

## STRAIGHT TALK FOR WOMEN



**WOMAN: GOD'S GIFT TO THE WORLD**

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Woman: God's Gift To The World  
By Melvin Latimer

In the beginning, women were created for companionship, conversation, and co-rulership of the earth. Presently a woman is not the creature she was destined to be in the garden. Over the ages women have been mistreated, misunderstood, abused and damaged: mentally, physically and emotionally.

Today's woman needs to be reminded to look forward. She needs to rediscover the plan of her Designer. Before she can find real fulfillment and security, she must be willing to change her mind about where hope is found, being able to go back to the pattern and protective shelter of the Creator.

The Bible clearly offers that plan; it shows a woman how to live with dignity and serenity. It urges her to experience the difference the Lord can make in her life. It encourages her to trust God for her every need.

God's plan for a woman is rooted not merely in time and culture, but in creation itself. The godly woman puts her real confidence in the graciousness, strength, and integrity that come from her relationship with Christ.

A woman's strength of character is made perfect in weakness. A woman's strength of character must be channeled through her circumstances. As the saying goes "You have come a long way baby but you still have a long way to go."

So, I salute women everywhere because you make this world a better place to live. You are indeed God's gift to the world and the world and mankind owe you a debt of gratitude that it can never repay.

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## Would Somebody Please Explain My Husband?

By Ron R. Lee

A well-known Christian author and his wife once summed up their relationship in 13 words: “Put us together, and we add up to a fairly decent human being.”

I enjoyed their self-deprecating sense of humor, and only later realized they were rephrasing a profound biblical truth: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

When two people become one, they compensate for each other’s deficiencies. If I were left to my own devices, for instance, I’d turn into the Tom Hanks’ character in *Cast Away*. But team me up with my wife, Jeanette, the Queen of Sociability, and I turn into a reasonably presentable human being.

While we husbands benefit greatly from being married, we often don’t communicate it well. Women are into relational nuances – the meaning behind the meaning. Men basically wonder if there are any more mashed potatoes.

One night, Jeanette and I sat quietly, enjoying ourselves in the corner of a candle-lit restaurant. Then, out of nowhere, she looked into my eyes and said, “Let’s talk about our relationship.” It always makes me nervous when she says that.

Relationships are usually complex, and guys are pretty basic. A husband tends to think in concrete terms. Instead of pondering his marriage, he’ll picture the woman he comes home to at night, the woman with whom he has children, the women with whom he shares his bed. Call that a relationship if you want, but you’ll just confuse your husband.

What else about your husband do you wish you understood? Let me toss out seven things that might help explain a few of your husband’s odd behaviors.

1. **A man does more talking – and listening – when he’s unaware it’s happening.** Most guys don’t overwhelm their wife with deep inner feelings! However, there’s a way to get your husband to share what’s going on inside. It involves talking to him the same way his buddies do – while doing something else. Men go fishing, watch a ball game, or help each other move a pool table down to the basement. And of course, they talk a lot while they’re doing these things.

For Jeanette and me, all it took was building a wood rack together. I got out the lumber and power tools; Jeanette gathered the nails, screws, and tape measure. Amid the noise and sawdust, she told me she was struggling over whether we should make a long-distance road trip to visit her parents. I’d already told her I’d do whatever she decided, but Jeanette needed to talk out the options. While we built a rack to hold our firewood, we discussed the pros and cons. What else could I do? I had to hang around until we finished the wood rack.

Take it from me. If you start doing more stuff with your husband, you’ll find he

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actually has a lot to say. And he'll listen a lot better, too.

**2. If a man pauses before answering a question, that doesn't mean he's losing interest in the conversation.** Guys really get into it when they're verbally sparring with their buddies, so you might wonder why your husband can't invest that kind of passion in sharing with you.

When a guy "shares" with his wife, he knows his every utterance carries a meaning even he doesn't realize. So he's extra careful about what he says. That explains the frequent pauses.

One night after dinner, Jeanette came back to the table and sat down as I was reading the newspaper. Jeanette wanted to talk about how I was dealing with our recent move. In the months since we'd left the Midwest, I'd been saying how thrilled I was to be living in Colorado.

This was beginning to wear on Jeanette, who wondered if I still had a beating heart in my chest.

Finally, I laid the newspaper aside. "I don't miss the weather or the traffic," I told her. "But I do really miss Ed and Joann. We always had a great time when we got together. I hope they'll come visit us."

Jeanette tells me I revealed this sense of loss amid several pauses. She resisted the urge to hurry the conversation by guessing what I missed most. She told me later her patience paid off when I finally indicated I was hurting about some of the people we'd left behind.

(Note to any husband reading this article: If your wife sits down at the

dinner table after the meal, lay down the newspaper. That's one of those silent signals we're supposed to pick up on.)

**3. If your husband likes to hang around the house, he's actually paying you a compliment.** Here's one way to tell if your husband thinks your marriage is going well. He won't work late unless he absolutely has to, and he won't overload his schedule with meetings and golf dates with his buddies. The reason? He'd rather be home with you.

Sounds good so far, right? But let's say you've had a terrible week, and as Friday approaches, all you can think about is getting out of the house for a quiet dinner and maybe even a movie. You can picture the restaurant, taste the appetizer, and even smell the popcorn at the theater. But your husband gets home from work on Friday and all he wants to do is stay put. Before you take it personally, remember that if he wants to hang out at home, it doesn't mean he doesn't want to do something with you. It just means he wants to do something with you at home. I realize a steady diet of staying home eventually will drive you up the wall. But for now, take it as a compliment. Maybe next Friday he'll have more ambition.

**4. When your husband's a little short with you, 9 times out of 10 it has nothing to do with you.** Some things that really bug your husband are taxes, bills, his boss, and the ever-present threat of male pattern baldness.

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For me, the most frequent low-level life stress is automobile-related. Our cars break down with unnerving regularity.

One afternoon, Jeanette called me from work to say that when she pulled into her office parking lot, steam poured out from under our van's hood. I picked up some antifreeze, several jugs of water, and headed off to her office. Sitting at a red light, I made a mental list of what causes coolant to leak: a cracked radiator or heater hose, a bad water pump, or the worse possibility – a blown head gasket.

By the time I arrived at Jeanette's office, I'd worked myself into a lather over the likelihood this repair would drain us financially. That means I wasn't all smiles and affectionate greetings when Jeanette walked out to meet me. As I poured antifreeze into the radiator and watched a new green pool form on the ground, I asked Jeanette to follow me to the repair shop. Then I took off down the street.

Here's the significant thing about this story: Jeanette didn't take my fit of pique personally. She understood I was angry at the *situation*, not at her. (Now to any guy reading this: It was the head gasket. It set us back \$1,800.)

So if your husband acts less than chummy and you wonder if it's something you said, think about what else has happened in his life. He probably had some huge, last-minute project dumped on his desk that afternoon. Or maybe he just opened the

the mail and looked at the VISA bill. You, he loves. The credit card bill he'd gladly burn at the stake.

5. **The words husband and hint don't belong in the same sentence.** I maintain there's a perfectly good explanation for why guys are clueless. It's because wives like to hint around at what they mean; then they wonder why their husbands aren't responding.

