

# STRONGER TOGETHER



A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES | Vol. 41 | Issue Four 2024



**PURPOSEFUL PAUSES**

# STRONGER TOGETHER

Issue 4  
2024



## ON THE COVER

Take a slow, deep breath. Relax your shoulders. Close your eyes and think about God's goodness or your favorite Bible promise. Small pauses like this help bring calm in a busy world. Jesus understands our need to rest, reflect, and recuperate. He bade His disciples to step away from their work and rest with Him in a quiet place (Mark 6:31). This issue seeks to draw us into places of peace and rejuvenation with Purposeful Pauses—intentional time apart from active ministry that restores mind, body, and soul.



SCAN TO READ ONLINE

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# PURPOSEFUL PAUSES

EXPERIENCE THE SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF REST

MY HUSBAND AND I LOVE to take vacations together. From time to time, we also go on vacations with the whole family. However, his idea of a perfect vacation is different from mine. He loves to explore the places we visit, while I enjoy staying in the lodging and relaxing. I purposefully schedule time to relax on my vacation. He insists that we go out and enjoy the area, but I counter that I do not want to take a vacation that, in the end, requires me to take another vacation to recover from the previous one. For me, vacations are for relaxation, and I make it a point to pause, relax, and smell the flowers.

In today's fast-paced world, taking a purposeful pause can seem counterintuitive. However, the Bible offers profound wisdom on slowing down and reflecting. Purposeful pauses are not just moments of inactivity but opportunities for spiritual renewal, deeper connection with God, and realignment with His purpose for our lives.

*For me,  
vacations are  
for relaxation,  
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flowers.*

### THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR PAUSES

One of the clearest examples of a purposeful pause in the Bible is found in the creation story. Genesis 2:2, 3 states, “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” Here, God Himself models the importance of rest after six days of creation, setting a divine precedent for the Sabbath—a day dedicated to rest and worship.

This divine rest is not an indication of weariness but a purposeful pause to reflect on and enjoy the work accomplished. It underscores the value of rest and appreciating God’s blessings.

### PURPOSEFUL PAUSES IN JESUS’ MINISTRY

During His earthly ministry, Jesus frequently took time to withdraw and pray despite the pressing demands on His time and the constant presence of crowds. Luke 5:16 notes, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”

These moments of solitude were not merely for rest but purposeful pauses to connect with the Father, seek guidance, and renew His strength.

In Mark 6:31, 32, Jesus encourages His disciples to take a break: “Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” This invitation highlights the necessity of taking time to rest and replenish spiritually and physically, away from the busyness of life.

### THE VALUE OF PURPOSEFUL PAUSES

#### Renewal of Strength

Isaiah 40:31 reminds us, “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Purposeful pauses allow us to wait on the Lord, renew our strength, and regain our focus.

*In the busyness of life, it’s easy to lose sight of God’s purpose for us.*



### Deepening Our Relationship with God

In Psalm 46:10, we are admonished, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Stillness before God fosters a deeper understanding and relationship with Him. In these quiet moments, we can hear His voice more clearly.

### Reflection and Gratitude

Pausing allows us to reflect on God’s goodness and express gratitude for His blessings. Philippians 4:6, 7 encourages us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

### Realignment with God’s Purpose

In the busyness of life, it’s easy to lose sight of God’s purpose for us. Romans 12:2 advises, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Purposeful pauses provide the space needed for this transformation and realignment.

### PRACTICAL WAYS TO IMPLEMENT PURPOSEFUL PAUSES

- **Daily Quiet Time**  
Dedicate a specific time for prayer and in-depth Bible study each day.
- **Sabbath Observance**  
Honor God by keeping His commandments, resting on the seventh day of the week, and keeping the Sabbath holy.
- **Periodic Retreats**  
Take occasional retreats or personal days to disconnect from routine activities and focus on spiritual renewal.
- **Meditation on Jesus**  
Spend time during the day refocusing your mind and thinking about Jesus. As Colossians 3:1 says, focus on the things above, not on earthly things.

In conclusion, purposeful pauses are essential for maintaining spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. Following the biblical examples of rest and reflection, we can cultivate a deeper relationship with God, renew our strength, and stay aligned with His divine purpose. **J**

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*Aurora Canals serves as associate ministerial secretary for pastoral spouses and families.*







# Special Quotes

by Ellen G. White

The Christian life is not made up of unceasing activity, or of continual meditation. Christians must work earnestly for the salvation of the lost, and they must also take time for contemplation, for prayer, and the study of the Word of God. It will not do to be always under the strain of the work and excitement, for in this way personal piety is neglected, and the powers of mind and body are injured.

*Christian Service*, p. 249

All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. In them is to be revealed a life that is not in harmony with the world, its customs, or its practices; and they need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, "Be still, and know that I am God." This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life's intense activities, he who is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men's hearts.

*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 58

Though time is short, and there is a great work to be done, the Lord is not pleased to have us so prolong our seasons of activity that there will not be time for periods of rest, for the study of the Bible, and for communion with God. All this is essential to fortify the soul, to place us in a position where we shall receive wisdom from God to employ our talents in the Master's service to the highest account.

*Principles for Christian Leaders*, p. 293

Brethren, when you take time to cultivate your garden, thus gaining the exercise you need to keep the system in good working order, you are just as much doing the work of God as in holding meetings. God is our Father, He loves us, and He does not require any of His servants to abuse their bodies.

*Counsels on Health*, p. 564

Remember that prayer is the source of your strength. A worker cannot gain success while he hurries through his prayers and rushes away to look after something that he fears may be neglected or forgotten. He gives only a few hurried thoughts to God; he does not take time to think, to pray, to wait upon the Lord for a renewal of physical and spiritual strength. He soon becomes weary. He does not feel the uplifting, inspiring influence of God's Spirit. He is not quickened by fresh life. His jaded frame and tired brain are not soothed by personal contact with Christ.

*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 243

# PAUSING TO GROW IN HIS LOVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

## RENEW YOUR SPIRIT WITH A MINI RETREAT

AS MINISTERIAL FAMILIES, we're super-busy on Sabbaths and often spend our vacations attending church camps. We rarely have time to immerse ourselves in God's love and to focus on our families' faith.

