

Joyful Living



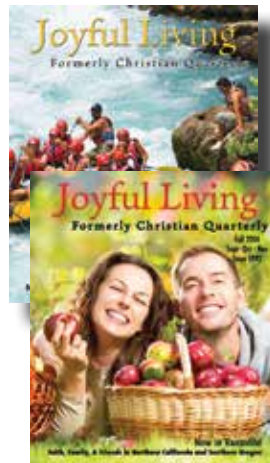
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Written by: Ali Lopez

On Wednesday, February 10, 2016, at the Redding Civic Auditorium Kari Nunes will be hosting a walk to support the Leukemia and Lymphoma society. The walk called Light the Night creates a place for you to know you are not alone and be supported. If you to the website lightthenight.org and sign up for the walk here in Redding, \$100 will get you a t-shirt, sandwich from Jersey Mikes, and a lantern that you will take with you on the walk. On Wednesday night, the walk starts at 7:00 in front of the civic and will go up the trail past Sundial Bridge up to Hilltop.

Kari, like too many of us, has known people who have suffered from cancer and is passionate about seeing it defeated. LLS is a blood cancer that runs through the lymph nodes and affects people usually 20 years and younger. The good news is that there is a 90% survival rate from those who get the chemotherapy, but to the remaining 10% we have faith and stand with you to find a cure. The money goes to UCSF to help with their research. Please come and know that you are not alone.



Learn Generationally

By Cheryl Stasinowsky

Awhile back, I was having challenges with my teenage son. He was not able to forgive his father and me for a decision we made when he was eleven. According to him, that decision ruined his life. No matter how many times we apologized to him, he just could not let it go. Many times he would remind us of how we made a poor decision. Of course, we would respond with rationalization and justification as to why. We could not ask an eleven year old if we should shut down our business and go to ministry school, it was not his decision to make, so we felt justified in our decision and he felt unimportant and unheard.

This went on for several years. One day I realized I, too, was feeling this way about my mom. There were decisions she made in my childhood that I felt were detrimental to my upbringing. I paid attention to what I was thinking and wanting from her. I did not want to hear, what seemed to me as, excuses as to why things happened, I just wanted her to take responsibility for what it did to me. I realized that is what my son needed to get from us. He did not need to hear any reasoning, but just that we were sorry for ruining his life. I wrote him an email, he lives in Florida, and kept it short and apologized for the decision we made and how it had affected him. I never heard back from him in regards to that email, but he hasn't brought it up since and he seems to be much more accepting of us. I was learning generationally...

I, then, began looking at my relationship with my mom, because of circumstances we never really bonded as mother and daughter. I had a wonderful relationship with my daughter and so, I started paying attention to how she was treating me and honoring me as her mother. I began trying to do those types of things for my mom. My daughter would send me a text message telling me she loved me and I would then send one to my mom. The more I became aware of this, the more I was trying it and it was changing our relationship. I was learning generationally...

My husband was finding it hard to have conversations with our son. Our son was calling me all the time, but not him. I encouraged him to look at his relationship with his dad. What is it that challenges him when he is on the phone with his dad? What did he wish his dad would say to him? He started giv-

ing to our son what he wished his dad would give to him. He would listen better and give less advice. He would on purpose stay on the phone and not find a way or get distracted to get off the conversation. It started working, our son was calling him more often and the conversations were good. He was learning generationally...

This has now become a way of learning for both my husband and I as we learn in both directions how to give to our children what we desire for our parents to give to us and we give to our parents what we desire for our children to give to us. This has changed all of our relationships. We have learned how to honor better. We have learned how to pay attention to what works and what does not work for us. We give far less advice and we listen far more. We allow our children to live their lives and we don't get involved in their decisions unless we are asked. I would encourage you to take some time and look both ways in the generations you are between and see if there is something valuable to learn. www.wordscribeministries.com

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Let's Talk Thyroid Health!

By Beni Johnson

Before we start, I want you to know my heart for this article. This is a part of my health journey and learning these pieces below has really helped me so I want to share it with you. It's not meant for you to diagnose yourself but to give you suggestions on how to help have a healthy thyroid. Of course it is important that if you suspect you have a problem to check with a healthcare provider.

The thyroid is one of the eight major glands in the body. It produces the hormones T4, T3 and TSH.

When someone goes to the doctor to have their thyroid tested, the doctor will administer a TSH thyroid test. This test only evaluates the pituitary hormone in the brain, which is important, but is not a complete test of thyroid function. If you go to the doctor for a thyroid test, ask your doctor to test for T4 and

T3 hormones. These hormones regulate the cells in your body. Also, ask your doctor test for the rT3 hormone, which your body should produce in much smaller amounts than T3 and T4. Do not let your doctor talk you out of this test.

Some signs of thyroid sickness are: decreased energy (lethargy), depression, slow heart rate, dry skin, weight gain, hair loss, constipation, and feeling cold all the time. A sick thyroid can even negatively affect fertility. If you are thyroid sick and overweight it is important that you see a health care provider and be tested. If your thyroid is not functioning correctly and you are trying to lose weight, you will not be able to, no matter what you try.

There are natural ways to heal your thyroid without medication. Below are some helpful tips for repairing and optimizing

thyroid health.

Things to avoid:

- Soy milk and soy proteins – Isoflavones present in soy foods, as well as menopause supplements that contain high amounts of soy can crash your thyroid levels. Soy attacks the thyroid gland suppressing thyroid activity. DO NOT give soy-based formulas to babies.
- All plastic – Yes, even BPA free. Try to always use glass.
- Thyroid thieves called halogens – Fluorine is the worst culprit, along with chlorine, bromine, and iodine. (A few places fluorine is found are tap water, toothpaste and fluoridated salt but there are many more!) Also, though rare, astatine is another halogen that should be avoided. Iodine is the only one of the bunch that is a good guy. The rest are what you call bullies. When you use these bullies they will actually push out the good guy iodine. Your thyroid gland concentrates iodine, but the other halogens are considered toxic to the thyroid gland.

If you want to see if you are iodine deficient you can take a simple test. Go to any drug store pick up some iodine, it's the orange stuff your mom used to put on your cuts and scrapes. Put a small patch on your inside wrist and wait to see how long it stays. If it stays 24 hours you are good to go. The first time I went into my naturopathic doctor she put the iodine on my wrist and it was gone in a half hour! She put me on iodine for two months. If you find that you are low in iodine, you also need to be careful not to overdo the iodine. You can take iodine supplements. Standard Process is a good brand and I'm sure any organic based product will work.

Ways to add iodine to your diet:

- Seaweed/sea vegetables
- Cod
- Shrimp
- Dairy
- Eggs
- Potatoes
- Grains

The foods below also contain selenium, an important mineral that is most highly concentrated in your thyroid gland. Himalayan salt, Celtic sea salt or French grey sea salt, spirulina and coconut oil.

- Brazil and cashew nuts
- Fish: Yellow fin tuna, halibut
- Meat: Chicken, turkey
- Lentils
- Oatmeal
- Bananas

Low levels of Vitamin D and B12 have been linked to thyroid sickness. Many of us are deficient in vitamin D3 because we are so afraid or too busy to get ourselves out in the sun. My rule of thumb is to sit out in the warm, morning sun for up to 20 minutes without sunscreen to get the daily dose of vitamin D3. Vitamin D3 is also found in many foods including fatty fish, beef liver, egg yolk, dairy, and mushrooms that have been exposed to UV light.

Food sources of vitamin B12: poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy. Or you can take a good organic vitamin B12 supplement.

If you are taking medications for your thyroid and want to begin taking alternative supplements, make sure to take the medication and supplements separately at different times of the day. Do not mix the two. And, if you are going to start supplementing while on medication make sure you talk to your healthcare provider first. While we are on the topic of supplements, here is a list of some that benefit thyroid health.

