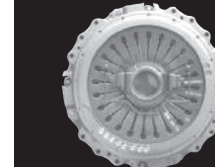
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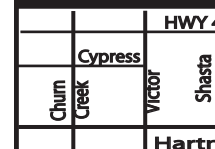
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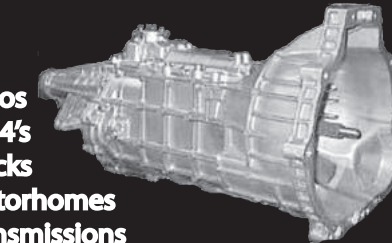


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Why Wait?

By Diane Hunter



“EVERYONE I KNOW HAS SEX BEFORE THEY’RE MARRIED,”

my Christian friend matter-of-factly said to me. “They might try to wait until they’re engaged, but once people know they’re going to marry, they think, ‘why wait?’” Unfortunately, my friend’s statement aligns with public opinion polls taken over the last twenty years that tell us that close to 95% of all people (Christians and non-Christians alike) in the United States have had sex before marriage.¹ So, if only 5% of people are waiting to have sex until they are married, we are missing the benefits that purity provides. God has set the specific boundary of marriage around our sexuality. Why? Why does He tell us that “sexual immorality and all impurity... must not even be named among you”? (Ephesians 5:3).

This is important to God, and whether we understand it or not. The path we walk down (in either purity, or impurity) will affect every area of our life. Purity brings very many spiritual, physical, and social benefits, which I will share in upcoming articles, as well as in our book, *Purity by Design*. Today, though, we will focus on the relational benefits.

Sexual purity provides a powerful protection from unhealthy, damaging, and abusive dating relationships. The strengthening process of developing purity protects us. How does it do this?

Choosing to abstain from fulfilling our natural sexual desire creates a pressure (or tension) within us.² Allowing ourselves to be refined by this pressure shows us not only our strengths and weaknesses, but it also allows us to see into the heart and soul of the one we are considering as a lifelong partner.

Do you want to marry someone who doesn’t have strength of character? If we cannot control our sex drive before we’re married, we may not be able to control our sex drive once we are married. Let’s not be part of the statistics. Self-control is worth its weight in gold.

If someone has a streak of weakness, selfishness, unfaithfulness, or impatience, it will clearly be exposed. How does someone act when his desire is not satisfied? Does he push? Manipulate? Coerce? Blame? Or, does he develop a loving kindness that lifts up the other person for the greater good? People who have a tendency to think that things revolve around them usually become frustrated when they do not get what they

want, often misdirecting their anger and unhappiness.

THE GIFT IS: character flaws and immaturity will be seen when sexual tension is experienced and sex is deferred until marriage. Those who reject purity through having premarital sex nullify this safeguard and often find themselves disillusioned once they marry.

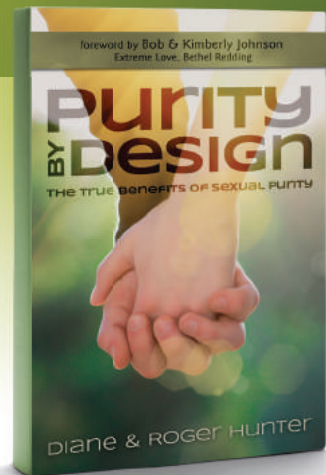
Please do not short-circuit the purpose of the dating process by involving sex before its time. Commit to investing in your future (or current) marriage now, through purity. The rewards are well worth the price.

So what’s the answer? Honestly, the answer is found in being loved by God. If you have not walked in purity, or find yourself struggling, ask God to show you how He sees you. Ask Him to fill you, and begin to worship Him. This is one powerful key that will begin to align you to His truth and freedom in all your relationships.

For more keys to walking in purity, check out our new book, *Purity by Design*, at our website: epiclifeministries.com. God has allowed my husband and I to walk through rich pastures of grace and redemption together, and we would love to share these treasures with you.

1 “Trends in Premarital Sex in the United States, 1954-2003.” And, <http://waitingtillmarriage.org/4-cool-statistics-about-abstinence-in-the-usa/>

2 This principle that God showed me many years ago helped me stay pure; Moral Revolution also has great teaching on the value of sexual tension.