Here are a few ideas for creating your own spiritual retreat to help you breathe slowly, pray together, and grow closer to God. You can explore the ideas on your own, as a couple, and even share them with your children or grandchildren. Choose the ideas that appeal to you and create a tailor-made spiritual retreat to renew your heart and soul—for an hour or a whole day.

### THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

When God inspired His people to share their faith with the next generation, He told them their priority was to love Him first (Deuteronomy 6). John explained that we can only love God and others when we have first experienced God's love (1 John 4:7–21). Otherwise, we won't be able to recognize true love. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and that the second was like it: loving others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39, 40).





## Pausing to Grow in His Love

George Barna, a Christian researcher in the USA, identified the top two levels of Christian maturity as loving God profoundly and loving others profoundly.<sup>1</sup> These important scriptures, and Barna's thorough research, emphasize the importance of experiencing God's love for us, loving Him with all our hearts, and loving others as Jesus would love them.

When we pause and open our hearts to more of God's love, then our love for Him and others will grow. This will help us have a stronger relationship with Him, our loved ones, and everyone we meet.

### PRAYING THROUGH GOD'S LOVE

Write the letters of the alphabet down the side of a sheet of paper. For each letter, think of at least one aspect of God's love. See how many you can find. Then focus on one word at a time. Praise God for that dimension of His love and thank Him for loving you in this way. Think of Bible stories and verses that illustrate this aspect of His love and consider your personal experiences too. Gather them in a notebook or create an illustrated scrapbook of God's love.

### REFLECTING ON GOD'S LOVE

Choose one of the following Bible passages: Psalm 23, Psalm 103, Psalm 145, Ephesians 3:14–21, or 1 John 4. Read it very slowly, one verse at a time, and write down what each verse tells you about God's love. Or discuss the passages together as a couple or family.

### HUNTING FOR GOD'S LOVE

As you reflect on God's love, think about objects around you that illustrate different aspects of His love (safe water, bread, lights, blanket, fruit, soap, pillow, rock, map, etc.). Search for twenty things that remind you of His incredible love for you. Explain why you chose your objects. Draw or display some of them to remind you of His love.

### FOCUSING ON GOD'S LOVE

Pause and focus on God's love for you in this moment. Even if you have experienced trauma and abuse, the Holy Spirit can help you experience God through clear spiritual lenses and a warm, open heart.

How do you like to be loved? God will love you in that beautiful way. Remember that He is present with you every moment of the day. Imagine Him hugging you. What would He say to tell you how much He loves you? What are the special gifts of love He has given you in the last week? How has He helped you to carry your burdens? Thank Him for every loving gift. Keep your eyes and heart open to notice every expression of His extravagant love for you. Write them in a journal.

*Keep your eyes and heart open to notice every expression of His extravagant love for you.*







## STORIES OF GOD'S LOVE

Recount the story of your life with God. Look through the lens of being God's beloved child, even if you haven't always known Him. Gather the life stories that remind you of God's love for you through all the joys and challenges of your life. He has been your Psalm 23 Shepherd. He is your provider, protector, restorer, comforter, and guide. He is with you in your dark valleys, and He celebrates your joys. Write, draw, or tell how God has loved and cared for you.

## GROWING IN GOD'S LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13. Write down all the different aspects of God's love described in this chapter. His love is patient, kind, forgiving, respectful, hopeful, lovingly honest, persevering, and more. How are you growing in these qualities of God's love? Reflect on the past year and consider how you have grown more patient, kind, forgiving, and respectful. Describe times when you were especially hopeful, loving, or persevering.

Then look ahead to the coming year. Which of God's loving qualities would you like to nurture? Ask God's Spirit for wisdom and power to develop that aspect of love in your life. Encourage one another to grow more like Jesus.

## CREATIVELY RESPONDING TO GOD'S LOVE

After reflecting on God's love for you, consider what you would like to make or do in response to His love. Take a photo, draw a picture, write a prayer or a psalm, or make a collection of hearts that express different aspects of His love. Create a banner, a garland, or something else that summarises and expresses your experience of His love for you and your love for Him.

## EXPANDING YOUR PICTURE OF GOD'S LOVE

Pray that God will expand your picture of His character by growing your awareness of His love. Ellen White says that we will spend eternity learning about God's infinite and indescribable love (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 740). Keep a diary and write down fresh aspects of God's love as you notice them every day. Set your watch to vibrate every hour as a reminder to tune into God's constant loving presence.

## SHARING GOD'S LOVE

How has this purposeful pause with God's love inspired you to share His love with others? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you someone who needs a deeper experience of God's love. In cooperation with God, what will you do to touch their heart with His love? How could you share this retreat experience with others?



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<sup>1</sup> "Research on How God Transforms Lives Reveals a 10-Stop Journey," Barna Group, March 17, 2011. <https://www.barna.com/research/research-on-how-god-transforms-lives-reveals-a-10-stop-journey/>.

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*Karen Holford writes from England. She is a departmental director at the Trans-European Division. The different ways God has expanded her understanding of His incredible love inspire her, and she loves to share His love with others.*

# IN THE MORNING WHEN I RISE . . .

CALM OR CHAOTIC: YOU CHOOSE

WHAT IS A TYPICAL WEEKDAY morning like in your home? Do you often sleep a bit too long after the alarm goes off, giving yourself a late start to the day?

Running late translates to rushing to get the household up, fed, washed, and dressed; lunches slapped together; maybe a brief family prayer said; and then hurrying everyone—including yourself—out the door on time so the kids can get to school and the adults to work on time. Throw into the mix a pair of lost shoes, someone who dislikes what's for breakfast, the dog throwing up on the carpet, a car that won't start, and (whew) you leave the house exhausted, stressed, and hungry because you had no time for breakfast yourself. Oh well. There are always donuts in the break room at work.

## A CALM MORNING IS POSSIBLE

The secret to saving yourself stress and chaos in the morning is doing some prep work the night before. To make sure nothing gets forgotten, make a list of evening and morning tasks to stick on the fridge, the bathroom mirror, or some other visible location as a reminder. Evening tasks can include:

- Laying out the next day's clothes,
- Packing up kids' backpacks and adult work materials,
- Putting packed lunches together, and
- Getting a start on breakfast prep.