Supplements to benefit thyroid health: Probiotics and enzymes (which we should all be taking for gut health), kombucha, which is loaded with probiotics and enzymes, P5P, methylcobalamin, iosine, zinc, selenium, manganese, molybdenum, ashwagandha (also beneficial for adrenal health), reversatrol, tyrosine, and mullein.

(Tip: antibiotics, corticosteroids, antacids and acid blockers, estrogens such as birth control, blood pressure pills, caffeine-containing drinks, sugar and refined foods, having an appendectomy, Celiac, Crohn's Disease, IBS, and alcohol reduce the healthy bacteria in your gut.)

Your body works as a team. Your hormones and major glands long for balance. In fact, your whole body is looking for balance. I highly recommend the book *Thyroid Healthy* by Suzy Cohen, RPH. This book is full of information and great tips on how to stay thyroid healthy.

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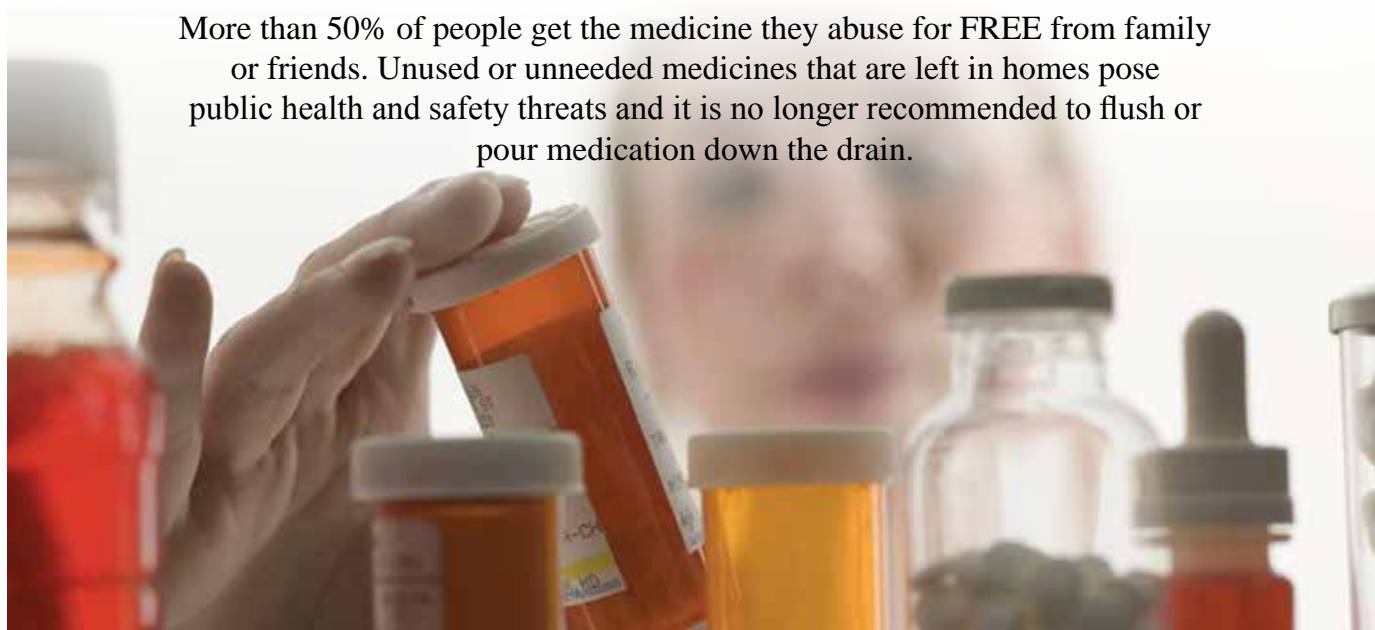
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City of Shasta Lake Sheriff's Office

4488 Red Bluff Street, Shasta Lake

Shasta County Sheriff's Office

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- Medication patches
- Ointments and powders in original containers, **tightly sealed & personal information blacked-out**

☒ NOT Accepted

- NO pill bottles - **Recycle the bottle at home**
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- NO needles or other sharps - **visit www.shastahhsa.net for a disposal location**
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The Invitation to Reconciliation



By Yvonne Martinez

Reconciliation is fundamental to the gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21.) Reconciliation helps persons and communities become living expressions of God's redemptive love in the concreteness of daily life.

For instance, reconciliation can help someone who is grieving the loss of someone they loved; a couple in conflict over raising step-children; an individual who struggles with addiction; a person dealing with unresolved trauma; parents overwhelmed with financial loss; a family torn because cultural bias; or someone who can't seem to find an intimate connection with God.

Reconciliation as a process and an outcome

Reconciliation is aimed at building and healing through a process of change that redesigns and redefines of relationships.

- A process through which people move from a divided past into a shared future. Where there was once separation or division-- now they come together in co-union.
- Reconciliation is a dynamic, end-state of outcome, where unity thrives, where all are honored and valued, and, in particular, where all is forgiven.

Reconciliation as relationship-building

Relationship reconciliation demands changes in our aspirations, our emotions and feelings, and in our beliefs. Reconciliation, by its nature and purpose, will confront the relationships between those who need to implement changes and find solutions.

- Reconciliation is first and last about people and their relationships.
- Reconciliation is the process of addressing conflicted and fractured relationships.
- Reconciliation establishes the framework for new types of relationships.

Reconciliation as justice

Along with truth-seeking, healing, and reparative opportunity, justice is a core dimension of reconciliation.



- Reconciliation values the justice that restores community, rather than the justice which destroys it.

Reconciliation as forgiveness

Reconciliation's goal is to promote forgiveness and works toward the opportunity and potential where forgiveness may happen.

- Authentic reconciliation cannot be achieved through pressure or a demand to forgive.
- Holding on to the right not to forgive sabotages and undermines the purpose of reconciliation.

Reconciliation as community

Purpose of war is victory, the purpose of victory is occupation, purpose of occupation is habitation... the result is community.

- Reconciled communities demonstrate the presence of shared values, positive relationships, interaction and interdependence, respect, trust and co-operation.
- Reconciliation is the habitation and co-existence through peace, shared-values, joint interests, trust, partnership and active relationship.

Reconciliation entails a profound transition of personal interaction which centers on emotion, acknowledgement, apology, forgiveness, healing and the forging together of shared personal bonds.

However, reconciliation is not unconditional; it requires a response, and reconciliation is not universal; some will not respond. In other words, reconciliation is an invitation. It is an invitation to come close, let go, and receive the peace and love only God can bring.

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 17 books and educational director of CARE-EDU, an approved drug and alcohol certification program, www.care-edu.com. For a personal ministry appointment with Yvonne, call Transformation Center (530)229-7909.

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Classic Toys that Accidentally Teach Kids About Money

You may be tired of the barrage of electronics kids play these days. And even worse, many of those electronic games are focused on destruction, blowing up things and people. Whatever happened to real toys? Many of the toys we enjoyed are still available. Remember the board games you played with your brothers and sisters, cousins and friends? They were fun and inexpensive and could get you through many a rainy day. One of my favorite kid memories was playing games around the Christmas tree, adults and kids alike, and my favorite board game, Pay Day. Games like Monopoly, The Game of Life, and Pay Day were fun and, although we didn't know it then, they taught us about money. Earning, saving for a delayed purchase, investing, and giving. Another game, called Loose Change, has a goal of being the first one to accumulate change that adds up to exactly a dollar without going over. You might think that's no big deal, but I remember the day I paid a teenage cashier and completely confused her. The bill was \$2.50. I gave her a five dollar bill, which she entered into the register. The register then told her to give me change of \$2.50. "That can't be right!" she moaned. "That's the charge, not the change. I messed up." I tried to explain it, but she had to get a supervisor to approve the transaction. That was my first clue that while young people may like to spend money, they may not have basic knowledge of it. Maybe it's time to put away the electronics, at least for now, and go back to the basics.

