

# Joyful Living

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a crown of white daisies, smiles while holding a large bouquet of daisies. She is in a field of many more daisies. The background is a soft-focus field of white daisies with yellow centers.

Spring 2016

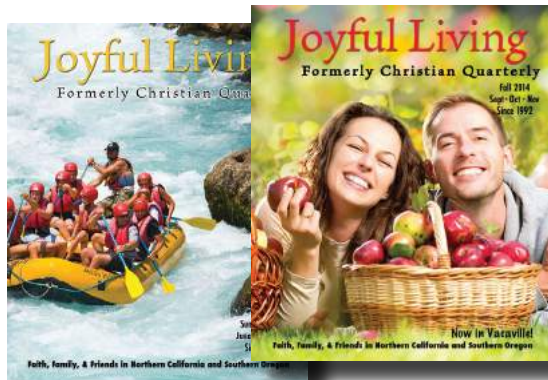
Northern California - Southern Oregon

## Joyful Living Magazine

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I'M GETTING TOGETHER ALL THE FALSE  
PROPHETS AS A GROUP. I AM CALLING  
THEM A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION



By Bonnie Mark

**My husband and I both stared** in wide-eyed wonder at the pan of mishmash that now graced our dinner table. Large chunks of bread floated freeform in a slick, beefy glaze, as soggy carrots and sickly peas hung limply from the sides of the pan. Ah yes, meatloaf, the gold standard that any newlywed could whip up in a jiffy. Not.

My sweet mama always made the perfect meatloaf. Her secret? A can of vegetable beef soup thrown in for good measure. Unfortunately, my meatloaf looked nothing like Mom's, and, I'm sorry to say it, more closely resembled something I'd once seen in a bout of stomach flu. One bite of this night's concoction was enough to know I definitely didn't have her touch.

My husband is a very smart man; if he's learned anything over the years, it's the "poker face". Most men do develop this fine skill sooner or later in their marriage, but honing the craft is always a good idea. The basic premise is this: never, and I mean never ever, reveal what you really think about what's placed on the dinner table. I'm not suggesting lying, of all things, but this could be Marriage Survival 101.

On this particular night, I tried to give my husband an out with numerous hints that I knew this loaf was disgusting. But did he crack? Not on your life. Once, though, between soppy mouthfuls, an ever so slight twitch appeared at the corner of his mouth, a mere glimmer of a snicker. Fortunately, every fiber of his being knew that his marriage, and quite possibly his life, hung in the balance. He could not and would not reveal his

hand—the mark of a true gentleman.

Forrest Gump once said, "Life is like a box of chocolates—you never know what you're going to get." Maybe marriage, and life itself, is a bit like a meatloaf, too. Here's what I've learned:

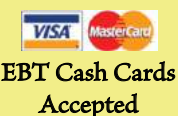
1. Let's not be afraid to get our hands dirty—a good meatloaf only comes together properly when we squish it with our bare hands. Jump right in.
2. Sure, our moms may have made the best meatloaf, but we are not our moms. Let's stop comparing ourselves to her or anyone else.
3. Even if our meatloaf is a disaster, it's up to us (and God) to pull ourselves back together, face the world, and get back in the kitchen.
4. Like my husband, the master, we must practice our "poker face". Proverbs 16:23 reminds us if we "teach our mouth, it will add learning to our lips." This could definitely save our marriage and our lives.
5. Don't be too prideful to get out the cookbook; if it's been fifteen years since we've made a meatloaf, we might need HELP!
6. Last but not least, learn to laugh at our goofed up "meatloaf". I still chuckle (and gag) when I picture those sickly peas and sad bread chunks. Truly, it's just not that big of a deal—it's time to get over it.

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# The Top 5 Side Effects of Exercise

By Fred Schaeffer

## Your doctor feels like a broken record.

That's right - he's (Could be he or she, I'm using he for brevity!) sick and tired of telling you how important exercise is to your health because YOU DON'T LISTEN.

He's sick of explaining how so many of your health problems will improve or even disappear as the result of a consistent exercise program.

He's tired of tallying your controllable risk factors which include physical inactivity and obesity.

So why does he continue to give you the same lecture?

Because he's seen exercise change lives.

He's even seen exercise save lives.

## A Doctor's Perspective

Dr. David Shilling MD has been a family doctor for over 30 years. In that time he's given a fair number of patients the exercise lecture...with good cause.

He's seen firsthand the healing power of exercise.

Exactly what kind of healing? Dr. Shilling shared the top 5 benefits that he's seen patients experience as a result of exercise...

**1. Feel Great:** The first thing that patients tell Dr. Shilling after starting an exercise program is how much better they feel. "People don't realize how bad they feel. They get used to feeling bad. Then when they start exercising they feel so much better."

Your energy levels boost and you feel great.

**2. Pain Be Gone:** Next patients notice a reduction in aches and pains. Chronic muscle and joint pain that they've lived with for years begins to fade. For some, joint replacement surgery is postponed. For others, arthritis pain is reduced.

Your muscles and joints feel better than ever.

**3. Goodbye Coronary Heart Disease:** While patients can't feel this healing benefit of exercise, it is the one that saves

lives. Exercise removes two of the major risk factors that lead to heart disease: 1) physical inactivity and 2) obesity. Exercise also increases your good cholesterol (HDL) and lowers your blood pressure.

Your risk of heart attack or stroke is reduced.

**4. Goodbye Type 2 Diabetes:** Patients with type 2 diabetes gain substantial benefits from exercise. Exercise improves the body's use of insulin, and the related excess bodyfat loss improves insulin sensitivity. Of course patients with type 2 diabetes need to get guidelines from their doctor before starting an exercise program.

Your blood sugar levels are better controlled.

**5. Goodbye Sleep Apnea:** Patients with sleep apnea are often caught in a destructive cycle. Their weight promotes occur-

rences of apnea then inadequate sleep promotes bodyfat weight gain. Dr. Shilling has seen exercise break this cycle.

Your sleep becomes restful and weight loss becomes easier.

With all of these benefits it's hard to see why anyone would avoid exercise. What's your excuse?

- I know you're tired...exercise gives you energy.
- I know you're in pain...exercise alleviates joint pain.
- I know you'd rather stay in bed...exercise makes your sleep more restful.
- I know you're pressed for time...exercise improves your efficiency and extends your life.



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# A MODERN DAY FAIRY TAIL



By Sara Cormany

***Once upon time, there was a prince.*** Who loved Excel spreadsheets, logic and plans. Who hoped to find a princess that would fit into his well-crafted happily ever after.

Now in a land, not too far away, lived a princess. Who loved creativity, existential logic and loosely drafted plans. Her plans. Plans that didn't really include a prince at all or even a happily ever after.

But then they met. It was not love at first sight. Or even second. Or third. The prince thought the princess was not his type. And the princess thought the prince talked entirely too

much. But they made each other laugh, so they determined to be friends.

Just friends. Until they weren't. Until they fell in love. Or something like it. The prince still loved plans. And the princess, logic that defied logic. But they thought they knew what love was. Love was rose petals. And chiffon. And candles. And cards. And first kisses.

But then came marriage. Where love became something else entirely. Love was humility. And forgiveness. And keeping your promises. Love was remembering to bring home flowers. Or pretending you remembered by getting flowers the follow-

ing day. Just as love was acting as though you had no idea they had been forgotten. Love was watching girly movies. Or the Godfather series, in sequence. And trying not to fall asleep. Love was dirty socks in odd places. And wet towels on the floor. And clogged toilets. Love was hospital beds. And doctor visits. And hugs that meant I love you no matter what. Love was more than the prince or princess had imagined. Different. But strangely, better than it had been before.

