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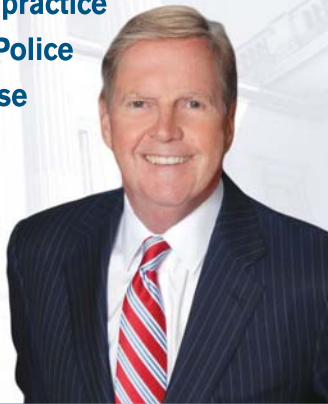
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Bread winner: Provoking harmony with an act of kindness

When my wife and I first moved into the house we live in now, our next-door neighbors had their own business and worked out of their home. They seemed nice enough, although they had a rough edge or two.

They were suspicious of everyone, especially the government, and weren't too sure about my wife and me, either. The combination of academia AND journalism made me just a little shady in their eyes (especially when I wore my "Trust Me—I'm a Reporter" T-shirt). To top it off, we drove a Volvo. It was the trifecta of anti-Americanism, in their view.

We told our neighbors the good news when we found out that my wife was pregnant. Always able to find the shadow in sunlight, they said, "Ugh. I hope your baby doesn't cry all the time like the baby that was in your house before you. Drove us crazy."

Obviously, we didn't expect them to host the neighborhood baby shower.

One day when we got home from work, my wife and I went through the day's mail. One item was a letter from those very neighbors. It had a stamp on it and had gone through the post office, even though our houses were within steps of each other.

"How odd," I said, as I opened it and began reading it out loud.

The letter was a litany of their complaints about us as their neighbors. Our dog barks too much and leaves deposits along the fence that makes it difficult for them to work in their driveway. I play my music too loudly with the windows open. We have friends over who are loud when they get back in their cars late at night. On windy days our eucalyptus trees shed leaves into their boat on the other side of the fence. Someday those trees were going to blow over al-

together onto that boat and then we'd have a real problem on our hands, the letter said.

As I read this out loud, I took on a German accent and clicked my heels for emphasis. My wife was not amused. The letter finally ended with demands that we do something about these offenses right away.

"I'll do something, all right," I said, feeling the testosterone filling my being. I headed for my computer. They want to get into a war of words with a writer? Seriously? I snorted throughout the composing of my witty, snarky response. In the background I heard my wife working in the kitchen.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"Baking bread."



"At a time like this? Who can eat when we've been insulted? Anyway, I'm not hungry."

"It isn't for you. It's for our neighbors."

I thought about this for a moment, then caught her drift.

"Of course! I'll get the needles and the crushed glass! I like the way you think!"

She turned to me with a very serious face.

"If we are going to live here for a long time, we are going to have to find a way to be neighbors with these people,"

she said. "This is the only way I know how."

Both of us agreed that my letter was brilliant, cutting, and justifiably vicious, but when the bread was ready, that's all we brought next door.

When the lady of the house answered our knock on their door, she saw it was us and took a step backward. Maybe she thought we were going to let the dog loose on her.

"We baked you some bread," my wife said. "Can we talk about your letter?"

They invited us in, and the awkwardness of the moment disappeared almost immediately.

Pretty soon they were offering us drinks, snacks, and a game of cards.

Our evening together became a reconciling moment. Even though we were offended, the bigger issue my wife recognized was that what we really needed was to live at peace with our neighbors. The bread was a symbol, and so much more.

Harmony, wholeness, reconciliation, are all part of God's work in our families, our faith communities, our places of work, our neighborhoods and in all of creation. Through Christ, "God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross—to reconcile all things, whether on earth or in heaven, through him alone." (Colossians 1:20, NEB).

May the peace of Christ motivate us in 2015!



Dean Nelson directs the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. His book about seeing God in everyday life is "God Hides in Plain Sight: How to See the Sacred in a Chaotic World."



FINDING FORGIVENESS

Pain and shame give way to healing

by LORI ARNOLD

In her final year of college, Cara* was accustomed to taking tests. She knew all the steps she needed to successfully prepare for the best outcome. But this one, offered up by the school of consequences, was more than she thought she could bear.

"In the darkness and secrecy of the bathroom at home, I took the test... and waited two agonizingly long minutes," Cara said. "When I looked at the results, weakness, nausea, and pangs of guilt hit me, and I simply fell to the ground and cried."

There was no mistaking this test's results. The committed Christian was pregnant.

"My boyfriend and I had been dating for over a year, and even as I was meeting in a small group with other young women from church, I was falling into the kinds of temptations that I never thought I'd fall for," she acknowledged.

Faced with their new reality, Marcus* helped a sorrowful Cara to the couch.

"He started talking through tears about how we would figure a way to make a life around this little one," she said. "He confessed he'd already bought a ring and had intended to propose that night. It wasn't the road we'd planned, but he assured me things would be OK in the end."

Cara was not convinced.

"I went into a fog after the pregnancy test," she said. "I barely ate. I ended up flunking out of what was supposed to be my last semester of college. I ran mile after mile hoping to miscarry. I shut out everyone around me."

Fear cast monster shadows on her soul.

"Having been raised in the church and a Christian school, and having spent years trying to keep up a facade of perfection, having even served as a youth leader and worked for 10 years to promote pro-life policies and organizations,

I knew full well what was living inside of me," she said. "And, yet, my fears were so much bigger than anything else.

"I 'knew' I would be rejected by my family and my boyfriend's family. I 'knew' that this child would go through life with people constantly doing the math and realizing he/she was conceived before the wedding. I 'knew' that I would never again be allowed to serve as a youth leader. I 'knew' so many things that really just grew out of my fears that any failure on my part would leave me with a permanent 'FAILURE' stamped on my life."

Fear triumphs


She gave into that fear, making an appointment at a local abortion clinic.

"The denial I was able to keep going... it's mind-blowing," she said.

At the clinic they administered the first phases of RU-486, which starves the baby of nutrients, creating a hostile environment in the womb. At home, Cara completed the process by taking miscarriage-inducing pills.

"I 'delivered' a 7-week, 5-day-old lifeless baby at home," she said. "Sitting on the cold tile floor, hugging a toilet, throwing up from pain, I wondered how God could have allowed me to fall so far. How could He let a person who had tried to serve Him end up telling the baby she was carrying that she was so sorry, as the medication took over and induced contractions? How could He love me if He let me spend a night awash in the blood and vomit of death? I hated Him then. And that wasn't easy to let go of."

Especially after being rejected by her family after they found out about the abortion. A month after the procedure, Cara called CAPS

A woman is shown in silhouette, sitting at a table. In the foreground, a clear glass vase holds a bouquet of purple flowers. The background is a bright window, creating a strong backlight effect. The overall mood is contemplative and somber.

“I felt like God had betrayed me for letting my life go so differently than I wanted... I felt like God should have somehow spared me from all that pain...”

Pregnancy Services to get help for her post-abortive issues.

“I was so depressed, not eating, unable to work most days, and isolated from all friends and family,” she said. “The post-abortion class I went through literally helped save my spiritual life,

and probably my physical life as well.

“I was able to confront my sin, my decisions, my grief, my failures, my pride, my angst, my anger, and my helplessness head-on, with people who had walked roads similar to mine. And by the end, I had hope. I had worked through so much

ugliness, and found that God loved me more than I could ever imagine.”

Helping others find healing

Today, at age 37, she volunteers at CAPS, speaking to young girls about abstinence, self-esteem and responsible behavior. She also counsels post-abortive women and girls.

“Satan loves darkness because he can work unhampered,” Cara said. “Telling a trusted friend, family member, or even someone at a crisis center about your secret pain is a crucial step in stopping further damage and beginning the healing process.”

Now the mother of four girls with Marcus, whom she married shortly after her abortion, says the road has not always been smooth. After the birth of their first daughter, the couple tried for a year to conceive again, then lost the child to miscarriage.

“Although I knew in my mind that I’d been forgiven, and I had proof that the abortion hadn’t rendered me completely infertile—because I had a 2-year-old to tuck in every night—I wrestled with feelings of guilt and inadequacy,” Cara said.

“Ironically, I felt like God had betrayed me for letting my life go so differently than I wanted, even though I knew that some things were the results of my own decisions. I felt like God should have somehow spared me from all that pain, including the miscarriage of the baby I had so desperately hoped for.”

More healing came by way of “Captivating,” a book by Staci Eldridge.

“God spoke into parts of my heart that I hadn’t realized were still holding on to guilt, shame, and stubbornness over how I wanted my life to look,” she said. “It took about a year from the time of the miscarriage before I was able to really surrender my pain and guilt, but God was always lovingly patient with me.”