BOOKS THAT INTRIGUE AND TEACH

Remember Curious George? How about Curious George Saves His Pennies? Or, for really young children, Dr. Seuss's One Cent, Two Cents, Old Cent, New Cent: All About Money. Then there's the Berenstain Bears' Dollar\$ and \$en\$e, or Trouble with Money. And The Coin Counting Book, teaches kids the value of coins, about spending, and most importantly, about saving. There's also a Money Savvy Kids Club series, which you can find

here: http://www.msngen.com/assembled/mskc_books.html
This series includes books like Garage Sale Riches, and Put the 'Do' in Donate. Both good concepts.

PIGGY BANKS WITH SOMETHING EXTRA

There are so many fun piggy banks out there these days, in great colors. One is a classic pig, but it has four sections, labeled: save, spend, donate, invest, showing kids there's more to money than spending it. It's available on Amazon.com and is called Money Savvy Pig.

For older kids, there's the Moonjar Classic Moneybox, which also teaches to save, spend, and share.

OTHER TOYS

Paper play money all on its own is fun and a great way for kids to learn. Combine that with another blast from the past for many of us, a toy cash register. My sisters and I used my toy cash register to play restaurant and store. That helped us realize early on that the food on our table and the clothes on our backs did not magically appear.

With young children, you could challenge them to find ways to earn a dollar. Each time their earnings reach a dollar, pay them, and have them stash that real cash away in their cash register or piggy bank.

There are toys and video games that are meant to be educational and teach about money. Personally I think those are less effective than toys that are meant for fun and happen to also teach something practical. A toy, a game, or a book doesn't have to set out on a mission to be educational. Often when it does, it loses its appeal. That's when the kid tears open the package on Christmas morning and has more fun with the box than the gift.

This Christmas, consider some of the old fashioned toys you enjoyed as a kid. Not only will your children accidentally learn something, but they'll make the kind of memories that last they'll share with their own kids someday.

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No Big Decisions

My Lesson in the first year of Widowhood

BEFORE MY HUSBAND DIED from an uncommon lung disease, details pertaining to the “when” were decided and in legal documents. He was the leader in our home and I appreciated not having to make the big decisions.

On December 6, 2014, suddenly, the “when” happened. No matter how ready I thought I was – nothing truly prepared me. I was catapulted into making arrangements, planning the service, and hosting family. Heaviness of grief, loss, despair, fear, confusion, and the inability to process all of that was insurmountable.

I received a lot of advice and if I had a dollar for each time someone said, “Don’t make any big decisions for at least a year.”

I’d have financial stability for years! I heard this over and over. I had no intention of making any big decisions, so the advice was appreciated but quickly forgotten.

I felt like I handled my loss relatively well, not feeling urgent to change my life in any way. I sought God for direction and prayed he would help and lead me down The High Road and do what was right and fair. He was with me every step of the way. I made no big decisions as instructed, until . . . the morning of August 10th when my phone rang.

My son’s words between sobs broke my heart. His father-in-law, Rick, took his Gold Wing motorcycle on a leisurely Sunday drive when a twenty-year-old delivery truck driver ran a stop sign. In a blink of an eye, our lives were turned upside down and suddenly my level headed thinking, taking things slow, not making big decisions went straight off the cliff. The mom in me wanted to be San Diego immediately to help. Fortunately, I wasn’t able to drop life in Redding so I was forced to stay grounded physically, but mentally - I left the planet.

Heaped on top of my own loss, was grief for my son and his family. In 8 months, my son lost 2 dads, my grandkids lost 2 grandpas, and my daughter-in-law lost her most precious-to-her-heart daddy.

The next thing I knew, I had a For Sale sign in my yard, sold Herb’s truck and told my employer I was moving to San Diego.

I flew to Rick’s memorial but after 4 days, I began realizing I’d made a mistake. For 6 weeks, the stress was incredible and I struggled with deep guilt. “How can I do this to my kids?” And, that question, “Where is my faith? Do I not trust HIM to provide a new job, place to live and the income I would need there?” I already started packing and the grandkids were excited, but my emotional life was unraveling at record speed. I thought, “How do I un-ring this bell?”

Selling my home felt like I would be closing the last chapter on my life with Herb. I am not ready for that! That’s when I realized, I had made that forbidden “Big Decision.”

Reality is just recently sinking in that he is gone forever. I recall the morning at the hospital sitting by him and how surreal it seems in my memory now. I was not in touch with what happened that morning – I am just now beginning to wrap my head around it. Perhaps in a few years I can consider a move, but for now, my For Sale sign has been removed, I asked my boss if I could stay at my job and asked my son’s forgiveness for changing my mind.

I have experienced God’s grace and mercy abundantly on this roller coaster ride. My job is stable, my son understood, and my realtor was gracious and took my home off the market immediately. I am breathing again.

And that, my friends, is why we, “Don’t make any big decisions the first year after the loss of a spouse or close loved one.” Grief tends to cloud good judgment and life changing decisions can be made strictly on emotion rather than logic or common sense.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” And I will wait upon Him for my next big decision!

Renae Tolbert lives in Redding, where she writes short stories, enjoys the outdoors and wildlife photography. She works at Shasta College. Her “Creator’s Touch” prints and greeting cards of local wildlife and scenery can be purchased at Enjoy the Store on Placer Street in downtown Redding. She’s been published in Cup of Comfort for Christian Women, Guideposts Heavenly Company anthology, and Birds and Blooms magazine.

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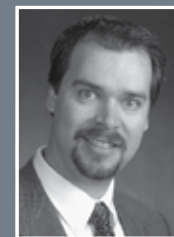
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Sometimes you just have to jump in the puddles



By Hermelinda Simon

A couple of weeks ago there was actually a rainstorm in sunny California! I was pretty excited for the rain because we have needed it for a while now. We had days of a lot of rain and nice cold weather. My kids love it when it rains because rain brings puddles. Lots and lots of puddles.

Since it was a couple days inside the house because of the rain, my kids were eager to get outside to play. While my son was in school I took my daughter Charlotte out for a walk. She always loves to wear her rain boots even when it's not raining, so today she was especially excited to go outside.

I think she started running outside before I even had the chance to open the door. We started our walk and looked at the flowers, saw a rainbow, and was just enjoying being outside.

Then I saw the puddle and I started to stress. I know it sounds weird but I knew what my daughter was going to want to do. She

was going to want to jump right in the puddle, of course.

If you know me as a mom you know that I like my kids to stay clean and not get too messy. Sounds crazy, right?

Charlotte started running toward the puddle and I just told her to jump a little bit in the puddle. Who was I kidding; she wasn't just going to jump a little bit.

She got a head start and started to run full force towards the puddle, and the jumping begin. She jumped and before I could see how soaked she was I couldn't help but see how much fun she was having and the laughter that was coming from her mouth

She was so excited and I think she jumped in the puddle a hundred times.

As we got back from our walk I began to think what life would be like if I jumped in more puddles. Sometimes as moms, we can become so uptight about what we want our children to be like and act like that we forget about enjoying the fun moments and the jumping in the puddles.

How much more fun would parenting be if we just let our kids be kids. Sometimes as moms we require so much from our kids and forget that they are kids looking to us to guide them.

I know that I have to work on that for myself as a mom and the first thing I am going to do to help me is jump with Charlotte in the puddles. I am going to get messy, dirty and have that childlike fun!

I would encourage you to do the same. Relax and realized that your kids will be ok if you get on their level once in a while.

Go outside jump in the puddles and enjoy every minute. The minutes will go by so fast and there will come a time when our kids will not want to jump in the puddles anymore.