But there is so much more to making a good morning happen.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



# *The secret to saving yourself stress and chaos in the morning is doing some prep work the night before.*

## **TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**

**Wake up unalarmed.** First, avoid late nights as much as possible. Getting enough sleep will go a long way toward decreasing tiredness and potential irritability in the morning. Taking care of yourself equips you mentally and physically to take good care of others.

**Spend time with God.** Set your alarm for 20–30 minutes early to give yourself a chance to greet the Lord, thank Him for His watch care over you through the night, and offer Him your heart and life for the day. Read some of His promises or a devotional passage for encouragement and strength. Then hum or sing a favorite hymn. You will be blessed with calmness and clarity of perspective as you cope with the day's challenges.

**Resist checking your phone.** Your phone holds a lot of potential stimulation and stressors that can demand your immediate attention. Pick up your phone first thing in the morning and it may derail your whole morning routine. Choose to bask a little longer in that calm, relaxed state you first enjoy upon waking.

**Care for your body.** Do some simple stretches or get outside for a brisk walk in the fresh air to help activate those feel-good chemicals in your brain. You will feel energized physically and refreshed in attitude and mood.

**Wash and brush.** Routine skin and teeth care is self-care too. View skin care as a mini pampering session—a special gift you give yourself. Besides regular check-ups and cleanings, daily brushing and flossing are essential to oral and cardiovascular health.

**Hydrate yourself.** A glass of water upon waking sets you up for a good start physiologically, and it has positive effects on brain function too. Not taking time to drink water first thing can delay drinking anything for hours into a busy day. Plan for regular water breaks and note the benefits of decreased brain fatigue and overall energy lag.

**Make your bed.** This seems like a small chore—unimportant to many. However, studies indicate that when your space is uncluttered, your mind tends to be less cluttered too. This simple chore also encourages good hygiene habits in other areas of personal care and provides a small sense of pride in completing the first task of the day.

**Eat breakfast.** Skipping breakfast can often be seen as an option for saving time in the rush of morning chaos. The stress and anxiety of trying to get out the door and to work on time is hard on emotions and stamina, especially with the lack of nutritional fuel support. Treat yourself to a relaxed, healthy morning meal every day to boost focus and mood. Fill your plate with colorful fruit, whole grain cereal or bread, and a protein food. You'll be less likely to need a sugary snack mid-morning.





## In the Morning When I Rise . . .

**Practice thankfulness.** We all have stress and worries. Work, church responsibilities, concerns over family or friends, anxiety about the future, or sadness over past incidents can pull our moods downward. When that happens, take these emotions to the Lord and lay them at His feet. Ask Him to show you some blessing in each problem. Then take a few minutes to thank Him. Doing this will put a positive spin on your perspective and boost your faith. Practice gratitude during the day. Sharing feelings of thankful joy with family, friends, and others at every opportunity can support good mental health.

**Check your to-do list.** Does your day include appointments, important tasks, and errands? Take a few minutes to review your calendar and refresh your memory to ensure nothing important gets overlooked.

**Prayers and hugs.** If you have a family, plan for a few minutes to read an inspired story together and pray, giving every member into God's care for the day. End with a short song and a loving hug to each one as you separate for the day. Assurance of God's presence and family love gives peace, comfort, and a sense of security to children and adults alike as they exit the home to face the world.

**Try music to melt away stress.** Does your family need morning calm? Do you drive a distance to work or negotiate heavy traffic? Listen to God's gift of relaxing and inspiring music to sooth tension and encourage a peaceful attitude. J

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### RESOURCES:

<https://www.webmd.com/balance/ss/morning-hacks-ease-stress?>

<https://bemorewithless.com/simplify-your-mornings/>

<https://www.self.com/story/morning-routine-habits>

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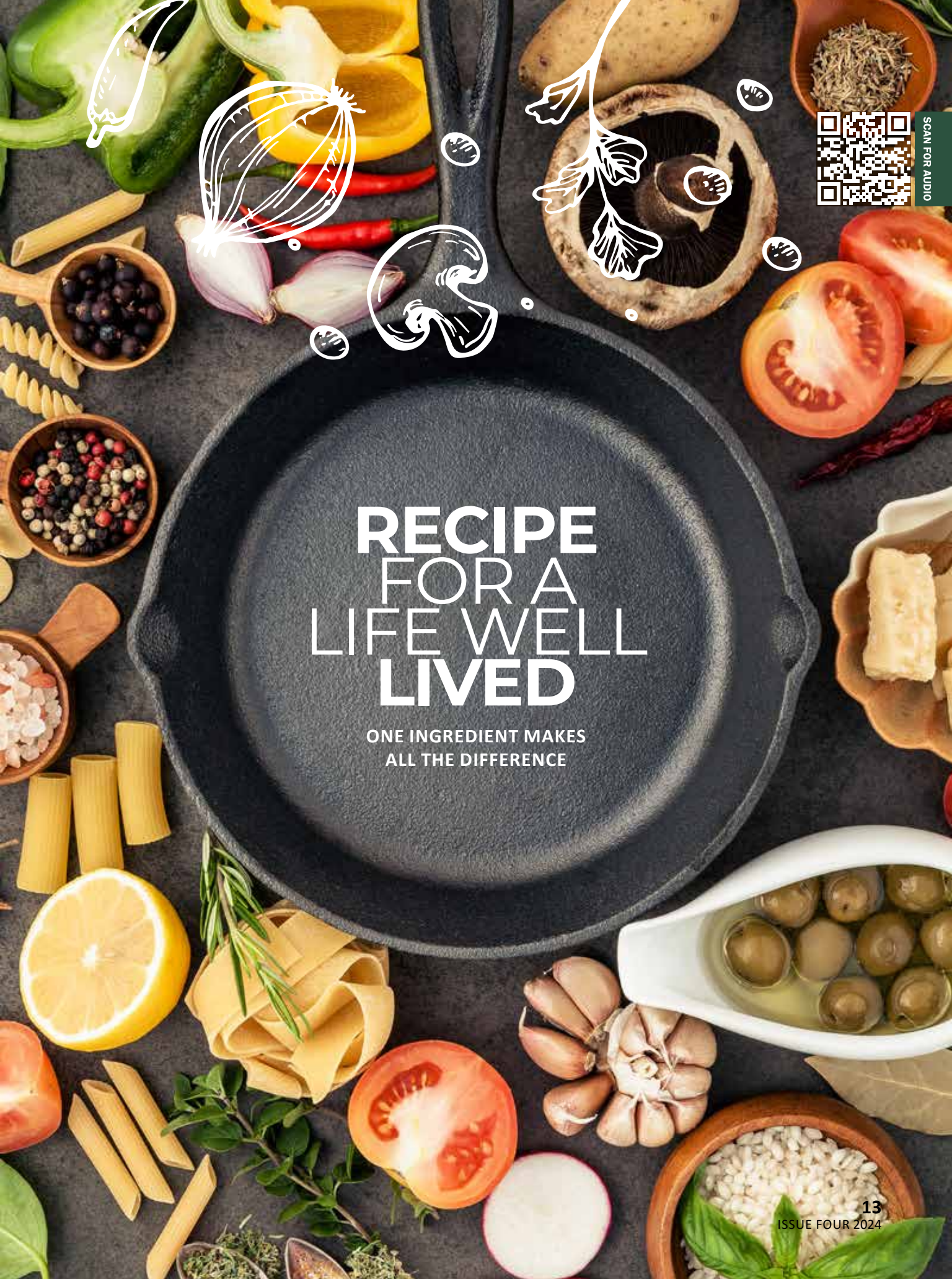
*Rae Lee Cooper is a registered nurse. She and her husband, Lowell, have two adult married children and three adorable grandchildren. She spent most of her childhood in the Far East and then worked as a missionary with her husband in India for 16 years. She enjoys music, creative arts, cooking, and reading.*