“My journey was heart-breaking and there is a created being in heaven who was never granted life on earth, but God’s promise to work all those things together for good has certainly been true.” ■

** names changed to respect privacy.*

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SAYING GOODBYE

How do you say goodbye to a child you gave up through abortion? Cara* and Marcus,* grief-stricken over the choice they made, decided to hold a private memorial service for a child they believed to have been a girl. Just days before their wedding, they navigated their boat to a spot just off the coast of Point Loma.

The rest comes in Cara's own words:

We turned off the engine and rocked to and fro, with only the lapping waves making any sound. Eventually, conversation returned, and we unwrapped the protected, pink long-stemmed rose we'd selected for our little girl. Fragile, delicate, perfectly beautiful, the rose was as close as we could get to touching the baby we'd lost.

I held the stem, afraid of the velvety petals, sure that their pure softness would break my monstrous soul. We said something, which we couldn't even remember later that day. Those moments were held by inexplicable emotions, not by words.

My fiance reached for my hand, and unknowingly inspired me to caress the light pink petals. As the sobs overcame me and my soul cried out to be rescued from the hell of grieving an aborted baby, fresh winds sprayed salty sea mist over us, and I was answered by a God whose love dove straight through the sobs, into the depths of my pain, and into the shame of my past.

The rocking of the boat became like the rocking of my Father's arms, the mist like his caress, mixing with my tears and washing me clean from the horror of the preceding months.

When the rocking slowed, we set the small rose upon the water and watched as it swayed farther and farther away from us until we saw nothing but the calm sea, the deep tan of the cliffs and the sailor's blue sky.

Though more storms would surely come, and the damage was far from over, that particular storm had passed as God ushered in a new day for us both. ■

** names changed to respect privacy.*





Lamar Lacañgan, a Christian jazz and R&B artist who goes by the stage name of Marz Jukebox, found his faith after being shot at point-blank range.

Point blank

Shooting alters singer's direction

by LORI ARNOLD

Lamar Lacañgan was sitting in the driver's seat of his car. Next to him was Tony, a friend from high school. A recent graduate of Rancho Buena Vista High School, Lacañgan was visiting his hometown during a break from pharmacy school in Irvine. The two were chatting away, an easy conversation between two young men just beginning to explore the world. Parked outside of a Vista apartment complex, the pair was waiting for one of Tony's friends who needed a lift. Although Lacañgan had never met the young woman, he offered his wheels for the spontaneous favor.

As the woman hurried to the car with her infant, Tony jumped out of the two-door coupe to let her into the back seat. Out of nowhere, the woman's enraged boyfriend approached with a gun. See-

ing the flash of metal, Tony hightailed it around the corner, prompting the gunman to turn his attention to Lacañgan.

"He came around to my side and said, 'Who are you? Why you trying to talk to my girl? Why are you trying to hook up with my girl?'" Lacañgan recalled.

"I'm not," the pharmacy student responded. "I don't even know her."

Apparently satisfied with the response, the man turned from Lacañgan and started to walk away. A deceptive move, much like a cat toying with a mouse.

"But then he turned back around and said, 'I'm going to cap you anyway,'" Lacañgan said. "He held that gun about three feet from my head as I sat there in the driver's side. I remember the silver gun and I could see the bullet in the back

of it and, at the moment, all I could say was, 'Lord, be with me.' That's all I really knew and he shot."

Dazed, and with the smell of gunpowder still lingering, Lacañgan assessed what had just transpired.

"I was still seated in the driver's side, but I laid slumped over on the passenger side and I felt blood running down my face," he said. "I remember saying to myself, 'Lord, I think I heard about it, but I pray my name is written in that Book of Life,' but I knew in my heart that I was on a different path."

In that split second of horror, Lacañgan—raised in a non-Christian home—managed to recall a passing reference from Revelation that declares that those who have committed to follow Christ will have their names recorded in the Book of

Life and shall escape the “lake of fire.”

“I felt He lifted up my head,” Lacañgan said. “He sat me back up in the driver’s side and I still saw blood running down my face. I heard Him audibly say, ‘Go do My work.’”

The bullet, it turned out, merely grazed the side of his face before slamming into the passenger side door pillar. Only a few stitches were required; the scar is a permanent reminder of God’s provision.

“The doctors looked at me like, ‘I don’t know how you are alive,’” he said. “That began my journey. It was one of those Jonah moments where He swallowed me and upchucked me on the shore there. From that moment on I said, ‘I’m just going to be fearless for you, God.’”

He quit pharmacy school to focus full-time on music, his lifelong passion.

“From that point on I had laser-point focus,” he said.

• • •

As a child, Lacañgan, the son of a single mom, was captivated by music. He spent hours listening to the classics with his maternal grandfather, whose record collection boasted Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Nat King Cole. Over time the grandson, nicknamed Mar by his family, developed his own love for soul.

“I was breastfed on Motown and Stevie Wonder and the Michael Jacksons and the Princes and the Earth, Wind & Fires. Those were all of my influences that I loved even though I was a generation removed from it. That was all I listened to.”

While his grandfather gave him an appreciation for music, it was his grandmother who saw to it his talent was developed.

“I really wanted to be a football player,” he said. “That was my goal.”



Instead his grandmother signed him up for piano.

“Football players don’t play piano,” he said.

His grandmother won that struggle and Lacañgan learned piano from a strict teacher who hit his hands with a ruler when he demonstrated bad form.

“It was something that stuck with me and became my career,” he said, his easy smile widening. “I guess she knew something I didn’t.”

His repertoire has expanded to include guitar. He also dabbles with the drums and bass. And in addition to providing lifelong skills, the music helped keep him out of trouble.

“It was just my mom and I,” he said. “I didn’t get to see her much because she was always trying to work and when she was home she was tired.

“I could have done anything I wanted

to but I really saw how hard my mom was working and the only thing I could do was bring home good grades and stay out of trouble.”

That sense of responsibility came in part, Lacañgan believes, from growing up as an only child.

“I really had to learn how to do life on my own,” he said. “If there was a goal or something that I wanted, I had to go get it. There was nobody else that I could blame. Nobody else that I could really get in trouble with. That could go either way. You’ll be really focused, but are you going to be focused on the right things or the wrong things. It was just God’s hands always lovingly nudging me.”

• • •

After the shooting and under the guidance of a local pastor who officiated

“It isn’t always going to the healthy.... I love my Christian brothers and sisters... But I am most effective with the sick, those who don’t know the Lord.”

at the funeral of a friend, Lacañgan dove into the Scriptures.

“He took me under his wing,” Lacañgan said. “We met an hour each day to go through Scripture. He was determined that ‘you need to know.’”

Lacañgan also reconnected with the two high school classmates he had joined with to form the singing group Kindred Three. Active through most of high school, the guys stopped performing together when they headed off to different colleges. Reconstituted, they signed a recording deal and their “I wasn’t raised in a Christian home, so the Christian music, when I heard it for the first time, I was kind of bored with it,” Lacañgan admitted. “It didn’t really grab me musically because I was not listening to the lyrics.”

His tune changed after he became more familiar with its message, and in the late ’90s Kindred Three began touring across the United States.

“I landed on a label with a girl named Katy Hudson, who is now Katy Perry,” he said. “I remember her tagging along with me saying, ‘I just want to sing and harmonize like you guys.’ (She was) this little blonde girl with a guitar.”

Eight years ago, after coming off of the Kindred Three tour, Lacañgan went solo, changing his stage name to Marz Jukebox.

“The jukebox came in because I was the kid growing up where people would give me a quarter and say, ‘Sing that song that I like.’ I was the family jukebox.”

Today, that Jukebox reflects the music he grew to love as a child, but with the focus celebrating his affinity for Jesus.

“When people ask me about my music style, I say it’s those (classic) influences, but with the message of hope, Christ. It’s a mix of rhythm and blues, jazz, funk and soul and some hints of hip-hop here and there. But ultimately it’s my way of performing for an audience of One.”

Seeing his music as an opportunity to evangelize, Lacañgan often prefers venues far removed from the church.

“I use the music as my platform where I am able to open up for somebody like B.B. King and then be in the bar, sing a couple of songs but then break out with worship and watch people take their wine glasses, put them down and then start praising God,” said Lacañgan, who sometimes sings with his wife, Julie, a back-up singer. “That is the heart of what we do.

“God has given me a really unique gift. The Scriptures talk about being adopted. It isn’t always going to the healthy. He goes to where the sick are. I love my Christian brothers and sisters. I love church. I love encouraging them. But I am most effective with the sick, those who don’t know the Lord.”