So get outside, find a puddle and have fun with you kids! You kids will love you for it and you will create memories that they will never forget!

BIO:

I often get the question, Hermi, what are doing with your life now? You mean taking care of two children isn't enough? Then they say we know you are a stay at home mom but what else are you doing? Really, I need to be doing something else?

I would just take a deep breath and say I am a mom, wife, room parent, etc.

That is when I realized that as women we often get caught up in the labels that people put on us. I am much more than a mom, though that is one of my favorite roles. I am a wife, mommy, daughter, friend, and so much more, but if you are like me you are a woman trying to do it all.

As women we think that we can do it all and we think that we can do it all well, but that is just not true. God continues to teach me every day to not get caught up in the labels that people place on me but to see myself through God's eyes.

I have the privilege of being a mom to two beautiful children. God has brought me through so much and my desire is to help women be who God wants them to be, come alongside parents in raising their kids spiritually and building confidence that can only come from Christ.



Up & Over Coming.... Shine Baby Shine!

BY CYNDI BARBER

EVERY KID COMES WITH A DESIRE TO SHINE. There's a deep need inside all of us that wants to be seen, that wants to be seen shining. Kids are always presenting their accomplishments to their parents for validation.

"Mommy, watch me win this level on the video game!"

"Dad, watch me tie my shoes by myself!"

Every kid I've spent more than 30 minutes with wanted to show me something they could do. That need doesn't go away when we reach adulthood. We still want to be seen shining.

Somehow society (and/or painful life experiences) has taught us that we should shine but we shouldn't want to shine. Somehow it is believed that wanting to shine is somehow arrogant and shameful. People who are confident and openly proud of themselves are deemed egotistical. I'm not sure how that belief became so proliferate. How did we come to the place where we have lost that childlike desire to shine out loud?

In the church it's even more the case. We're encouraged to demean ourselves in the name of humility. It would seem that when a Christian champions their own strengths it is considered prideful. It becomes a big turn off to those around them. Fear of pride causes us to hide our own personal wonderful. I'm not convinced

that was God's design. I think that the virus of worthlessness is much more deadly to the human soul than the illness of pridefulness.

Isaiah 60:1 says, "'Arise, shine; for your light has come, And the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.'" NASB. Inviting Jesus into our lives is inviting His whole being into ourselves. This invitation causes His attributes to become merged with the ones we were born with. Greatness is the result of this combination. That greatness needs to be seen. He doesn't want us to be more hidden, He wants us to be more illuminated. This illumination is attractive to others. People will want to point their inner compass toward that radiance. Once they get close to this light, they find not just the human element of this equation but also the divine element as well. Our shining brings others into their own shining. God wants us brightly gleaming in expression of His glory within. We are His sons and daughters. He wants to show us off! He is championing our greatness. Verse three in that passage of Isaiah 60 says, "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.". Kings are drawn to the light of God's radiant people.

So shine, baby shine! You were created with a unique combination of His attributes and He wants to show you off to the world around you.

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WHO AM I AND WHAT DO I STAND FOR? This is a question all of us have asked ourselves at one point or another, but it is most often pondered in our younger years.

I love teenagers because they are passionate, curious, daring, and messy. They are constantly analyzing the people and world around them and are incredibly skilled at reading people. If someone is not being authentic, they can sense it almost instantly. I have found that authenticity and being genuine are keys to teens' hearts.

As a youth pastor I have seen that authenticity and vulner-

ability greatly aid in building relationship with these young and impressionable people. Everybody wants something real and tangible that they can hold onto in a relationship, and teens are no exception.

Teenagers are intelligent and have walked through life long enough to figure out that sometimes it can be difficult. It is my heart and passion to equip this new generation to trust God and run after Him. I want them to know what it means to pursue God and seek Him out when life is blissful and everything seems to be in order, as well as what it looks like to trust God after receiving devastating news and still know that He is good. I have found that being vulnerable and sharing my process with them has allowed the chance to create a connection and understanding that being closed off and pretending like everything in my life is perfect would never have allowed for. I invited them into my personal experience with devastation and heartache, as I have also shared with them incredible testimonies of God's goodness and kindness in my own life.

It is so important for each of us to have a personal relationship with God. Listening to His voice and knowing what He thinks of us is what cements our identity. God is our creator, the One who formed us and shaped us. He is the only One who can truly reveal to us who we are and for what we were born. I love creating the opportunity for teens to listen to God's voice and how to tell if it's

His voice they are hearing. It is in those moments when I see their faces light up when they hear the incredible things God has to say about them. When we discover what the Living God has created us for, we are able to step confidently into our destinies.

When our young ones discover that relationship with God is so much more important than anything else in their lives, they will be able to stand for the things in which they believe. When they know beyond a doubt, God is good; they will know that when hard times come God can still be trusted. Instead of running from Him, they will lean closer into Him. They will know Whose they are.

I long to see this generation pursue their own unique relationship with God; a relationship they will continue building throughout their lives. My heart's desire is to see this generation recognize their identity and run hard and steadily after God.

By equipping them to hear God's voice and see God's character in all circumstances, I believe this can be achieved. We have an influential young generation at hand; once they have been ignited, they will not be quenched.

Caitlyn Tucker is a youth pastor at Freedom Church in Red Bluff California with husband, Sebron Tucker. They have been youth pastors for a year and a half and Caitlyn completed three years of Bethel School of Supernatural Ministry in Redding, California. She is on staff with The Transformation Center and is passionate about young people walking in their identities.

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The Voice in my Head

By Max Klaiber
(17 Year Old High School Student)



“Stop. What are you doing? Where are you going?”
“What would Jesus do?” The voice in my head was speaking to me loud and clear that day.

I couldn’t escape my thoughts. Today I was invited to my first high school party. From the tales told by my fellow classmates, I was in for a night of fun and an experience I would never forget. All I heard however, was that I was in for a night of sin and an experience that could scar me forever. Yet, on this particular day I was consumed by my own curiosity and teenage hormones screaming for something new. I reluctantly agreed to go.

“Are you trying to be cool?” The voice persisted. Popular kids I had never talked to before, asked me to go to the party. I had gained new found fame among my peers. I knew I shouldn’t go, but I believed I was old enough to make my own decisions. Growing up in a Christian home I knew better. I was disobeying my parents, and my Heavenly Father Who wants the best for me. The vulgarity of what occurs at these parties made me sick, almost to the point of shaking. But, I couldn’t go back now, how would that make me look? I just acquired a new sense of popularity and I wasn’t willing to lose that so quickly. After school, friends were reminding me to be at the party. I have never been more scared in my life.

“What if you get hurt? More important what if you hurt someone else?” The voice persisted. The drive home was a blur. I greeted my parents in a flurry of random words and took off into my room locking the door behind me. I tried my hardest not to think about all the negatives of attending the party.

“So many things can go wrong Max, more bad things than good.” I ignored the voice in my head as best as I could being somewhat set on my decision. I showered, and put on my nicest outfit. I kissed my mom goodbye, telling her I was going to hang out with some friends and spend the night at my buddy’s house.

“It’s not too late, you don’t have to do this.” The voice insisted. I made it to the party, however, I could not get out of my car. I became paralyzed with a fear that shook me down to my core. The voice in my head became louder and more clear than it’s ever been. Sitting in my car I began to weep. I cried out in shame as I looked inside the house. Lifeless people parading around, waving bottles and blaring music. “Is this what you want Max? Think about the consequences.”

“Max, its time to go. You know you don’t belong here.” I agreed with the voice. After looking at what was going on in that house I didn’t think twice about leaving. I decided that my popularity came from a false appraisal. My face full of tears, I drove home. Tears of sadness because I disobeyed and tried to go against the lessons of my parents, and my Savior. Tears of joy because I made the right

choice to listen to the voice in my head. Later, I found out that the party got busted by the police and every kid involved received a major punishment. That could have been me. I am thankful for the voice. I laid in bed that night ever so grateful for the life I have been given. I have a life to live and I now know I could never find it in the bottom of a bottle, but rather in a relationship with my Lord Jesus Christ who watches over me, protecting me from a world that lives in darkness.

