

into our spirits! Prayer is KEY! It does not involve a daily ritual—in fact, true time out with God requires that we be willing to get BEYOND the ritual and really learn to commune with Him! It does not involve a set place—in fact, true communion, or relationship (less religious word!), does not even happen at a set place and in a set way but rather ALL ALONG THE WAY!

In Hosea 2:16, we see our broken-hearted God wanting much, much more than this STUFF that we so commonly offer Him as a relationship. He wants to walk with us and talk with us and show us HIS heart while we walk with Him and talk with Him and show Him our heart! He wants to be our very first love! He wants to be our soul satisfaction! Nothing or no one else satisfies! Nothing or no one else brings contentment! No other relationship is able to compare! Tired and weary? Cast ALL of your cares at His feet! Pour your WHOLE cup out! Then...wait upon the Lord and soon your cup will be overflowing!

Get ALONE with God Regularly!

Relationship is MORE than just communication and our relationship with God is TOO! There is just something about getting into the presence of God and just basking there!

As we look back at the life of Jesus, we see that He made this a priority in His life too. Jesus made time in His busy schedule for God as His first priority! We see that as He began His earthly ministry, He began by entering into a time of solitude in the desert. His time alone with God did not end there. In Mark 1:35, we see that "in the morning, long before daylight, He got up and went out to a deserted place, and there He prayed. (Mark 1:35)." Also, Luke 6:12 says, "Now in those days it occurred that He went up into a mountain to pray, and spent the whole night in prayer to God." Just Jesus ALONE with God!

Oh, but Jesus did not get alone with God just in the lull of things. Rather, He knew how vital ALONE time with God was. We see in His life time-after-time that He consistently pulled back in the thick of demands! Luke 5:16 comes in the midst of His growing fame and growing crowds and in turn, growing ministry needs. We see in Luke 5:16 that Jesus withdrew to the wilderness/desert and prayed.

Even during the most difficult and painful situation of all—the crucifixion—we see that He prefaced the toughest of times by pulling aside to be alone with God! There is just something about solitude to equip and sustain the man and woman of God perfectly for their call! This is MORE than just a snippet of prayer, Bible Study, and quiet time! It is DEFINITELY more than just that weekly (or yearly!) visit to church. This is a time of retreat to get alone with God!

Some of the best advice that I have been given by those pouring into my life and ministry has been the counsel to set aside REGULAR times to pull back, pull away, and snuggle up to the Lord for a season of refreshment, renewal, and refueling! I laugh, but I don't just get this "counsel" occasionally when I am tired and weary. I am delighted that so many people care about me enough to constantly remind me to make it a *regular thing*, not an exception! Sure, at the point of exhaustion, mighty warriors need MORE time alone with God, possibly a whole season, but I am talking about the need for something more preventive in our journey: *REGULAR time alone with God!*

Now, I can almost imagine the response here, "OH, this is not FOR ME, I am not in ministry..." "OH! I have a quiet time..." Beloved, this is not just a ministry tip! This is a necessary way of life!

Right here in the pages of Jesus' "daily planner," we see the priority that He gave to solitude. We see that He did not let the other "to-do's" steal the time from Him. In fact, it seems from these passages if you will take a closer look, as though the busier He was the MORE He pulled back, pulled aside, and snuggled up close the Father! Here in Scripture, we also see that He did not let His environment influence whether or not He pulled back into solitude. Rather, it seems that His environment brought about a greater need to get alone in the presence of God! So, whether we are needing to prepare for our call as so many of the great men and women throughout time (which happened to also pull aside for a season in solitude) OR we are needing more strength for our daily walk, follow the example of Jesus and take time out to get completely alone with God!

Time to Learn!

Looking back to the life of Jesus, we see that although being completely God incarnate, Jesus was also completely human! Does it excite you as much as it does me when you read of how Jesus kept learning and how Jesus kept teaching the greatest truths through things He did in His everyday life? Even as a child until His death, we see that Jesus never stopped learning and growing.

While not written on this topic, Romans 2:21 still gets me back to the basics! It says, "Well then, you who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" This little verse brings me SO much conviction! My ministry began from my TOTAL addiction to the Word of God! It is funny when I think back to my childhood and remember one of my greatest delights of watching my Daddy. I remember his total delight in Scripture. Those verses that God gave JUST to Daddy would FIRE him up! I loved that!

As I grew up and began my own family life, one of the things that God began to do for ME was to take His Word and not just make it a thing for my parents...or my pastor...or for missionaries. He made it mine! I began to know verse-by-verse that awesome delight that Daddy had in Scripture! Then, came ministry—simply sharing those delights with others!

What is YOUR story? Well, let me share the warning...

Yep! The warning is that it is so very easy to get so busy teaching our children... writing our Bible Studies... teaching our workshops/Bible Studies... that we forget our first love and get stale in our relationship! Then, you know what happens next! We try to keep on in our own strength. We try to pour out what is not inside. We get more and more malnourished. Eventually, we fall back or drop out! Even among those that are "learning," probably there is a greater need than realized since "learning" is probably just more like "preparing" for the next lesson! Even those that have a regular time set aside, it may just be that you are probably already "learning" but just need to make the most of each and every moment!

This is not what our precious Lord wants! It is not what WE want! So, as we follow the footsteps of Jesus, we need to take TIME OUT to learn!