*“Morning is an important time of day, because how you spend your morning can often tell you what kind of day you are going to have.”*

*– Lemony Snicket*







SCAN FOR AUDIO

# RECIPE FOR A LIFE WELL LIVED

ONE INGREDIENT MAKES  
ALL THE DIFFERENCE



AS I APPROACH MIDDLE AGE (yes, it is hard to admit I'm almost 40), I have started thinking about what I have accomplished and still want to do. Consequently, a couple of metaphors caught my attention while I was teaching a psychology class: Life as a Journey and Life as a Story.

I thoroughly enjoy finding connections between psychology and biblical concepts, and these two metaphors allow me to do just that. Let's break them down and find practical applications for our spiritual walk. I challenge you, after reading this article, to pick one for your life and continue to apply these concepts individually and in your family.

### LIFE AS A JOURNEY

All humans share the same periods of development: birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and the elderly stage. Each stage has its challenges and joys. Each stage helps us grow physically, mentally, and spiritually. Erik Erickson, one of the founders of developmental psychology, paints a picture of each developmental stage.<sup>1</sup>

The first of four stages explains our development from birth until age 12, including parental attachment and physical and cognitive development. Proverbs 22:6 reinforces how imperative Christian upbringing is during this time: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." The events in this stage influence us for the rest of our lives.

Then comes adolescence, when we start developing an individual sense of self and a personal identity. Theologian Walter Brueggemann suggests that "as we move from the question 'Who am I?' to the question 'Whose am I?', eventually all questions about identity become questions of vocation," which he defines as "finding a purpose for being in the world that is related to the purposes of God."<sup>2</sup> This part of the journey is crucial for the future, and Christian mentors are especially needed to guide teenagers to find their identity in Christ (1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 2:10).

Then comes the need for intimacy, where young adults desire a partner to share their lives with (Mark 10:8, 9). Before a successful relationship can happen, both individuals must achieve their sense of identity and maturity.<sup>3</sup> Happy marriages are made of people who can fight fair and balance negative feedback with tenderness.<sup>4</sup>





Next, we enter Generativity. During this stage, adults want to help society and the next generation. The adults who find a way to serve others and reach outward instead of inward will achieve the greatest happiness (Galatians 5:13, 14). One of the most consistent findings in psychology is that happy people are helpful people.<sup>5</sup> Happy individuals experience success in different areas of life, such as marriage, friendship, employment, income, work performance, mental health, and psychological health. We adults are responsible for being mentors and forming a support system for the next generation, especially spiritually. We need to remember what it was like to be young, open ourselves up to being vulnerable, and heal so that we can have a bigger impact on the upcoming generation.

Finally, we arrive at the ego integrity stage, which gives us “the ability to look back on our life and see that the various pieces and phases of the journey fit together to form a meaningful and worthwhile whole.”<sup>6</sup> This is so important! We must look back and see that despite our mistakes and bad decisions, God guided our lives, enabling us to serve Him with our talents. We need to believe what Romans 8:28 says: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (ESV).

### LIFE AS A STORY

Reflect on one of your favorite stories you have read about or seen in a movie. What made it special? Was it the plot, the hero versus the villain, the struggle, the drama? Each of us has a story from the moment we were born until now. How did it start? Who has been part of it? What has happened in your life story?

Psychologist Dan McAdams has spent his career researching life as a story. His findings reveal that we are constantly changing. How so? Well, try to remember who you were as a child and teenager. Are you the same person now as you were then? Do you have the same levels of empathy? Or have your life experiences changed you?

Viewing life as a story helps us create the initial chapters in adolescence and young adulthood.<sup>7</sup> We realize that children speak and reason like children, but adults give up childish ways (1 Corinthians 13:11). Based on our early years, we expand on the rest of the story. We don’t know how our story on this Earth ends, but we know God can continue guiding our path as the chapters unfold.

*Happy marriages are made of people who can fight fair and balance negative feedback with tenderness.*



We experience “positive aging” at the scenes of ripe old age.<sup>8</sup> Longitudinal studies found the following predictors for a healthy and satisfied life at age 75: not smoking, no history of alcohol abuse, adaptability and mature coping methods, healthy weight, regular exercise, years of education (future orientation and perseverance), and—most importantly—stable, loving relationships. How do we achieve this? From the time we are young, we make decisions that will write each chapter of our lives. We heal and cooperate with God to become more like Christ. A relationship with Him brings purpose and meaning to our story.

### THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT

I have concluded that we have a story within our journey. Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, ESV). He also says, “And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it. It shall belong to those who walk on the way; even if they are fools, they shall not go astray” (Isaiah 35:8, ESV).