“You are my son Max, I have you in my hands. I will never let you go.” The voice now gentle and reassuring.
Now, as a High School senior, I continue to pierce the darkness of this world with His light that is within me, thanks to the voice in my head.



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HOW TO FIND VALUE WHEN YOU FEEL Insignificant





By Suzanne Luis

Many people today determine their value according to what they do or how much validation they receive from others; while we all need validation because God designed us to be part of a community, if being validated alone determines our value we are in trouble.

I realized after being part of a large church that I felt in order to feel good about myself I needed recognition in ways that were not healthy, this article is about some of the ways the Lord has shown me how to overcome the need for validation in order to believe you are valuable.

We all have personal needs these needs are intimacy with God, fellowship with others and self-worth; we all need to feel loved and accepted, and the need to know we can help others in a way that impacts their lives. We all need to belong and have assurance that we are considered worthy by someone important to us, a feeling that we are useful and competent.

“Security includes being able to regard ourselves as loved, accepted, and cared-for as individuals. Significance involves being able to regard ourselves as important and valuable to others in impacting their lives for good. “ - Minirth & Meier, The Healthy Christian Life p 139-143

Looking to another person in order to get my needs for significance and value is futile, the validation and sense of well being

is temporary at best, we do not love people well but rather end up using that person to feel adequate rather than being free to love them. Needing someone to endorse me and give me value stunts my growth, my ability to know who I was truly created to be by God.

Let’s take a look at the ways the Lord can meet our emotional needs and show us how to be secure in Him while being part of a loving community.

First of all being honest with God helps us to feel know, performance destroys our sense of being known and leaves us feeling lonely and used. Trust Him to give you the grace to find a loving community where you feel you belong and are valued for who you are while keeping your obedience to Him a priority so that you are able to say no to things He is asking you to say no to rather than agreeing to do things He has not called you to do in order to feel valued.

I will continue this article in the next publication.

I am a counselor at Bethel’s Transformation Center, I have a Lay Christian Counseling Certificate from Regent University, I also am licensed with the State of California as a Drug and Alcohol Counselor and I teach and do dream interpretation.

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STRENGTHEND BY *Joy*



By Kathleen Dunlap

I didn't know what to expect. When I was asked to go skiing, I accepted the invitation. As I rode the lift up the mountain, I listened to my friends chatter. The terms "green run" and "black diamond" meant nothing to me

I neglected to tell them I had never skied in my life.

I had recently arrived in Colorado from 12 years of missionary work in Germany. I had a new job, a new roommate, and a new church group. My family was far away, still in Germany. I struggled to readjust to the American culture and find my bearings as a single young woman. Doubt darkened my soul as I looked for God to be present in my circumstances. I was running out of strength.

So why not risk a broken leg on a ski slope?

When we reached the top of the ski lift, all my friends hopped off. I promptly fell on my backside as I tried to dismount. Once my friend Cherise assisted me, off she sped down the slope. Because I hadn't mentioned my inexperience with skis, she didn't know to wait for me.

I gingerly glided forward with the two giant boards strapped to my feet. My friend Tim looked up at me from his spot on the mountain about 5 feet in the distance.

"I've never done this before."

His eyes widened. "You've never skied?"

I grinned. "Nope."

Tim pursed his lips together. Then he proceeded to coach me through every move I made.

"Lean into the mountain. Make a pizza with your skis. You're going to be awesome!"

And I fell and fell and fell. I've never fallen so often or landed in so many random positions. Once, I landed on all fours, and couldn't move in any direction for fear of tumbling down the mountain.

I laughed. From somewhere deep inside me, an overwhelming joy bubbled. Here I was, on this mountain in Colorado, stumbling and cackling like a crazy woman. I knew then I was going to be okay. God was with me through the bumps and bruises of that day.

Joy surprised my heart. I realized that the risk takers are the ones who are the vibrant, humming, energized individuals. They know the heartbeat of God. They understand Jesus' words, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) The bump of a job change. The bruise of divorce. The pain of death. The stumble of doubt. All of these problems challenge the risk takers, but they still move forward in search of God. I wanted to be a part of their ranks.

Four snow patrol people rescued me from the slope that day. The snow mobile driver took me back to the ski lift. Since I had only "skied" about 12 feet, I was closer to the top than the bottom of the mountain. The sight of the snow-capped mountains, framed by an azure sky and glistening under the winter sun, fueled my gratitude to God. He had brought me to this new place. He would see me through all the changes. His joy strengthened me. The apostle Paul said, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair." (2 Corinthians 4:8)

Just as I got to my feet every time I was knocked down by my own clumsiness, so I would get up and go with God. His presence permeated my soul. The abundant life waited for me. Joy beckoned. His grace and love poured upon me. I would thrive with Him.

I would live to ski another day.



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What Time is it?

It's time to surrender our souls to the lover of our souls once more, to remember our first love, to stir up our passion. We must see him now above all things with our whole hearts, laying down the distractions of the world. There is a window open right now to lay hold of promises both personal and for the body that have never been fulfilled, promises that had been held back for this time in history and all we have to do is get alone with him and make him the highest priority in our lives. It's time to focus wholly on him. Imagine being in the most intimate situation with your spouse, romance flying, stars shooting and he or she hears a beep and says hold on I need to see who commented on my post. Well maybe you can imagine, it's becoming more and more acceptable. We should not be texting or facebooking while we are seeking and worshipping the Lord of glory. I KNOW it's hard to feel valued by a person who is continually texting or all things cell phone while I'm giving them my time and this is almighty God, the maker of the universe who is worthy of all focus choosing to spend time with little Ole us. He deserves our whole attention. Bobby Conner said that the Lord told him "when it comes to seeking me I detest multitasking." I have heard that same word from the Lord.

It's time to remember who this awesome God is that we serve and behave accordingly. This all powerful God holds the solar system in place by his very word. This God breathed a breath and humanity in all its complexity He created. He is resurrection life. Proverbs 14:27 says the fear of the Lord is a foundation of life, that one May avoid the snares of death. And proverbs 14:26 says in the fear of the Lord there is strong confidence and his children will have refuge. We need not be overwhelmed or overcome by the circumstances in the world, Jesus told us what would happen in these last days but we have so many promises like Isaiah 60:2 that when darkness covers the earth the Lord will rise upon us. It's time For the whole of Isaiah 60

Now is the time for unquestionable obedience. Remember when you compromise one thing it becomes easier to compromise another. It's time to stick very close to the heart of God and listen intently and act on his voice and will Quickly. Remember deception is increasing and unless we obey even when it's difficult or when we don't want to we will swim down the wrong river. It's time to live according to truth we cannot give into reasonings and false comfort that never satisfy. Unquestionable obedience says I know fully that God is good and will always lead me in paths of righteousness.

It's time to get connected. Don't isolate. Remember "divided we fall." Grab hold of someone who is healthy, who will stand with you. It may not happen with the first person you have in mind but don't allow that stop you. We cannot partner with rejection, the enemy does not want us to realize who we are. Make your needs known and believe that you are accepted and favored. God is lifting our heads and we are one surrender away from God's best.

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The Blue Jay Way

By Bonnie Mark

I wasn't expecting a family of Steller's Jay birds to move into the Japanese Maple right outside my bedroom window last spring, but move in they did—lock, stock and twig. Apparently, they didn't get the memo to move to a higher, cooler elevation.