How? Bible Study and Bible Reading needs to get beyond boredom! Actually, we need to keep on

reading until we get our FOOD for the day! Prayer needs to become more—sitting there and not getting up until we have poured our whole heart out and soaked in the heart of God! Worship needs to get beyond the rules and regulations...the preferences and quirks...we need to get into the presence of God! We do not ever need to stop growing and learning! We constantly need to keep feeding our minds!

Our minds are no different from our children's minds. We are created as hungry beings that must be nourished each and every day. One of the reasons that our children are not learning in schools today is that the diet that is served up in their lessons is simply disgusting! Their young minds need great ideas to feed and nourish their souls and help them to continue to grow healthy!

Likewise, we are no different than our precious children! Talking to moms, so many of us almost feel that taking time to ourselves even to have a quiet time is an indulgence, much less to keep learning and growing—that becomes...well, SIN! (Ha! Just in OUR eyes, not in God's eyes!!)

Actually, what happens as we keep our hearts and souls malnourished on a diet of fast-mind and spirit food, we actually get into silly sins and miss God's best for our lives.

Time alone with God is critical to our spiritual preservation! Knowing our life purpose is essential if we are to step up to our call. But, we must keep on learning and growing in order to stick it out for the long-haul!

Time OUT!

It is time for us to take some TIME OUT! We need to kick back and really search out what God has called us to do! We need to live a life ON purpose for our purpose! We need to make a commitment for a deeper relationship with God than ever before! As we regularly withdraw to be alone with God in prayer, we are strengthened by God, Himself!

Ever feel weak and weary? Ever feel too feeble to do great things for God? Draw strength from the Master! Learn of Christ! Cut it all back to the MAIN thing! Try withdrawing from your life for a little while each day...try to set aside regular time to get alone with God...keep on learning and growing! I guarantee that you will come away not only with strength, but also the inspiration to do the work that God has set aside for you alone!

Withdrawal to your time away will have another benefit. You will mature much quicker because you will have that renewed mind that God promises! You will understand the things of God. This will help you to turn away from the "busyness" of daily life so you can get an eternal perspective on a daily basis! Withdrawing to God will comfort you in the tough times, give you the security of an intimacy with God in times of loneliness, and give you a passion for Him that will turn our culture upside down!

Sound easy...but, you KNOW it is difficult! I know! There is a battle waged from our enemy to keep us OFF of our knees, too busy to spend time with God, and too focused on the urgent to get around to the eternal! So...ready for some time out? Go for it and let your Heavenly Father FILL YOUR CUP!

The Starfish...

There was a young man walking down a deserted beach just before dawn. In the distance he saw a frail old man. As he approached the old man, he saw him picking up stranded starfish and throwing them back into the sea. The young man gazed in wonder as the old man again and again threw the small starfish from the sand to the water. He asked, "Old man, why do you spend so much energy doing what seems to be a waste of time?" The old man explained that the stranded starfish would die if left in the morning sun. "But there must be thousands of beaches and millions of starfish!" exclaimed the young man. "How can you make a difference?" The old man looked at the small starfish in his hand and as he threw it to the safety of the sea, he said, "It makes a difference to this one!"

OH! It's My Flesh Again!

By Cindy Rushton

"I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise. So if I can't be trusted to figure out what is best for myself and then do it, it becomes obvious that God's command is necessary. But I need something more! For if I know the law but still can't keep it, and if the power of sin within me keeps sabotaging my best intentions, I obviously need help! I realize that I don't have what it takes. I can will it, but I can't do it. I decide to do good, but I don't really do it; I decide not to do bad, but then I do it anyway. My decisions, such as they are, don't result in actions. Something has gone wrong deep within me and gets the better of me every time. It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and then just when I least expect it, they take charge. I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different."

Relate? This passage from Romans 7 in *The Message* COMPLETELY verbalizes that struggle that we all face inside, especially when battling against sin and its web of desire!

Now, I am not talking about those ABOMINATIONS. Instead, I am talking about my "less disgusting" (well, unless you ask my husband!) sins. You know...like those of my mouth! Oops—I am feeling the pang now! "It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up." I MEAN to encourage my family. I WANT to stay callllmmmm! I really do not want to scream...or nag...or fuss...or, (EEK!!) be contentious! But, just let me make a commitment to walk faithfully and it is like unleashing the battle for my soul!

That is not all! Ummm...my temper! "I've spent a long time in sin's prison. What I don't understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then I act another, doing things I absolutely despise."

I really do not want for anyone to spot that good old German temper. I have "worked" for my whole life to get rid of it...well, at minimum, cover it up! Actually, if there were one thing that I have asked the Lord to remove, bind, heal, otherwise-quench, it is my true-blue Gunter temper!

About the time that I make a renewed commitment...there it happens! The test of all tests!

Developing temperance requires that we face situations in which we USE temperance... humm...

then, my very own flesh contradicts EVERYTHING that I wish in my heart and soul!

We are indeed in the midst of a battle waging against the very soul of man and woman! The first step in waging effective warfare is first getting to *know our enemies*.

Yes...we find in Scripture that we do battle against *Satan*. He began his assault against humanity at the beginning of time. We learn in 1 Peter 5:8 that he is still busy battling against us so much so that we must, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour..."

Certainly, this enemy is alive and well! The devil stalks, waiting for any opportunity to chew us up and spit us out! But, far too often, our we give the devil WAY TOO MUCH credit! There are other enemies of our soul that also wait to pounce upon us.