If we are Christians, we are walking the way of life in Jesus. We cooperate with Him, preparing our lives for the journey ahead and leaving behind the luggage that has weighed us down. Only death will stop our story and our journey. And even then, it is merely a pause—a rest—for those who sleep in Jesus.

We are free in Jesus, and we should do as the apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:13, 14: “But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (ESV). Let’s continue to write our story and be counted with the redeemed: “Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story—those He redeemed from the hand of the foe, those He gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south” (Psalm 107:2, 3).

<sup>1</sup> David Myers and Malcom Jeeves, *Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> J. Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> Myers and Jeeves, *Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith*.

<sup>4</sup> David Myers and Jean Twenge, *Social Psychology*, 14th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Myers and Twenge, *Social Psychology*, p. 344.

<sup>6</sup> Myers and Jeeves, *Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith*, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> Dan McAdams, “Continuity and Growth in the Life Story—Or Is It Stagnation and Flux?” *Qualitative Psychology* 6(2) (2019): 206–214, <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000151>.

<sup>8</sup> George Vaillant, “Positive Aging,” in *Positive Psychology in Practice: Promoting Human Flourishing in Work, Health, Education, and Everyday Life*, 2nd ed., ed. P.A. Linley and S. Joseph (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), pp. 561–578.

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*A relationship with  
God brings purpose  
and meaning to  
our story.*



# SOUNDS FAMILIAR?

HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD'S VOICE



SCAN FOR AUDIO






Have you ever answered the telephone and failed to recognize the voice of someone you know fairly well? There are a few standard approaches to this dilemma:

- Greet the person enthusiastically and exchange some stock pleasantries.
- Keep talking and play for time while hoping to catch the caller's identity.
- Sheepishly admit, "Your voice sounds familiar, but I am not so sure that I recognize the voice."

This could be a precarious situation for a friendship. We hope that the person on the other end of the line will not be offended, but the possibility exists that feelings of being slighted could seriously threaten the relationship.

When the tables are turned, my reaction is very simple. I take the "out of sight, out of mind" or "I caught you by surprise, didn't I?" approach.

The truth is that we hardly have difficulty recognizing the voices of those who are close to us. The frequency of the encounters facilitates quick and easy recognition. When my family calls, I can plunge right into a conversation—no stalling then, because I know their voices very well.



*We talk so much that we cannot hear Him—because we are not listening.*

### THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE

Jesus told a parable about voice recognition in John 10:3–5: ". . . and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. . . . and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger . . . because they do not recognize a stranger's voice."

What a revelation here! It's all about a close relationship with the shepherd. This is the only way the sheep could hear and know the Shepherd's voice. When God calls us, do we hear and recognize His voice?

Here are some of the excuses we make for not recognizing God's voice:

#### **Oh, there is so much noise around here. I can't hear You too well.**

There is such an invasion of sounds in our lives—sounds of discontent, deadlines, competitiveness, trendy fashions, and envy. Sounds, sounds. Noise, noise. The "music" is loud, overpowering, and blaring, thus blocking out the voice of our lovely Savior. We need to turn the noise down. Turn it off, if necessary, so that we can enjoy the beautiful voice of Jesus.

#### **Seems like we do not have a clear signal today, Lord. You're breaking up.**

Why can't God get through to us? Perhaps the hills or mountains of responsibility and professional demands are forming a barrier. Even keeping up with our church activities can "break up" the connection with Jesus.



## *The truth is that we hardly have difficulty recognizing the voices of those who are close to us.*

### **I haven't heard You for some time, Lord. I think I have forgotten your voice.**

Forgetting God's voice is a dangerous indicator of a weak connection with Him and potential separation from our Father. This means that we miss out on numerous blessings. The psalmist David revels in his experiences of communing with God. A solid relationship does not happen by chance. It must be built by continuous hard work.


Oh, how wonderful it is to be so close to Him that we hear and recognize that voice! Sometimes when we realize that we have not been spending time with our friend Jesus, we make a frantic decision to reconnect with Him. However, in our prayer sessions, we talk incessantly, bombarding Him with our multiple wish lists. We talk so much that we cannot hear Him—because we are not listening. Is it any wonder that we are unable to recognize His voice?

### **HOW TO HEAR AND RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE**

- **Yearn to hear His voice**, then admit to God that there is a void within us. He will fill it. David articulated his insatiable “thirst” for God in Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.”
- **Find a place that is conducive to our hearing His voice**—“holy ground.” We are not thinking of a magnificent temple or impressively manicured lawns, just a quiet spot and a clean, willing heart—a heart receptive to that divine encounter. “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). In this place we will hear God's still, small voice by reading His Word and reflecting on the scriptures we have studied.

- **Take time to listen.** This is an exercise that will require much thought, determination, and practice. Claim God's promise for wisdom and perception, and in the quietness of our souls we will hear our Savior's voice.
- **Keep up the listening habit.** This will cement the memory of His precious voice so that when God speaks to us, we will promptly respond.

Of course, Jesus is waiting for us to share our feelings of joy and pain with Him. “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord . . .” (Isaiah 1:18, KJV). Profuse praise and copious expressions of gratitude and adoration should characterize our conversation. Add to these our confessions and requests and bask in the precious gift of His wonderful grace. What a wonderful Savior!

“Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Oh, what peace and eloquence we enjoy when we are silent in the divine presence! Let us resolve to listen for God's voice so that we can savor that enriched encounter and relationship. Then in our rapture we will exclaim, “It was so good hearing You, Lord. We must do this more often. I love You.” 

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*Dr. Gloria Trotman supported pastoral spouses throughout her adult life. She served as the ministerial spouses coordinator at various conferences and unions and as the Shepherdess coordinator for the Inter-American Division. She also wrote a curriculum used by the General Conference Ministerial Spouses Association. Gloria passed to her rest on July 1, 2024. We publish this as a tribute to her service and love for God.*



## TIPS TO THRIVE

### WHOSE BIRTHDAY IS IT?

## *How can we give a gift to Jesus?*

CHRISTMAS CAN BE much more than parties, sweet treats, and wish lists—they present opportunities for us to guide our children in showing gratitude to God (see *Counsels for the Church*, p. 159). Share the following parable with your children and encourage them to think of ways to “give a gift to Jesus.”