I was pretty excited by my newfound role as Blue Jay auntie, that is, until several friends cringed, "Blue Jays? Why, those are awful birds!" Another lamented, "One dive-bombed my head, and they make a mess." Someone chimed, "You'll be sorry they nested at your house." Well, too late now; the brilliant, navy blue gliders had settled in and stolen my heart. I definitely felt like part of the family as a good-sized nest took shape and Mama Jay began laying eggs.

Soon, Papa Jay began his vigil of watching the nest from another tree and bringing food to Mama. Her job was to keep the eggs just the right temperature as she turned each one every so often with her long, pointy beak. Then, ruffling her feathers just so, she'd settle back down to wait. And wait. And wait a little longer. Steller's Jays mate for life.

One day, a powerful windstorm roared in. I ran to the window in concern to check on the little family. Branches heaved and tossed, but to my surprise the Jay's nest wasn't even moving. These parents had built at the center of the tree, right next to the trunk. How could they possibly know to build in that safe spot?

Mama Jay was amazing. I wanted to coach her in egg rearing, but she didn't seem to need much help. Day after day (16 to be exact) hour after hour, heat and cold, she knew her role, and she accepted it. No complaining or bailing out on the deal; she was committed to the task at hand.

One day, I knew something big was up when both Jays flew high into the oak tree at the back of the house and started an ear-piercing ruckus. It could only mean one thing—the babies had arrived.

After the birth announcement, both Mama and Papa began tending to the babies, taking turns feeding the ravenous, squawking chicks. A hundred trips a day, back and forth to the nest, it seemed like they'd never get a break. Talk about a full time job; they knew their mission, and they stuck to it.

One day, an early heat wave set in, and the scorching afternoon sun was finding it's way through the leaf cover and onto the nest. I was sure no baby bird could survive, but to my surprise, Mama Jay began positioning her body to shield her young from the blazing rays. At times, she even fanned a bit with her wings. Like all good moms, somehow she knew she had to protect her defenseless kids.

Early one morning, an odd stillness settled in outside my window. I'd grown so accustomed to the Jays' crack-of-dawn-squawks that this silence had me worried. Hadn't I seen a rival Scrub Jay at the feeder the other day? Perhaps something had happened to the babies. I knew I'd have to investigate.

Fearful of what I might find, I began scraping my way up through the Maple's scratchy branches. When I finally reached the nest, to my relief, and some dismay, it was completely empty—no feathers, no babies, not a speck of a bird sign. This family had flown the coop when I wasn't looking.

An odd sinking feeling began to settle in as I numbly climbed back down. My fledglings were gone, and strange as it may sound, I already missed them. I'd been pretty wrapped up in that little microcosm of nature, and now? Apparently, the "empty nest" syndrome had come to roost.

My Blue Jays were pretty good neighbors after all, as they shared a piece of God's mysterious creation with me. The rhythm and the seasons of life are sometimes hard to understand and accept, but God is in each amazing moment. Like the old hymn: "His Eye is on the Sparrow" (and the Steller's Jay!), I do know He's watching over us.



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You wake up each morning with every intention of eating “good” today. You’ll skip the drive thru line on your way to work. You’ll refuse to get fast food with co-workers at lunch. You’ll boycott the vending machine in the mid-afternoon. And you won’t even think about having dessert after dinner. But then your cravings kick in... Your friend drops by with a big fluffy muffin and a latte for breakfast. A group of co-workers

invite you to that greasy spoon down the street for lunch. Cake is passed around at the mid-afternoon staff meeting. And after dinner your honey surprises you with a bowl of your favorite ice cream. You tell yourself that tomorrow will be different. Tomorrow you won’t give in to food cravings. But then tomorrow comes with its own special circumstances, and cravings get the best of you once again.

Why Do Food Cravings Always Win? Let’s face it, we live in a world where food temptations are everywhere...which leads to cravings, which leads to eating things that you shouldn’t, which leads to pounds gained. Again. And again. And again. Until you’re so fed up with your body that you don’t even know where to begin to get yourself back on track. Stores display the most tantalizing junk food items right where you could easily reach them. TV commercials for greasy, fattening foods portray them so scrumptiously that you literally salivate. Sugary snack items have full-page, glossy pictures in your favorite magazines. And as if all of these weren’t enough, the people in your daily life are another (constant) source of food temptation. To make matters worse, you’ve been conditioned since childhood to have a positive association with the act of indulging in your cravings. You use food as a reward. You use food as a source of emotional comfort. You use food as a way to relieve stress. And quickly these associations and uses of food become habit. A habit that’s not easily broken.

New Technique to End Food Cravings Food cravings don’t need to have the upper hand on you anymore. Here’s how you can fight back using your most powerful asset: your brain. Remember that your mind is an amazing thing. Once your mind is made up about something it’s nearly impossible to change it. **Try This Powerful Mind Exercise:** Imagine that you are peacefully floating down a river on a raft. The sun is shining, birds are chirping, and you are having a fun, relaxing time. You feel wonderful about the river because it’s making you feel happy. Now change perspectives for a moment. You’re now in a plane flying over the river and the raft. Instantly our eye is drawn to an enormous rocky waterfall. Then you look back to the person floating on the raft, having a wonderful time, headed straight for the treacherous falls. With this new perspective of the river, do you think that you’d agree to get on a raft and take your chances floating toward the falls? Laughable, right? You’ve seen the hidden danger of the river. You know it leads to pain and suffering. Now your negative association (watery death) with the river has replaced your initial positive association (relaxing fun). This is the key to overcoming food temptations and putting an end to food cravings: building negative associations in place of existing positive ones. I’ll break this process down for you in two steps:

Step One: Create a STRONG Negative Association with Unhealthy Food You may not have realized it, but up until this point you’ve placed unhealthy, fattening foods on a pedestal in your mind. As long as the wrong foods are on that pedestal you’ll continue to give into your cravings and will continue to gain fat. Take the wrong food off that pedestal by listing off everything negative about them...

- These foods make you unhealthy.
- These foods cause weight gain.
- These foods drain your energy.
- These foods kill your confidence.
- These foods lessen your quality of life.
- These foods damage your love life.

Every time that you feel tempted to eat an unhealthy food, focus on your list of negatives. Kick the junk off the pedestal and put something healthy in its place.

Step Two: Create a STRONG Positive Association with Wholesome Foods Now that your mental food pedestal has been cleared, put truly wholesome food items on it. Juicy fresh fruit, crispy vegetables and savory lean meats are the place to start. List off the things that you love about healthy food...

- These foods make you healthy.
- These foods promote fat loss.
- These foods boost your energy.

- These foods build your confidence.
- These foods improve your quality of life.
- These foods enhance your love life.

I encourage you to immerse yourself into the world of healthy, wholesome foods. Browse the aisles of your local natural foods store. Stroll through a farmer’s market. Pack healthy snacks to bring to work. Clear your kitchen of junk. Use the technique above consistently and you will soon find that healthy, wholesome foods are your favorite. And craving the wrong foods will be a thing of your past.

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What To Do When You're Stuck

By Aaron M. Marcelli



ARE YOU STUCK?

Odds are, whether it's in a specific area or just life in general, there are times when things just slow down or even seem to come to a complete halt. The trajectory of our lives (or an aspect of them) no longer has the movement it used to. And even if the period of waiting is only short-term, while we're in it, it

can cause us to feel like we're going to be stuck forever.

Perhaps you feel like God called you to something. To pursue a career, to handle your finances differently or to take on a ministry, for example. You obeyed. You stepped out. And things were good at first. God was blessing and things were moving. But then they slowed down. Now it seems there's no movement at all. Hence, you feel stuck.

In situations like those listed above, or others more specific to your circumstances, it seems like there's nothing we can do to get things moving again. Physically, we are the same. But in regards to our jobs, our health, our relationships, we are figuratively stuck. And when we feel stuck, our tendency is to do some of the very things that may keep us from getting free.