Another host of enemies is described in Scripture as we learn that we are battling "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

Oh! Those enemies seem to present such warfare! A real battle! Blow-for-blow! But! I am afraid that most often we never face those enemies because they need not hit us for us to be ineffective! Rather, our greatest enemy is *WITHIN* battling every time we make a commitment, a vow, a resolution, a deep resolve. Every time we find conviction and follow that conviction in repentance... this enemy seems to rise up to challenge us! At the very point of testing and trial, this enemy is right there, ready to trip us up! AND...boy does this one know JUST what buttons to push!

If there is one error that we all make which tends to set us up for failure in our daily walk with God, it is denial of this ruthless enemy!

Regardless of our good intentions... Regardless of our great commitments... Regardless of our history with the Lord... This enemy is ruthless. It finds every opportunity to trip us. Even if we didn't struggle with other enemies, this enemy is quite enough to keep us busy! In fact, much of the time that we plead, "The devil made me do it," we have no one to blame but our own stinking flesh!

But? What on earth do we do?

First, *KNOW that God has ALL we need* to win each and every battle! On the cross, Jesus Christ did ALL it takes to make us VICTORS! Take a look at 2 Peter 1 in *The Amplified Bible*:

"May grace (God's favor) and peace (which is perfect well-being, all necessary good, all spiritual prosperity, and freedom from fears and agitating passions and moral conflicts) be multiplied to you in [the full, personal, precise, and correct] knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. For His divine power has bestowed upon us all things that [are requisite and suited] to life and godliness, through the [full, personal] knowledge of Him Who called us by and to His own glory and excellence (virtue). By means of these He has bestowed on us His precious and exceedingly great promises, so that through them you may escape [by flight] from the moral decay (rotteness and corruption) that is in the world because of covetousness (lust

and greed), and become sharers (partakers) of the divine nature. For this very reason, adding your diligence [to the divine promises], employ every effort in exercising your faith to develop virtue (excellence, resolution, Christian energy), and in [exercising] virtue [develop] knowledge (intelligence), And in [exercising] knowledge [develop] self-control, and in [exercising] self-control [develop] steadfastness (patience, endurance), and in [exercising] steadfastness [develop] godliness (piety), And in [exercising] godliness [develop] brotherly affection, and in [exercising] brotherly affection [develop] Christian love. For as these qualities are yours and increasingly abound in you, they will keep [you] from being idle or unfruitful unto the [full personal] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One). For whoever lacks these qualities is blind, [spiritually] shortsighted, seeing only what is near to him, and has become oblivious [to the fact] that he was cleansed from his old sins.

Snuggle up close to God! KNOW that He has "bestowed" on us and placed within us ALL that we need to be VICTORIOUS in each and every battle we face! He died to give us this VICTORY! Grab a hold of all of your resources! You will find victory against those struggles!

Secondly, **KNOW that the ONE Who is IN YOU is GREATER than your most difficult struggle!** Take a peek at 1 John 4:4 in *The Amplified Bible*:

"Little children, you are of God [you belong to Him] and have [already] defeated and overcome them [the agents of the antichrist], because He Who lives in you is greater (mightier) than he who is in the world."

Christ IN US! Wow! This is one of the greatest keys to the battles that we face! In 2 Chronicles 20, we see that when Jehoshaphat faced almost overwhelming enemies, the first thing that he did was GO TO GOD! He declared a time of fasting and seeking God for himself AND his entire nation. As a result, God stepped up to battle FOR HIM!

We are so very blessed in our day as Christians to have total access to this same, awesome Almighty God at the moment that any of our enemies rise up against us! As a Christian, we have inherited a relationship with the God of All Hosts! All we need do as our enemies begin to surround and attack us mercilessly is GO TO GOD in prayer and worship! At that instant, we unleash our Lord! The battle is won by the One Who is within us! The Holy One IN US is greater than any struggle or battle that we face!

Finally, **KNOW that you HAVE ALREADY overcome!** If you are in Christ, you are an overcomer! Go back to 1 John 4:4. Look at it in the *New American Standard Version*:

"You are from God, little children, and HAVE OVERCOME them; because greater is He Who is in you than he who is in the world."

This verse promises that God has given us complete victory! We are overcomers! Not just overcomers when we battle against the devil. Not just overcomers when we battle against the world. But, ALSO overcomers when we battle against our own rotten flesh!

Want victory? **KNOW** your position! You are an overcomer! You are not designed to stay in a position of constantly being overwhelmed!

God has made provision for each of us to be victorious when battling our enemies!! Jesus did not die for his children so that his enemies could wipe us out on the battlefield! In fact, on the cross, the battle was **FINISHED!**

Paul, the same author of Romans 7 (the beginning passage of this article), also penned another verse that has become my heart's cry during the past few years. In fact, in Philippians 3: 12 he verbalized more than my heart's cry, he also gives us a challenge that can help us in the midst of our own battles.

Take a look at this passage:

"Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) *and* make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me *and* made me His own."

In John 10:10, Christ was specific about what He truly wanted to "lay a hold of" for us:

"The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)."

Isn't this **AWESOME???** Imagine the difference in our world if we all **REALLY GOT THIS** as Paul wrote about in Philippians 3:12?? I think that we **ALL** tend to miss this and not grab a hold of **ALL** that Jesus has set aside for us as our inheritance!