• • •

Since going solo, Lacañgan has released a self-titled album, “Marz Jukebox,” which he released in 2007. He also produces albums for other artists and in 2011 made a brief appearance alongside Carrie Underwood in “Soul Surfer,” a biopic about Bethany Hamilton, the competitive teen surfer who lost an arm in a well-publicized shark attack.

This fall, Lacañgan took a break from touring as he focused on promoting his annual Christmas outreach, I am Hope, in conjunction with Live 4 Legacy. The project provides a Christmas brunch and toys for as many as 400 North County children. His charity work also includes mentoring children through behavioral day programs in Vista and Escondido.

He also helped launched a community basketball team as another mentoring venue and has traveled to orphanages in Africa.

“My heart really ... I want to see other



Lamar Lacañgan poses with Carrie Underwood. Lacañgan had a cameo part in the movie “Soul Surfer,” which starred Underwood as Brittany Hamilton.

people succeed, not just financially but in the Lord,” he said.

While his 2014 stage time has been limited, Lacañgan has been busy writing music, hoping to release his next album, “Time Traveler,” later this year.

“It’s the journey of my life—past, present and future,” the musician said. “Talking about how I arrived here because of the journey God has taken me on. So through that journey there was different things I really had to experience.”

He reflects back on the shooting and on a recent serious car crash in which he walked away with just scratches, to a radio interview he did in New York City before heading back to San Diego on the evening of Sept. 10, 2001.

As he watched the news accounts showing the Twin Towers falling that clear autumn day he was thinking, “I was just there 10 hours ago.”

“It’s taking those moments and really hitting home that *this* is the man that I am today because ... who knows? If I turned left instead of turning right....” said Lacañgan, who attends New Venture Christian Fellowship.

Those intimate connections with God’s providence are what drives Lacañgan as he performs.

“People might show up at a concert to see me, but my goal is to let them see Him,” he said. “You wouldn’t want to hear my story, had God not led me to this period of time.” ■

Learn more at www.marzjukebox.com.

Musician's charity work strikes a chord with kids

by LORI ARNOLD

Lamar Lacañgan had just come off of a multi-year tour with his singing group, Kindred Three, and time became his new companion.

"I chose not to re-sign my deal," he said. "After that I was, 'OK, now what? What have you got for me Lord?'"

Looking to stay busy, he took a friend up on an invitation to hang out with some kids living in a group home setting. Soon he became a regular visitor.

His friend thought it would be cool for the youth to meet someone who has toured.

"It was interesting to me," Lacañgan said, "because I had never been in that type of environment before. Although I was familiar with the behaviors."

One of the first kids he met was a girl named Ashley. She spurned his attempts to get acquainted.

"She was raised to hate men, she was raised to hate African-Americans and raised to hate Christians, so that was three strikes against me immediately," he said. "She never talked to me, ever. I might have got an 'Umph, umph' and grunts out of her."

Since she wouldn't interact, he simply observed.

"She would be isolated, *always* writing. I said, 'OK, that's an interesting little note.'"

That discovery prompted him to pay closer attention the behaviors of others at the facility.

"There was one kid, every time you saw him he was tapping on the table," he said, rapping the table like it was a drum kit. "It was annoying to most people. He was always tapping his foot or something. Then there was a girl that every song that came on the radio she would just sing her heart out. Out of key. Out of tune."



Without any planning on his part, these quirks endeared them to his heart.

"Over a year's time I really became fond of these kids," he said.

Shining the light

Ashley was still mostly unresponsive, though, until Lacañgan asked her about the contents of her notebook.

"She takes her notepad and kind of shoves it over to me, slides it over on the table and says, 'Umph,'" he said. "It was a poem about her life. It was about all the things in her life she wished she could change. So a light bulb goes off. The Lord kind of said, 'This is why you are here.'"

Lacañgan, who at this point was professionally pursuing a solo career under the name of Marz Jukebox, broached a proposal.

I said, 'Ashley, what if I show you how

to take your poem and put it in a song format, like songwriters?' She went, 'What? No one has said that to me before.' I said, 'I know I've never said that to anyone.'"

Noticing he had piqued her interest, Lacañgan took it a step farther.

"Then I said, 'What if I got the girl that was singing out of key all day and I showed her how to sing your lyrics?' And she went, 'Huh?' 'And then the kid tapping on the table, what if I show him how to make the music for it and I take you to the recording studio and you recorded it?' Instantly, all their walls came down."

He worked with each of them, eventually getting them into a studio where they were able to cut a CD with their song.

"They all hated each other," Lacañgan



Some of the children attending an I Am Hope Christmas party pose with their gifts and co-host Lamar Lacañgan, aka Marz Jukebox.



said. “They were from different gangs, different upbringings, different cultures. The song ended up getting downloaded all over the world to help the next group of kids. It started out like that and became the ‘I am Hope’ project.”

“We take them from nothing. We teach them how to write not just the lyrics, but write the music. Then I take them into the studio and then we record. The

Left: Lamar Lacañgan hugs a child during a tour of Uganda. Bottom: His ministry there reaches more than 1,000 children and teens living in orphanages.

whole process is based on how quickly they learn.”

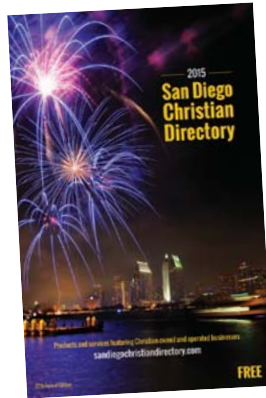
Paying it forward

In addition to mentoring and music training, I am Hope co-hosts an annual Christmas party that draws as many as 400 children who are regaled with breakfast, toys, and visits from former Olympians and NFL and NBA players. Recent additions to the event, which just celebrated eight years, included donated buses to transport families and an inquiry by a local theme park to provide free

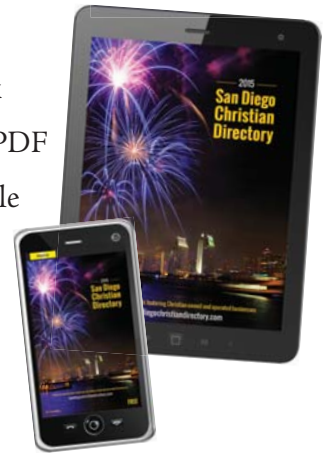


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tickets.

“I’m like, ‘Whoa!’” he said. “I just showed up. I cannot take credit for anything. It’s all God’s doing. The message and vision for I am Hope is not that *I* am the hope, but *you* are the hope. Ultimately, God is the hope, but in your world, you are the inspiration. God can use a person and that’s what we instill in kids.”

That work is not limited to North County. In fact, Lacañgan’s traveled to Uganda several times reaching about 1,200 children and teens living in orphanages.

“We went from village to village, all over Africa,” Lacañgan said. “Some of these places you would literally open the bushes and there they were in huts. It was very humbling.”

The trips were designed, he said, to inspire young people to take charge of their own destinies by first relying on a sovereign God.

“When we are in Africa, they are looking at us like, ‘You are from America. Oh, you guys are here to save us.’ I’m like, ‘I’m not here to save you.’ They are like, ‘What?’

“They are looking for a handout,” he said. “They see Americans as rich and we can solve all their problems, but I’m trying to tell them that *you* can solve all your problems.”

To help them on that path, I am Hope delivered native-language Bibles to pastors living in Rakai, an area known as the birthplace of AIDS and where voodoo is a common practice.

“The whole place broke out like you would have thought it was the Super Bowl,” he said. “They were crying. Some of them all they had was maybe a half a page of the Bible and whatever that Scripture was, that’s what they preached from. We got to bless them with music and the Word.” ■

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Stumbling in the DARK

by TIM WALKER

My mornings begin in darkness. I'm up at 5:00 a.m. For some of you, you roll over and see your clock at 5:00 a.m. and think, "I have two or three more hours of sleep." I see it and think, "It's time to wake up."

I blame my father. Well, not really blame—but I certainly take after him. I'm a morning person because of him. I used to go to work with him during the summer, and we would wake up at 5:00 a.m. I would drag myself out of bed, into the shower, and then sit zombie like in the car until we pulled into Bojangles for a biscuit before heading to my dad's business.

Now, I'm not pleasant, cheery or chatty in the morning.

But I am productive.

I get a little more pleasant after the second cup of coffee.

One thing about getting up at 5:00 a.m. is that it's dark. Like nighttime dark. So to avoid waking up my family, I try to turn lights on after doors are closed. Every morning is an effort to be as stealthy as possible. It's a little game

I play. My family would have to tell you how good I am at it.