Take last Thanksgiving, for instance. Jeanette and I had a houseful of guests, some of whom were watching football in the family room. Being a good host, I figured I'd watch it with them. Just then, from the kitchen, Jeanette said, and I quote, "Ron." She used that tone that means I'd messed up – without specifying the infraction.

"Should I feed the fire?" I asked. That wasn't it. "Do you want me to help you get the dishes out?" Not that, either. "Is it time for me to take drink orders?" Wrong again. Finally, I hit on it. "You don't want me to watch football while other guests visit in the living room, do you?" Bingo! At last I'd guessed correctly. But it would have been less frustrating if Jeanette had just said, "I don't think you should watch football while the other guests entertain themselves in another room." If she'd uttered those words, I would have caught on. Honest.

6. **Many men are clothing challenged.** Forget those immaculately attired GQ guys; a chimpanzee would look great if he had a team of trained professionals picking out his clothes, too. Assuming you're married to a regular guy, chances are your husband suffers from a combination of fashion blindness and ensemble dyslexia. Sometimes we freeze

up. Does this tie go with this jacket? Are these socks black or navy blue? If I wear the pink polo shirt, will other guys start asking me out?

I have a friend who had to make a big presentation at work, and he wanted to make a good impression. That morning, he noticed a new sweater hanging on his side of the closet and was overcome by a wave of gratitude. His wife, realizing the importance of this presentation, had been thoughtful enough to buy him a really nice sweater.

He wore the stylish garment to work, gave the presentation, and came home to tell his wife about it. She listened attentively, and then asked, "But why did you wear my sweater?"

I'm not saying guys are clothing idiots; I'm just saying we can use a little help. If it weren't for our wives, we'd be giving people the fashion willies every time we left the house.

**7. A guy likes to put disagreements behind him.** Most guys think there's only one proven method of making up after an argument, and that involves getting physically close. My friend Michael speaks for a multitude of husbands when he says that as soon as the fight's over, physical contact with his wife helps him feel things are once again okay.

"I don't carry grudges," he says. "But Susan's different. When we strongly disagree about something, or when I've hurt her in some way, she feels distant from me, and it takes more time than I'd like to get close again. As for me, I can get close within minutes of a fight, even if it really hurt my feelings."

Michael's prescription for reconnecting after an argument: "Sex at a time like this? Sure!" To that, the men of the husband brotherhood add: "Why not?"

I can't speak for Phil, but I remember the third thing that keeps me happy. Every few weeks, I need Jeanette to tell me whether my brown loafers go with the khaki trousers or the navy blue pants. Every time she clarifies this for me, I'm a really happy man.

**Facing Failure**  
By Verla Gillmor

As I handed my carefully wrapped package to the postal clerk, I thought, by tomorrow, my publisher will have my manuscript, and in a few months I'll see a lifelong dream fulfilled – a published book!

I expected to feel elated, but instead felt numb. Completing the project had been a mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual marathon. I felt as though every intelligent thought I'd ever had, I'd poured into that book. I didn't have a single word left in my brain!

A few days later, my editor called. "We love the manuscript. Just one more thing ... we want you to write four more chapters. Get it to us as soon as possible. We're on a tight schedule."

It was as though I'd undergone a 9-month pregnancy, endured 24 hours of hard labor, delivered a beautiful baby, and a week later the obstetrician said, "You need to go back into labor for another 6 hours."

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For the next three weeks, I struggled. I negotiated with God. I cried. Day after day, whatever I wrote went immediately into the wastebasket. Panic seeped into my thinking: I'm this close to the finish line, and I can't make it come together! The only thing that appeared certain was failure.

My extra book chapters eventually sprang to life – which is why I feel safer talking about them than a failed relationship or a failed business venture. Failure's something we'd rather talk about after it's overcome with subsequent success.

That's unfortunate, because failure teaches us things we can't learn any other way. The key is to treat failure as a visitor: allowed to deliver unpleasant news, but not allowed to take up permanent residence. We need to say, "Make your point – then leave."

Are you learning from your failures? Here's what I've learned so far from mine:

**All failures are not equal.** When a beautiful, talented young woman is named first runner-up in the Miss America Pageant, we say she failed. Yet some people would give their right arm to experience that kind of failure – to be named the second most attractive female in a national competition. It's a matter of perspective. We need to look closely at our failures, and give them weight appropriate to their importance in the overall scheme of things.

For example, I once received a "D" in college. I know it's ridiculous, but that sticks in my mind like a pebble in my

shoe. Why do I fixate on that grade, and not the fact it happened the semester I carried 19 credit hours, worked part-time, got engaged, and spent six weeks in the college health center with mononucleosis? When I put the experience in its proper context, it loses its power to undermine my confidence.

**Failure teaches us what's important.** I have a close friend who was downsized out of a job she loved. It caught her by surprise because she was good at her work.

"I intended to be full of pride," she says. "I got away with it because I was successful. But losing my job under those circumstances really humbled me. In the end, I was glad. With pride, you have no permission to fail. It's a heavy yoke to wear. I don't wear it anymore, and I feel much 'lighter' in my spirit. I don't have the burden of having to be perfect.

The best part, she says, is how God used the experience to bring her to him. "Had my bubble not burst, I might never have become a Christian. Success doesn't require any explanation. But when failure touches us, we want answers. I began asking questions about life – and they ultimately led me to God."

**Failure is a circumstance, not a life sentence.** I know a woman who spent 15 years in the extremely challenging restaurant industry. She felt from day one, when she opened her first franchise, that God had her there for a reason. She ran the business with integrity, provided excellent service, put out a quality product, and championed biblical values to everyone with whom she came in

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contact – employees, vendors, and customers.

It wasn't a cakewalk: Someone threw a bomb into the restaurant three weeks after it opened. Then her chief franchise competitor opened a restaurant right next door. "Everyday," she says, "I gave the business to God. It was up to him to keep it going."

As the business flourished, her husband joined the company as chief financial officer. Fifteen years later, they owned 14 restaurants, enjoying financial success and the respect of their peers.

Then one day the franchise company changed the rules. My friend and her husband felt they could no longer operate successfully without compromising their values. The parting of ways was messy; it exacted a heavy emotional and financial price. To observers, it looked like a colossal failure.

I wish failures didn't have to be in plain view – especially in view of those who hold biblical values in low regard. It feels so unfair. My friend admits it was a painful time. Over and over she and her husband revisited what happened, trying to drain off the wisdom from the situation before discarding the rest.

In *My Utmost for His Highest*, Oswald Chambers says, "If through a broken heart God can bring his purposes to pass in the world, then thank him for breaking your heart." My friend and her husband chose that path. Now she's able to talk convincingly about the whole experience as a "Romans 8:28 thing": "We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him. They are the ones God has chosen for his purposes" (CEV).

She says she'd do it all over again. "God hands you a package and you open it," she says. "You don't always know what's inside. I want to spend my life doing whatever God gives me to do." Today my friend's a successful executive coach who counsels other CEOs on how to manage their businesses and their lives.