Grasp onto **ALL** that Jesus Christ has died in order to give **YOU!** Jesus died for **MORE** than just our salvation! He died to provide for us much, much more than a "life insurance policy!" Rather, Jesus died in order that we could have access to **ALL** that we need to live a life of abundance! A life that overflows in goodness! A life of joy! What about you? I feel like Paul did. If Jesus gave His **ENTIRE LIFE** for me to have it, I want it! What about you?

Take this into those struggles... One of those things that He died for was our provision to be victorious when battling our enemies!! Jesus did not die for us to live in defeat! He did not want for us to collapse in fear when the devil roars...or to fall every time that our flesh beckons! The agony that He faced on the cross enables us today to "lay a hold of" all we need for victory over our enemies today.

So, flesh or the Spirit? Frustrations or victory? Defeat or overcome? Know that **God** has **ALL** that you need to be a victor! Know that the **One IN YOU** is greater than your greatest struggle! Know that regardless of the roar of your enemy, you are **ALREADY** an overcomer!

"But I say, walk *and* live [habitually] in the [Holy] Spirit [responsive to *and* controlled *and* guided by the Spirit]; then you will certainly not gratify the cravings *and* desires of the flesh (of human nature without God)."

Galatians 5:16
(The Amplified Bible)

Stones. . .

By Carrie ten Boom

"For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

2 Corinthians 12:10

It has been said that the removal of small stones which frequently encumber the fields does not always increase the crop. In many soils they are an advantage, attracting the moisture and radiating the heat. In one experiment, the results of removing the stones were so unfavorable to the crop that they were brought back again.

We often cry to God, as Paul did, for the removal of some thorn in the flesh. Later experience teaches us that it was better for it to remain.

*Your strength, my weakness—here they always meet,
When I lay down my burden at Your feet:
The things that seem to crush will in the end
Be seen as rungs on which I did ascend!
Thank You, Lord.*

Dealing With The Dragons In Life (OR... How To Remain A Romantic In A World of Realism)

by Larry D. Wright

Life was unfair to her. Her dreams of a perfect world were shattered when a dragon invaded her space and took something that did not belong to him. For years she looked for a knight on a white stallion to charge forth and rescue her and slay all the dragons in her world. She longed for someone to appear who could find all the broken, missing pieces and make them fit together again. Floating aimlessly in a sea of insanity, she longed for her life to make sense.

As wounded people are apt to do, she dreamed of living in a remote castle surrounded by a moat where she would be protected from all the fire-breathing dragons in the kingdom. It would be a safe place to live and one that would shield her from other shattering experiences in life.

The knight never came. She never found the castle. The shattered pieces of her life remained scattered and the dragon from the past would not go away. In fact, more dragons came after him.

All the dragons in her life seemed to have the same purpose. They threatened to blow out the dim flame of hope, fairness and decency that flickered deep within. Her dream of an immaculate world was tainted as the grimy footprints of an ugly dragon smudged the landscape of her previously chaise life.

When I met her she was dangerously close to becoming a dragon herself because dragons perpetuate other dragons through the people they violate creating a vicious cycle. This explains why there are more dragons flourishing in the forest than free people who build castles in the mountains.

When the world of our dreams and the world of reality collide, the result is shattered dreams, resentment and a sense of helplessness that eventually gives way to the poison of bitterness. The question is, "What do you do with the fragmented pieces of a shattered life?" Better yet, "What do you do with the dragons who invade your world?" How does a romantic live in a real world? By the term *romantic*, I mean a mind-set, an outlook, a perspective that tends to be adventurous in nature and is definitely idealistic in its approach to the way life is suppose to be and how problems are solved. Romanticism is a paradigm. It is a pair of glasses through which a person views the world.

The good news is that when your dream of a perfect world is shattered, you can live in a world that has broken pieces and old dragons but you must make some choices along the way. You can choose to be bitter and you can be determined to become better. The outcome is a result of your choice.

Joseph Epstein in his book *Ambition: The Secret Passion* writes: "...we do choose how we shall live: courageously or in cowardice, honorably or dishonorably, with purpose or adrift. But no matter how indifferently the universe may be to our choices and decisions, these choices and decisions are ours to make. We decide. We choose. And as we decide and choose, so are our lives formed".

The bottom line is this...we make our choices and our choices make us. You choose to become a dragon or you choose to live as a free person in the kingdom. Choices swing on the hinge of opportunity so when a dragon invades your space, you are faced with the opportunity to make a choice.

The dragons in life may steal some things from you, making you feel violated. They may even inflict pain so that you hurt. They may breath intimidating fire so that you cringe. They are still dragons and you are still free. You can choose to live in the kingdom as one who is free, dream big dreams and pursue those dreams until they become reality or you can become another dragon.

When you allow the dragons in life to extinguish your flame, in the darkness you come to realize that you have become like them, another dragon. It's easy to be a dragon...quite challenging to be a dreamer...down right difficult to be a dragon slayer. I know. I have had to slay a few dragons in my life so I am confident that it can be done. If you are a person involved in mortal combat with a dragon from your past, you need to know that you do not have to live in hiding. You can be free... free from the dragons in life...free from the frustration of shattered dreams.

Praying Patiently *By Mrs. Charles Cowman*

"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Psalm 37:7

Have you prayed and prayed and waited and waited, and still there is no manifestation?