I can lose this game by dropping the shampoo in the shower, or running into a door that is slightly closed. Both of those have happened more than once. And there's always the wild card—some obstacle left behind by someone in a hurry. It could be a nerf gun, a duffle bag, or shoes.

Those moments usually don't mix well with the "not pleasant, cheery or chatty" pre-coffee Tim. I just need a clear path, with as few obstacles as possible.

I think God realizes that as well, particularly when it comes to sin, repentance and forgiveness.

In Psalm 103:12, David writes of the forgiving nature of God. He says: "He [God] has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12 NLT).

Now, I've always read that verse as if God removed the sins from Himself. "Get it away from me," I presumed Him saying, as if someone just handed Him a dirty diaper. Far away from Himself—

as far as the east is from the west,
which east becomes west and west
becomes east and no one knows where
the line is of when east ends and west
begins, and it becomes one of the those
things that goes on and on. I think my
brain just melted a little bit.

But He doesn't remove them from
Himself—He removes them from us.

Why? I think it's because He knows
that if it's not moved out of the way
it will become an obstacle to us. We'll
stumble over it. We'll continue to fall.

We'll wound ourselves over and over.
We'll constantly have to deal with it.

It would linger and become this
mass of shame and guilt that we'll have
to step around, climb over.

How incredibly kind and loving of
Him to remove them from us.

In the verses prior to verse 12, David
describes God like this:

“He revealed His character to
Moses and His deeds to the people
of Israel. The Lord is compassionate
and merciful, slow to get angry and
filled with unfailing love. He will not

constantly accuse us, nor remain angry
forever. He does not punish us for all
our sins; He does not deal harshly with
us, as we deserve. For His unfailing love
toward those who fear him is as great
as the height of the heavens above the
earth” (Psalm 103:7-11 NLT).

If He didn't move it, our sin would
just lie there on the ground. Rotting. A
big pile for us to trip over. Because “He
knows how weak we are; He remembers
we are only dust” (Psalm 103:14 NLT).

When I think about this, I am
overwhelmed.

I thought I realized how much God
cared for me, loved me. I thought I had
a pretty good understanding of all that.

But then I realize just how limited
my perspective is.

He's not only the God who forgives,
but He also clears the path. ■



Tim Walker is a husband/
father/writer who is
navigating faith, marriage,
parenthood and mid-life.
Follow his blog at [www.
timswords.com](http://www.timswords.com).

CAROL LEBEAU

Exercise your motivation with a trainer

I used to think personal trainers were for other people.

Not me. I'm motivated to work out on my own, thank you. I don't need some guy with six-pack abs watching my every bicep curl.

Well, last year that all changed when I realized I needed help. Following multiple surgeries, I had developed aches, pains and muscle weaknesses that only seemed to get worse the harder I pushed on my own at the gym. Even swimming left me with a stiff neck and a knot in my back.

Frustrated, I asked for advice from one of my fit friends. His recommendation? You guessed it—a personal fitness trainer. Desperate, I took his advice and called Bret Smith, a credentialed instructor and owner of the “Move Strong Studio” in San Diego.

Bret quickly assessed my situation and gave me simple, corrective exercises I could do at home. After several sessions with “my” personal trainer, I began to feel better, stronger and happier as my aches and pains subsided. Because of Bret's personal attention and expertise, I'm grateful to be back hiking, biking and swimming strong.

As I've gotten to know Bret, it's clear he's more than a fitness trainer. Not only is he knowledgeable on most aspects of health and fitness, he's also a wonderful (but gentle!) motivator!

So, as we begin a new and (hopefully!) healthier New Year, I've asked Bret to share some of the tips he gives his clients to help them start and stick with a fitness program.

Bret's Top 10 Tips for looking good and feeling great in 2015:

1 Just get moving!
Starting a new fitness program can be

daunting with all the “have to's,” and all that information can lead to overload. The simple and best way to start is to just get moving and increase your general activity level throughout the day. Taking a walk after lunch or dinner; taking the stairs instead of an elevator; standing while on the phone or when someone walks into your office; parking a little farther from your destination. Little things that can add up and make a big difference in helping you move and feel better.

2 Have an accountability buddy.
This will help you stick with a plan. You and your workout buddy both promise to not let the other skip a workout. This buddy may be a friend with similar goals to yours, a family member, co-

worker or even a fitness professional who will motivate you to stay on track.

3 Choose activities you enjoy.
And do them! Again and again! Nothing will short-circuit your workout plan faster than a boring, non-eventful activity. Even if it's completely new, give it a try if it sounds interesting. You're more likely to stick with something you enjoy. Don't be afraid of trying a bunch of things to see what connects with you.

4 Pick the pro.
This is especially helpful if you're just getting started, you're unsure, or just unaccustomed to having regular activity in your life. Investing in a Certified Fitness Professional can get you off on the right foot ... helping you to build a solid foundation, focus on your goals and prevent injury. Word-of-mouth and referrals from trusted family and friends is the best way to find the best pro for you.

5 Set your goals!
Write these ideas down and be specific. How many pounds? Dress size? Body fat percentage? Whatever it is, get it down on paper. Then post the goals, completion date and workouts completed to date in places you see regularly. Consistent reinforcement is key to your success.

6 Be relentless.
Unrelenting dedication is the key to succeeding. Set your schedule. Stick with it. No excuses. Make your workouts as important as show-



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ing up for work, being with your family or having fun.

7 No four-letter words!

Banish the CAN'Ts, DON'Ts and WON'Ts from your vocabulary. It may take some self talk and gentle reminders—but focus on what you CAN, WILL and WANT to do. Take it one step at a time.

8 Prepare for the journey.

Consider your new undertaking as the journey of a lifetime. As you and your journey grow, you'll explore new and exciting ways to stay happy, healthy and fit along the way.

9 Make it social.

We are social creatures and one of the highest rates of success in sticking with a fitness and wellness plan comes by sharing it with a group, partner, friend or spouse. Make them part of your team and see how everyone benefits.

10 Ignore the hype.

If you are easily influenced by the media buzz of a fad diet or latest fitness gadget, stop and ask two simple questions: For whom? For what? Promos for programs and equipment promise you success with little time or effort. The truth is, it takes time, work, dedication and determination. No diet or trendy gadget will change that. There are no shortcuts to success...only detours and U-turns if you fall prey to the hype.



Carol LeBeau is a former 10News anchor, Staying Healthy reporter and current Health Champion for Palomar Health, avid runner, bicyclist and ranked, rough water

swimmer. Learn more at www.carollebeau.com.

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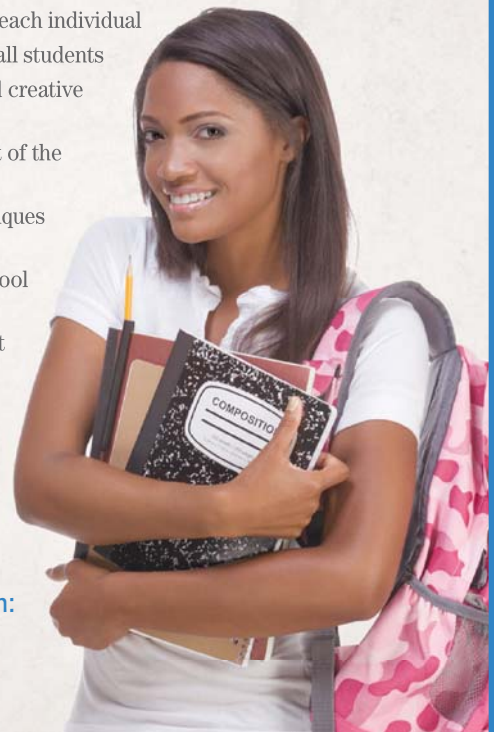
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'Unbroken' explores life of POW Louie Zamperini

World War II prisoner of war and 1932 Olympian Louie Zamperini, who died in July at the age of 97, is the subject of "Unbroken," directed by Angelina Jolie.

Released on Christmas Day, the film mostly avoids Zamperini's post-war conversion to Christianity and the evangelistic life that follows. Still, "Unbroken" boasts timely values of hope, liberty and justice as it chronicles the crash of a U.S. warplane, which is survived by Zamperini (Jack O'Connell) and two other crewmen, Phil and Mac (Domhnall Gleeson and Finn Wittrock). The trio spends 47 days floating on a raft in the Pacific Ocean, only to be picked up by the Japanese Navy and sent to a prisoner of war camp.