#### A PARABLE FOR CHILDREN

Let’s pretend it’s almost time for your birthday, and some nice people have planned a wonderful party. There will be lots of people, good food, and presents. You can hardly wait for the day to arrive, and when it’s finally here, you are so excited!

You dress in your nicest clothes and beg your parents to take you to the party as early as possible so you can stand by the door to welcome all your guests.

When they start coming, you notice that everyone is carrying a beautifully wrapped gift—that’s exciting too, isn’t it? You step in front of the first people and greet them warmly, thanking them for coming, but they rush by you as though you weren’t even there. Then they take their gift to a special table where gifts are to be placed.


But the next person does the same thing—and the next, and the next! Nobody even notices you standing there. You feel disappointed and soon grow tired of trying to be friendly.

The party proceeds the way most parties do, with people talking and eating all the goodies. Finally, the time comes to open presents.

The first present goes to somebody else, as do the second and third. Before it is all over, everyone at your party has gotten a present except for you. There were no presents left. What a disappointment!

This story never really happened. It is only a made-up story—like some of the parables Jesus used to tell—but it can remind us of how Jesus might feel when we celebrate Christmas and people give big, beautiful gifts to everyone but Him. Christmas is indeed the day that people should think of Jesus and His birth.

How can we give a gift to Jesus? Giving a gift to someone who may not get one otherwise makes Jesus happy. Obeying our parents and teachers and doing nice things for others is like giving a present to Him. Jesus said in the Bible: “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Another thing that is like giving Jesus a gift is telling Him we love Him and want to be His friend. Thank Him for preparing heaven for you, and tell Him you really, really want to be there to live with Him. Can you think of at least one thing you can give to Jesus? 

*Evelyn Griffin is a retired pastor’s wife. She and her pastor-husband have four children and 14 grandchildren.*



# RELEASING

## HOW TO HELP YOUR SPOUSE PAUSE TO RECHARGE

THE HONEY-DO LIST in my mind would easily add up to a dozen different items. If I wrote down each item and focused on this list of things that haven't been done yet, the outcome would not be positive. No, I would potentially fall into a pit of frustration and, even worse, bitterness, blame, and resentment. Perhaps I have lingered in this pit at times and experienced the potential negative results. OK, not perhaps; I have.

As I am sure you have experienced, church administrators and church workers have pressures and responsibilities that result in ten-hour-plus workdays, often extending into at least six days a week. Undeniably, the challenges they face are beyond difficult. According to the Barna Group March 2022 Pastor Survey, only one in ten pastors who are considering leaving the ministry prioritize self-care.<sup>1</sup> Could it be that spouses have anything to do with this?

When my husband walks through the door after a long workday on the spiritual battlefield, he needs time in his "empty box." Unfortunately, that means not tackling my to-do list.

I am not saying pastors can't fold some clothes, wash dishes or the car, mow the lawn, and listen to their partner's day—they totally can. However, if spouses can give pastors some room and space to be still, this will recharge them to be able to help you better.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



Maybe the time allotted your pastor-spouse in that empty box could be pre-negotiated? Then, when you are deep in diapers, supper preparations, Bible stories, and helping siblings share, you will know that the empty box time has a limit, and soon help is on the way! Can I hear a “Hallelujah”? In the same way, work with your spouse to carve out uninterrupted time for you, because being a pastoral spouse is hard work too. You need to be released to have your moments to rejuvenate and develop passions.


### **SPACE TO RECUPERATE**

Another area where we need to encourage our dear ministers is in allowing them to have hobbies. Again, not focusing on the to-do list but releasing them to have time for their rejuvenating passions. When they engage in something that interests them it will stave off potential burnout.

For my pastor-spouse, it is the simplicity and joy of bird watching. I know that if he spends two to five hours a week logging birds spotted, he is refreshed in a way that honestly refreshes me. In addition, if I can release him to go build trails in the woods at Middle East University, he returns exhausted but deeply renewed. When he is tackling weeds or sawing fallen down trees, he is alone with nature and God.

Working outdoors gives him a place to exert physical energy and cry out to God for wisdom. There is no chance the cracked-paint walls that are on my honey-do list will be fixed, but somehow my man has received the renewal he needs to face the problems and challenges for the next week.

Sometimes I struggle with releasing my man. It's a balancing act, and one that I have not always navigated with the right attitude or freedom. I'm human and so are you. At times the urgency of the list overtakes the need to release and rightly so—especially if it is

A photograph of a man with a beard and a backpack, looking through binoculars in a forest. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

*Working outdoors gives him a place to exert physical energy and cry out to God for wisdom.*

## We are in a long marathon of ministry.

affecting our quality of life (like the hot water tank is broken). A healthy conversation would revolve around how to balance our need to accomplish some practical things with our need to release each other to have fun.

Importantly, as ministers creep closer to retirement, they need interests outside of church. If their only identity is ministerial work and more chores from your to-do list, they will not navigate retirement well—at least not nearly as well as someone who has developed passions and interests.

### COUPLE TIME

Marriage is hard work. The importance of taking renewal time to intentionally focus on the two of you as a couple cannot be overstated. A “ministry-marriage”

is a relationship defined by church work.<sup>2</sup> While that can seem noble at first, in the long-term it is not healthy. If all we are doing is church events and talking about church and ministry, we are heading for trouble. Pastoral couples must make time for things that bring us closer as a couple.

We are in a long marathon of ministry. Run well. Run wisely. A prize awaits. We are stronger together when we release each other to recharge, and when we play together. Take courage as you navigate the years of ministry ahead.

<sup>1</sup> “For Pastors Who Want to Quit, Self-Care & Soul-Care Slip,” Barna Group, March 5, 2024. <https://www.barna.com/research/spiritual-formation-back-seat/>.

<sup>2</sup> Gail MacDonald, *High Call, High Privilege* (Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA, 1998), pp. 165–167.

*Ruth Boyd enjoys tea and scones, encouraging pastoral spouses, and supporting her husband in ministry. A nurse by training, she presses into working with refugees in Beirut, Lebanon. She is a mother of four adulting sons.*

## MARRIED TO A PASTOR?

Discover a safe place to fellowship, ask questions, and learn from others on social media!