Are you tired of seeing nothing move? Are you just at the point of giving it all up? Perhaps you have not waited in the right way. This would take you out of the right place—the place where He can meet you.

"With patience wait" (Romans 8:25). Patience takes away *worry*. He said He would come, and His promise is equal to His presence. Patience takes away your *weeping*. Why feel sad and despondent? He knows your need better than you do, and His purpose in waiting is to bring more glory out of it all. Patience takes away *self-works*. The work He desires is that you "believe" (John 6:29), and when you believe, you may then know that all is well.

Patience takes away all *want*. Your desire for the thing you wish is perhaps stronger than your desire for the will of God to be fulfilled in its arrival.

Patience takes away all *weakening*. Instead of having the delaying time, a time of letting go, know that God is getting a larger supply ready and must get you ready, too!

Patience takes away all *wobbling*. "Made me stand upon my standing" (Daniel 8:18). God's foundations are steady; and when His patience is within, we are steady while we wait. Patience gives *worship*. A praiseful patience sometimes "longsuffering with joyfulness" (Colossians 1:11) is the best part of it all.

"Let (all these phases of) patience have her perfect work" (James 1:4) while you wait, and you will find great enrichment.

*Hold steady when the fires burn,
When inner lessons come to learn,
And from this path there seems no turn—
"Let patience have her perfect work."*

Praying God's Way

Author Unknown

I asked God to take away my pain.
God said, "No. It is not for me to take away, but for you to give it up."

I asked God to make my handicapped child whole.
God said, "No. His spirit is whole, his body is only temporary."

I asked God to grant me patience.
God said, "No. I give you blessings, happiness is up to you."

I asked God to spare me pain.
God said, "No. Suffering draws you apart from worldly cares
and brings you closer to me."

I asked God to make my spirit grow.
God said, "No. You must grow on your own, but I will
prune you to make you fruitful."

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life.
God said, "No. I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things."

I asked God to help me love others as much as He loves me.
God said, "Ahhhh, finally you have the idea!"

Ministering To The Hurting...

By Cindy Rushton

Have a beloved friend in great pain? Have no idea how to help—really help? Great! This is for YOU! Grief is never easy. Even going through the same kind of grief over and over cannot prepare one for the fresh pain of more grief! But, God CAN use us to minister to the hurting. Here are some things that have blessed (and even HURT) us through the years of our tough times that may help you to minister to those that hurt in your sphere of influence...

- ⇒ **Jot a note of encouragement.** Have no idea what to say? Don't sermonize! Don't simplify the painful situation! Surely, don't give your "wisdom" or theological beliefs. Instead, send a sweet card. Include a Bible Verse that has ministered to you in tough times...a neat quote that has been special to you in your darkest moments...a poem or hymn that has blessed you in your struggles.
- ⇒ **Let THEM talk!** So much swarms inside during grief! It is so precious when friends or family sit down and just LISTEN! No lectures! No judgment! Just listen! Listen to those memories of the person...what happened...how they are feeling... Just let them talk!
- ⇒ **Weep!** Jeremiah 9: 20 tells us to teach our daughters how to weep and mourn. There is a great ministry need for us to join in weeping with those who weep and mourning with those that mourn! Just taking the time to really care ministers to the heart in a mighty way. In a society that is busier than ever, this sets the godly apart! Get into the lives of others. Seek to understand and truly empathize! Carry the burden with those that are hurting. Show God! Be a vessel used by God to reflect a glimpse of the heart of God! Show to others a God Who is our "with us" God!
- ⇒ **Let them cry!** I KNOW how hard it is to let someone you love cry! It is just so tough! BUT! Crying is a release that leads to healing! Crying lets the grieving one let go of their "air" of strength and release their pain and grief. There is nothing like the release of a good cry! I remember one time that my daughter looked up to me and said, "Mommy, you need to cry...you can lay down in MY lap and just cry!" Talk about bringing on the tears. I laid down in her sweet little lap. She caressed my face and rubbed my face while I just cried and cried and cried myself to sleep. I could just be ME! I could just pour out my heart! I woke up and this sweet little girl was still sitting there rubbing my head and looking down at me with complete love! I need not tell you how precious that memory is to me! Make a memory by ministering to the heart of those that you love!
- ⇒ **Take a special meal for the family.** If you are part of their church or support group, also help to organize meals for a period of time. Keep in mind that meals that can also be frozen and served later are great for the days when others forget. Carry dishes that are disposable!

Plan meals that can go far! I love to carry soups/salads/homemade bread or a meal like lasagna/salad/homemade bread. Of course, brownies or chocolate is always a hit! Meals take a BIG load off of those that need to rest and be nurtured a bit! PLUS, it helps SO much to know your family's fed well!