The film, based on the book by Laura Hillenbrand, has been criticized by Pastor Rick Warren and Movieguide founder Ted Baehr for ignoring Zamperini's strong faith.

Movieguide has also issued a warning because of the film's violence and foul language.

'A.D.'

Juan Pablo di Pace, a dastardly villain in TNT's "Dallas" series, goes from the darkness to the light after landing the part of Jesus in the original NBC series event "A.D." Di Pace leads a cast representing 10 nations.

Produced by Roma Downey and Mark Burnett, the 12-week series is a follow-up to their highly rated "The Bible," which aired last year. It premieres on



Easter Sunday. Juan Pablo di Pace, a cast member of TNT's "Dallas" series, will portray Jesus in the original NBC series event "A.D." The 12-week series premieres on Easter Sunday.

Easter Sunday.

Based on the first 10 chapters of the Book of Acts, the series explores the aftermath of Christ's death and its profound impact on his disciples, his mother Mary, and key political and religious leaders of the era.

"A.D." will take its audience from the intense sorrow of Christ's ultimate sacrifice to the awe-inspiring wonder of the Resurrection, and deep into his disciples' struggle to survive against opposition from every side as they continued to share his message of love with everyone, everywhere," a news release said.

'The Identical'

"The Identical," which follows the journey of twin boys raised in different depression-era homes as they discover and apply their musical gifts, releases Jan. 13 in the home market.

Starring Ray Liotta and Ashley Judd, "The Identical" centers on a young Ryan Wade (Blake Rayne), a preacher's son who rejects his father's desire for him to join the ministry and instead embarks on a career as a rock singer. As Wade struggles to pursue his dream and rise to stardom, he finds love, pain, success and failure, and ultimately uncovers a hidden family secret that reveals who he really is. It's a captivating story about a family restored, and a life discovered. Rayne also portrays the twin, Drexel Hemsley, in a dual role.

The movie captured the Nashville Film Festival Audience Award for U.S. Narrative.

"The Identical" intertwines meaningful themes of faith, family, fatherhood, forgiveness and finding your true calling in life," said a review on Focus on the Family's influential PluggedIn.com website.

Presented by City of Peace Films, Capitol Christian Distribution and Cin-edigm, the film is available on Blu-ray/DVD combo pack, DVD, VOD and Digital HD.



Angelina Jolie explores the back end of the camera by directing "Unbroken," which highlights the life of Louie Zamperini. The two share a moment before he passed away in July at age 97.

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Liberty Bible College & Seminary

Natalie Grant uses film to highlight trafficking

Christian recording artist Natalie Grant has stepped out from behind the mic to produce and narrate “In Plain Sight: Stories of Hope and Freedom,” a recently released documentary that highlights the scourge of human trafficking and the modern-day abolitionists who are diligently working to combat the criminal practice.

The 68-minute documentary features interviews with six modern-day abolitionists as they fight sex trafficking across America, plus trafficking survivors, law enforcement officials and court officials.

Although “In Plain Sight” was released on Dec. 23, officials are hoping to further increase awareness of the issue through a series of screenings in January, which is Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

Companion pieces for the documentary, a project of Awaken Media, include the “Hope for Justice” music album and a “31-Day Devotional & Group Study Guide” that is designed to help readers “understand God’s heart for the vulnerable and broken in our world.”

Grant lends her voice to the album project as she sings “In Christ Alone.” Other featured artists include Jeremy Camp, Building 429, All Sons & Daughters, Bard Millard, Big Daddy Weave, Anthony Skinner, Digital Age, Fernando Ortega, Mark Schultz, Page CXVI and Elijah Young.

Bird sings a new tune

Dove-nominated singer/songwriter Misty Edwards was set to release her fourth studio album, *Little Bird*, on Dec. 29, during the International House of Prayer’s annual *Onething Conference* in Kansas City, Missouri.

The new release reflects a different direction from its predecessor *Only a Shadow*.

“A lot of worship leaders feel limited and frustrated creatively, but we’re called to so much more as Christians, even when it comes to our typical definition of worship,” Edwards said, adding

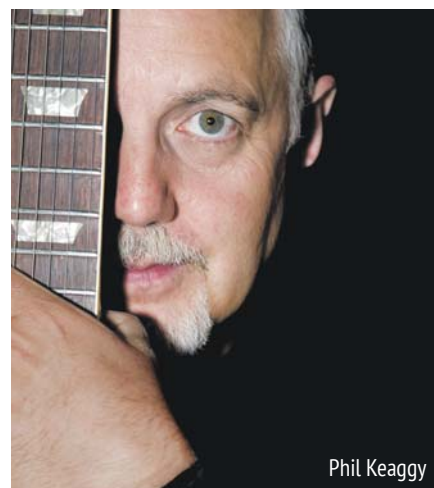
“I strongly believe there’s a whole group of listeners who won’t gravitate towards worship music because they have a taste for a different kind of creativity, and it was in my heart to reach those people.”

Keaggy honored

Gospel Music Hall of Famer and guitar virtuoso Phil Keaggy has been named the Greatest Christian Rock Guitarist of All Time by the Classic Christian Rock Zone website.

The title came after a survey of 24,000 fans, plus votes by a “top peer group of Christian rock musicians,” Christian rock broadcasters and magazine publishers and site administrators. Together a list of the 100 Greatest Christian Rock Guitarists of All Time was created.

Keaggy’s solo career has spanned 40-plus years and has included more than 50 solo albums, both vocal and instrumental, as well as three releases with his



Phil Keaggy

band, Glass Harp. Inducted into the GMA Gospel Music Hall of Fame in 2007, Keaggy has earned seven Dove Awards and a Grammy nomination. Rolling Stone magazine has also named him one of the “25 Most Underrated Guitarists,” alongside Prince, The Beatles’ George Harrison, Kurt Cobain, Neil Young and Fleetwood Mac’s Lindsey Buckingham.

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‘Angels’ raise funds for homeless youth

Two millennia after angels harkened the arrival of Jesus’ birth, a different team of angels, assisted by a Thrivent Action Team, descended on North Park Dec. 13 to bring their own glad tidings.

The result was the raising of \$18,000 to benefit 3,000 homeless youth living on San Diego streets. The money was raised at the 3rd annual North Park Christmas, a holiday event with music and gourmet food.

The evening was a joint venture between Urban Street Angels and the Mount Woodson Group of Thrivent Financial. Money raised through the event will help Urban Street Angels provide food, shelter and other opportunities in an effort to change their lives and get the teens off of the streets.

The volunteer-based community outreach conducts as many as six outreaches each month, including Friday outings in Ocean Beach. On Jan. 27, for instance, the group will hit the streets of downtown San Diego.

“Our amazing teams of volunteers distribute meals and water during each

event, as well as socks and dry goods, backpacks, sleeping bags and hygiene kits during seasonal events,” the ministry website said. “We also regularly distribute resources and critical information related to medical care, transitional employment and housing opportunities, and other available social services.”

In addition to treating the 250 event guests to an evening of entertainment, the nonprofit increased awareness of their work by sharing stories of their street-level work.

The financial services organization was able to assist Urban Street Angels through one of its own Thrivent Action Teams, which are member-led projects—fundraisers, one-time service activities or educational events—that can be completed within 90 days.

The action teams were developed to allow members to quickly identify a need, receive resources and put a plan together to help others in their community. According to organizers, the mission of Thrivent is to serve members and society by guiding both to be wise with money and live generously.

“Going out and serving the homeless



Thrivent Financial associate Sarah Davis and Eric Lovett, executive director of Urban Street Angels, pose together at the Christmas benefit, which raised \$18,000 for the homeless youth organization.

with this group is a humbling experience that truly makes you appreciate all you have in life,” said Thrivent Financial associate Sarah Davis. “We’re proud to be able to serve our community and are grateful for Thrivent’s support. It’s amazing to see what \$250 of seed money and a group of willing volunteers can do.”

Learn more about Urban Street Angels, at www.urbanstreetangels.org. Learn more about Thrivent Action Teams at Thrivent.com/actionteam or contact Davis at (858) 566-9200 or by email at Sarah.E.Davis@Thrivent.com.

Help with anxiety

LA MESA — Skyline Church will host Anxiety-Free Living, a free seminar on relevant topics and issues, at 6:45 p.m. Jan. 6.

The presenter will be Dr. Daniel Jenkins, a regular columnist for Refreshed magazine. Yolanda Gorick and Dr. Don Welch, the moderator, will also participate.

The seminars are part of the ongoing My Therapist Sez meetings, held the first Tuesday of every month.