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Celebrating Advent?

I CAN REMEMBER coming to the end of one Christmas season as a pastor and thinking, “Boy am I glad that’s over with.” I thought about that a lot and asked God to help me understand how to change my heart. Christmas seemed to be about programs, and parties, and shopping, and running from one thing to another.

I wanted the Christmas season to be a season of joy, not a tedious and hectic “Can’t wait to get this done.” The following Christmas season I decided to take time each day to read Scripture, an advent-themed book, and pray. It was a time to meet with God and see the incarnation fresh and new. In the beginning I did it alone, but after a couple of years, I began to use an advent candle and do short readings with the rest of the family, and they loved it! Years later I began

to blog daily Advent readings and invited others to come along. At the encouragement of family and friends I wrote an Advent book and published it to Amazon Kindle entitled *An Advent Sojourn*.

My love for Christ makes this season a time of anticipation and real joy. I’ve seen my kids embrace it for their own families, and many others too. Discover Advent, and let the season be about preparing for Christmas – waiting on and for Christ.

.....
Elliott Pollasch is the pastor of New Life Church in Randolph, WI and the author of *An Advent Sojourn* available on Amazon Kindle





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ALMOST WENT TO HEAVEN

By Joy Fry



SUPPOSE YOU WOKE and knew it would be your last day on earth? How would you spend it? Who would you choose to be with? What would you communicate to loved ones? How would they remember you? These questions weighed on me after a near death experience.

What had been an ordinary day of working at a bank in Oakland suddenly turned into a nightmare. I exited the bank around 5:30 pm, and began walking through the center of the city. The streets were busy with daily commuters rushing to their bus stop or a mass transit station below. Then a man came towards me yelling the same swear words over and over. As I continued to walk, I heard the same foul language and it was even louder. I knew he was following me. Immediately, I was grabbed around the neck from behind and beaten on my back and shoulders. Then, I was dragged down the street in plain view of many. I screamed and fought my perpetrator with my arms. As I am only five foot, three inches tall, he easily reached around and clawed my face, barely missing one eye.

Fear gripped me. What would he do next? I continued to scream but no one came to my aid. I was in front of the Clorox Headquarters Building and thought someone would stop to help me. Just then, his strong hand tightened the grip on my neck and he pulled me to the curb in front of the Broadway Avenue bus stop. I could see to my left there was a bus moving quickly down Broadway toward this stop. Then, he shoved me as hard as he could on to this main street with two lanes of on-coming traffic. I remember thinking the bus is going to hit me.

I closed my eyes as thoughts raced through my mind. In the distance I could see a bright light. Oh my, I am going to die! I didn't get to tell my loved ones how much they mean to me and that I love them. I've been working late for months and my relationships have suffered. If I'd known today was my last, I would have made better use of my time and focused on things which were significance. Then, my soul grew peaceful and I waited for my arrival in the place with the bright light.

To my surprise, I opened my eyes and found myself lying in the middle of Broadway. My purse was nearby and my eye glasses were in the middle of the street but unbroken. Slowly, I got up. I stood in amazement, hardly able to believe I was still alive. I felt my face and looked down. My face had a cut and scratches and my legs were scraped but I had not been hit by the bus or any cars. I recognized my life had been spared. I believe I was protected by one of God's angels as I was pushed into the path of cars and a bus.

This experience led me to have a new perspective on how I wanted to spend my days. I had a desire to focus on things with eternal significance. Jesus teaches us in Mark 13 we are not to know the hour or the day the Lord will return and we will leave this earth and be taken to heaven. Verse 33 says "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come."

If you were asked, "Are you prepared if today is your last day on earth?" how would you respond? Set aside some time to write down any unsettled business in your life or where you desire change. Share what you write with a friend and develop a plan to address the items. You may discover, as I did, a desire to reserve more time for relationships and serving others.

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SUNSHINE FOR THE GOLDEN YEARS

By Kathleen Rigdon Highley

MY EXUBERANT THREE-YEAR OLD granddaughter scrambled into my lap, where she sat still--for mere seconds. She rubbed her tiny hand up my bare forearm, as though examining each wrinkle and spot. She looked up at me and said, "Gran, you're old."