- ⇒ **Be there!** We just got home from Papaw Glenn's funeral. I mentioned to Mrs. Rushton and Harold that it was simply phenomenal to watch the ministry of those that stepped up to the call of ministering to our family during this tough time! The funeral home was packed every single minute. Even meals prepared for the family by two separate churches were so special with those that took the TIME to go above and beyond just making a meal—they were THERE to minister to each and every one of us. No cliché' answers or great "grief war stories" to "touch" our hearts. It was the simplicity of BEING THERE. Sweet hugs. Sweet smiles. REAL concern! AND keep coming! Especially after others begin to forget!
- ⇒ **Laugh!** Yes! Now, this is not counsel to be crude, rude, or inconsiderate! However, laughter brings healing! For the longest time during our losses, I just wanted to be able to grieve, yet still laugh. It seemed as though everyone around me was so tense that I just wanted for everyone to lighten up and laugh with me a bit! One of my favorite gifts was a DVD featuring Chonda Pierce. From the first seconds, I laughed harder than I had laughed in years. All of the sudden life fell into perspective...my joy was spurred on...life became more doable again. So, find a way to laugh in the midst of tears. You will minister to the heart of those who are hurting!
- ⇒ **Pray!** Oh! The power in prayer! This really should be first on the list! There are times that ALL you can do is pray. But, even when the situation allows for other means of ministry, prayer is the mightiest gift you can give to a friend! A friend of mine shared with me this past week about how the Lord was convicting her of the importance of intercessory prayer and the void left when we fail to step up to the call to pray. Just think of the difference that intercession made as Moses stepped up to the mountain in prayer while the Israelites battled the Amalekites (symbolizing *the flesh* in Scripture). Even Moses had helpers while he interceded. What a difference it made with the whole crew loose during the battle. First, the battle would have been impossible without those valiant warriors on the battlefield. Then, we see that God used Moses to intercede and point those warriors to the Lord during their battle. But, with those valiant warriors AND Moses loose, still the battle was going back and forth swaying between victory and defeat—well, until Aaron and Hur stepped up to the call to hold up Moses' weary arms. Then! Victory! Your loved ones may be battling for their very lives, but you have a weapon with great power! When you want to wage war on their behalf, fall down on your knees and pray till heaven moves! You will be sure to minister to the hurting in a mighty way!
- ⇒ **Don't use grief as an opportunity to "practice" your doctrines on others!** I think that after 7 years of infertility intermingled with loss, I can say confidently that there is NOTHING that I have not heard yet...but, I am ever amazed at the insane things that "Christians" will say in an effort to minister to others...hummmmm! I don't want to sound crude, but DON'T! Trust me, it is better that I share this suggestion than YOU hurt someone deeply in the midst of a precious opportunity to minister to them! When a loved one is in the midst of a trial, they MOST need our presence and concern...not our explanations, judgment, or assumptions of what

God is up to or what WE think God is all about! So, hug...smile...touch...but *GUARD* that tongue! Don't be guilty of being like Job's friends...or wife...hummm!

- ⇒ **After the whirlwind of activities, plan a special time out together!** Treat them to a special time out! Tea? Coffee? Antique shopping? Scrapbooking? Find something just FUN and bless them! Don't forget to let them talk if they want...AND watch YOUR talking!
- ⇒ **Minister during those tough times.** Remember that certain days will be tough... Christmas without that precious baby there! Thanksgiving without Grandma! Mother's Day after a loss of the baby—or every Mother's Day for the barren one! Oh! Mother's Day is such a tender time for those whose mothers are gone on to be with the Lord! Father's Day! Even other special family times are so hard and lonely! The hardest times are where traditions are no longer possible...or where expectations and dreams are shattered. Get to know your loved one and their heart so you can minister during those tough times!
- ⇒ **Don't forget! Anniversaries!** Talk about a precious way to minister to the hurting. Jot down the date of the loss in your Daytimer. On anniversaries, jot them a note or plan a special time out to minister to them! Anniversaries are SO tough! It may not be SEEN on the calendar of your hurting friend, but you can guarantee that it is written on their heart! Encourage them to take it easy on those anniversaries. Let them cry. Let them tell those sweet stories and memories. Talk about a blessing!
- ⇒ **Let them get REAL with you!** If there is a need in our culture, this is IT! What is it that we have allowed the devil to do among the church? I am ever amazed at the "secret sorrows" that so many Christians bear on their own. Let's bear one another's burdens...oh, is that in the Scripture? Great idea!

Oh, so much can be done to minister to others. You probably have many, many ideas too. Go for it! Just be a friend. A real friend! Stick close when those you love are hurting even though those are the toughest times to be there. It is SO hard to watch someone you love go through a time of pain and suffering, but keep in mind all throughout that nothing hurts more than going through those tough times ALONE! The little things REALLY make a big difference! Take the time to be a real friend. Let God minister through you!

In The Weaver's Hand...

By Corrie ten Boom

"Does God always give us what we ask in prayer?"

Sometimes His answer is no. He knows what we do not know. He knows everything and His negative answer is part of His plan for our lives.

My life is but a weaving, between my
God and me.
I do not choose the colors.
He works steadily.
Oftimes He weaveth sorrow, and I,
in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I,
the underside.
Not till the loom is silent and
the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas and
explain the reasons why,
The dark threads are as needful in
the skillful Weaver's hand.
As the threads of gold and silver in the
pattern He has planned.

Lord, it is hard to accept a negative answer, but keep us humble enough, patient enough, and faithful enough to trust. Thank You that You always answer our prayers in Your way with a yes or no. How good it is to know that You never make a mistake.

Maintaining Friendships

By Julie Druck

I've been recently thinking about the blessing that God has given me in friends. My friends bless my life in many ways - they encourage me, challenge me, help me and just plain give me joy.

Friendship is a wonderful thing, but just like marriage, there is some work involved to maintain friendships.

A few years ago, I did a short devotional on friendship and listed a number of things that can be done to show your friends that you care. If it's been awhile (or even if it hasn't!), since you've told a friend how much they mean to you, pick out one or two of these ideas and bless THEIR life today!