**God sees failure through different eyes.** Book chapters, beauty pageants, and grades don't inflict the same damage as more serious failures – especially those brought on by our own choices: an addiction that threatens to undo us; an uncontrolled tongue that damages important relationships; a deceit that betrays the trust others placed in us. But it's vital to remember God views even serious failures differently than we do.

While God expects us to take responsibility for our part and to ask his forgiveness, he never confuses the sin with the sinner. God may be deeply disappointed in our behavior, but he never walks away. "But God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful. But there is more! Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life's blood, we will also be kept safe from God's anger. Even when we were God's enemies, he made peace with us, because his Son died for us" (Romans 5:8-10, CEV).

It's impossible to fail so badly that God's grace can't reach us. We can hand over to God the messes we've made, and stand amazed at his ability to create beauty from the ashes.

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Jesus' death on the cross looked like a failure. He hung there exposed and forsaken by his own Father. An angry mob called him a phony. He had warned his disciples that a dark day was coming, telling them it would not be the end of the story. But when it happened, I doubt his followers believed any part of that could remotely "work for the good of anyone who loves him." Who knew?

That's the point, really. In the midst of what looks like failure – real or imagined, large or small, our fault or someone else's – God's perspective is the one that counts, regardless of other louder voices. He says the good guys win in the end, and he ought to know. Our job is to do what he told us to do until Jesus comes back.

### How to Move Forward

It's no fun to revisit your failures – especially if they represent "unfinished business." But facing them head-on empowers you to get on with life. Here's how:

- Ask God for courage to look at your failure from his perspective.
- If you're still depressed or angry about what happened, tell him all of it. He can handle it.
- Write down how it changed you as a person – good or bad. Be specific. Has it had more impact than it deserves?
- Do you need to take responsibility for any part of what happened? If so, tell God you're sorry and want to be released from the guilt or shame.
- Ask God to make clear any additional steps you need to take.

- Thank him for loving you unconditionally through all the experiences of your life. Celebrate God's grace!

### Feeling Overwhelmed?

By Richard A. Swenson, M.D.

Do you dread facing your day? Are your relationships strained from stress? Do you wish you could check into a hospital just to get some sleep? If you're feeling overloaded, here are 12 prescriptions to help you regain control of your life.

1. **Practice "stress switching."** If I'm unsuccessful at balancing my checkbook, setting it aside and worrying about it does me no good. Instead, I "stress switch," replacing a stressful activity with something positive, such as exercise, so I can return and tackle the problem refreshed.
2. **Exercise.** I know, it's hard to find time for it. But you'll discover more energy and efficiency when you make even simple exercise a priority.
3. **Establish stability zones.** It can be a favorite place for prayer, an enjoyable routine, or an annual vacation spot.
4. **Play music.** When God created music, he somehow enabled it to penetrate straight to the depths of our spirit.
5. **Breathe deeply.** This simple "8-8-8" breathing exercise is low-tech but effective: Inhale slowly on an 8 count, hold for another 8, then exhale slowly on 8.

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6. **Practice saying NO.** Take lessons from a two year old. Saying no is not an excuse for noninvolvement, laziness, or insensitivity. It's simply living by our priorities.
7. **Limit time with negative people.** You can't satisfy or change them – and it will exhaust you to try.
8. **Simplify meal choices.** “Plan meals with your family's likes and dislikes in mind,” write Table Talk authors Mimi Wilson and Mary Beth Lagerborg, “but once you've set the menu, try this rule: Today's Menu – Two Choices: Take It or Leave It.”
9. **Adjust expectations.** If you always expect success, you're destined to be chronically frustrated. But if you expect life to be messy, you're more likely to be content with the simple blessings God sends your way.
10. **Develop healthy sleeping habits.** Choose to get enough sleep. Value it. Take a nap – and don't feel guilty.
11. **Learn to laugh.** One person, after a hurricane in southern Florida devastated her house, posted a sign in the front yard: “Open House.” It didn't help her rebuild, but it helped her weather the storm.
12. **Choose daily to follow God.** The Old Testament patriarch Moses reminded people to choose carefully: “Choose life, so that you and your children may live, and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold

fast to him” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

### 7 Steps to Financial Freedom

1. **Create a vision for your finances.** Set goals, such as “By the end of 2001, I want to have \$1,000 invested in a mutual fund,” or “I want to be debt-free by year 2002.” Then develop a monthly plan to support those goals. You need to have a vision for your finances, regardless of how much you earn.
2. **Balance your checkbook regularly.** A quick look through your checkbook will show you what your life priorities are. Pay attention to where you spend your money.
3. **Pay off all credit-card bills monthly.** That way, you'll avoid finance charges and interest fees. Start using your credit card only when you know you have the money to pay the debt you're about to incur.
4. **Save and invest regularly.** Saving and investing are essential. It's a wonderful feeling to know you have money and don't need it, but rather stressful when you need money and don't have it! Establish a “peace of mind” fund or “set aside” money to allow you to transform financial emergencies into nothing more than planned challenges.
5. **Don't live above your means.** When you spend less than you earn, you'll have money left at the end of each month! And don't be tempted by your neighbor's lifestyle. Just because your neighbor can afford a certain car or fancy vacation doesn't mean you acquire it because you want to keep up with your neighbor!

6. **Prepare a will and have adequate life insurance.** Decide in advance how you want your assets divided and determine who will receive them. Having sufficient life insurance is your way of saying to your family, “I love you enough to provide my contribution to our family, even after I’m gone.”
7. **Give back to God.** When you tithe, you’re returning part of what you have to its rightful owner – God!

### Need a Confidence Boost?

By Verla Gillmor

Recently I turned to a friend who was riding in my car and asked her, “What do you like about yourself?” We rode in silence for several minutes. Finally, she turned to me and said, apologetically, “I can’t think of anything.”

I was stunned. My friend is intelligent, charming, and compassionate – yet she couldn’t see any of that.

I know she’s not alone. Low self-esteem has become the number-one issue plaguing Christian women. Despite God’s assurance that he’s absolutely crazy about us, most of us can’t believe he means it. It’s like the cynical editor who tells the cub reporter, “If your mother says she loves you, check it out.”

### Check Out Your Sources

I was a reporter for 12 years. One of the first things I learned in researching a story was “garbage in, garbage out.”

If your raw data is flawed, you end up with a faulty conclusion. The same is true with how we see ourselves. If we lack self-confidence, maybe we’re working with flawed data.

The reality is, in hundreds of subtle ways, our culture, family friends – even our thought life – conspire to undermine our confidence. We grow up in families void of affirmation, encouragement, and respect – the building blocks to self-confidence. Then we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of a world that lionize Size Two Hollywood starlets and Barbie-doll figures. Our paycheck, our title, our designer labels, or some other artificial yardstick gives us temporary entrée into the world of The Accepted. But in our hearts, we know it isn’t real. How do we find our way to the truth?

In the J.B. Phillips translation of the Bible, Romans 12:3 reads, “Try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all.” Our relationship with Jesus sheds new light on who we are and what we do.