"Yes, darling, I know."

Alexi Josephine Ortiz hopped down onto the floor and danced in circles. "When I grow up, I will not get old!" she said. Her sister, Avery Cricket, joined her in happy abandon, their voices echoing through the house.

In my life, God balances the pain and inflammation of rheumatoid arthritis with the desire to get up and answer the cry of a tiny voice in the other room. He balances fear of the unknown with the delights of today: the unexpected delivery from a local florist fills my nostrils with the delicate scent of roses; the soft velvet feel of Alexi's hand resting in my palm; the joy of watching Avery Cricket snuggle into the chair swing, smiling back at me; the taste of honey on my lips; the sound of unbridled laughter as the girls play school.

When I pay attention, the darkness is blocked by the light—the Light of Jesus Christ. The light of love in my granddaughters' eyes. The joy of knowing they love and need me overshadows any web of deceit I may have let Satan weave over my spirit.

Such sweet surrender to the blessings God has bestowed on me takes my focus off the ugly parts of life. Our God is so huge that nothing is bigger than God's plan for my life. I choose to focus on the goodness, the power of God Almighty. I choose to receive the gift of health. I choose to be the best "Gran" I can possibly be in order that my grandchildren will see God in me, and will be aware that circumstances need not dictate our level of joy, our measure of faith, or the direction we choose. I heard about the prayer of a little boy, and became encouraged to receive healing. "Thank You, Lord, that it makes You happy to heal our boo-boos," prayed the child. We, as God's children, give Him joy when we receive what He longs to give. Through the musings in my head, I hear tiny voices as they lift me up—here in the midst of the struggle, in the battle waged against us by Satan.

"Such sweet surrender to the blessings God has bestowed on me takes my focus off the ugly parts of life."

"Gran, I need you!" "Gran, you need to get my juice now. Please." "Gran, I need a hug." "Gran, I miss you when you go to work."

Words spoken from the innocent hearts of my grandchildren make me grateful for their presence in my life. I look forward to watching them grow and develop into the women God has created them to be.

So, the next time Alexi scrambles into my lap and declares, "Gran, you're old", I will smile and say, "I know, darling, but you and Avery make it all better."

Kathleen Rigdon Highley is an award winning author who delights in sharing the message of hope through various genres, from poetry to short stories to novels. She and her husband rejoice in their five children and ten grandchildren. She lives in West Texas, where writing, singing and helping others find the Light embody her passions.

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Prayer is not a
"spare wheel" that
you pull out when
in trouble, but it is
a "steering wheel"
that directs the
right path
throughout life.



IN THE MIDST OF THE GREATEST OF TRIALS and roughest of storms, God is never far away, and He never fails! During the spring of 2013, the Lord led my wife and me into the living room of a woman who had been crying out to God for help. This woman was without hope and unknown to us and crying out to a God she had denied for so long, but the God of all creation heard her cries. She was three days from being homeless, suddenly alone in the world, no source of income and desperate. She needed a miracle, the kind of miracle only God could perform.

Deborah and I had felt the Lord was leading us to look for a home for our school of ministry. As we drove by this one particular home, there was an overwhelming draw in our spirits. As we encouraged each other with the confirmation of these thoughts and began to pray together, we knew it was more than the home we were being drawn to. With the help of our realtor we made entry, only to find this woman of whom I speak sitting in her chair, a Bible rarely opened yet open now, lying on the table. Our first response to this scene was in unison, our spirits joined with that of our creator; we were there for her, not the home.

This meeting was the beginning of a long journey, one that included salvation, many miraculous events, friendship, love, and yes, even pain. In the end, it was redemption that became the prize. We brought Barbara into our home; she enjoyed the holidays, the laughter of children, and the conversations about

life. She enjoyed the comfort of being part of the family, not just an earthly family, but the family of God as well. She endured many physical trials, doctor appointments, countless medical procedures, and more, yet through it all two gifts remained in her possession, never to be taken away again—family and salvation. Was she perfect? No. Was life perfect? Certainly not. Was she being perfected? Oh yes. Did God hear her cries and answer her with love? Most assuredly.