And they thought they knew what love was. But then came parenthood. Where love became something else entirely. Love was putting yourself dead last. And forgiving everything. And keeping your promises before you made them. Love was late nights. And throw up. And "I'm sorry's" even when you struggled to really mean it. Love was poop diapers. And temper tantrums. And realizing that "I hate this family" probably meant you were doing your job well. Love was dirty socks, shoes and other various items in odd places. And more wet towels on the floor. And definitely, more frequently clogged toilets. Love was reading Thomas twenty times. Or Fancy Nancy. Or Guess How Much I Love You. Love was still hospital beds. And doctor's visits. And hugs that meant I love you no matter what. Love was all the things that the prince and princess never dreamed they'd be. But they were love. Just the same.

And just as unexpectedly, the prince had long-forgotten the Excel spreadsheets. And the princess didn't even need loosely drafted plans quite so much. For they realized their happily ever after would never be like all the story books. It would be better. Because of the King who was writing it. Who had loved them in hospital beds. Through late nights. And doctor's visits.

A King who knew love because He was love. Who had taught the prince and princess that real love is most often unexpected. But that it is always perfect. A King who had held them. Carried them. And promised them. "I'll love you no matter what."

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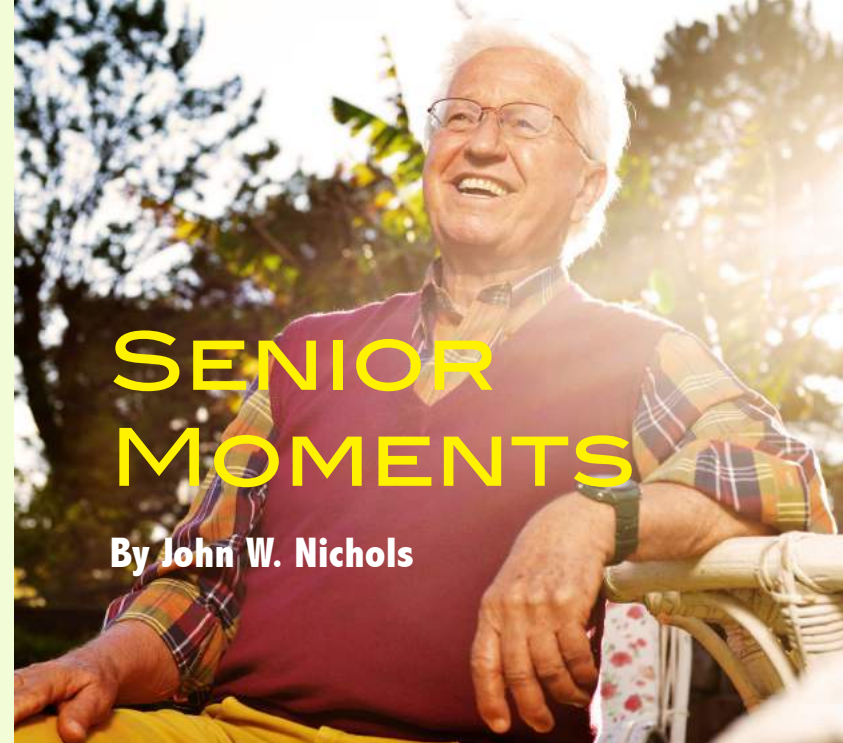
## To my new son *On my daughter's wedding day:*

When God made you,  
HE had this gorgeous woman in mind,  
And I as her mother, couldn't have picked  
A better man for this bride.

Love her like I do.  
Keep her safe as I have.  
Be her rock, her shoulder to lean on, her best friend.  
I'm not losing a daughter; I'm gaining a wonderful son.  
Who would've known this, when you two first begun!

Today you two go hand in hand.  
Today she becomes a woman, and you her man.  
Be there for one another,  
Admiration is the way.  
Put God first in your marriage, do this everyday!

When God made you,  
He had this special woman in mind,  
And I as her mother, couldn't have picked a better man for this bride.



## SENIOR MOMENTS

By John W. Nichols

### *When I first heard the term senior moment*

I pictured a group of high school kids celebrating their football team's championship. Imagine my disappointment when I learned the term applies to sudden interruptions in the connection between my brain and my mouth. And it happens without warning.

My wife and I recently joined another couple for dinner. We're of similar ages and backgrounds, and our evenings together are punctuated with side-splitting laughter. One person relating a story paused mid-sentence with a pained look. She confessed, "My mind is blank. I can't remember what I was sharing." And no one laughed. We've been there.

The years have a way of replacing our strength and stamina with the aches and pains we once associated with our grandparents. Reading tiny fonts or manipulating small items may require several adjustments of the eye glasses before things come into focus. Rising from the floor after another dropped-pill roundup convinces us that the pull of gravity must be increasing with time.

The writer of Proverbs tagged gray hair as a crown of glory (Proverbs 16:31), but reality may seem to offer a less glamorous status. Age and experience, once sought-after commodities, now mark workers as prime targets for corporate downsizing and outsourcing events. We're considered to be out of touch with technology and incapable of learning new skills yet our survival testifies to our adaptability.

Evangelist Billy Graham once offered this insight, "I had been taught all of my life how to die, but no one ever taught me how to grow old." How do we grow old? Should we embrace our increasing years with a resigned attitude? Can we be models of grace as we accept the inevitability of our changing reality? Or do we fight like mad to retain our youth no matter the cost?

Seniors, we're not outdated or nearing our expiration dates. We're vintage, classics. Our years of preparation equipped us for a future ripe with new assignments. Our time, our resources

whether large or small, and the opportunities surrounding us represent frontiers to explore and conquer. This is our moment to shine.

The generations coming behind us may not realize the vast and often untapped reservoirs of our knowledge, wisdom, abilities, and skills. We may have to demonstrate that we're not relics to be abandoned to a photo album.

Start small. Find a place where you can make a contribution and get the job done. Many organizations are desperate for volunteers, and volunteers with track records of accomplishments are invaluable. Consider your local church, schools, charities, and neighborhood groups.

Listen more than speaking. We have more ways to communicate than ever before, but personal connections are becoming rare. Seniors understand the importance of building face-to-face relationships, and listening demonstrates our concern for the ones who cross our paths.

Offer advice sparingly. Certainly we know the outcome of certain choices and the soundness of good decisions. Our hard-earned experience was won through the mistakes of our youth. Were we willing back then to take the word of our elders, or did we have to stumble on our own before we sought help? Be ready to help, but be gracious to wait for an invitation.

Practice patience. Seniors have a grasp on the words of James (James 4:14) when he tells us that our lives are like a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. We sense a need for deliberate action, for urgency. Our overtures of friendship and help may not be accepted, and our best intentions may be misunderstood. But we don't quit. We know the worthwhile blessings of life take time.

Now, take a look in the closest mirror. Stand tall. That's an experienced and valuable person looking back, a person God has placed in unique circumstances.  
John at [www.nicholsnotes.com](http://www.nicholsnotes.com)

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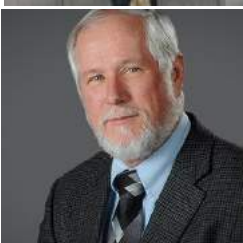


**David Hocking, Ph.D.** is Bible teacher on Hope for Today Radio. His pastoral and radio ministries exceed 50 years. In addition to his ministry of Bible exposition, he specializes in Bible prophecy, especially as it relates to God's plan for Israel. He has authored over 35 books, including commentaries on Daniel, Isaiah and Hebrews. He has also written two best sellers: *Good Marriages Take Time*, and *Romantic Lovers*, a commentary on the Song of Solomon. David has traveled widely in the land of Israel and has been in personal contact with Israel's leaders over the years. He publishes a monthly newsletter which includes current geopolitical and political events related to Biblical end-times prophecy.