- ♥ Remember their birthday with a phone call or card.
- ♥ Give them a bouquet of flowers for no reason.
- ♥ Bake an extra batch of cookies and deliver some to your friend.
- ♥ When you see an article, postcard, or newspaper clipping of interest to a friend, send it in the mail with a short note that you were thinking of them.
- ♥ Call just to see how they're doing.
- ♥ Pray for them and hold them accountable.
- ♥ Go out for dessert and pick up the bill!
- ♥ Tell them that you love them.
- ♥ Send them a card for no reason at all.
- ♥ Be considerate with their things - quickly return all things that you borrow.
- ♥ Have them and their family over for supper.
- ♥ Surprise them with a little, unexpected gift.
- ♥ Keep their children so they can date or have an afternoon "off."
- ♥ Here's an interesting one that I read in a book somewhere: "Think twice before burdening a friend with a secret." Now that's one to think about!

I've Learned...

Author Unknown

I've learned....

That life is like a roll of toilet paper. The closer it gets to the end, the faster it goes.

I've learned....

That we should be glad God doesn't give us everything we ask for.

I've learned....

That money doesn't buy class.

I've learned....

That it's those small daily happenings that make life so spectacular.

I've learned...

That under everyone's hard shell is someone who wants to be appreciated and loved.

I've learned....

That the Lord didn't do it all in one day. What makes me think I can?

I've learned....

That to ignore the facts does not change the facts.

I've learned....

That when you plan to get even with someone, you are only letting that person continue to hurt you.

I've learned....

That love, not time, heals all wounds.

I've learned....

That the easiest way for me to grow as a person is to surround myself with people smarter than I am.

I've learned....

That everyone you meet deserves to be greeted with a smile.

I've learned....

That there's nothing sweeter than sleeping with your babies and feeling their breath on your cheeks.

I've learned....

That no one is perfect until you fall in love with them.

I've learned....

That life is tough, but I'm tougher.

I've learned....

That opportunities are never lost; someone will take the ones you miss.

I've learned....

That when you harbor bitterness, happiness will dock elsewhere.

I've learned....

That I wish I could have told my Dad that I love him one more time before he passed away.

I've learned....

That one should keep his words both soft and tender, because tomorrow he may have to eat them.

I've learned....

That a smile is an inexpensive way to improve your looks.

I've learned....

That I can't choose how I feel, but I can choose what I do about it.

I've learned....

That when your newly born child holds your little finger in his little fist, that you're hooked for life.

I've learned....

That everyone wants to live on top of the mountain, but all the happiness and growth occurs while you're climbing it.

I've learned ...

That it is best to give advice in only two circumstances; when it is requested and when it is a life threatening situation.

I've learned....

That the less time I have to work with, the more things I get done.

Celebrate Fall!

By Janet Birkey

What are you doing to celebrate this mini-holiday of the autumn season? I know that autumn is a season, but it feels like a holiday between the burn of summer and the freeze of winter. So, how we will make the most of it and celebrate this refreshing time of year?

I love to come up with fun, wonderful sounding...at least to me...ideas. Buuuuuuuutt, sometimes I'm a little slow in the implementation of those ideas. I want my kids to leave home with great memories, but I really have to be on guard that I don't spend more time planning and thinking about all that great stuff to do, rather than actually doing it!

Here are a few ways to bring a little fall fun into your life...

- . When one of my children was struggling with certain math concepts, last year, I cut fall leaves out of brightly colored paper and wrote one math problem on each leaf. I would give the child a certain amount of leaves to do each day. When they do the problem, and get it right, hang the leaf on a ficus tree. Instant fall decoration that gives the feeling of accomplishment to your child. Die cuts are great for this!
- . We have tons of pecans in our yard around Thanksgiving, so a simple basket of pecans and nut cracker welcomes all ages to our family living area. I've seen little ones and older ones help themselves and feel at home with the pecan basket.
- . Do you have a broken wooden chair? Wire it to a tree and surround it with a pumpkin, some mums, a glued on straw hat, raffia. Put an old rusty can out there with an all-weather bow on and some sticks tied up in the whole thing. Rustic is the key word! You might not have to wire your chair, but in our west Texas winds, our neighbors would enjoy our chairs more than we do if we don't wire it to the tree....and they live 1/2 mile away!
- . Baking bread. No need to hardly even mention this, but you can't NOT mention it! Serve with a hearty soup, but do it with a twist. We have a favorite soup around our house that the kids cannot get enough of...Tortilla Soup (see recipe—included in this issue). When I started making this recipe, I thought "This is just another name for vegetable soup and the kids will hate it!" But no...they LOVED it! And my kids are (sad to say) finicky vegetable eaters. Anyway, this soup already had a name, so I didn't have to come up with one, but I might've called it, "Chips for Supper Soup."

Ready? You get the idea...Add a little fun and see what you can get your kids to do.

Here's my Tortilla Soup recipe:

Tortilla Soup

Contributed by Janet Birkey

MMMMMMMM...good! This hearty soup is enough for my man that I've called Honey for over 16 years...a real steak and potatoes kind of guy!

Chicken thighs (or any parts...we just like dark meat)...cook and save the water you cook them in. How many will depend on your family.

After cooking chicken, I always **de-bone** it.

Add :

2 cans green beans

2 cans corn

1 can Ro-tel tomatoes (or 2 cans if you like!)