Before we can “hear” it, though, we have to identify the “dirty data” we’ve believed. We need to expose ways in which we’ve inadvertently contributed to the problem:

#### *Comparison traps.*

I’m techno phobic. My brother got all the genes required to understand operating manuals, to repair things, or (gasp!) to make sense of computers. When I first had to learn how to use a computer for my job, I was convinced it was the end of life as I knew it.

I remember with painful clarity a beginner’s computer class where the

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instructor told us to “press any key. I searched in vain for the “any” key. By the end of the class, I was certain I wasn’t smart enough to drive myself home, much less dress for work the next day. This was despite the fact that I managed a home, a family, a job, and a professional staff.

Why was it so humiliating? Because I compared myself to the 10-year-old girl next door who effortlessly surfed the Net to research her term papers while I struggled just to log on. Instead of simply concluding that technical prowess is not one of my strengths, I concluded I must be stupid. It was a lie.

### *The art of the put-down.*

People respect us as much as we respect ourselves. That’s why the absence of self-confidence can telegraph to others not to believe in us.

For years I struggled to receive a compliment graciously. If someone complimented my hair, I’d discount it. I’d say my hairstyle made my face look fat or that my hair was a mousy color. What I really meant was, *There must be some mistake. I’m not worth your regard. I don’t like myself and can’t really believe you do, either.* The trouble is, if we persist in putting ourselves down, eventually people start to believe we’re right.

### *Self-doubt.*

Sometimes the problem isn’t faulty data. We have an accurate picture of ourselves or a situation, but we capitulate the first time someone challenges us.

Several years ago, I discovered a grape-sized lump on my left breast. My doctor scheduled outpatient surgery right away. A month later, when I resumed periodic self-examination, I felt the same lump in

the same hard-to-reach place. I was certain of it! When I called the doctor to suggest he might have missed the lump in question, he insisted I was wrong. It could not possibly be a lump, he said, because he had removed it. After all, he was the doctor.

I got off the phone, doubting what I’d felt with my own hand. But fear of lethal consequences gave me the courage to insist he re-examine me, at which point he reluctantly acknowledged that, yes, it did seem to be the original lump. He removed it in a second surgery.

### **Reclaim the Truth**

It’s time to go on the offensive and regain the confidence God wants for you. Here are a few ways to get started:

#### **Name the lies-and give them to God.**

Make a list of the falsehoods others have said about you (and what you’ve believed about yourself). Be specific. Then, agree with God that it’s not how he sees you. Tell him “God, I know you made me – and you don’t make junk. These lies have got to go. I want to see myself the way you see me. Please begin the process of changing my mind.”

Eugene Petersen, in *The Message* paraphrase of Romans 12:2, urges us to reject the flawed thinking of our culture and those around us: Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.”

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### **Grieve the loss of what you'll never have and never be.**

I once knew a woman who believed the lie that she was a victim. She wasn't in an abusive situation; she wasn't poor or ill or alone. But she felt as though the world always let her down. Eventually, she confessed to God the truth – playing the victim was easier for her than dealing with her own emotional “junk.” But that was only the first step. Next she had to grieve the loss of a “crutch” she couldn't use anymore. She had to find a whole new way to live.

In my case, I had to confess the lie that I was stupid because I didn't understand technical things. Yet, even after acknowledging that I'm actually a pretty intelligent person, I still had to grieve the fact that no amount of classes or training would ever completely solve my technical ineptitude!

Another lie I believed about myself was that I'd been selfish for having only one child. The truth is, I nearly died giving birth to my daughter, and my husband didn't want to adopt. Still, I spent years feeling like an inferior mother – like I should have trusted God to protect me in subsequent childbirths.

I now believe that – in my case – one child was God's will for me. I've rejected the condemnation. Nevertheless, I had to grieve that I'd never have the houseful of children I'd always wanted.

### **Replace the lies with the truth.**

God's Word is full of information about your identity and position as a believer in Jesus Christ. Let the wonder of God's perspective on you soak in. Do you fully realize what it means to be ...

- Fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14)
- Precious to God (Isaiah 43:4)
- Cared about since your conception (Isaiah 46:3)
- God's child (John 1:12)
- Jesus' friend (John 15:15)
- Chosen by Jesus (John 15:16)
- Loved dearly by God (John 16:27)
- Free from condemnation (Romans 8:1)
- A temple – a dwelling place – of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- Redeemed and forgiven of all your sins (Colossians 1:14)

Maybe you'd prefer God say he's crazy about dishwater blondes who are 20 pounds overweight. Then you'd know he meant you. But God didn't get that specific in describing Eve! All he tells us about her in Gen. 1:27, 31 is that she was made in his image and it was very good!

He feels the same way about you.

### **Celebrate you!**

During my years as a radio news anchor and reporter in Chicago, I occasionally was called upon to participate in annual fundraising telethons. Telethon producers would round up as many media types as possible to answer phones. Most were TV news anchors with recognizable faces – the thought being they would attract viewers who would then pledge dollars to the cause. Because I worked for one of the

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major network affiliates, at times I was pressed into service, even though I worked in radio.

During one particular event, I stood off-camera, waiting to be told what to do. It happened during a season in my life when I was trying to figure out who I was and whether I truly liked myself. I'd been in counseling and had been studying God's Word to learn about my identity in Christ.

A twentysomething junior producer came over to me, clipboard in hand, and looked me up and down with obvious disdain. He scanned his list of "celebrity guests," then said, "Are you anybody?"

My mouth dropped open in disbelief, "Well ... no ... I'm not anybody," I said. Suddenly, the absurdity of his comment hit me and I started to laugh. "You know, once I was nobody. Does that help you? But, listen," I whispered, leaning toward him, "Now I'm somebody! I'm just not somebody you know." He shook his head, clueless, and walked away.

You, too, are somebody – somebody worth the sacrifice of what was most precious to God – his only Son. God may be the only person you'll ever know who love you unconditionally. But once this truth soaks in, God's opinion becomes the only one that really matters.

### **Go Ahead - Dream** **By Stacey Padrick**

You'll be surprised at what God will do!

When I was a child, I owned a plaque that picture a kitten on a rock gazing up at a golden butterfly. Its caption read, "Set aside some dreaming time." While I loved the photo, I always thought of a dreamer

as someone with her head in the clouds – forgetting the real world around her. So when I entered college, I left dreaming to the philosophy students. It seemed impractical in the real world of limited resources, changing job markets, and fierce competition. I stuck to what could be measured and graphed – often putting myself and God in a box.

But several years ago, I was diagnosed with systemic lupus, which turned my "real world" upside down. Physically weakened and highly susceptible to viruses, I had to withdraw from activities, and some of my deepest desires no longer seemed possible. As my hopes for the future evaporated, I had to start trusting God with my aspirations. And as I began to trust, to my surprise, I sensed God beckoning me to start dreaming about doing things seemingly unrelated to my education and training, dreams that may seem insignificant in others' eyes. But these dreams – learning to swing dance, writing a book, leading a missions trip to Asia, and more – make my heart sing. I've allowed God to take me from my comfort zone and do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." (Ephesians 3:20)

Do you limit yourself to what's possible? Practical? Acceptable? Do you find it difficult to allow yourself to dream? The following ideas will help you begin to listen to your heart's desires.