## On CREATON Vs. EVOLUTON



**Dr. Randy Guliuza, M.D.** (University of Minnesota) represents the Institute for Creation Research. He is a captivating speaker who is known for his well-documented and often humorous scientific and Biblical presentations to audiences of all ages. He has debated evolution vs. creation on secular university campuses and other forums. Dr. Guliuza also holds a B.S. in Engineering from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, a B.A. in theology from Moody Bible Institute, and a Masters in Public Health from Harvard University. He served nine years in the Navy Civil Engineer Corps and is a registered Professional Engineer. In 2008, he retired as Lt. Col. from the U.S. Air Force, where he served as Flight Surgeon and Chief of Aerospace Medicine. He has authored *Made in His Image*.



**Dr. Danny Faulkner Ph.D.** (University of South Carolina) earned graduate degrees in physics and astronomy and taught at the University of South Carolina Lancaster for over 26 years. Dr. Faulkner is a member of the Creation Research Society and also serves as the editor of the Creation Research Society Quarterly. He has written more than a hundred papers in various astronomy and astrophysics journals, and is author of *Universe by Design* and *The New Astronomy Book*. Other fascinating articles include: “*Did We Really Land On The Moon?*” and “*Does The Second Law of Thermodynamics Favor Evolution?*”

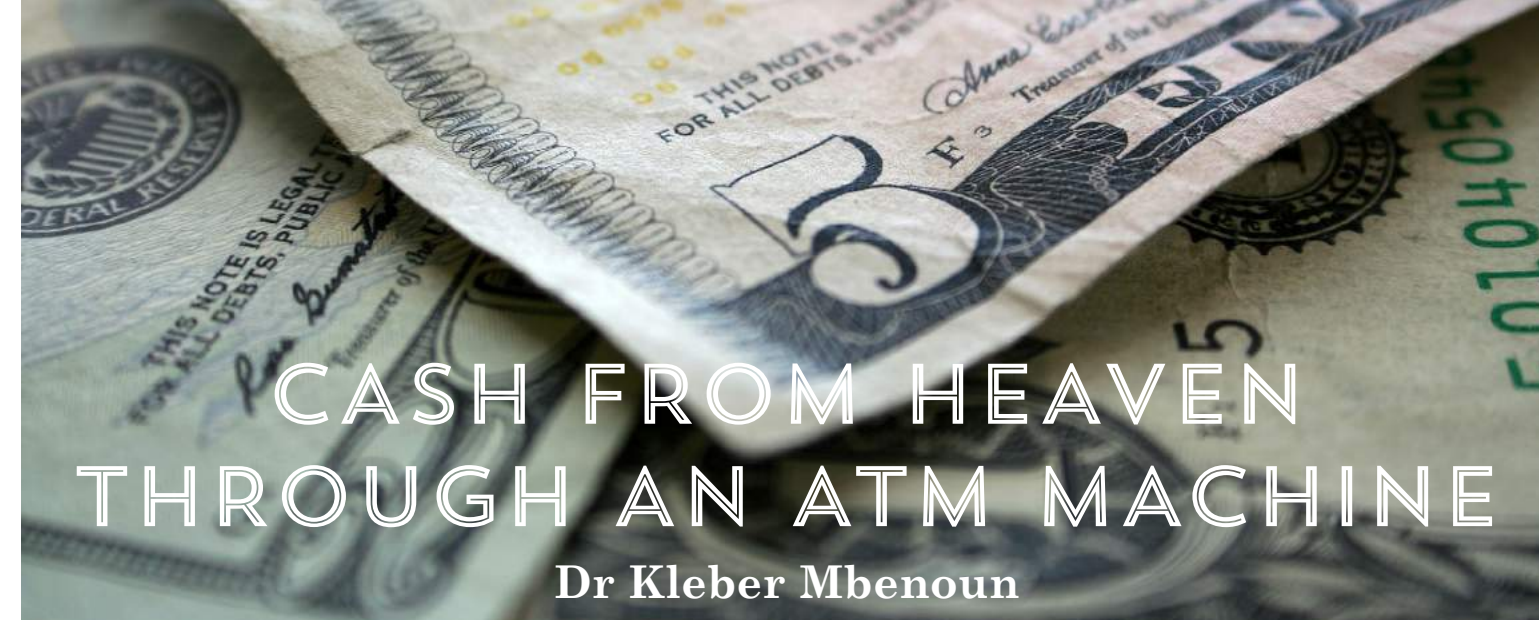


**Dr. Al Franklin, M.Div., D.D.** speaks at churches and conferences on Creation as Traveling Representative for Shasta Bible College & Graduate School. While the thrust of his ministry has been exegetically-based Bible exposition, at Redding's Grace Baptist Church, he is widely known and respected for his practical defense of Biblical creation based on irrefutable scientific evidence found in the fossils he has unearthed and identified in California's Shasta, Kern & San Luis Obispo counties, Arizona Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota. Using actual fossils, he demonstrates the absolute impossibility of evolution and the abundance of fossil evidences for the world-wide flood recorded in Genesis 7 & 8. His observations have often baffled and confounded secular evolutionists who have no reasonable explanation for his evidence.

**Wed., Thurs. & Fri. Morning Sessions begin April 6th, at 8:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. in the SBC Chapel.**

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In 2009, Mathew was going through a tough time. He was broke, having used much of his savings to come up for his tenants' failure to contribute on his mortgage. Bills were piling up and he did not even have a car.

One day, at a breaking point of his life, he borrowed his roommate's car and went for an ATM transaction. On the way there, he poured out his heart to God. He asked Him to give him \$1500 dollars to buy a used car.

After completing his transaction as he walked back toward the car, he heard a beeping noise. He turned around to look and saw bills coming out of the machine. He picked them up, and counted fourteen 100 dollars bills and two 50 dollars bills.

Believing this to be the ATM's malfunction, he went home, checked his account, and found nothing missing. The next day, he went to one of the bank branches and inquired about the source of these funds. After checking with the bank teller, she told him that nothing was missing from the bank's end. As soon as he stepped out of the building, the Lord reminded him of the prayer he made for money. But he was so broke that he used \$1000 of these funds to pay his credit card and other bills, gave \$100 to his fiancée, and was left with \$400.

One week later, a friend told him of someone selling a car. It was a fully loaded-1996-Honda Accord, whose retail value was at least \$2500. Although he had no money, Matthew went to see the car and asked the seller how much he was selling it for. The seller replied, he would sell it to him at Matthew's price. The seller accepted \$300 for the car, on the condition that he takes back the new tires he had just put on it.

When Matthew went with a tow truck to pick up the car, the seller decided to let go of the

tires. The take away? A couple of things:

**1. God still does supernatural things:** In the small circle of His intimates, such happenings are not uncommon. One believer told me of the amazing way God paid his bills. He was without employment and had bills due. The Lord asked him to write a check, even though he had no money in the bank. He obeyed, wrote the checks, and they were cashed.

**2. God is faithful to His own:** He said Hebrews 13: 5, "I will never leave nor forsake you"

### ***3. What to do to experience God's faithfulness in finances:***

- Maintain intimacy with God: Spend quality time with God in daily prayer and Bible reading.
- Be a person of Integrity: Especially in financial matters.
- Make a financial covenant with God: By paying your tithes and making offerings.



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# Bubbles

BY WENDY DELUCA

Laughter drew me toward the family in the park. A young boy took a breath and blew a soapy mixture through a wand. Hundreds of bubbles floated in the air. Some overlapped, forming bunches of rainbow-colored spheres glistening in the sunlight. A baby clapped when the family's dog jumped and nipped at bubbles.

*I yearned to join the fun.*

Divorced and without children, I could have become lonely from this happy scene. But I didn't. Instead, it reminded me of people who sparkle in my life. They fill my need for affection, companionship, and love. These are my bubbles. God created us for relationship, both with Him and others.