On October 14 of this year, Barbara's suffering came to an end, and she met face-to-face the One who had redeemed her, the One who heard her cries. I am more than confident Barbara now understands the love of her Savior. All questions have been answered, and joy such as she has never known is now hers to hold for eternity. Death was not a punishment for her or those who knew her; it was, in fact, her ultimate reward, and we rejoice with her today!

This is not a story of death. No, this is a story about the miraculous God we serve and His willingness and desire to redeem His people—a story of encouragement and a reminder that in the midst of the greatest of trials and roughest of storms, God is never far away, and He never fails!

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CHOOSE LIFE OR DEATH

By James Wilson



I WILL NEVER FORGET the inner healing session I conducted with the distraught widow of a member of my congregation in Virginia a quarter of a century ago. Her husband had hanged himself in the entryway of their home and she found his body when she returned from grocery shopping; their six-year-old found it with her. During the inner healing session she had a vision in which The Father allowed to see her dead husband – alive with Him. When He asked her if she had a message for her husband she replied, “I want to beat the stuffing out of him.” The Father answered, “Well, he owes you at least that,” and she proceeded – in the vision – to punch him until she was out of breath. She opened her eyes and said to me, “Now I can forgive him.”

That may not seem like a very Christian way to forgiveness

– it doesn’t to me at least – but reality is the husband brutally injured the wife and young son. He left himself in the front hallway deliberately and with calculation. We do not belong solely to ourselves; we belong as well to the God Who created us and the loved ones we invite into covenant with us. G. K. Chesterton calls suicide an ultimate expression of a will to destroy. That young widow was entitled to express her own rage. When it was done – in the vision and not to the husband’s physical self – she was truly able to forgive and begin to heal and move on.

Equally burned into my memory was the time I had to forcibly restrain my own mother from swallowing a whole bottle of pills in our front hallway. I literally held her by the throat until she spit them onto the carpet. Another time I restrained

her as she screamed she would drive her car off a cliff; I had my brother disable the car.

Please don’t misunderstand me. The despair that can drive a person to want to end his own life is real and compelling. It runs in my family and I neither question it nor mock its gravity. On top of this, there are mind altering drugs that can produce suicidal thoughts and motivations; some of these may have played a role in the death of Robin Williams. But if we learn anything from the Word of God and our own pre-disposition to admire sacrifice and sacrificial heroism it is that only a life lived for others has meaning. Our original fall from grace was all about human beings deciding to live for their individual selves instead of for God and each other. Jesus Christ came into the world to restore the natural created economy of sacrifice with His own sacrificial death and resurrection.

Suicide is an ultimate choice to seek one’s own good at the expense of others. The greatest irony is that it turns out to be the enemy of all life doing a number on one more victim every time. Attempted suicides for whom intervention was successful are virtually without exception the first to admit how grateful they are. It may sound like old fashioned guilt-tripping but it is appropriate to point out that every person has forged interdependent and covenantal relationships that carry mutual obligation. The so-called right to die is a non sequitur; rights are for the living.

When my mother entered the last stage of her battle with an atypical form of tuberculosis she asked me to do something that was unthinkable for me as a Christian. She wanted me to connect her with a Dr. Kevorkian type who would usher her out of this life. I told her I would gladly prevent doctors from taking heroic measures to extend her life, but under no circumstances would I play God by facilitating the termination of her life. Once she knew I was serious – over the next few days – she became interested in asking Jesus Christ into her life for the first time in her life. When she actually popped the question she said it was because she had never known the peace she saw in me even when the world was crashing down around me. We prayed and that peace entered her even as the Spirit of God entered. Four days later she lapsed into a coma and went home.

Had I cooperated with her expressed desire for suicide assistance she would not have gone anywhere. Our choices are seldom easy, but they really are that simple. Jesus says, “I came that they might have life, and that abundantly.” This is true, and it is good.