Official groups for ministry spouses online:

 [ministerialspouses](#)  [@ministriyspouses](#)  [@gc\\_ministerial\\_spouses](#)

 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/esposasministeriales/>







# CHOOSE LOVE AND FIND JOY

## FIVE RULES FOR HAPPINESS

I RECENTLY CAME ACROSS an inspirational and convicting story about a 92-year-old legally blind woman who lost her husband after 70 years of marriage. On this day, she was moving into a nursing home—her new home after her husband's death.

After waiting patiently for several hours in the lobby, she was told her room was ready. She smiled sweetly. While gingerly maneuvering to her room with her walker, she was provided with a visual description of it, including eyelet curtains that had been hung on the window.

"I love it," she said with enthusiasm.

"Mrs. Jones, you haven't even seen the room . . . just wait," her escort said.

"That doesn't have anything to do with it," she said. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. I already decided to love it."

"Every morning when I wake up," she explained, "I have a choice: I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work, or I can get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away just for this time in my life."

She went on to say, "Old age is like a bank account—you withdraw from what you've put in. My advice to you would be to deposit a lot of happiness in the bank account of memories. I am still depositing." With a smile, she shared five simple rules to being happy:

1. Free your heart from hatred.
2. Free your mind from worries.
3. Live simply.
4. Give more.
5. Expect less.

I couldn't help but think about Philippians 4:8 after reading her story: "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Despite difficult circumstances, which is often where our minds most often take us to dwell, Mrs. Jones chose to focus on the lovely, the praiseworthy, and the excellent. What a difference it made!

*Excerpted from an article that originally appeared online at <https://justbetweenus.org/everyday-life/faith-and-feelings/choose-love-and-find-joy/>.*

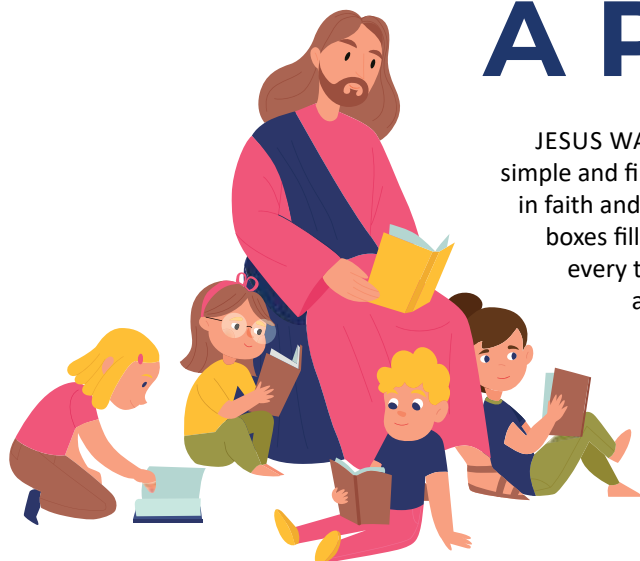
**Shelly Esser** has served as editor of Just Between Us magazine for 35 years (see *JustBetweenUs.org*). She is currently the executive editor.



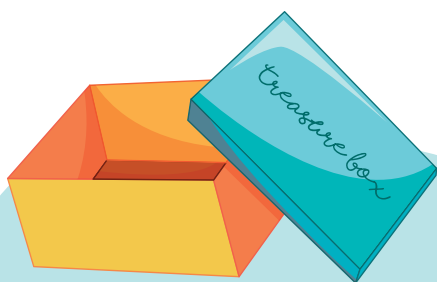
# PAUSING WITH A PARABLE



SCAN FOR AUDIO



JESUS WAS AN AMAZING storyteller! His parables are simple and filled with important treasures to help us grow in faith and become more like Him. Parables are also like boxes filled with treasures, and we find new treasures every time we open them. Pause and think carefully about the stories that Jesus told, and see how much treasure you can find in each one! Here are some fun ways to pause with a parable.



## PARABLE “TREASURE BOX”

- Find a small box with a lid—a little “treasure box.”
- Choose one of the parable stories.
- Copy the Bible story of the parable onto a paper strip that fits inside the box. Roll it up like a scroll and tie it with ribbon or twine.
- How might Jesus tell the story differently if He told it in your town today? Write your version of the parable on another strip of paper. Roll it up and tie it with a different color of twine.
- Put at least one thing in the box that reminds you of the parable, such as a seed, a coin, or a toy sheep. You can also add several small items that you can use to help you retell the story to your family.
- Make another treasure box to add to your collection whenever you explore another parable.

## PARABLE QUESTIONS

- Write each of the following questions on different cards:
  - What do you like best about this story?
  - What are some of the treasures and ideas that are hiding in this story?
  - What do you think God is saying to you as you read this story?
  - What does this story help you to understand about God’s love?
- Each time you pause with a parable, think about the questions on the cards or discuss them with your family.







### PARABLE CREATIVITY

- Gather creative materials such as paper, glue, church magazines, stickers, marker pens, pencils, fabric scraps, and natural materials.
- Keep them in a box so they are ready to use whenever you need them.
- Create something that shows what you have learned from the parable, such as artwork, a poem, or your version of the parable—whatever brings you joy or whatever the Holy Spirit inspires you to make.



### SLOW SCENES

- Pause and take time to make different scenes from a parable. You could draw a cartoon to tell the story or create 3D scenes using your toys, household objects, or natural materials.
- Show the scenes to your family and tell the story.
- Photograph the scenes to make a visual story to share on social media or use the scenes to tell a children's story at church.
- If you can access the internet, ask an adult to help you look for animated Bible stories created with plastic toy bricks. There are many examples to explore and watch.



### PERSONALIZED PARABLES

- Imagine you are one of the characters in a parable.
- You might be the farmer who scattered seeds, the woman who lost a coin, a servant of the king who had a great feast, the father of the prodigal son, or the man the Good Samaritan helped.
- Re-write the story from the perspective of this character.
- What did you learn from pausing with the parable in this way? How did it change your understanding of the story?



# STUDY SOME PARABLES WITH YOUR FAMILY

Here are a few more ideas to help you and your family pause with the parables.