**Preface your planning with prayer.** Ask God to grant you wisdom and inspiration, to open your eyes to a greater vision of your life and him. I used to

hesitate to dream, wondering, *What if I dream something that isn't God's plan for me? Who am I to say what I want?*

Yet, as I'm growing in my relationship with God, I'm learning he wants me to be honest with him. God encourages us to pursue our dreams while rejoice in him. "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Pray God would reveal the dreams he's written on your heart.

A few years after college, a friend recommended me for an overseas graduate scholarship. Though I'd dreamed of an opportunity such as this for years, I hesitated, wondering if I should stay at the missions organization where I was working. The trip would be a lot of work, and I wasn't sure I was prepared for the challenges I'd face. Despite my reservations, I paid attention to this dream I felt God had given me. I applied, won the scholarship, and studied overseas. There God gave me abundant ministry opportunities to share his love with students from around the world.

**Set aside some time.** Find time to be alone in a quiet place – maybe a scenic spot you enjoy. Often nature can help us "think big" as we see the grandeur of God's creation. Even a quiet corner in a local library or café can provide an atmosphere for reflection. Bring a journal, pencil, and perhaps a book to stimulate your thinking. One book that helped me was *The Path: Creating Your Mission Statement for Work and for Life*, by Laurie Beth Jones (Hyper-ion). Another that may help you is *Follow Your Heart* by Judy Peterson (Cook Communications).

**Let your pencil go!** During a job search, I took out my pencil and began to list my dreams – even the wild and crazy ones: learning Chinese, hang gliding, becoming a missionary journalist. Exhilaration and excitement surged through me when I allowed myself to dream with abandon.

Let your mind and pencil go! Color outside the lines. Ask yourself: *If money, time, or background had no bearing, what would I dream? What activities give me a sense of being fully alive? What gifts do I enjoy using? What things do I do to bless my friends? What makes me feel as though I were made for this?* All these can be clues to help you detect and shape your dreams.

My friend Tamara, whose parents ran a restaurant for years, has a flair for gourmet cuisine and entertaining. Friends often refer to her as "Martha Stewart" and rave about her food presentations. Encouragement from friends and family, coupled with much prayer on her part, led Tamara to open her own restaurant at the age of 27. Within two years, it was the most popular gourmet restaurant in town.

**Silence the skeptic.** As you pursue your dreams, be aware of skeptical, discouraging thoughts. For example, when I began writing, my inner critic immediately accused, *Me? Write? I can't write! Besides, I don't have anything of value to say.* By identifying your reservations, you'll be better able to discern whether dreams are from God, yourself, or Satan, who will try to deter you from God's plan.

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Don't define your limits! Let God decide what you can and can't do. I've argued with God many times about my capabilities. I can attest that arguing only wastes time and obstructs blessings. God loves to work through weaknesses and apparent impossibilities. Truly, "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

I wanted to do something adventurous after college, but when God opened a door for me to reach in China, I thought, *No way! I can't teach. I'm too young to teach at a university! I don't know a thing about China nor do I speak a word of Chinese!* Yet, trusting God, I finally stepped forward and went. That year was the most fulfilling year of my life.

Dream big about things that won't happen by your own strength and ingenuity, but only by the power and grace of God. We can never out-dream him!

**Stand guard against dream-killers.** Dream-killers lurk around every corner, ready to pounce just when you find the courage to begin pursuing your dreams. They take many forms, such as concern about others' opinions. Perhaps words spoken to you when you were young, such as "You're so shy," have kept you from dreaming about public speaking.

Although my father had always encouraged me in whatever I wanted to do, when I was offered a job as a writer and editor, he remarked, "I don't see you liking that type of work." In truth, he didn't see himself liking that type of work. I took the job and enjoyed it. God used it as an unexpected launching pad for my writing career.

Other dream-killers can be imagined or real limitations (lack of time, ability, or

training). For me, the daily challenge of living with an unpredictable illness threatens to disrupt my goals and extinguish my dreams. When my health unexpectedly weakens, I often must cancel plans at the last minute. Thus, I become fearful of making commitments and pursuing dreams. Yet, through this challenge, God teaches me greater daily dependence on him. Rather than relying on my strength and determination, I rely on him, knowing that without him I can do nothing. We all deal with some form of limitations, but they can't limit what God can do as we step out in faith.

**Try bite-sized beginnings.** If you find "dreaming big" difficult, start cultivating smaller dreams. My friend wanted to run a marathon before she turned 30, and she did it – but she started by running 2 miles a day.

If you're afraid to pursue a dream, start with the first step, no matter how small. When Moses crossed the Red Sea, he first had to step into the water before it would part.

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the hero teeters on the edge of a chasm separating him from the cave that harbors the sought-after holy grail. The ancient map says he must step forward, though there doesn't appear to be anything to support him from falling to his death. Yet, as he steps into the abyss, he feels something solid under his feet – a camouflaged bridge that had been there all along. Similarly, as we step out in faith, paths we never knew existed will open before us.

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**Be on the lookout.** Look for ways God might be offering direction and guidance as you pursue dreams. A local church or community college may offer a class or workshop that provides in-sight or resources related to your dream. Also, talk with others involved in your area of interest. You'll be amazed how God makes connections and honors the risks you take.

While visiting a friend, I mentioned my interest in retreat ministry. She told me of a couple she knew in Virginia who'd just purchased a bed and breakfast/retreat center. They needed helpers to develop the ministry. Six months later, I was living at the b&b where I could learn hands-on about the ministry.

As we step out in faith to pursue the dreams God's placed on our heart, inevitably we'll experience setbacks and disappointments. As I write this, I'm still saddened by the loss of a long-held dream to lead a missions trip. After planning and preparing for a year, I had to forego the project at the last moment because of a downturn in my health. Yet in my disappointment, I continually claim the apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair" (2 Corinthians 4:8).

God can work powerfully in our weakness or crisis because we're forced to trust him. We shouldn't wait until we "have it all together" to dream. Begin now, even in the midst of brokenness. My friend Tamara, who opened the gourmet restaurant, pursued that dream after

her husband left her. As we entrust broken dreams to God, he'll release new dreams – and do more than we could hope or imagine.

So go ahead – dream! Whether your personality's practical or imaginative, your limitations real or self-imposed, your dreams grandiose or simple, set aside some dreaming time. Whether you learn to swing dance as I did, or aspire to do something life-changing, such as launching a new ministry, allow God to expand your horizon and use you to fulfill his purpose in your life.

### **Married to Mr. Unromantic By Judy Chaney**

I smiled to myself as my husband, Frank, handed me a bag of Hershey's Kisses from the grocery store shelf, then said, "Here, I think you need this for Valentine's Day." When I checked my e-mail a little later, he'd sent me an electronic postcard. Lo and behold, I could print out my own Valentine! That night, at a Sunday school party, when each husband presented his wife with a red carnation, Frank handed me the long-stemmed blossom with these romantic words: "Here's your flower." Obviously, my husband is romantically challenged – in the traditional sense. But rather than voice disappointment with Frank's practical, matter-of-fact Valentine, I told him (and myself) how blessed I am to be married to him.