James A. Wilson is the author of **Living As Ambassadors of Relationships and The Holy Spirit and the End Times** available at local bookstores or by e-mailing him praynorthstate@charter.net

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Dear Judy,

I watched Good Morning America the other day and a guest said there's a void inside people and we do whatever we can to fill that emptiness, whether it be drugs, sex, food, or something else. I've been a Christian for many years, but this made me think: "With what am I filling the void in my life? Is it really God and the Bible or is it something else, maybe something good, but not God?" Why do I so seldom feel driven to study the Bible? Then I started to wonder if I'm really a child of God.

—Troubled

Dear Troubled,

For the first part of my life I was one of those people who filled that void with the wrong stuff because I felt so empty, but even when doing the wrong stuff, I still felt empty. I believe that all people are created with a God-shaped vacuum in their lives that only God can fill and bring true happiness and fulfillment.

Before I allowed God to fill that void in my life, I was always searching for something but really never knew what it was I was searching for. My empty searching went from bad to worse, not only harming myself but others around me.

When I finally awoke to the truth and allowed God to fill me up to overflowing with His life, I went from being self-centered to God-centered. Living in this busy world, it is easy to get off track. We could get to where we seldom read our Bible. This does not happen overnight and usually happens when things are going right for us.

The Word of God is the only truth that will keep that void filled up at all times. We have to purpose in our hearts to put the things of God first in our life. It takes discipline. This must be done in the good times so we can get through the bad times of life. God will do His part but we must do our part.

Being a child of God is not about feeling you belong to Him but knowing that you belong to Him. This is done by repenting of your sin and asking the Savior Jesus Christ to come into your life. You do that and He will come and fill that void. The Psalmist David wrote about God, "You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thoughts afar off and are acquainted with all my ways" (Psalms 139). Meditate on words like that and the many other promises in the Word and it will continually fill you up!



Struggle

By Kim Harmon

He validates our anxious thoughts;
His whispers stop impending death.
He musters angels to our cause and
Roars when we're victorious!

He bends down at our softest cry;
He laughs at our "sure" hiding.
He lends His hand to help us up.
His love compels, inviting...

...Us to trust Him,
To let Him in.

Like the gentle, old man on the bench in the park,
With nowhere else to be,
He pats the seat beside Him,
Smiling easily.

When we resist, so full of wrath,
With flailing arms and discontent,
He nods to show He understands,
And gently pats the seat again.

When anger ebbs, outmatched by peace;
His arms extend as we collapse.
Rantings stop and tirades cease,
He pulls us weeping to His lap,
And we are home,
We're home at last.

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CREATE A PLAN OF ACTION AND DON'T LET TRAUMA WIN!

By Yvonne Martinez

You may have had one or many very upsetting, frightening, or traumatic things happen to you in your life, or that threatened or hurt someone/something you love. When these kinds of things happen, you may not “get over” them quickly. Sometimes you don’t even notice symptoms right after the trauma happens. Years later you may begin having thoughts, nightmares, and other disturbing symptoms.

Self-management can help you feel like a powerful person, rather than feeling tossed around by fear and circumstances. Here are things you can do every day to help yourself feel better.

- **Be present in the moment.** Many of us spend so much time focusing on the future or thinking about the past that we miss out on fully experiencing what is going on in the present.

- **Connect to the internal Kingdom** of God. God is with you and in you. Focus on His presence in you and you feel the experience that you are not alone.

- **Do something fun or creative,** something you really enjoy, like painting, drawing, woodworking, making a sculpture, reading, doing crossword or jigsaw puzzles, playing a game.

- **Get some exercise.** Exercise is a great way to help yourself feel better while im-

proving your overall stamina and health.

- **Write something.** You can keep lists, record dreams, respond to questions, and explore your feelings. Keep your writings in a safe place where others cannot read them.

- **Do a relaxation exercise.** There are many good books available that describe relaxation exercises. Listen to relaxing music or nature sounds.

- **Do something routine.** When you don’t feel well, it helps to do something “normal.” This would be the kind of thing you do every day or often, things that are part of your routine.

- **Get little things done.** It always helps you feel better if you accomplish something, even if it is a very small thing.