## THE PRECIOUS PEARL (MATTHEW 13:45, 46)

- Read the parable of the precious pearl.
- This story is often read as if we are the ones who sell everything to follow Jesus. But what if each of us is a precious pearl, and Jesus is the merchant who sold everything to “buy” us because He loves us so much?
- Pearls come in many colors, like white, cream, gray, and pink. Cut a large circular “pearl” from paper. Write the two Bible verses of the story in a spiral from the outside edge to the center of the pearl. Write lightly with a pencil to make sure all the words fit inside the circle. You can trace over the words with ink or marker if you would like.
- Walk through your house and imagine selling everything you own, even your home, to buy a pearl. What does this say about the love that Jesus has for you?
- Think of all the things that Jesus gave up for us to show how precious we are to Him. On the reverse of the pearl, write the words and phrases of gratitude and praise that come to your mind as you understand how precious you are.
- Put your “pearl” where it will remind everyone how precious you are to God.

## THE GREAT FEAST (LUKE 14:15–24)

- Read the parable of the great feast. Read the earlier verses in this chapter to discover why Jesus told this story.
- Any meal shared with love can be a feast. After reading this parable, who would your family like to invite to a “feast”?
- Draw a picture of your table showing all the food you would serve at your feast and the people you would like to invite.
- What are some sad excuses people give for not accepting God’s loving invitation?
- What kind of invitation has God “sent” to you? What answer would you like to give to God?

## THE LOST COIN (LUKE 15:8–10)

- Read the story of the woman who lost an important coin.
- Cut out a large circle for each person in your family. Draw a picture of a family member on one side of the paper circle and write their name around the edge. Write “Lost and Found!” on the other side of the coin.
- Ask an adult to hide the paper coins in an area of your home. See how quickly you or everyone else in your family can find the coins. Make sure no one is lost!
- Hold hands in a circle around the paper coins and thank Jesus that He has a plan to save each of us.
- Hunt for some spare coins and buy something for a lonely or sad person to let them know how precious they are to God.

**Karen Holford** is the family, children’s, and women’s ministries director of the Trans-European Division. Her favorite parable is the story of the prodigal son because it reminds her of God’s great love for all His children.





# REPLACING ANXIETY WITH PEACE

TRUST GOD'S WORD AND FIND REST

ANXIETY IS ONE OF THOSE heavy, undesirable spirits that seem to creep upon us as part of our fallen human experience. Sometimes, it looms in the subconscious; at other times, it springs up in the conscious mind. It can be disguised behind a broad artificial smile or manifested in the eyes of its victims. Some sufferers of anxiety choose to recoil in worry, while others put on their running shoes to break a sweat, thus secreting an abundance of endorphins (a friendly hormone)!

David was quite familiar with anxiety, as indicated in his monologue in Psalm 42, but he showcased one of his coping strategies in the same passage. He reminded himself to keep hope alive because no situation is permanent: "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (verse 11, KJV).

*"Hope thou in  
God: for I shall yet  
praise Him, who is  
the health of my  
countenance, and  
my God."*

*— Psalm 42:11*


We all can recall our various triggers of anxiety and how we respond. The context of my most memorable experience with anxiety was in my new home in South America, in the country of Suriname, where I migrated to live and work with my husband in 1997.

I was immersed in culture shock, a language barrier, unemployment, and homesickness. Additionally, the country was facing an economic downturn, which meant inflation and the unavailability of food items, such as infant formula, while I was raising two babies. My self-talk was concise and negative: “How could I have made such a foolish mistake to quit my well-paid job in Trinidad and come to live in this place?!” This was sufficient fuel to ignite the spark of anxiety on all levels in my life.

#### THE ANTIDOTE

Our Creator, in His awareness of the structure of the human psychological faculty and with His knowledge of our archenemy, has provided us with an awesome antidote for anxiety. This antidote is always soothing to our psyche, and it is a weapon that brings victory against the mental attacks of the enemy. I am happy to testify that imbibing this remedy transposed my mental state from anxiety to a place of peace, hope, and rest in the bosom of our Heavenly Father.

Jesus has promised us, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27, KJV). Today, as I face life’s challenges, I choose to identify and quickly arrest all feelings of anxiety and have those feelings replaced by the poignant and powerful promise of these wonderful words whispered by the lips of my Savior. During the day, I walk and repeat the message under my breath, and at night, while in bed, I repeat this antidote over and over until I fall into the deepest, most restful sleep.

I encourage you, my friend, to apply this remedy: Memorize John 14:27 and follow my strategy. It kept my mental health intact for the ten-year sojourn in South America. Even though the situation appeared dark, it is incredible to experience a mysterious mental boost due to ruminating on this scripture. And I have found that His peace leads to praise! As we read earlier, David added, “I shall yet praise Him”—and I found this true. The Word says that God inhabits the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). 

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**Dr. Grace Eversley-Jacott** is an educational leader at the University of the Southern Caribbean in Trinidad, where she zealously shares the Word of God with students. She serves as the chaplain of the South Caribbean Conference Ministerial Spouses Association and an advisory member of the women’s ministry committee of the conference.

*We all can recall  
our various triggers  
of anxiety and how  
we respond.*





## *Euro-Africa Division*

The ministerial spouses advisory met in Florence, Italy, in June 2024 for fellowship and lovely gifts from the division. Those attending enjoyed getting to know each other, spending time in the Word, and praying.



Varta Panayotova, ministerial spouse coordinator for EUD (far right), organized a ministerial spouses advisory.

## *Southern Asia Division*

Shepherdesses held local meetings in various regions throughout India.



Southern Asia Shepherdesses met in Hosur.



South Central India Shepherdesses met in Machireddipalli in March 2024.



In March 2024, West Telangana held a Shepherdess council in Machireddipalli.



A Shepherdess advisory was held in March 2024 by Western India in Lonavala.





South East India Union Shepherdesses held an advisory in Trichy in May 2024.



In April 2024, Shepherdesses in North East India held an advisory in Dimapur.



Shepherdesses from Guntur Section gathered in Malladi.



A Shepherdess training program was held in Northern India.



In March 2024, Western India held a Shepherdess advisory in Lonavala.



South Andhra held a Shepherdess workshop in Chandarlapadu Church.



A Shepherdess council occurred in South Andhra Section.



Readings by  
Pavel Goia

# 10 DAYS OF PRAYER

January 8–18, 2025

## *But When You Pray ...*

"But when you pray . . . pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

MATTHEW 6:6, ESV

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