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I have to admit, there was a time when I longed to hear sweet nothings whispered in my ear. I yearned for original poems that spoke of undying love inspired by my inner beauty and winsome ways. I dreamed of a man who would serenade me with songs written just for me. But it just didn't happen. I wasn't married to that man. Twenty years after we said "I do, I've come to appreciate Frank's unique terms of endearment. And I've learned to redefine romance in terms of what my unromantic husband has taught me about love.

**How love sounds.** Songs, sonnets, and sentimentality can be delivered in an attitude of falseness. I've known men whose eloquent expressions were belied by their lack of commitment and faithfulness. My husband, Frank, has taught me that words such as *faithful*, *committed*, *steady*, *trustworthy*, *dependable*, and *industrious* can be synonymous with love. Frank's never effusive with compliments, but what he says is sincere. His simple words convey deep feeling.

**How love acts.** I no longer expect my husband to be just like me. We have opposite strengths. Creativity's my strength; Frank has a real knack for organization. While I might elect to take a "creative" route to our destination, Frank gets us there. While I'm looking for the perfect present for any occasion (or no occasion), Frank's planning for our future and providing a wonderful home, as well as the many extras we enjoy. But it's his personality. While Frank does remember many special occasions with gifts or flowers, it's his integrity that's by far his most precious gift to me.

**How I can show love.** I've found that the more I express love to Frank, the more loving our whole environment becomes. I've learned to search for ways to show him that love in terms he understands:

1. I compliment him in front of other people. He enjoys the compliments I give him directly, but the praise I share with others is especially appreciated.
2. I encourage Frank to spend time doing things he thoroughly enjoys (hunting, fishing, etc.). Occasionally I join him for some of those activities.
3. I take the lead in situations that are more comfortable for me, such as social settings and activities that involve verbal and written skills. Frank takes the lead in business matters in which he has the expertise and the lightning-fast calculator!
4. I occasionally plan some special, creative, romantic surprises. Frank enjoys them – he just doesn't think to initiate them. Some suggestions are:
  - Send him on treasure hunts to find gifts.
  - Tuck love notes in his pockets.
  - Leave massage oil in a brown paper bag (well-sealed, of course) on his desk.

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- Leave a card under the sofa with a long piece of yarn tied to it. Leave the end of the yarn sticking out for him so he will discover the card.
  - Write “I love you” with cake decorating gel on his dessert plate.
  - Leave a love note written in shaving cream on the bathroom mirror.
  - Take him his morning cup of coffee with some “mug mail” (a strip of paper with a loving message stapled around the handle of his coffee mug).
5. Most importantly, we express our love of God together. We make it a part of our formal worship as well as our times together at home.

**I’ve discovered** I already have what’s important in my life. God’s given me a spouse whose practical side is a perfect balance to my emotional, creative side. Given a choice, I’d rather have a husband who’s practically perfect than flowers, songs, and poems any day – and every day!

### **Tough Love**

**By Elaine Creasman**

Though my husband, Steve, and I recently celebrated our twenty-sixth wedding anniversary, our marriage hasn’t been filled with the wedded bliss you might expect from such a committed couple. Through the years, our relationship has weathered the storms of Steve’s struggle

with pornography and a volatile temper, my severe PMS and incessant need for control, and our unforgiving spirits.

I’ve battled *I-can’t-live-another-day-with-this-man* feelings. And Steve has said that on the days I “acted crazy” (during my PMS), he’s thought, *I can’t live like this the rest of my life*. Since we’ve never allowed divorce to be an option, on my most desperate days, I’ve cried out to God, “I can’t go on!”

But thanks to God’s faithfulness and resurrection power, we have gone on. While we’ve both relied on our deep faith in God, we’ve also hung in there partly because I have a stubborn streak that God’s transformed into tenacity. And Steve’s stint as a Marine instilled him with an *I-will-not-give-up-on-this-mission* mindset – in this case, his mission being staying married to me for a lifetime.

As I hear others make excuses for withdrawing love from their spouse, I think of the motto Steve learned in the Marines: “No excuses – just results.”

Even though we continue to struggle at times, Steve and I still love each other very much. Here are some of the lessons I’ve learned about loving my spouse even in the tough times.

#### **1. Adopt God’s Perspective on Sin.**

One problem in our marriage was my mixed-up view of sin. My sins – being critical or judgmental, for example – seemed small and harmless to me compared to Steve’s swearing, temper, or spending all his time in front of the television rather than with the kids and me. However, God showed me the error of this thinking when I read Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:5: “First take the plank out

of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. "Begrudgingly, I noticed it didn't say, "Remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the plank from your brother's eye."

When I let God expose my motives and attitudes in the light of his Word, my sins always appear like planks, while Steve's sins grow smaller in comparison, God wants me to deal with my sins, not Steve's.

While Steve was in the Marines, he perfected the bad habit of swearing. He still occasionally lets loose a string of profanities. I worried about its negative influence on our children, particularly when they would utter a curse word. I remember one day praying haughtily, "Lord, deliver him from this evil habit." But then the Holy Spirit spoke to me, *What about your sins of the mouth?* Suddenly they came to mind – criticizing, complaining, and gossiping. I cringed when I realized our children had picked up these sinful habits too. The truth hit me: My use of words was no better than Steve's.

Now I see that Steve and I are equals as we each battle to overcome sinful habits in our lives. I feel so close to Steve when we help each other do this in an atmosphere of love, not condemnation.

## **2. Remember Who the Real Enemy of Marriage is.**

In our second year of marriage, when Steve and I were further apart emotionally than we've ever been and I had no where else to go, I turned to God

for salvation. In his mercy, God allowed the distance between Steve and me to open my heart to his saving grace.

As a believer, I continually need to remember that the enemy of my marriage isn't Steve, it's Satan. God's shown me the importance of being wise to the Enemy's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11) and taking my stand against them (Ephesians 6:11). One way I do that is to remember what first caused me to fall in love with Steve – his faith in God, compassion, integrity, intelligence, wisdom, and great sense of humor. He still excels in these qualities, but too often I fail to focus on them.

One reason I kept seeing Steve as my enemy was that I kept track of everything he did wrong. I even wrote down his "crimes" – his critical re-marks, his lack of attentiveness towards me. Now when I start to make that list, God reminds me that love "keeps no record of wrongs" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

These days, I've decided to thank Steve for what he does right. I keep a record of these good things by daily jotting down something about Steve for which I'm thankful in my quiet-time journal. Sometimes I put these positives in a letter to Steve.

Occasionally when I slip back into *he's-the-enemy* thinking, Steve will say, "Honey you're forgetting – we're a team." I appreciate his reminder, because I forget it all too often. We're partners working together to build a strong union and working against the Enemy who aims to destroy marriages.

**3. Pray God's Way.** Instead of demanding that God do what I want in my husband's life, I've learned to ask, "How should I pray for Steve?" Then God gives me instructions and directs my prayers. One day I prayed, "How can I show love to Steve today?" I received a surprising answer: *Iron his shirts*. Steve knows I hate to iron, so that was a good way to show love. Even though it seemed to be such a little thing to me, Steve appeared so happy when he discovered me ironing his clothes.