Everyone wants relationships. I build significant friendships as a single in supportive communities. When people meet together who share common interests, there is belonging. I feel included by others who want to know me.

With friends to walk the journey with me, I am not alone. "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help" (Eccles. 4:9-10, NLT). A helper doesn't have to be a mate. Mom

is my best friend and greatest support. In addition, my church community is a family that looks after me. These people fill the gap after my divorce and provide things my spouse used to.

I need my bubbles like I need air. They protect and care for me. Provide spiritual leadership to encourage and challenge my faith. Share emotional intimacy so I have a safe place to be vulnerable and real without judgment.

One small group not only comforted me after my father died, but also helped move furniture into storage. A "Pitstop" ministry fixed my car when I didn't have money for a mechanic. My pastor came over and prayed for me when I was sick with a high fever. Handy friends completed home maintenance. Other singles invited me to Thanksgiving dinner so I wasn't alone.

My community has given so much, I want to give back in return. Being in a group requires action. God gave me gifts to share with others. He uses me when I pour into someone else's life with physical and emotional support. A note in my Bible reminds to "be alert to meet other's needs." I love to give hugs at church. Encourage my small group. Pray with women's ministry. Affirm other singles. Listen when friends need to talk. Provide feedback in writer's group. Make sack lunches for the homeless.

Friendships are not limited to my Christian bubble. Camaraderie is felt with fellow veterans when we talk about time in the service. Support groups for Multiple Sclerosis encourage me, because others also struggle with the disease. At the senior center, I dance with partners who enjoy the jitterbug as much as I do. When I share resources and ideas with coworkers, they appreciate my help.

As I reach out and build relationships, my needs are met in return. Luke 6:38 (NIV) says "Give, and it will be given to you." Every time the pastor's father greets me at church, he gives a big hug, tells me I am beautiful, special, and he missed me. My heart overflows when I hear his words. It feels like God speaking directly to me through him. I feel accepted, wanted, and unconditionally loved.

God doesn't want me to hold onto this love, but allow it to flow through me. The boy at the park shared bubbles by letting them go. I can burst my bubble and shower the world with the love I have received.

*Wendy Taryn Deluca, a U.S. Navy Veteran and Clinical Therapist, provides faith-based counseling. She studied at Liberty University and Australia's Hillsong International Leadership College. Wendy is writing a book to help women find joy and contentment in singleness. For more information she can be contacted at wendydeluca.com.*



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## Is Text Neck affecting your posture?

Bobby Fano, DC, MS, DGCSS

A recent study sponsored by Facebook shows that 79% of the population between the ages 18 and 44 have their cell phones with them almost all the time—with only 2 hours of their waking day spent without their cell phone on hand. With over a billion people using smartphones, "Text neck" is a 21st century term and new phenomenon that is becoming a common household name.<sup>1</sup> We need to be aware of text neck as potential threat to our health.

Text neck is the term used to describe neck pain and damage sustained from looking down at your cell phone, tablet, or other wireless devices too frequently and for too long. Children and teens are especially at risk for suffering symptoms of text neck.<sup>2</sup> It seems the same technology that is positively shaping the world today has added the potential consequences of re-shaping our necks away from the spine's natural design and alignment. Your spine is the foundation to every movement your body makes. It not only gives us shape, strength and motion, but also protects our nervous system, which coordinates every process within our body from our heart beating, lungs breathing, and even hormone release and utilization. Normally, the healthy forward curve of the neck acts as a "spring" protecting the integrity of the intervertebral discs which influences nerve spacing, function, and longevity. Without the defense system of the spinal curves, the joints are left weakened and

exposed to the overloading effects of stress and gravity.

Over time, text neck may lead to poor posture. According to the research, poor posture may lead to tight and weakened muscles, extra wear and tear, inhibit organ function, tension headaches, neck pain, and alter our emotional state. If you are suffering from text neck, follow the preventative recommendations below. Below are some simple habits for avoiding the symptoms of text neck from looking down on your smartphone:

- Reduce the amount of time you spend texting and using social media on your smartphones. Use a computer that is ergonomically correct to offset time on your phone and reduce forward neck bending.
- When texting, raise your hands to eye level instead of looking down toward your lap.
- Alternatively, laying on your back with arms up and screen at eye level or on your stomach with arms up and the screen at eye level. This is better than looking down toward the floor.
- Consult your local chiropractor. I highly recommend visiting a corrective care chiropractor that evaluates your spine and symptoms. Specific and gentle adjustments may restore the alignment and function of your spinal joints to treat and prevent pain associated with text neck.

1. Always Connected How Smartphones And Social Keep Us Engaged An IDC Research Report, Sponsored By Facebook  
<http://www.nu.nl/files/IDC-Facebook%20Always%20Connected%20%281%29.pdf>

2. A Modern Spine Ailment: Text Neck. Steven Shoshany, DC. Spine-health.com Nov. 6, 2015  
<http://www.spine-health.com/blog/modern-spine-ailment-text-neck>

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## A Mother's Journey to Loving the Orphans

We were not planning on doing foster care. It all started when our five year old son would cry for a little brother, but because I could not have any more children, we made the decision to adopt. When we knew the child that we were being called to adopt we started the process, and within a year he was ours. Our five year old son finally had his little brother and we were so blessed to be his parents. After we had him for a while we felt we wanted to have a little girl, so we started doing foster care. Once you start doing foster care your heart really expands for the orphans. Just recently we adopted a sibling set we were fostering. Two sisters. They are the most amazing and loving little girls. We also have another sibling set that we were just planning on fostering, but all potential placements fell through, and we just knew that God was calling us to adopt them so now we are in the process of adopting them as well. Loving orphans is a journey that will change your life for the better.

Sandra Linnell

A Foster Parent with Krista Foster Homes in Redding Ca.



## JOY IN EXERCISING: FIVE TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

By Joy Fry



Yes, you can enjoy exercising. I used to dread making time to exercise. Now, I look forward to it. What changed? I'll describe the five tips that helped me get moving. Soon, I learned to enjoy exercise. Now, I look forward to walking with friends, hiking, and attending a weekly Pilate's class.

- Identify exercise activities you like.** That may seem simple but often we listen to what others tell us. Several of my friends advised me to swim laps and attend aqua aerobics classes. I tried both and did not want to continue. I love viewing birds and wildflowers. So, getting out for a hike each weekend brings a smile to my face. Make a list of your favorite ways to get some exercise. Then, focus on a plan to begin the top three.
- Find someone to exercise with.** If you enjoy walking, set up a regular time each week to walk with a friend or family member. If you work, ask a co-worker to join you for lunch time walks. If you prefer attending fitness classes make friends with some of the class members and invite them out for coffee afterwards. Make an effort to check in with them before or after class. You'll find they miss you when you're absent.
- Set goals and keep track of your progress.** An exercise tracking device, such as a Fitbit, can track your progress. Then, reward yourself when you reach an exercise goal. My husband focuses on walking 10,000 steps a day. He loves to update me when he meets his goal for the week. Another option is using the Health Dashboard on your phone or iPad to monitor your daily steps.
- Schedule exercise in your calendar.** Whether you use an electronic calendar or a paper-based one, schedule your exercise time just like an appointment. This helps to reserve the time you need to complete your exercise classes and meet your goals. If you sign-up for a weekly dance class right after work, block out that time as personal on your work calendar.
- Keep at it, even when you skip an**

**exercise activity.** This happens to all of us. Rather than beating yourself up, pick yourself up and persevere. Develop a plan for how to make it to your next planned exercise activity, class or workout. Focus on the progress you had been making and how good you were feeling during and after the exercise.