- **Learn something new.** Think about a topic that you are interested in but have never explored. Find some information on it in the library or on the Internet

- **Do a reality check.** Checking in on what is really going on rather than responding to your initial “gut reaction” can be very helpful

- **Look at something pretty** or something that has special meaning for you. Stop what you are doing and take a long,

close look at a flower, a leaf, a plant, the sky, a work of art.

- **Play with children in your family** or with a pet. Romping in the grass with a dog, reading a story to a child, rocking a baby, and similar activities have a calming effect.

- **Expose yourself to something** that smells good to you. Sometimes a bouquet of fragrant flowers or the smell of fresh baked bread will help you feel better. Try essential oils that also have therapeutic value.

- **Listen to, or play, music.** Pay attention to your sense of hearing by pampering yourself with delightful music you really enjoy.

- **Singing helps.** Singing fills your lungs with fresh air and makes you feel better. It helps you breathe.

- **Make a gratitude list.** Being appreciative for the things we have, rather than on what is bad. Gratitude will lift us out of despair and open windows of hope.

Yvonne Martinez has nearly 30 years experience ministering God’s power, healing and freedom. She is an ordained minister and serves as director, pastoral counselor and addictions specialist in the Transformation Center at Bethel Church in Redding, CA. Yvonne is the author of 14 books and educational director of CARE-EDU, a CAADAC approved drug and alcohol certification program, www.care-edu.com. For a personal ministry appointment with Yvonne, call Transformation Center (530)229-7909.



Unreasonable Obedience

By Karin Berry

MATT AND I MET and married in eight months. Within the first six months we committed two first-year-of-marriage no-nos: we both started new jobs and we moved. Despite everyone’s warnings against these changes, we felt God propelling us so we didn’t hesitate.

We struggled through the adjustments but survived. Everything seemed to fall into place. That didn’t surprise us because we knew we were where God wanted us. We were ready to enjoy the rest of our honeymoon year.

Three months later, however, I was miserable. Every day I went to work I knew I wasn’t supposed to be there. Somehow I’d made a mistake. Matt and I prayed. We decided I should quit and prepare to substitute teach the next school year, which was only two months away. In the meantime, I would get us settled into our new home. We never doubted that was God’s will. We had confidence in his guidance.

Two weeks later Matt confessed that he’d been feeling tired and unusually sore. That night was especially painful, so we drove to Urgent Care to pick up an antibiotic or pain killer. Instead, the staff hurried him in to see a doctor. They ordered a number of tests, rushing him to the front of every line. The results shocked us—Matt had cancer.

The doctor left us alone to process the news. Matt lay on the examining table staring at the ceiling. As I watched him, doubt washed over me.

I’d just quit a secure job with benefits. Matt’s insurance hadn’t started yet. I was unemployed and he wouldn’t be able to work through chemotherapy and surgery. The medical bills would bankrupt us. At the very worst I’d be a young widow. As uncertainty clung to me, I clung to Matt and sobbed.

He prayed, thanking God for his goodness even in the midst of the diagnosis. Matt also reaffirmed our devotion to God and to his direction in our lives. As we sat in the cold examining room, I felt the arms of God wrap around us. His comfort engulfed us. The worrisome thoughts that had bombarded me weakened.

I offered to try to get my old job back, but Matt refused, reminding me that God had directed our steps. The diagnosis didn’t change that. Instead of looking for a job, I followed God’s plan.

Matt had his first surgery in September. Two months later I started teaching. Nineteen months, three rounds of chemotherapy, and two surgeries later, all signs of cancer

were gone. It’s been over five years now, and Matt is cancer free. His healing and recovery alone testify to God’s greatness, but God didn’t stop there. He awed us even more with the blessings he poured out during our time of obedience.

Days after Matt’s diagnosis we discovered that he had qualified for health insurance two weeks prior. The insurance company covered the cost of every treatment. Matt also received short-term disability and earned partial paychecks while recovering. Then we received checks from the IRS—they owed us money from previous years’ income taxes. Then, a company in which Matt had invested sold, and all stock holders received a cash buyout.

I only worked part-time during the school year and Matt couldn’t work for seven months, but we never missed paying a bill. For every financial need, God provided a way, but even that wasn’t enough for God. With neither of us working fulltime, Matt and I eliminated most of our debt and started saving. God not only provided for our finances, He also blessed us beyond our needs.