I usually also add 1/2 can of tomato sauce or a can of tomato paste.

Add the de-boned chicken back in the pot, sprinkle liberally with garlic. **Serve** by crushing tortilla corn-chips in a bowl, put soup on top and sprinkle liberally with cheddar cheese.

The Sin of Worry...

By Julie Druck

For the past few weeks, God has been preparing my heart for a big lesson.

In the past, when He's been about to teach me a great truth from His Word, I am aware of a great expectancy in my life. I can't quite explain it, but somehow God starts prepping my mind and heart and lets me know to watch carefully for His teaching.

That great truth was "born" this past week after reading three of Corrie ten Boom's works: "The Hiding Place," "Tramp for the Lord," and "Jesus Is Victor." These books told of Corrie's horrible experiences in Nazi prisons and concentration camps during World War II and also of her later travels around the world sharing what God taught her through hard times.

I was impressed over and over at the things that Corrie taught others - truths from the Bible that are so simple yet so profound. God used the life of this woman and the things that He taught her to teach me.

One of the things that God really "brought home" to me was the sin of worry. Yes, I said the SIN of worry. Most of us don't look at worry as a sin - we just pass it off as something that can't be helped. Many times I've heard myself say, "I know I shouldn't worry, but I can't, just can't help it." That statement is partially true: I can't help it, but God can. I was made to see that when I choose to worry about things I am, in essence saying, "God can't take care of this. This is too big (or small) for Him. I don't believe He will do what He promises." Do you see how worry disrespects and disregards God's sovereignty, His faithfulness and His trustworthiness?? That's why we are told NOT to worry.

God has promised us over and over and over in His Word that He hears, that He answers, that He cares, that He loves us. We must begin to listen to Him - either we believe God's promises or we don't. And I'm discovering that there is such a freedom in laying my burdens at His feet and CHOOSING not to worry. You see, that's what we must do time and time again - CHOOSE not to sin.

Oh, I know it's hard, but Jesus is our Victor - He is true to His word and will help us to not worry when we choose to believe and obey Him.

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?,' or 'What shall we drink?,' or 'What shall we wear?'" For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."

- Matthew 5:31-34

Make Your Own Household Notebook!

By Cherie Foss

Your daily planner is the #1 organizational "power" tool. In the process of getting organized it is central to everything else. By it, you plan and organize all other areas of your life and home. You are able to keep tabs on your schedule, activities, and plans for organization and so on. But I think another tool that is also essential is to have a **Household Notebook**.

The **Household Notebook** is just a 3-ring binder that you keep in a central place in your house usually the kitchen. Basically, it is a place to keep up with all the important papers that come through your kitchen and tend to stay there, hanging on the refrigerator or inside cabinet doors.

Instead of going through many details to describe it, I will give you a list of the kinds of things that are currently in mine to get your creative juices flowing. I will also suggest a helpful web site. To place your papers in the binder you would either need to have a hole-punch handy or, preferably, you can place a good amount of plastic sheet protectors in it. These are available at any office supply store or more cheaply in bulk at Sam's.

My **Household Notebook** is divided into the following sections: *Home Management, Activities, Miscellaneous, Coupons and Menus, and Contacts.*

In the "**Home Management**" section:

- Our daily schedule
- Chore schedule and assignments (The children each have their own copies of these but I keep them here so that I can follow up on them.)
- The list of items that we keep stocked in a box in our van. (I talked about this in the previous newsletter.)
- A spot remover guide from Don Aslett
- A sheet that discusses the various uses of OxiClean. (We love that stuff.)
- Our garbage and recycle schedule

In the "**Activities**" section:

- Papers from all the clubs, sports, music lessons, and other activities that are brought home. This may include general information, rules, regulations, schedules, and contact lists for each of these activities.
- The gym and pool schedule from our local YMCA
- The workshop schedule of my Scrapbooking consultant

In the "**Miscellaneous**" section:

- A Family List of Things to Do (compiled to help us answer "Mommy, what do I do?" or "I'm bored.")
- The schedule for our favorite Christian radio station.
- A list of herb uses and their dosages.
- A sheet given out by our pediatrician regarding fevers and when to call the doctor.

In the "**Coupons and Menus**" section:

- Menus from our favorite places that we order from. (Not that we do that much.)
- Coupons for restaurants, dry cleaners, hair cuts, etc. (I slip all these into one sheet protector.)

In the "**Contacts**" section:

- Phone lists from church and our home school group (Make copies of the originals if you need to.)
- A list of utility `emergency numbers, and numbers for babysitters, kid's contacts, neighbors, doctors, and the pharmacy.

One more item is good to have in the back of the notebook is to get a plastic 3-hole punched 'duo-tang' type folder with 2 pockets inside. Keep in it all papers from activities that need to be completed and returned instead of letting them lay around on the kitchen counters.

As with your H.M.A. (or MAKE YOUR OWN BRAIN-IN-A-BINDER!!) planner, be sure to go through the household notebook regularly to clean it out.

Another place to get some great ideas for your household notebook is from <http://notebook.organizedhome.com/>. It is a nice site with forms you can print out. They do suggest keeping everything in your household notebook from your daily calendar to your budget, and medical records. I personally feel that this is too much to keep in one place especially the kitchen. Much of it is more appropriately put in other places, like your personal planner and your files.

Happy Organizing!!