After following the tips above, I began to feel contentment while hiking, taking walks, and participating in Pilate's classes. I discovered I could enjoy taking care of my body. The Bible teaches us in chapter six of First Corinthians our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. I believe God delights in seeing us exercise. Will you consider trying these suggestions? If so, take time now to schedule the date and time for your first activity. I can envision the smile on your face when you complete your first week of exercise.



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by Renae Tolbert

It is hard to believe Herb has been gone 15 months. It seems like he was just here, making me laugh, holding my hand, taking me on adventurous hikes. It feels like last weekend he sat in the living room watching basketball while I made his weekly batch of fresh chocolate chip cookies.

At times, grief blind sides me, but I have found when I focus on the 18 years we had, not on my loss, I am filled with joy despite the emptiness. When I recognize where my mind is going, I have to make a decision what to focus on: what we had or what I lost. I get to own my emotions.

I decide to think about the road trips, hikes, and joyful times we had. Yes, those thoughts can trigger a deeper sadness, and a tear may fall, but, through the tears, I choose joy – sometimes I fail miserably, but, God reminds me of the gift He had given me for those years and I find my way back to the joy again.

One rainy morning, I put one of his flannel shirts. As I slipped the oversized sleeves onto my arms, I got a whiff of his Adidas Cologne. It took my breath away. Later in the day, I pulled a long strand of his gray hair from the collar. I was filled

with joy and my discovery made me smile and my heart hurt at the same time. A tear fell, but I smiled because of the serendipitous moment of joy.

Herb left journals penned with letters to God. I have learned more about him and his love for the Lord than I ever imagined I would know. These letters bring me so much comfort. It is a blessing and an honor to have these treasures. As I read them, I can virtually hear his voice saying the words as if he is sitting right here with me praying.

Herb Tolbert loved books. I have discovered, tucked neatly between pages, notes that I wrote to him such as, “I went to the store, be right back –Wfie” (my trademark signature for him only) I used to sneak notes into his lunch. I did not know it, but he never threw them away, he used them for book marks. My heart leaps when I find one of these gems.

There is joy in the mourning. It is possible to smile amidst your grief when you keep your perspective. It’s ok to be sad and mourn your loss. But, after a good cry, you will find joy once again.

If you are in a season of grieving, I pray you are able to find Joy in your mourning, and that God will put his loving arms around you and bring to mind the blessings you had in your life during the years with your loved one.

“For I will turn their mourning into joy  
and will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.”  
Jeremiah 31:13

*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.*



**After many years of marriage**, I found myself a widower. I knew I didn’t want to spend the rest of my life single. After a year I went online and met Liz. She was a tonic to my soul. We went on a few dates and agreed our relationship would be exclusive. A few months later, we discovered our love was moving us toward marriage. It was going very fast–too fast. We had a heart-to-heart discussion and agreed to slow down. Before we came together as lovers in marriage, we had to build a friendship.

After considering the word “friend” and consulting a dictionary, I discovered three key dimensions for friendship are knowledge, trust, and affection. If one of these is missing, you don’t have a friend; an acquaintance perhaps, but not a friend.

**Knowledge** doesn’t happen in an instant. I had so much to learn about Liz. I had to study her, determine her likes and dislikes, meet her friends and family, understand her history, and interact with her in joy and in stress. In short, I had to experience every season with Liz. For this reason, we waited a year to set a wedding date. It took that long to gain sufficient knowledge of each other.

**Trust** is earned. It is not awarded. Liz had to feel safe with me. I had to see her as a woman of character who keeps her word. Forgiveness can be graciously given in a moment, but trust takes time. Will she do as she says? Will I? As Liz and I grew in knowledge of each other, we also learned to trust each other. Friendship without trust can lead to ruin.

**Affection** comes naturally to those in love. Be careful not to confuse affection with infatuation which is fleeting, or obsession which is demanding. True affection is a desire to be in the peaceful presence of the other, to hang out, to enjoy the other’s company. When you’re away from a friend, your heart should warm with thoughts of them. I had to like Liz as a friend before I could love her as a husband.

Jesus chose each of disciples carefully. Through three years of daily contact, he grew to know his friends, trust them, and care for them deeply. Follow his example as you consider a potential life partner. Are you in a dating relationship now? How does your partner rate in these three dimensions? Before you enter a lifelong commitment, make sure the love of your life is first your three-dimensional friend.

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# Soul Health



By Beni Johnson

**“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of the world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect”. Romans 12:2 NLT**

Over ten years ago, I heard the Lord speak to me with instructions to get healthy. My husband, Bill, and I had been pastoring our church in Redding, California and we were seeing God move in great and powerful ways. Spiritually, I was in a good place; but physically, I

had a long ways to go.

Over the course of my journey towards health, The Lord began to reveal to me that health is not just for our bodies, but also is intended for our soul and spirit. God created us as a triune being and His will is to see us flourishing in all three areas.

Before we explore what Soul health looks like, allow me to first differentiate the difference between our spirits and our souls. An in-depth study of the Greek words for ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ suggests that they are similar - in fact, almost

identical. However, I found this definition that helped to clarify the difference for me, ‘The soul is the essential life of man ‘looking earthward’ and the spirit is that same principle of life breathed (like wind) into man from God that can look towards and experience God’. This suggests that the spirit and the soul have different emphases. For the sake of avoiding confusion, I am going to refer to the soul (the part of us that looks earthward) as the mind.

As believers, having a healthy mind is an essential part of our Christian walk. Jesus’ disciple, Matthew, records Jesus as saying, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

(Matthew 22:37-40 NLT)

I love this verse because it so beautifully gives us an important key in living a healthy life. It shows us that we must align our minds and our thoughts with God. In order to love our neighbors well, we must love ourselves well. The connection of loving God, loving ourselves, and then being able to show that love to others so beautifully shows how God intended for us to live. For many of us, learning to love ourselves may feel difficult or even impossible at times! But I promise you that once you begin the process of falling in love with yourself, you will find more freedom and joy in Christ with each passing day.

Aside from finding a new level in freedom in Christ, having a healthy mind has also been proven to have a positive effect on your physically bodies as well! As I mentioned earlier, our beings (spirit, soul, and body) are all wonderfully connected. Respected brain specialist, Dr. Caroline Leaf, in her book *Who Switched Off My Brain*, states that, ‘Toxic thoughts are thoughts that trigger negative and anxious emotions, which produce biochemical, that cause the body stress. They are stored in your mind as well as in the cells in your body.’ It’s time to take these toxic thoughts and replace them with loving ones that will bring us healing.

You may be asking yourself, “How do I begin to have a healthy mind?” First, I encourage you to invite the Holy Spirit into this journey. He will be your faithful friend and guidance through this. Take some time and grab a pen and a journal and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you His thoughts about you. What does He love about you? What does He see when He looks at you? I encourage you to write down what He reveals to you even if you have a hard time believing those things yourself. Next, I encourage you to say a prayer of repentance for believing lies about yourself or thinking negative and unloving things. This is important because you are breaking agreement with your former ways. True repentance means that you are changing your mind, which is exactly what you want to do. Next, I want you to say out loud the things that God revealed to you. These will become your “declarations.” Declarations come from aligning our thoughts with God’s and seeing His will, and then partnering with Him by speaking His truth into existence. A definition of declarations that I found and love is “The

formal announcement of the beginning of a state or condition.’

In addition to declarations, another way to combat lies that you might believe about yourself is to laugh at them. I want to encourage you to do just that. That’s right. Laugh at them. I know a pastor who strongly believes in this practice, and will actually put people in a circle, and have each one share with the group a lie that they believe about themselves. As they confess the lie, the whole group begins to laugh. It’s a powerful form of ministry because laughter dismantles the lie’s power in such a fun way – it reveals the truth, and brings perspective.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul instructs us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” Some of us may have spent years, even decades, living with unhealthy and self-loathing thoughts so much so that you may not even realize that you are having those thoughts! The next step is to ask the Holy Spirit to show you when you are having negative thoughts about yourself, another person, or a situation. When you take that thought captive, replace the thought with how God sees you or the situation.