God knew what He was doing when He called Matt out of self-employment and into a job that paid less but offered health insurance. God also knew what He was doing when He led me to substitute teach part-time, putting me in an environment that allowed me the flexibility to take time off to care for my husband. The cancer didn’t surprise God, nor did it interfere with His plans to provide for us. God knew exactly what would happen—all He needed was our obedience.

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The Example of a Parent

By Cheryl Stasinowsky



Mom: Tell your sister you are sorry.

Son: But I'm not!

Mom: Tell her you are sorry anyway.

Son: But I didn't do anything wrong.

Mom: Tell your sister you are sorry.

Son: Sorry...

Mom: Tell your brother you forgive him.

Daughter: I forgive you.

This situation happened many times in our home when my two children were younger. Did it accomplish true forgiveness? Is this training them to take responsibility for their actions? What do you do when they do not feel they have done anything wrong? As a parent, we are constantly placed in this position of mediation. This forgiveness process is not just for grown-ups. "Train up a child in the way he should go, Prov. 22:6, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Does this apply to forgiveness? Are we supposed to train our children to forgive? How in the world do we train our children to do this, when we ourselves have not fully learned this? Maybe you are better at this than I, but for me, I started on this forgiveness process eight years ago, and I am 53 years old. My children, at this moment, are 26 and 20. You do the math on this; they were not very young when I began working on my own forgiveness from my past. You cannot force someone to say they are sorry and

mean it, but we, as parents, surely do try at times. You also cannot make someone forgive you, no matter how much we say we are sorry or try to explain. So, what is our responsibility in this "train up a child in the way he should go" in regards to forgiveness?

To me, it is modeling it each day. When I mess up, I try to go to them and tell them I am sorry. I had no right to do or say what I said. I will do this in person, if it is possible. If it is not, then I will call, text, or write an email. I try to do this as quickly as possible. First, I am teaching them to take responsibility for their actions by taking care of mine. Second, I am teaching them how to apologize and what it looks like.

There are times that we, as parents, make life changing choices that our children do not understand. We cannot involve them in the decision because they are too young. Eight years ago, we made such a choice and our son has not been happy about it. He feels we ruined his life.

As a parent, I feel guilty about how he feels. I think we have a very good life, but he somehow feels cheated. That guilt is not fun for a parent to carry, and it influences certain choices and decisions we make or do not make. We constantly are trying to make up for what we did, but it is never good enough. There does not seem to be any reasoning with him. So, as I sat with the Lord begging Him to tell me or show me what I can do to help him. The Lord reminded me of my own childhood. What I really wanted was for my parents to just take responsibility for the choices they made that hurt me and tell me they were sorry. I will admit that when He showed me what I needed to do, I did not jump on board right away. I heard, yet again, my reasons and rationalization that I have told him over and over again. I knew that the Lord was showing me what to do through my experience. I understood how it feels not to be heard or considered. So, I wrote him a short email asking him that I hoped one day he would be able to forgive us for hurting him. We did not intentionally do it, but it did hurt him and for that we are sorry.

Yes, I will admit that I want to move on from all of this and forget about it. I cannot change our choice and I cannot change our lives in the past. But, he is stuck there. That twelve year

old boy, now twenty, was deeply hurt by our choice. Whether we can see value in our decision does not help make up for the hurt and devastation the little boy remembers and feels. At the moment, he resents us and does not respect us. But, I trust God with him and the process it is going to take to get him back. I, as his mom, am giving him what I longed to receive from my

parents, an apology without excuses or justifications or reasons.

God modeled and gave forgiveness... He is our example that we, as parents, know how to model and give forgiveness, too. Don't hold onto your child's failures or mistakes. If they apologize, forgive them and let it go, be the example. Don't bring it up in the next confrontation or disagreement...let it go.

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This is a chapter from Cheryl's latest book, 'Given to Forgive'. It is available on Amazon.

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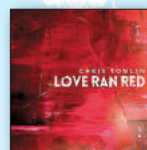
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