For example, when we find ourselves in trying circumstances, our reaction is to look inward. We become problem-solvers, immediately searching for a plan or a system that will provide release to our struggle. We seek to get unstuck by taking the reins of our lives and trying

to will ourselves back into motion. But looking inward and focusing on ourselves and our situations is very counterproductive when it comes to the movement of our lives. In our frustration, we see nothing but the part of our lives we're unhappy with and make that displeasure larger than all that is good. More than that, focusing on our circumstances keeps us from being in a position to see an opportunity for deliverance.

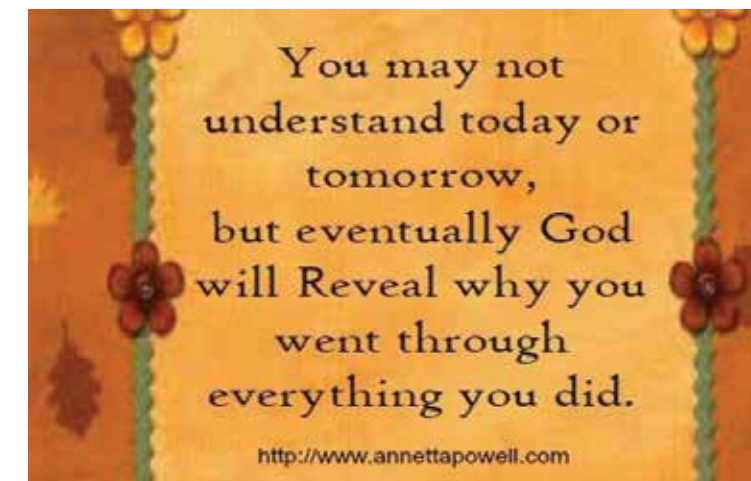
Even when we are struggling to find peace and safety, even when we feel stuck, even when things have slowed down, when we find ourselves in undesirable stages of life, it is important that we keep looking up. Our focus must remain on Christ rather than our circumstances. Guard against looking inward and continue to look to God. Because we don't want to miss God. We don't want to miss what he may bring about as an opportunity for growth or delivery through our trials.

But guarding our mental focus is only half the battle. As important as it is to keep our circumstances from steeling our focus, being stuck is one of those situations where the adage "pray like it's up to God, work like it's up to you" may apply. A positive attitude will make us aware of opportunities that exist, but when those opportunities present themselves, we must be prepared for them. We must be putting in the work. We must continue to be doing what is right.

This exact outline is what we see in the New Testament when Jesus' disciples are caught in literal storms. They were literally stuck on the Sea of Galilee. And what Scripture tells us is they were looking for Jesus, allowing them to accept him as he came to them, walking on the water. Also, the passage points out that as Jesus approached them they were rowing furiously. They were working. They were not allowing their storm to cause them to give up. And the belief that God may show up in their circumstances motivated them to keep rowing through it.

So when you're stuck, when you find yourself in a period of waiting and the vision God called you to is all the sudden not getting any closer, draw from these principles. Keep your focus on Christ and keep rowing. Continue to look for God to show up, and when he does, let him find you being faithful. Look to God, seek him, but also keep at it. Keep working. Keep giving. Keep praying. Keep believing.

It is our faithfulness in our times of being stuck that allows the breakthrough to happen.



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Letting Go of Listening to SHOULD

By Joy Fry

Recently I faced an unexpected decision. I was offered a part-time job at the fitness center where I exercise. I became paralyzed by should. My mind began racing through the reasons I should say yes. It was close to my house, my friends worked there, and it would get me to the gym three days a week. However, I felt anxious. If I took the position, I would have to give up other commitments.

Before I came to know the Lord, I would struggle through these decisions alone while scolding myself for indecision. Often, I would choose a commitment to please others. Then, I would be left with the consequences of that choice.

Since beginning my faith journey, I have followed a different approach when making a decision involving my time or resources. Here are steps I follow most of the time:

- Take several days for personal prayer. In evaluating this decision, I practiced the discipline of sitting quietly talking and

listening to God. I even wrote down my prayers as it helped me to stay focused.

- Discuss with a wise believer. I talked through the pros and cons of the decision options with my husband and my best friend, Teri. Next, I asked for their honest feedback and what questions they had. I valued their insights.

- Seek prayer from a trusted family member or friend. I gave myself a week before making this decision. The bigger the decision, the more time I give myself. I reached out to several family members and friends and asked them to hold me up in prayer.

- Write a note to God expressing your concerns and fears. After following the three steps above, I spent time writing my feelings about the new job. What aspects of it made me excited and which led to anxiety? Doing this freed me from the confusion caused by should.

After following the four steps above, I chose to let go of listening to should. I proposed a solution that would work for me. I offered to take the job but only to be on-call and not committed to working a certain number of hours each week. This would allow me to continue teaching Sunday school, leading hikes, and participating in a weekly Bible Study. Although I had fear about proposing this alternative, I was confident in the peace I had after making my decision.



I really meant to be awesome today

By Sara Cormany



You know, mom awesome.

Where you have awesome plans and you make it through each one with awesome-like finesse and ALL your kids basically think you hung the blessed moon. But then today happened. AND PBBBBLT.

Just. Pbbbblt.

Where mom-fails outnumbered my mom-plans and I lost my mom “stuff” all over the place and I am fairly certain the kids are interviewing for my replacement as we speak. There also *may* have been a twenty minute interval where I was “looking” for a lost toy underneath my bed. And I *might* have also downed a bag of Ritz Chips like it was my last freaking meal after I “failed” to find said toy.

So. Not. Awesome.

And then there were the water balloons.

Sweet heavens, the water balloons.

The last-ditch effort at redeeming myself from hiding under the bed and binging on golden deliciousness.

Just a little unthinking, “Hey, it’s unholy hot out there, so what’s more fun than pulling out the water balloons that have laid dormant all summer, kiddos?” I mean I talked it UP! Only to find out that the reason we got a water balloon sling and 30 water balloons for a total of \$3 was because the balloons are total CRUD.

It was only after attempting to fill and breaking EVERY BLESSED ONE that the tears, the wailing, the hysteria reached critical levels. And that was just me. Forget about the children. Finally, I just yelled, “HERE’S A SPRINKLER...JUST RUN THROUGH IT!!!!!!”

Again. Not. Awesome.

Maybe I tried too hard. Okay, okay, I tried too hard. But I suppose that’s part and parcel of this whole illness deal. Every day that your kids are with you is supposed to be like Mary Pop-pins because what if tomorrow you are praying to the toilet or laying in bed (not under the bed) all blessed day?

But mamas, life isn’t always magical. Even here. In a place where we get that every day is precious.

Yes, even here.

It is not always precious.

And sometimes?

It is a holy hoot of a mess.

But it is at the end of these not-so-awesome days, where I am utterly human and need a whole heap of Jesus that I get a picture into something entirely worth it.

Be it snuggling up to my 9-year-old, holding her close and saying, “Hey, you know you are the best thing I’ve ever done, right? Or having my son tell me jokes as he heads off to bed with a “You’re my best, mom!” Or climbing into my Sophie’s lower bunk and saying, “I’m sorry for being a grump.” And holding her close as she answers back, “I am sorry I was SO mean, Mom.”

For every mom-fail. For every busted-up plan. For every time you lose your mom-stuff.

There is forgiveness and bedtime and chocolate and the sweet, new-morning coming.

So rest in that tonight, my mama sisters. (And maybe a bag of Ritz Chips.) Because at the end of the day, I know you meant to be awesome too.

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YOU DID NOT CHOOSE ME, I CHOSE YOU.

By Dr. Bob Segress

Men usually feel that they have chosen the woman. Actually, the smile that girls have on their face when they hear a boy say such things is a smile that comes from the girl knowing that they have accomplished their task of mate selection. Girls know men are hunters and women are shoppers.