As with any new change, always allow yourself Grace. Creating a healthy soul is a journey and a process that will not happen overnight. Embrace the process! Enjoy the journey that you and the Holy Spirit are embarking on!

1. <http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/8847/trichotomous-vs-dichotomous-views-of-man/8887#8887>
2. *Who Switched Off My Brain*; pg.19
3. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Declaration.aspx>
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# Ramblings of a Retired Mind

I found this timely, because today I was in a store that sells sunglasses, and only sunglasses. A young lady walks over to me and asks, “what brings you in today?” I looked at her, and said, I’m interested in buying a refrigerator. She didn’t quite know how to respond. Am I getting to be that age?

I was thinking about how a status symbol of today is those cell phones that everyone has clipped onto their belt or purse. I can’t afford one. So I’m wearing my garage door opener.

You know, I spent a fortune on deodorant before I realized that people didn’t like me anyway.

I was thinking that women should put pictures of missing husbands on beer cans!

I was thinking about old age and decided that old age is when you still have something on the ball but you are just too tired to bounce it.

I thought about making a fitness movie for folks my age and call it ‘Pumping Rust’.

When people see a cat’s litter box they always say, ‘Oh, have you got a cat?’ Just once want to say, ‘No, it’s for company!’

Employment application blanks always ask who is to be called in case of an emergency. I think you should write, ‘An Ambulance’

Ah! Being young is beautiful but being old is comfortable. I was thinking about how people seem to read the Bible a whole lot more as they get older. Then it dawned on me. They were cramming for their finals. As for me, I’m just hoping God grades on the curve.

Birds of a feather flock together . . . and then crap on your car.

The older you get the tougher it is to lose weight because by then your body and your fat have gotten to be really good friends.

The easiest way to find something lost around the house is to buy a replacement.

Did you ever notice: The Roman Numerals for forty (40) are XL

The sole purpose of a child’s middle name is so he can tell when he’s really in trouble..

Did you ever notice: When you put the 2 words ‘The’ and ‘IRS’ together it spells ‘Theirs’

Aging: Eventually you will reach a point when you stop lying about your age and start bragging about it.

Some people try to turn back their “odometers.” Not me. I want people to know ‘why’ I look this way. I’ve traveled a long way and some of the roads weren’t paved.



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Quality Time	Running errands Taking trips Doing things together Going on walks Sitting/talking at home	Quiet places with no interruptions Undivided attention One-to-one conversations	Too much time with friends or groups Isolation Gaps of time between meetings
Receiving Gifts	Giving gifts Giving time Remembering special occasions Giving small tokens	Private giving of gifts Pleasant facial expressions	Materialism Forgetting special events
Acts of Service	Assisting with house chores Ongoing acts of helpfulness Exchanging of chores	Say: “What can I do for you?” “I will stop and get...” “Today, I did... for you.” Making a checklist	Forgetting promises Over commitment of tasks Ignoring
Physical Touch	Hugs Pats Touches Sitting close	Pleasant facial expressions Mostly non-verbal	Physical abuse Corporal punishment Threats Neglect

\* Taken from Gary Chapman's The Five Love Languages of Teenagers



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By Hermelinda Simon

*A couple of months ago* my husband and I were in beautiful San Francisco. It had been a while since we had gone away with just the two of us.

This was a new adventure for us. We had been up north many times but had never vacationed in San Francisco, so we wanted to do all the touristy things, such as go to Fisherman’s Wharf, see the famous crooked street, have some chocolate at the Ghirardelli Factory and of course see the Golden Gate Bridge.

One night as my husband and I were talking at dinner the waiter told us about biking to the Golden Gate Bridge. As the waiter was talking I could see my husband’s wheels turning and him getting really excited. This wouldn’t be an easy 2-mile bike ride; it would be about 10 miles one-way and would require a lot effort and endurance.

My husband and I both love the outdoors but he is a little outdoorsy then I. He loves to camp, go mountain bike, long bike rides and anything else that is outside. Me on the other hand, enjoy the outdoors but I like a lounge chair and pool to be involved, so doing this bike ride was going to be a little stretch for me.

Without thinking I looked at my husband and said, “Let’s do it!” Then I thought, “What am I getting my self into?” All the bad thoughts started to come into my head: “How am I going to be able to ever finish this?” “I can’t do this.”

We woke up the next morning, had a good breakfast and we were on our way to pick up our bikes. Found the perfect bikes for the 2 of us and our adventure begin!

The first couple of miles were not that bad but then we got to the 8 - 9 mark and I became very tired - especially when we were going up hill. My husband was right there encouraging me, pushing me, and he didn’t let me give up. When I needed to rest, he rested with me; when I needed a cheerleader, he cheered me on, and needless to say I crossed the bridge!

As we were crossing the Golden Gate Bridge, I felt accomplished, felt full of joy, felt powerful because I did something that I thought there was no way I could do.

I learned a couple of things from my experience:

1. Make sure that you surround yourself with people who will encourage you, push you when you need it, challenge you and move you toward being who God wants you to be. If my husband wasn’t there cheering me on I probably would have given up and missed out on a great experience.

2. We can accomplish more than we think we can. Our mind is our greatest and worst enemy. Sometimes our mind can tell us many things that cause us to live in fear and will paralyze us from moving forward. Don’t allow this to happen but fill your mind with the things of God and don’t believe the enemies lies. So my question to you today, “What is your bridge?” What is something that you are afraid to but know you should be doing? Challenge yourself to do something new, something out of the box, something that you know you can’t do on your own.

We all have a bridge that we are trying to cross and sometimes we just need that extra push to get us to see what God has for us on the other side. You will be amazed what God can do when you trust Him and step out in faith!



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## THE POWER OF JOY

By Diane Hunter

**“Dr. Oh’s office called and he wants to see me,”**  
Roger said to me as I walked into the kitchen. My heart felt like it twisted into a knot and was held by a vice for a minute. Dread is a heavy thing, I noted. I went into the other room and began to pray. My mind was swirling but I knew I needed to find my anchor. I needed the truth of my God.

Roger had just had his second PET scan after finishing radiation and chemo treatments. He had gotten a clean bill of health in July and we were expecting another... But when the call came from his oncologist’s office stating that his doctor needed to see Roger immediately, I felt the imploding vortex of chaos beginning to pull me in.

No! I cannot afford to entertain these fear-based thoughts. I will not get sucked into this drowning whirlpool of devastation. It’s one thing to get told your spouse has cancer... and go through the months of grueling treatments to fight it. It’s another thing to consider having to do it again...

In this place, I needed one of my strongest weapons: Joy.

Joy is one of the most powerful offensive weapons I have ever experienced.

Why is it so powerful? Because the enemy has no context for it.

Obedience to the LORD is wonderful and necessary, but the enemy understands the concept of obedience. From his vantage point obedience is control. In his camp it’s called bondage; but he understands it.

But following God in joy—overcoming temptation, rising above disappointment and fear, from a stance of joy—is something that puts the enemy in a tailspin.

*Joy simply confuses him.*

Just like the children of Israel who blew trumpets and hit pitchers, throwing confusion into the enemy’s camp, so our joy brings confusion to his camp.

*Joy is the highest, most effective kind of warfare.*

The enemy tempts us to take our eyes off the truth and goodness of the LORD and put our focus on difficulties, or a bad report. But joy allows us to rise above our circumstances. It seeds desperation in the enemy’s camp, and scrambles his plans.

As Roger and I drove to the doctor’s appointment that day and sat in the waiting room... and waited... we looked to Him. We began to filter our thoughts through His truth. We remembered the price He paid for us. We invited His Spirit into our difficulty, and we declared His attributes.