Often during my prayer times, God uses his Word to bring me insights about true love. One verse he repeatedly brings to mind is 1 Corinthians 13:5, "Love does not demand on its own way" (TLB).

**4. Love Your Husband Unconditionally.** Recently I complained to God that he still hadn't answered a few specific prayers about Steve I've been praying for years. I recalled two of Steve's habits that almost caused me to call off our wedding while we were engaged – his temper and his excessive television watching.

During that time, my attitude was, *I'll love you again if you change*. Steve wrote me letters promising he would. And he did – for a while.

Throughout the years of our marriage, I'm ashamed to admit I've sometimes waved those letters in front of him, demanding, "When are you going to keep your promises?" God convicted me that I still had a negative attitude and was holding back because of those habits. But *I'll love you fully if you change in those two areas* isn't in line with my marriage vows. The

correct attitude is, *I love you even if these two things never change*.

Because of my wrong attitude, I've sometimes blocked the way for change, or been blind to how much Steve has changed – even in those two areas. And I've blocked the flow of love from my heart to Steve's.

One wise wife said, "My job's to love my husband; God's job is to change him." God wants me to love Steve fully and extravagantly, regardless of where he is in our life journey. After all, that's the way God loves us – unconditionally.

**5. Give Your Marriage to God.** Just because I pray for our marriage doesn't mean I always succeed in giving my difficulties to God. I'm quite adept at praying feverishly about problems and then taking them back one second after my "amen." My Bible study teacher has taught me to pray, "God, you've got a problem," which keeps me from thinking I have to solve everything.

The day I finally trusted God with my husband's addiction to pornography was a turning point in his healing. Prior to that point, I'd think Steve had given up viewing pornography only to find hidden contraband in our home.

"When is he ever going to give this up?" I'd cry to God, my counselor, or to a trusted friend. I told Steve my feelings, and he seemed to understand my hurt. I felt he finally was delivered.

But one morning I awoke early, and there was my husband looking at porn on the Internet. I felt as though I'd been kicked in the stomach. My usual response to such a discovery was sobbing, shouting,

blaming, and shaming. This time I heard God whisper, *Say nothing.*

I went into the bathroom, knelt on the floor, and cried out, “God, I can’t take this anymore.”

Suddenly peace overwhelmed me as I gave Steve’s sin and my pain to God. *Psalm 62:1* came to mind: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation” (AMP). For the first time, I was silent. I didn’t say anything to Steve. I didn’t complain to my friends. I didn’t call my counselor. Instead, God helped me see Steve’s battle rather than focus on how his addiction affected me. While Steve looked to pornography for comfort, I realized I too looked for comfort in things besides God – things such as food and shopping. Within a week, Steve announced, “I’ve made an appointment with a counselor,” something I’d pleaded with him to do many times.

He confessed he’d never sought counseling before because he was ashamed. And what was my natural response when I caught him in the act? To shame him. I had been part of the problem.

When I got out of the way, Steve was able to turn to God for healing. Giving our marriage to God isn’t a one-time deal; it’s something I have to do over and over.

Recently my parents reached their fiftieth wedding anniversary. As I joined in celebrating their lasting love for each other, I reflected on God’s faithfulness through their tough times. And ours. I’m looking forward to our fiftieth. We only have 24 more years to go. When Steve and I reach that milestone, I’ll give God the credit. I’ll shout, “What a miracle!” – and

even more loudly, “What a Miracle Worker!”

## **I Was Sexually Abused** **But I’m finally healing from the pain of my past.**

By Joy Michaels

It was a sunny afternoon, and my parents were at a church function when my 13-year-old brother called me into his bedroom to show me some magazine pictures. “This is how a man and woman have babies,” he told me, pointing to a photo of a naked man and woman having sex. I’d never seen pornography before.

“You want to try it, just for fun?” he asked, as he stuffed the Penthouse magazine under his mattress. “You’re too young to have a baby anyway,” he assured me.

I followed innocently as he led me to a twin bed stored in the basement. Instructing me to undress, he did the same. Then he fondled me. I was only seven.

For the next few years, my brother periodically compelled me to meet him in his bedroom or in the basement. We never had actual coitus, but a few times he tied my legs to the bed frame, and when I let out a scream, he threatened to get me in big trouble. One time he left me naked and strapped to his bed. Alone in his room, I wept as I struggled to wriggle free.

Confused and ashamed, I couldn’t bear to tell anyone – especially my Christian parents – what was going on. They trusted him implicitly, letting him

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baby-sit my four-year-old sister and me. My brother swore me to secrecy, and I felt the heavy burden of that secret.

At school, I discovered none of my girlfriends knew much about sex, so I played dumb. I was fearful and insecure, putting pressure on myself to appear normal. But at night, I'd often cry and pray to Jesus to let me die in my sleep so I could be with him in heaven.

Once my mother discovered a cartoon I'd drawn of a naked person being tickled by a big feather machine. When she asked me about it, I was so embarrassed, I cried and denied there was any significance to the cartoon. She let it go, crumbling the paper and dropping it into a wastebasket. There went my chance for intervention.

When I turned 11, my independent nature kicked in. Although I'd always felt ashamed about what was going on between my brother and me, it was then I finally realized something was seriously wrong with his behavior. In a moment of courage one evening while my parents were out, I turned down his advances. When he tried to persuade me with a few quarters (a temptation, because money was tight in our family), I still said no. He stopped pursuing me for sexual stimulation, but I later learned he went after my precious sister, a sweet, sensitive girl who wanted that money in order to buy candy.

In high school and college, I masked my insecurity and poor self-image by getting high grades. Although I'd always wanted to remain a virgin until marriage, I often wondered if I still qualified. So when a

college boyfriend finally pressured me into sex, I felt too defenseless to say no.

After graduation, I drifted from my Christian upbringing, moved out of state, and continued to date guys who weren't good for me.

My secret continued well into my twenties, until I flew home to spend a weekend at my sister's house while her husband was out of town. While chatting on her bed, we ended up cautiously and painfully revealing some of our childhood secrets. My little sister cried as she remembered the horror of being chased and cornered in the basement, where my brother and his buddy took advantage of her. We each knew about the magazines he'd kept under his mattress. We each suspected my brother's friend had introduced him to pornography just when he male hormones were kicking in.

After unearthing some of those long-buried secrets and drying each other's tears, my sister and I felt some relief, but also self-pity and anger. I wondered if my relationship woes were somehow tied to my loss of innocence in childhood. My sister figured her lack of interest in sex was because of the incest. Naively, we encouraged each other to forgive, and get on with life. I tried, but didn't get very far.

When a volatile relationship I was in ended in heartbreak, I decided to move closer to my roots. Depressed from failing to fix my life, I temporarily stayed with a friend who, unbeknownst to me, had become a Christian. She told me daily about the power of Jesus to heal and save. I've grown up hearing the gospel, but never considered having a personal relationship with Christ before. I soon surrendered my life to him, and began to

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pray God would restore my innocence and heal me from the sexual abuse of my childhood.