Women choose their mates on the basis of whether the male appears to have the traits necessary to father, protect and provide. A man hunts for the most appealing and satisfying trophy.

A female grizzly bear is a good example of mate selection.

When her body is preparing for babies she is very gentle and compliant. She invites the male (who is busy tearing up trees to impress her) to approach and provide her with what she needs. Later, after the babies come, she will fight him to the death if he gets too close.

God's children often are preoccupied with their accepting Jesus as their Lord and Savior and miss out on the core of an abiding relationship.

The center of Christianity is not what we have done, but what He does. We did not choose Him, He chose us.

A mind and heart that not only hears these words, but un-

derstands them, is a soul that touches heavens rhythms. A soul that can believe that Jesus chose them is a soul that is awed and starts to understand the nature of love. When we are loved by Jesus, we have been chosen through no merit on our part but solely because of grace through faith.

When a person comes to understand that God works in them not only to come, but also to do His will, they lose all sense of pride and instead find gratitude.

Living a life that can only be found by abiding on Heaven's Vine, a child of God finds they are never alone. When a person knows Jesus chose them and appointed them to bear fruit and to bring glory to the Father by their answered prayers, their heart fills with love and a peace that passes understanding.

When I think about Creation, I think about the fact that the Creator is understood by the things that are made, as Romans 1:20 reminds. Common themes such as procreation and physical needs are seen in all of God's creatures, yet I see design, power and love behind the daily provision and the maintaining of nature's rhythms. Looking at clouds floating by in changing beautiful designs blown by God's powerful breath, I feel love breathe on my face, and my heart softens.

Knowing the Creator personally, I feel nature is my friend, a friend that I cherish and attempt to live with in harmony. My heart feels blessed by all of my brothers and sisters no matter the color of their skin as we all had the same original parents. And, it brings joy if they know Jesus because they are also my spiritual family and what do we have without family?

Because of these thoughts and feelings I'm grateful today to be more than just a man and more than an animal. And, I quietly pray: "Thank You for choosing me Lord. Amen and Amen".

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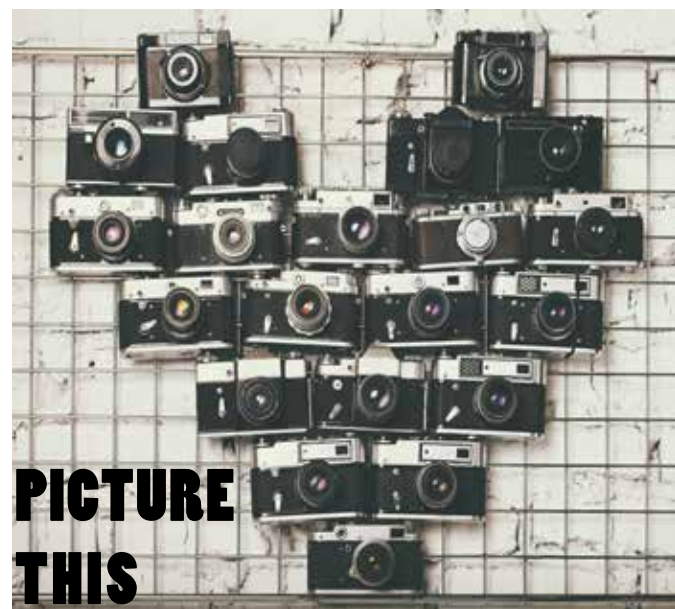


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PICTURE THIS

To try and picture love, think of love as being the framework that surrounds and binds two people captured in love. Neither the size of the picture nor the complexity of their lives matters, since the framework, like love, is designed and able to accommodate all who choose it to surround their lives. Such a unique picture calls to be protected and have its surroundings accentuate the desires of their heart. Upon mutually choosing their framework completes this picture of love, it can then be very enjoyable and satisfying to view and live-out.

For all who have been in pictures or have taken pictures realize the importance of "focus." Clarity is of utmost importance to see things as they really are. It's when things are out of focus that they become obscured and invite the imagination to wander for better or worse. In life or through the lens there are many tools at our disposal to achieve a true picture of love. Auto settings, like simple decisions are easy and assuring for those learning how to make the right adjustments so as to achieve a common desire. A certain amount of trust is developed during this phase, when desired results are exposed. Inevitably complex settings and adjustments will be required, such as shedding more light on a particular subject. One approach in achieving this is by slowing down your speed or by opening up (one's self) or (the aperture) enough to receive favorable results. Patients and encouragement are our friends at this point. Prayer and faith in Christ Jesus will provide us hope and direction. To develop a pleasing result, perseverance and dedication in working together is essential. Trust gained in this phase enables a much smoother operation and confidence in what or who you are working with.

When two people choose to love each other exclusively, they open themselves up to the other. In other words, Intimacy and dedication keep two in focus. I (shutter) shudder to accept anything less.

Ron D. Keating
ronsgrayspot58@yahoo.com

Safe Shopping Tips

AT CHRISTMAS AND ALL YEAR

From Police Departments around Northern California

Just as the daylight hours get shorter and the weather cools down, the Christmas shopping season is heating up. That means there's a good chance some of your holiday shopping will be done after dark. Of course, thieves thrive under the cloak of darkness, so you'll need to be even more watchful than you usually are. The best tip from police officers seems to be to shop with a friend whenever possible, and always be alert. Thieves look for someone who is distracted, so don't be that person. If you're carrying a purse and using a shopping basket, tether your purse to the basket using the child safety seat belt, or a long key chain.

Here are tips gleaned from police department websites around northern California, plus a few from other security experts.

Before You Leave Home to Go Shopping:

- Take off the flashy jewelry.
- Leave unnecessary cash and credit cards at home. Take only what you expect to use, and carry it in a front pocket or in your hand.
- Always carry your ID.
- Remove "bait" from inside your car, even small items which may seem low-value to you. You never know what will tempt an unscrupulous person. If you wait till you get to the mall to move things to your trunk, a thief on the prowl may notice, and pounce as soon as you are out of sight. While you're clearing things out of your car, if you plan to leave your purse or wallet or extra cash and credit cards in your trunk while you shop, stow those items there before driving away from home.

In the Parking Lot:

- Park under a light if it's dark out, or if it will be dark when you return to your car.
- Don't park next to vans, trucks with camper shells, cars with tinted windows, and structures that could provide cover to criminals.
- Assume that someone is watching you, looking for victims.
- If you take a break from shopping to put packages in your trunk, it's a good idea to move the car. Otherwise, police say, you are advertising to anyone watching that there's something there to steal.
- Day or night, set your car alarm.
- Don't be a distracted walker, police warn. It's critical to stay alert to your surroundings. That means no texting or phone calls, and no fishing for keys in your purse or pockets. Distraction is a thief's best friend, so before you leave the store have your keys in your hand and ignore your phone if it rings.
- Keys in hand can also be a life saver. If your key fob has an alarm button, don't be afraid to set off the alarm – even from a distance -- if you feel threatened. Better to risk embarrassment if you are wrong, than to risk attack.
- If you see a suspicious person lingering near your car, return to the store and ask for a security escort.
- If your arms are loaded with packages, keep your purse or wallet close to your body, where it will be harder to grab. Martial arts experts say, if a stranger demands your wallet, don't resist. Toss it away from you, then run in the opposite direction, preferably toward the store.
- When loading your trunk, put your purse in first so it's not easily grabbed. My sister lives in a very low crime area, but while she was loading packages into her trunk a thief ran by and grabbed her unguarded purse. Now her purse is the first item to go in the trunk.

Whether you enjoy shopping or consider it a necessity, don't let criminals steal your peace of mind, or your assets. They are counting on you to be distracted... it's up to you to put them out of business.

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