And, I remembered the power of joy. I didn’t feel joyful but I have come to understand how joy crushes the head of the enemy and takes ground in the Kingdom of God.

Gratefully, Roger got a clean bill of health and has been cancer-free for over a year and a half now, but regardless of what we go through we must remember that the ways of God and the ways of the enemy are mutually exclusive.

We cannot be full of self-pity and joy at the same time;  
or fear and joy,  
or disappointment and joy,  
or comparison and joy,  
or resentment, or hopelessness, or doubt,  
or anxiety and joy.

So, this day, let us choose the ways of God. Let us choose joy. Let us choose truth. And let us remember that since the enemy has nothing that can overcome joy, his biggest strategy is to keep us far from it—to keep us focused on what isn’t working. May we resist this trap and, instead, focus on the Victorious One who sits in the heavens and laughs Ps. 2:4.

May we laugh with God and wield the power of His joy in every situation!

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By Cheryl Stasinowsky

We all have expectations, known and unknown, realized and unrealized, real or false, but we still have them. We expect people to act or be a certain way. We expect them to think like and make decisions like we do. We expect people, at times, to read our mind. We expect people to be appreciative when we do something for them. We expect, and, many times, do not even realize we are expecting. All of this gets played out in our

relationships with others. Guess what? They are doing this to us, too...

Where do our expectations come from? They come from our parents and upbringing. They can come from television shows

and movies we watched growing up. They come from what we personally like and dislike. Sometimes they come from an unhealed hurt of our past, and we set up protection for the future. They, at times, get established within us and we do not realize it.

We discover our expectations when someone lets us down. We can think we do not have any expectations when we give something to or do something for someone, but if they do not respond or react like we felt they should, we can find ourselves frustrated or upset. Why? They did not receive what we did the way we expected them to. Did we communicate our expectations to them? Many times we do not. We might even tell them that we have no expectations, or even tell ourselves this, but the proof is in our reaction to their response or lack thereof.

This happens in marriage when two people say, "I do." Two people with expectations of marriage come together and discover the other person is not living up to their expectations. Do they call it this? Most likely, they do not even realize this is what is happening. They just know they are not happy and the other person is not meeting their needs or making them happy. If communication is poor, soon this marriage is in trouble and can fail, with each blaming the other for the failure. But, in many situations, it is unrealistic expectations not being met. The first mistake is, many times, the expectations are not even communicated, and the other person constantly has to learn the hard way. If our expectations are not communicated to the other person, we really do not get to expect them. I'm going to repeat that sentence. If our expectations are not communicated to the other person, we really do not get to expect them. It is not fair to the other person and brings frustration to both. Think about it...

This happens with our children, our in-laws, friendships, co-workers, leaders, and pretty much every relationship we have. Many times, the expectations we have of others are impossible to fulfill. I am not even sure we live up to our own expectations if we were totally honest with ourselves. Think about it...take time to think about your expectations of each person in the relationships you have that are struggling or have failed.

We all have needs and, many times, we are unaware we expect others to fulfill them. But what if the people around us are not the ones who can nor are supposed to fulfill our needs? What if the deep needs, desires, and expectations can only be fulfilled by God? What if we expect people to be who we want and need them to be and people are not meant to be the ones to do this? If we are mad at God, or do not even know Him or have a relationship with Him, we will go through many relationships trying to get that need and expectation met. Yes, there might be a few people who will meet our expectations, but not many. Think about your relationships in your past...what went wrong? What went right? Did you expect something that should not have been expected of them? Were your expectations realistic?

I have, personally, been re-evaluating my expectations of others. I have let go of what an ideal relationship should be, because the truth is, I do not live up to my own expectations that I have of others. I have forgiven them and asked the Lord to forgive me, and I have forgiven myself. I am learning to have realistic expectations of people and not try to make them be who I want them to be, and let them be who they are to be...guess what, we are also on the receiving end of this...Think about it, make a change, get real, be aware of what you are expecting, forgive, and make a new plan...your relationships will thank you!

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# Getting Your Giggle On

by Antje Hill



## Remember when we couldn't wait to grow up?

The years were long as a fifteen year old. We couldn't wait to go on a first date, to get our driver's license, then to be on our own. Life continued and all that we anticipated happened. We have a spouse, a home, children, maybe grandchildren. So what now?

With the things we dreamed of came the seriousness of adulthood and responsibility. Somewhere along the way, it seems we grownups forgot how to laugh. Researchers say laughter is seldom heard in households across American. The diagnosis of DDD (delight deficiency disorder) is becoming epidemic. Husbands, wives, parents, homeowners, so busy with hectic sched-

ules have forgotten to have fun. And it's a fact that life goes on whether we're having fun or not.

We adults find it hard to ignore negative news. Constant media coverage keeps us well informed of things we don't have to know about. But in the end, it is not totally correct to blame outside forces for our dilemma. We are responsible for what we dwell on.

Online sources reveal numerous studies through the years that promote the benefits of humor. According to experts, humor reduces stress hormones, elevates brain awareness, increases alertness, eases muscle tension and improves blood circulation to mention a few. Best of all, it is non-prescription!

I appreciate my sister more and more as the years pass. She has always been that life-of-the-party type of girl. She is partly responsible for relieving stress hormones, increases my mental alertness and improving blood circulation for me through the years. I am sure she was the culprit that planned the tomato party that took place at our home a few years back, while we were away, ensuing bouts of healthy laughter.

A couple of years after our marriage,

my husband planted his very first tomatoes. He had always lived in the city and never had the chance to try his hand at gardening. He eagerly awaited lots of fried green tomatoes, salads and BLTs. But as the fruit started to ripen, he decided to sell his home in Michigan. That meant a trip there for an extended period of time. We knew the tomato season would be over when we returned. Sadly we announced to our family, "Help yourself to our tomatoes while we are gone." That opened the way for lots of fun in our family. They helped themselves to the luscious fruit with my sister planning all the while for a photo op.

A month into our time away from home, a large envelope arrived with tell-tale evidence of a party that had taken place on our patio. Photos spelled out the food, the people involved and to what extent they enjoyed themselves. Photos revealed our table laden with fruit, chips, mayo, bread and big slices of tomato. My parents posed with sunglasses and big hats over exaggerated wigs with the caption, "The best we've ever eaten and there was a toast to the "farmer"! What a sight! The last photo was of each guilty party hanging their head, captioned, "We

can't eat another bite!" Those funny photos were like a health elixir to Richard and me.

Life can be serious, sad and even cut short. If we don't enjoy life as it is happening, we miss the promise of abundant life that our heavenly Father so graciously declares to us. Gloria Gaither once wrote a song that says "Yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never come. But we have these moments today."

As research in humor becomes stronger, I'm delighted that science is catching up to what the bible tells us in Prov. 17:22:

**"A merry heart does good like medicine."**

Abraham Lincoln must have learned the benefit of laughter when he said, "With the fearful strain that is on me night and day, if I did not laugh, I should die."

It is not always easy to change habits, but if laughter can help me burn calories, get a cardiac workout, improve my memory, reduce stress, promote relaxation and improve my sleep, you can bet I will engage in fun shenanigans and do everything I can to avoid DDD.



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By **Leslie Parker**

# still waters

## ON A SUMMER TRIP TO THE BEACH

I headed down to the shoreline in search of prized seashells. The pickings were slim that day and before I knew it, I had walked the length of two football fields. I gazed out at the vast ocean before me then back to the sand at the other visitors and vacationers and to those standing at the water's edge - those at my immediate left and right.