I craved justice, but didn't want to cause a family feud. One night I decided to tell my father just enough to indicate my brother hadn't acted appropriately toward me as a young girl. My timing wasn't so great (it was Thanksgiving), and my father found my story distressing and hard to believe. (He said he'd spent a lot of time with my brother growing up, fishing and mowing lawns, for example, to keep him out of trouble.) I was devastated. How could he think I'd make up something like that? On another occasion, my parents came to visit me, and I lamented the way my life had gone, suggesting my brother was partly to blame. My mother sympathized with me, but I was desperate for my dad to acknowledge what had happened and to put his arms around me and comfort me. Instead, he told me he'd asked my brother about it, and wondered if I was confusing incest with "child's play." I raged at my dad until my mother frantically called a halt to our argument.

Eventually, I saw a Christian counselor who tenderly prayed with me. He used the Bible to show my view of God was incomplete. Yes, God was almighty and powerful, but he seemed unfamiliar and distant –not the heavenly Father who cared deeply for me. Overtime, my counselor helped me change my viewpoint and deal with the issue of forgiveness – toward my brother and my father. I began to accept that my dad may never respond the way I'd like, but that God understands and has adopted me into his family (Rom. 8:15-18). As I've grown in my faith, my desire to be vindicated has lessened, and my relationship with my

parents has improved greatly. My sister and I also remain close.

A few years ago, I met with my brother, now married with his own family, and prayerfully confronted him about the past. He talked of a somewhat strained relationship with Dad, but denied most of his incestuous conduct or diminished the severity of it. I told him I forgave him anyway, that my attitude didn't depend on his response. However, when another relationship fizzled months later, I felt anger and sadness all over again. Forgiveness, I'm realizing, is something I'll need to practice whenever hurt feelings come to mind.

On one occasion I tried to talk to my brother about the dangers of pornography – its addictive nature, its degradation of women, its perversion of sex – but he didn't fully agree. He says he's a Christian, but it's not clear he's turned from this sin, as the Bible commands.

Despite the far-reaching ravages of pornography and sexual abuse, I don't blame my brother for the botched-up decisions I made in adulthood. (After all, I alone am responsible to God for my sinful actions.) Instead, I pray my brother will one day experience the forgiveness and grace I've experienced. And I thank God for saving me from a few potentially disastrous marriages and for teaching me to trust him with my life and future – whether or not I marry. Thanks to my church, I'm learning to adopt healthier dating habits and use discernment in my friendships with men.

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God, who brings good out of evil, has given me an empathy for abused women. Some statistics show one out of five girls are sexually abused before they reach adulthood – usually by a close relative. That number is likely to increase as long as society tolerates pornography, the impetus for sexual molestation, rape, and other crimes. My prayer is that Christians will oppose porn at every level – on the Internet, on screen, in bookstores, in their homes.

The greatest healing I've received isn't from a psychologist or a counselor, but from God's Word. I agree with Psalm 27:1, which says, "The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?" I don't need to dredge up the past repeatedly; I don't need to hold a lifelong grudge against the one who stole my innocence; I don't even need to claim victim status. I'm of inestimable worth to the God who fashioned me in my mother's womb. His Son, Jesus, has borne my griefs and carried my sorrows. Through his power, I can overcome my past. The longer I follow God, the more optimistic I am that I can laugh at the days to come.

Mother Teresa once stated that Jesus Christ is the Way to be walked, the Truth to be taught, and the Life to be led. I've found this to be true. He can redeem any life. He can restore innocence and joy. I'm living proof.

### **The Real Reason Men Don't Ask For Directions**

(and other baffling behaviors explained)  
by Jim Watkins

If you're in any kind of relationship with carbon-based life forms of the opposite

gender, you've already figured out there's a big difference between you and them. And it goes way beyond those health-class movies from junior high! John Gray may believe Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus, but I've decided we're from two separate galaxies far, far away. In fact, I think the differences between men and women are the strongest evidence that God has a sense of humor. So here's an attempt to help those of you with XX chromosomes understand the delightful (and disturbing!) differences between the genders.

The male hormone testosterone, which contributes to their competitive, aggressive nature, may explain some of the following contradictory behaviors:

**A.** Male subjects exhibit "male-pattern blindness," creating the ability to spot a '69 Corvette at a mile and a half, but a failure to see the ketchup in the refrigerator.

Some researchers speculate that since men were hunters in earlier centuries, males have adapted an incredible ability to see prey at great distances. For instance, in pioneer days civilization could continue only if Pa and his strapping sons could spot elk at a mile and a half. It was not, however, essential for survival to find his clean britches.

This attribute has produced males with highly discriminating vision – able to see buffalo, sports cars, and hardware stores at incredible distances but oblivious to water rings on coffee tables, an inch of dust on their desks, or bills that were overdue last week.

While males tend to possess long-range sight, they have extremely short-range

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patience. Thus, if the subject hasn't found something within a few micro-seconds, he resorts to whining, "Where are my tennis shoes?"

**B.** Another perplexing phenomenon: males who admit they can't find their car keys in their own home, yet refuse to stop for directions while searching for Ralph's Reptile Reserve 10 states away! Male researchers are stumped. (Perhaps because they refuse to ask why this is happening.)

Others claim men have tiny deposits of iron at the base of the nose that act as a compass, so males instinctively know when they're facing north. Of course, this does no good when they don't know if Ralph's is to the west or east of their current location.

**C.** Testosterone poisoning also can lead to males who display sophisticated sensory motor skills, such as picking up a 7-10 split at the bowling alley, but who seem incapable of picking up their dirty socks at home.

The competitive nature produced by testosterone causes men to love challenges (and to be obnoxious board-game players). But quite frankly, picking up dirty clothes doesn't qualify as a challenge worthy of their finely honed athletic skills.

Finally figuring this out, a friend of my wife's installed a toy basketball rim over the clothes hamper. Her two "children" (ages 3 and 25) now enjoy slam-dunking their skivvies and going for three-point shots with their socks.

The secrete, then, is to make every task a challenge. "Honey, we need milk. I wish

you could go get me some, but I don't know ... the car's making a funny noise, there's a lot of traffic out there, and you know how obnoxious that clerk at the Quickie Mart can be. Maybe you'd better not go there."

He'll change the spark plugs faster than an Indy pit crew and speed through rush-hour traffic to do battle with "Vermin" the clerk!

Don't think you women are immune. There's a parallel condition known as estrogen poisoning, which causes equally baffling behaviors. High levels of estrogen have been proven to cause females to actually believe that ...

**A.** Turning the thermostat to 95 degrees will cause a room to reach 70 degrees sooner;

**B.** They will actually win the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes;

**C.** Men on soap operas, who have the personality of a women's best girlfriend and the pecs of a longshoreman, actually exist outside the female scriptwriter's word processor. Even worse, estrogen-poisoned women expect their men to become these sensitive souls with abs of steel.

Researchers have discovered that people who learn to adjust to these hormonal habits and accept them as harmless afflictions exhibit a higher degree of satisfaction in relationships with the opposite gender. And let's face it,

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God made us each the way we are, so these quirky characteristics can't be all bad. The more we understand and attempt to appreciate these unique qualities, the easier it will be to live in harmony – or at least without killing each other!