Upcoming topics include “Managing Your Child’s Electronics” in February; “Addiction-Free Behavior” in March and “Pornography and Mate’s Pain” in April and “Telling Yourself the Truth” in May.

The church is located at 11330 Campo Road. For more info, call (619) 660-5000.

Aglow in El Cajon

EL CAJON — The El Cajon Aglow Light-house meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 12 at First Lutheran Church.

Meri Crouley will be the speaker. Crouley is the president of Destiny Studios and is in development on several major motion pictures. She also hosts her own television program called “Now is the Time,” which is broadcast around the world via satellite, various media outlets and on YouTube.

The free event is designed to provide a time for fellowship and encouragement.

The church is located at 867 S. Lincoln Ave. For more info, call (619) 440-2508.

Seminar on Alzheimer’s

SPRING VALLEY — Mount Miguel Covenant Village will host a seminar on Alzheimer’s and foods that can lower the risk

at 11 a.m. Jan. 13.

Dr. Marwan Sabbagh, research professor of neurology at the University of Arizona College of Medicine and co-author of “The Alzheimer’s Prevention Cookbook: Recipes to Boost Brain Health,” will be the featured speaker.

During the event, attendees will learn about specific types of foods, such as, cinnamon, fish and pomegranates, that will boost brain activity and help reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s and dementia. Sabbagh will also provide flavorful recipes that are healthy and preventative for attendees to try at home.

Register by calling 1-877-226-7350 or at www.mountmiguelcovenantvillage.org.

Financial seminars

SAN DIEGO — Thrivent Financial is hosting several seminars during January focusing on retirement and Social Security.

“Retirement & Estate Strategies” will cover savings vehicles, tax law changes, tax-advantaged investment strategies, retirement accumulation and distribution strategies and mistakes to avoid, multi-generational and IRA planning, and increasing the probability of investment success. It will be led by Thrivent financial consultant Jon Doering.

The workshop will be held at Skyline Church in La Mesa on Jan. 18, from 8:00 to 9:00 a.m. It will be repeated on Jan. 20 at the Toby Wells YMCA in Kearny Mesa from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

“Social Security: Strategize to Maximize” will explore the basics of Social Security and the best way to optimize the

benefits and how they fit in an overall retirement picture. It will be led by Thrivent financial consultant Melanie Meyer.

The workshop will be held on Jan. 27 at Oasis Mission Valley from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. On Jan. 29, it will be held at Oasis North County in Escondido from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. and in the evening from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m. at Tierrasanta Lutheran Church in San Diego.

For more information, call (858) 455-5706.

High-definition living

SAN DIEGO — Professional Women’s Fellowship will hold its monthly luncheon from noon to 1:30 p.m. Jan. 22 at the Handlery Hotel. A fellowship session starts at 11:30 a.m.

The guest speaker will be Barb Sanfilippo, an award-winning business speaker, consultant and author.

Topics to be covered include how to experience and receive God’s direction, peace and presence daily; fun and powerful exercises to conquer doubt, fear and help to monitor thoughts; and how to demonstrate trust and faith with the “Act as If Principle.”

Advance registration is \$25 for members, \$35 for non-members and guests and \$40 at the door.

The hotel is located at 950 Hotel Circle North. Learn more at www.pwfsd.org.

EVENTS ONLINE

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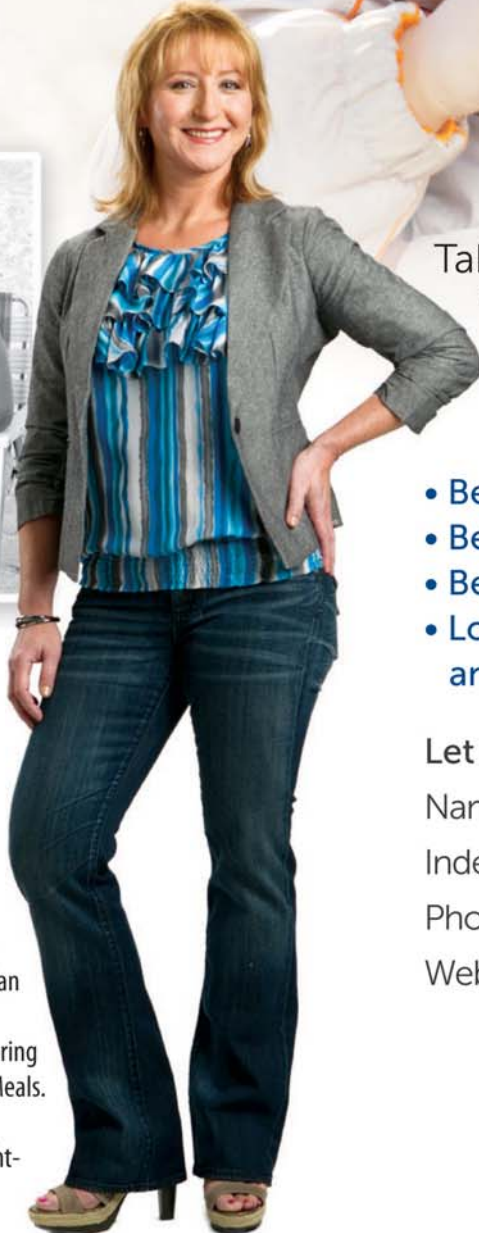
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How to live anxiety free

“And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus.”

— Philipians 4:7

First, some sound advice about coffee: Don't drink 10 cups in one day.

I have a friend who experienced a panic attack in the middle of the night after consuming a large quantity of coffee one day. As he was lying in bed he could hear his heartbeat and noticed that it seemed a bit irregular.

This concerned him and he then realized that his heart was beating faster, and his breathing seemed to be fast and shallow. He felt some tingling sensations in his fingertips and this really caused him some worry. He sat up in bed and wondered, “Could I be having a heart attack?”

His wife awoke and became alarmed as well when he described his symptoms. She quickly called 911 and in a matter of minutes his front lawn was filled with several emergency vehicles.

Apparently there had been an accident on the freeway and a number of rescue services were on the road when the emergency call came in. The entire neighborhood came out to see what was going on. Paramedics took him to a local hospital and numerous tests were run.

Diagnosis: Panic attack triggered by excessive caffeine consumption.

Some of us don't need 10 cups of coffee to trigger serious anxiety reactions. In fact, anxiety disorders are more common than any other mental disorder, including depression. There are many types of anxiety disorders, including phobias (of many kinds), generalized anxiety, social anxiety, and panic, just to name a few.

My friend was afraid that he was having a heart attack and this caused his body to go into “fight or flight” mode.

When he started thinking anticipatory thoughts about the future it really spiraled out of control. These would be thoughts like, “I'm going to die” or “The pain will be excruciating.”

Reality vs. future

The distinguishing factor between fear and anxiety is that fear is an emotional response to a real or perceived *imminent* threat, while anxiety is anticipation of a *future* threat. So, if you see a snarling dog blocking your path, you feel fear in that moment, but if you start thinking about how that dog might attack you, then you have moved into the realm of anxiety.

It is the anticipation of fearful events that creates anxiety, not the event itself. Anticipatory thoughts are limited only by our imagination. “What if...” thinking is the hallmark of worry, and over time in its extreme form can lead to a diagnosis of Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

Anticipatory imagination fuels our anxiety...

There's an initial, often immediate *primary appraisal* of a threatening situation. Our brain prepares us for that real or perceived threat by dumping stress chemicals into our bloodstream. In some ways these natural substances are like caffeine on steroids. We realize we are experiencing fear when we notice the changes that take place in our bodies. Here's the kicker: The part of your brain that dumps these chemicals into your bloodstream does not know the difference between real and imagined threats.

There is also a *secondary appraisal* that takes place when experiencing a threatening situation. Unconsciously we

ask ourselves if we have the resources to cope with the threat. For example, the snarling dog may not be so frightening if you see that it's only a Chihuahua rather than a large pit bull.

Anticipatory imagination fuels our anxiety, but the belief that we will not be able to cope with that future threat causes the anxiety to really spiral out of control. So, if we lived more in the here-and-now and less in the future we would feel less anxious, and if we believe that we can overcome potential threats we would also feel less anxious.

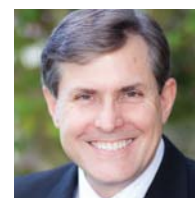
Divine assurance

We can't stop fearful events from happening—they are a part of life. However, we can do something about the secondary appraisal that involves imagining a fearful future and questioning whether we have the power to cope with those events.