From where I stood I spotted footprints, broken shells, seaweed, and happy children digging in the sand. I paused and thought of my own children digging and frolicking at the beach not so long ago. I walked a little further down the beach while listening to the crashing waves, the seagulls and laughter all around me. One minute I was looking for seashells and the next I felt I was in the complete presence of the Holy Spirit. The ocean has that effect I know. I've felt it before. I have talked to others who have as well. Most likely because of the oceans great Creator. One would only need to look as far as the bible at the hundreds of reference to the ocean, the sea and the waters. There are not many places geographically where I have stood and felt such a strong and definitive presence of the Holy Spirit. Today was very different for me and my thoughts stretched beyond taking in the beauty and thinking of the incredible hand that shaped it. I could hear His voice. I stopped momentarily and looked out as far as my eyes could see. The water was infinite it seemed and my eyes lost focus as I rested in what I was feeling and thinking and hearing. My vision came back into fo-

cus and I then looked out directly to the surfers in the water. I was taken in and began to think about the passion and stamina that surfing requires and the perseverance needed to learn to be great at it. Constantly repeating the same actions. Swimming out, getting up, staying up and riding the waves and rip curls. On this particular day one would really have to be especially good at it as there were warnings posted and extra lifeguards letting the crowds know to stay within a certain distance and far and away from the rocks.

I recalled how each time I visit this particular beach I could count on seeing the diehard committed surfers who would have to wake very early and get into the water in the fog in the frigid temperature's for this beloved sport. Some surfers come in groups, others come in pairs and some surfers come alone. They know how to read the ocean, the breaks and the jetties. My thoughts turned to what type of person stays dedicated to this sport. How bold they need to be to enter the waters, to be physically ready to push up, stand, balance swim and endure the breaking waves. Again, I was only looking for shells but the analogy to surfing and the commitment to being a Christian rushed though my head and into my heart.

I spotted the amateur surfers taking lessons and those also trying to go it alone- paddling out, popping up, and falling right back the into water - Some coming in to the beach and giving up after a few tough falls. I began to imagine those in that category as the lukewarm Christian straddling one foot into a life of faith

and the other foot still in the world. The lukewarm/in-experienced surfer in this particular analogy was perhaps someone who thought being a Christian would mean life would become smooth and there would no longer be the ever changing ebbs and flows we all endure – Even those who have professed Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Then I thought if the surfers are the rooted Christians and the novices are the lukewarm Christians where are the non-believers? That would be those that would not dare go into the water let alone get on a surfboard. But, yet they are so important in this fun philosophy. They are the watchers. The watchers could even be those who don't partake of

the beach at all. Those who may hate the sunshine. (And perhaps even hate the light). That's when my heart began almost racing in a good way as I felt the obligation that a Christian has to all of the bystanders. All of a sudden so much to consider in my new born analogy of a Christian surfing the waves of life. I go back to the committed surfer and the trust they must have in the timing, their technique and balance. But, the real trust is in the ocean itself. Surfers must learn to have a healthy fear of the water. Knowing when is the best time to be in the ocean at all and when it will not serve them well. What an awesome sport it is to surf!

What an awesome responsibility it is to represent God to other people! With that in mind we must realize that never are we more vulnerable to weakness then when our backs are up against the wall. It is then that the non-believer or those on the fence are truly watching and waiting to see how we ride the storm. Just as the 'wanna be surfers' try and attempt to glean techniques by watching so does the non-Christian or the Christian straddling the fence. And for that matter our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are watching as well and they often have a front row seat. They are never more attentive than when they see us 'fall' or 'bite it' in the waves of life. When the high tide could very well take us out the spectator watches to see how we will react and If we will recover. That is where redemption takes place & testimonies are born! So by now you may be thinking I don't surf. I don't want to learn and I am not a fan of the beach. But, I want to be a worthy example and point others to Christ, even when I don't feel worthy myself.

What would that look like?

How do I demonstrate faith

and trust and a peace that passes all understanding while I am drowning and in the midst of a struggle? There is one way that is unwavering and can bring you right back to shore – God's promises. Hold tight to His word as you walk through the fire and remember His mercies are new every day. Those mercies will happen! Insert disclaimer here– Mercies and grace and redemption all happen In Gods timing - not ours. Keeping in mind that sometimes to the Lord one day is a thousand days and a thousand days is a day. What do we do in the waiting? We immerse ourselves in the word, surround ourselves with Godly brothers and sisters and stay the course. We can pursue peace! Inwardly and outwardly showing others our trust and faith in Our Lord. Because when that tide goes back out and the waters are still you will bask in the Glory of the 'sun' (The son) and reflect on the wave that tried to take you down and rest in Jesus. And, on that day all of the spectators will see hope where there was no hope. They will see goodness where there was no good. And, by His hand and the seeds you have planted – They will see JESUS!



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*I was a teenager when I asked Jesus into my life. It wasn't until years later I realized He is alive. I had no idea who He was or what a relationship with God meant. I thought it meant you ask God for things you want and/or who I answered to when I did something wrong. All I really understood was I did not want to go to hell. From sixteen years of age, I have been on a journey to find a living God who made sense, one who made me feel better about who I was, and who added to my life. I wish I would have known to just ask Him directly for these*

things. I never felt I measured up to the Jesus represented in the churches I attended. Not only could I not measure up, but what was the purpose for it all? The only thing I had to look forward to was Heaven, and that was a lifetime away.

Imagine my relief when I met the Holy Spirit and found out God was not an ambivalent presence, but that He was good. He wanted me to have good things: life abundant, fullness of joy, and a prosperous soul. I wish my experience had been an in-

stant conversion, that in one moment all my beliefs and behavior changed. But that hasn't been my experience, and learning to enjoy the journey has been challenging.

The next challenge was to realize why would Father God care about the sin in my life. Think about a person you respect. What happens when you have done something that you think will disappoint him or her? For me, it is hard to go look that person in the face. That is why Father God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit care if I sin. It is why the Father hates sin; it makes me want to hide from Him and keeps me from turning to Him. I always felt condemnation when someone would say God hates sin. It made me afraid He hated me also. The reality is that when I sin, I am out of alignment with the Kingdom of God. It hurts my heart and God's, and as much I try to justify sinning, I cannot because I know it will separate me from God.

When I was a new Christian, my pastors loved me with the love I came to know Jesus had for me through their example. They did not judge or condemn my behaviors (and they were questionable). They drew me into this love affair with Jesus. They knew encounters with Him were the real answer. When I failed time after time to quit smoking, they simply loved me. They were my greatest cheerleaders telling me that I would obtain freedom from nicotine. They reminded me that Jesus loved me whether I smoked or not, and He would never leave me. It gave me incredible confidence that I could keep trying to quit. It gave me permission to take all the negative things in my life to Father God as He is so much bigger than the negative influences in my life. I have learned if I take my shortcomings

to Him, they don't want to hang around in His presence.

My DAD created the universe. He knew me before the foundations of the earth. He knew who I would become because He created me. I sometimes, either consciously or subconsciously, have participated in questionable behaviors, testing God to see if He would love me anyway. Never once has He said, "Sorry I'm done with you." His arms have always been open, and when I was ashamed to face Him, He sought me out. He reminded me that I can't earn His love or do anything to lose His love. What a comfort it is to know that He hates sin because of His love for me. He knows it will hurt my heart. He isn't a harsh dictator who wants me to act accordingly because He said so; He knows the unfortunate results of sin and would rather keep me from pain.

God's grace is new every day. He treats me with such love and respect, caring about my heart more than my behavior. He is a God of relationship, not of behavioral management. I want to be an example of this endless love to others, that is the journey I am on, and I would not trade it for anything in the world.


Laura Burwick is a certified Drug and Alcohol Counselor on staff at Bethel Church, Transformation Center and educational instructor for CARE-EDU, providing professional education for drug and alcohol counselors. For more information or an appointment, email [laurab@bethelsozo.com](mailto:laurab@bethelsozo.com)



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