Planning for the future is not a bad thing to do (Luke 14:28), but worrying about the future will not change a thing. In fact, worry has a way of shortening your life rather than protecting it (Luke 12:25).

As followers of Christ we also have the assurance that all things are going to work together for good, even if it means going through painful situations right now (Romans 8:28). With the resources of God at our disposal, we can make it through any trial with minimal anxiety.

Of course, if you drink 10 cups of coffee, all bets are off.



Daniel Jenkins, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist at Lighthouse Psychological Services in Mission Valley. He is also a professor of psychology at Point

Loma Nazarene University. Learn more at www.lighthousepsy.com.

JANICE THOMPSON

Practically speaking... A game plan for 2015

While I cannot predict the economic events ahead, without question your preparedness for the ups and down of uncertainty will play a major role in supporting your emotional and financial equilibrium throughout 2015. So, how about a game plan for the New Year?

We are going to be sharing some practical ways through the year to help you build a solid financial foundation. Since it must start with the basics, let's first look at three pillars that support solid financial health. Make it your goal this year to address these areas, if you haven't already, and you will be amazed at the results when December rolls around!

Rein in spending. Nothing can sidetrack quality of life more quickly than misguided spending decisions. I typically see two extremes: On one side are those guilt-ridden over every dollar spent. On the other side are those making mindless or impulsive spending decisions with little thought to the long-term impact. Both are detrimental to your well-being. Finding a balance between these extremes is the sweet spot for you and your family.

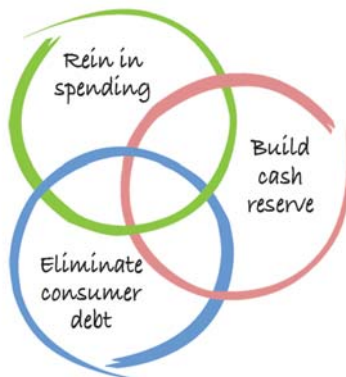
The simplest way to begin a reality check is to strictly use cash for all discretionary spending for at least three months. Somehow parting with hard-earned cash drives home the significance of decisions and quickly identifies leaks in your cash flow. I also suggest asking yourself a simple question when you are about to make a purchase, "Is this a need or a want?" It is surprising how often this pause will help you make a better decision. It's not always fun, and yes, it takes discipline, but financial freedom has exponential rewards.

Finally, keep in mind that the more limited your time horizon is with a spending decision, the greater the likeli-

hood of regret. Buyer's remorse anyone? Keep an eye on the future when making spending decisions today.

Eliminate all consumer debt. The elimination of consumer debt can provide an immediate tangible "return on your investment." The wisdom of Solomon reminds us that "the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7, KJV). The less you have in committed

Financial game plan



expenses, the greater your flexibility. There are, in certain instances, wise ways to use debt, but these uses should be *sparingly* applied. If you currently have credit card debt, begin a *crusade* to pay that off. To do this as quickly as possible you must:

Stop charging.

Focus on paying off one card (the emotional rewards for paying one card off are huge).

Then apply the amount you were paying on your first card to the minimum owed on the next card. You will be amazed at how quickly this snowball effect will pay off your cards.

An excellent resource for tackling your credit card debt head on is "Debt-

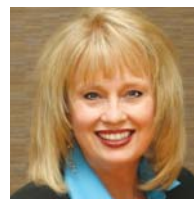
Proof Living: How to Get out of Debt & Stay that Way," by Mary Hunt.

Build a cash reserve. Depending on your circumstances, start with three to six months' living expenses. If you are a single parent, self-employed or have variable income, double it! It is much easier to stay on track if you have a cash cushion in lean times. It is also a sound biblical principal to prepare for hard times. Again, quoting Solomon, "Go to the ant, O sluggard; observe her ways and be wise. Which having no chief, officer, or ruler, prepares her food in the summer and gathers her provision in the harvest" (Proverbs 6:6-8, NAS).

Lean times are inevitable. If prepared, however, you are far less likely to suffer lasting consequences. And while you're at it, why not set aside a specific amount each month for Christmas this year. This will do wonders for your December celebration.

Money can provide a lot of things, but it cannot buy peace or contentment. The goal is not accumulation of wealth, but rather an abundant life that glorifies God. It begins with good stewardship of everything you've been given. The truth is (again from our good friend, Solomon), "An undisciplined, self-willed life is puny; an obedient, God-willed life is spacious" (Proverbs 15:32, MSG).

So what's your game plan?



Janice Thompson is a certified financial planner and co-founder/CEO of One Degree Advisors, Inc. A frequent speaker on financial topics and mentor for financial

professionals, she also serves on the board of directors for Kingdom Advisors. Learn more at www.onedegreeadvisors.com.

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5 family-affirming New Year's resolutions

My first New Year's resolution took place as a young adult, when I pledged to read the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—in one year. I remember enjoying Genesis and Exodus, struggling a bit with Leviticus and Numbers, and then getting bogged down in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy at the time was like quick sand, and I never made it out.

I since *have* made it through Deuteronomy, but I'm still mostly a failure at New Year's resolutions. For instance, my 2014 New Year's resolution was to plant garlic. It's unique and incredibly healthy, and it would save my family a bit of money. But I never even purchased a bulb.

Still, New Year's resolutions *are* worth pursuing, especially when it involves something as significant as your faith or your family. While resolutions themselves aren't mentioned in Scripture, the Bible *does* have a lot to say about second chances and new beginnings (Psalm 51:10-11).

I imagine even the Apostle Paul would have made New Year's resolutions. After all, it was never-look-back Paul who wrote, "But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-15).

So what type of resolutions should parents make this year? Here are five suggestions that—if followed—are sure to change your family life for the better:

1. Read the Bible with your child, each day. It's never too early to begin this, and there are plenty of board storybook Bibles for toddlers. For children exiting the toddler stage, get the "*The Big Picture Story Bible*" (2004, Crossway). After that, buy them "*The Jesus Storybook Bible*" (2007, Zondervan). Both do

an amazing job of telling the Gospel story on a child's level, and both show how the Old Testament looked forward to the coming of Christ.

2. Get home from work earlier, each day. This one is for me. I'm as guilty as anyone of trying to do one more thing, send one more email, finish one more task. Those five-minute chores add up, and pretty soon, I'm leaving work 30 minutes late. For an entire week, that's two and a half hours of missed family time. It's no fun to take work home, but occasionally I'll do it just so I can see my kids sooner. And when they're in bed, I'll finish that task.

3. Say more positive words around your child, each day. Do you spend hours throughout the day telling your child what *not to do*—correcting them, reminding them, disciplining them? There are certainly moments when that's needed, but this year, try doing less of that—and apply verses normally reserved for adult relationships to the relationship with your child. Such as: "Encourage one another and build one another up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Use positive words more each day. "Great job." "I'm proud of you." Even: "Wow!" Smile more. Laugh more. It's a guaranteed relationship-booster and it lessens stress. Each night, I tell my son as he's falling asleep that he's the "best first-grader in the world." It's fun ending the day on a high note.

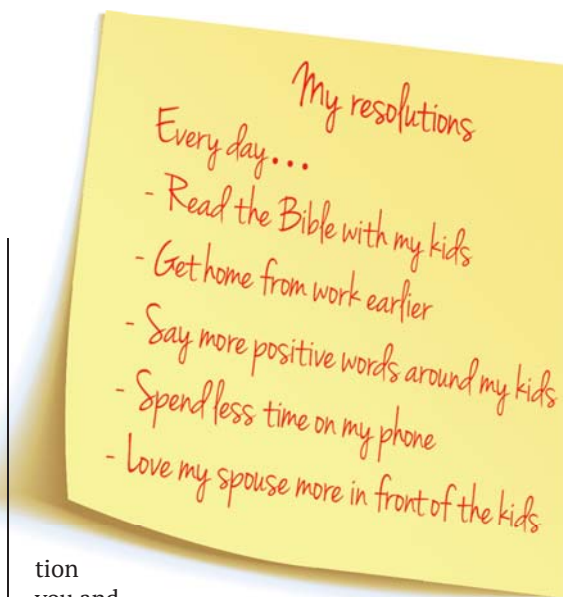
4. Spend less time on your smartphone, each day. A 2014 study by Ericsson predicted that by 2020, 90 percent of the world's population age 6 and older will have a cell phone. That's nothing to celebrate. Face it: Smartphones are addictive, delivering right into the palms of our hands nearly every tempta-

tion you and I deal with. Remember those hobbies you once enjoyed? They've been replaced ... by Facebook. This year, set boundaries. No smartphones at the kitchen table. No smartphones after (for example) 9 p.m. And no smartphones in bed. Your family will thank you.

5. Love your spouse more in front of your children, each day. Sadly, too many children in today's culture rarely see their own parents displaying godly love. And they definitely don't see godly love portrayed on television, where the depictions of parenting, particularly of dads, is abysmal. The Bible says a marriage is to be the ultimate form of earthly love (Ephesians 5), but do my children see that love modeled in my home? This year, hug and kiss your spouse more and more in front of your kids. It can just be a "peck," and they'll think it's "disgusting," but they'll walk away knowing that mommy and daddy love one another. And they'll grow up thinking it's normal—and wanting the same.



Michael Foust is the father of three small children, a writer and editor, and blogs about parenting at www.michaelfoust.com.



Self-control: Getting from point A to B

May I have a moment of transparency with you?

I have very little patience with bad driving. By “very little,” I mean you would need a microscope to find that morsel of patience.

I do my best to drive the speed limit at all times; but I confess that bad driving is maddening. Bad drivers are inconvenient. What’s worse, they’re in my way. I want to go from point A to point B without people cutting in front of me and then driving 25 mph below the speed limit ... that’s annoying.

But then I pass those same people and I see them on their cell phones ... that’s infuriating.

In those dark moments, I find myself on a crusade to eliminate bad driving worldwide. I communicate to those offending drivers that I’m not happy with them. I urge them to hang up their phones. I implore them to look around at the other cars on the road. I want them to know that they’re a risk to themselves and to others.

A noble crusade, don’t you think?

Except that I look pretty stupid when I’m on that crusade. I know that because I see how my kids look when they encounter a bad driver.

My wife has given me the “look” so many times when I’m on my crusade that I fear her face will freeze in that look permanently.

At the end of the day, I look

back on my reactions, and I’m embarrassed. I’ve allowed others to control my emotions. It’s discouraging. When will I ever conquer this?

I re-read Galatians 5:22-23, where Paul lists one of the characteristics of a life under the control of the Holy Spirit as self-control. I ask the Lord to give me that self-control stuff. Know what happens?

The next time I’m out driving, I encounter more bad drivers! It’s as if everyone on the road got together and said, “Hey! Let’s all line up and cut off that guy!”

Someone has to stop this bad driving; it might as well be me. So I embark on my crusade once more. And I go home and realize what just happened ... again.

It took me years to discover that when I ask the Lord to develop self-control in my life, He responds by putting situations in my life that will stretch me

to the point that I must either a) snap and lose self-control; or b) cry out to the Lord to control this thing for me.

Some days I do OK; others ... not so great.

That is, until the other day, when I believe the Lord showed me a tool that I can use. Some-

thing He cre-

ated. And it sounds crazy; but it just ... might ... work.

That tool: math.

That’s right. Arithmetic. Statistics.

When I drive now—doing the

school commute, doing the kid taxi service, whatever—I simply count every bad driving incident on that trip. At the end of the trip, I get a total. That total is then averaged into the other trips I have taken, and I have at my disposal the average number of bad driving incidents per trip.

How does that help? The next time I drive, I’m expecting to encounter the average number of bad driving incidents on that trip. As they happen, I’m calculating to see if I’m on average. If it’s below average, then I feel blessed. If it’s average, I’m not surprised. If it’s above average, I’m curious if that particular trip will break the record for bad driving examples.

Notice what I’m not doing? I’m not getting upset with the bad drivers.

I just started this little experiment. So far, the average for bad driving incidents is 3. I got up to 5 on one trip. I’m rooting for a trip where I get 6!

I read in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God will provide us with the escape route with each temptation so that we can endure it. Counting bad drivers is that escape route for me.

But more important, I’m sensing that God is getting the victory over this part of my old nature.

Maybe you’re the perfect driver with the perfect temperament. If you are, you have my utmost admiration and respect. Yet I am certain that there is at least one part of your old nature that God wants to clean up for you and give you victory.

For me, I just had to do the math.



Chris Clark is the pastor at East Clairemont Southern Baptist Church.

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The problem with New Year's resolutions

If you're like many Americans, at some point in December (probably under the influence of some eggnog or fruitcake) you made a New Year's resolution. It could be to save money or lose weight or get organized, but whatever it is, chances are that by this point in January you've given up.

Or at least started asking yourself why you bothered to make any resolutions that involved getting off the couch.

You're not alone.

According to the website Statisticbrain.com, 45 percent of Americans make some sort of New Year's resolution, but only 8 percent of those people actually achieve their goals. The rest either never reach their goals, reach them "infrequently," or don't make a resolution at all.

There are a lot of reasons we set out with the best intentions and then let them fall by the wayside. For many of us, a resolution is just something we're expected to do every Dec. 31, a decision prompted by holiday peer pressure.

But researchers have found that how committed a person really is to changing a behavior is the best predictor of how successful he or she will be in keeping that resolution. If you're not serious about the change, you'll fail. But if you really want to lose weight or save money or get organized, you will.

I don't think we really needed a major scientific study to make the point that lack of motivation is why we don't stick to our New Year's resolutions.

Most of us have no idea why we're even making a resolution, and half of us are so unmotivated that we don't even pretend there's something about ourselves we want to change.

As you know, I'm not a scientist and I failed statistics twice in college, but after years of research with findings based solely on my own excellent procrastination skills, I think I've solved the New Year's resolution problem.

First, we have to stop resolving to do things we don't want to do and start resolving to do more things we do want to do. Lose weight? Exercise more? Save money? Organize the attic? Who really wants to do that? No wonder we give up.

Research has shown—well, my research anyway—that when we are

doing stuff we like to do, we are happier when we do more of it. And when we are happier doing stuff that makes us happy, we feel more successful, and success breeds success.

So take more naps! Exercise less! Watch more television! Eat more cake! In fact, eat cake for breakfast! I'm pretty sure that putting \$5 in a savings account each week won't change your life the way eating cake for breakfast will.

Here's the other problem with New Year's resolutions. They come at the wrong time of the year. Where I live, Jan. 1 heralds a long, dark season of snow, ice and frigid temperatures. The joys of the holidays are behind us and all we have to look forward to are bills and bad weather.

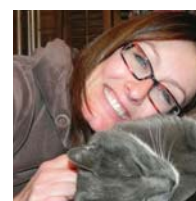
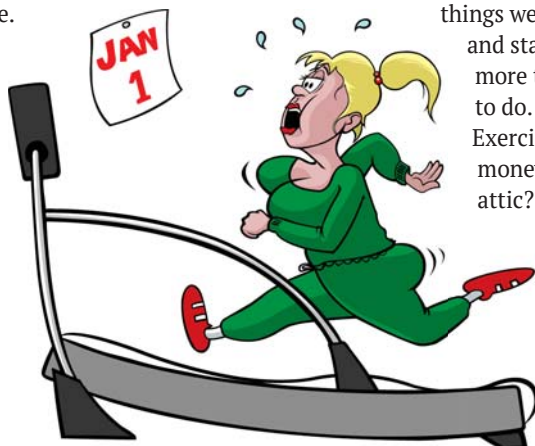
Clean the house? Fat chance I'm getting off the couch during a midwinter Netflix binge. Save money? What money? I spent it all in December. Get in shape? Going to the gym requires that I first go outside, which I avoid whenever possible between January and April. I don't want to change my pajamas in January, let alone my behavior.

So I say we move the new year to spring. Seriously, I can't believe no one has thought of this before.

In May the snow is gone, and buds are forming on the trees and the crocus and tulip bulbs are bursting through the soil. It's the perfect time to make a resolution and keep it, because May ushers in a season of rebirth. Everywhere you look, hope is in bloom.

Plus, in May the local ice cream parlor opens for the season. And if my resolution is to, say, exercise more, there's a good chance I will regularly take a walk if it means I can enjoy a hot fudge sundae halfway through the workout.

So this January, I encourage you to not make a New Year's resolution. Instead, curl up on the couch with a bag of chips, do some Netflix binging, and stop worrying yourself silly about whether or not you've gained a couple of pounds over the holidays. It's winter; no one can tell how big you are under all of those clothes anyway. And with my plan, you have five more months before you have to worry about it.



Award-winning freelance writer Joanne Brokaw spends her days dreaming of things she'd like to do but probably never will—like swimming with dolphins, cleaning

the attic and someday overcoming the trauma of elementary school picture day. She lives with two dogs, a cat, six chickens and one very patient husband. Learn more at www.joannebrokaw.com.

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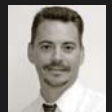
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