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Who says?

Deepening our passion for God's word

God's beauty from ashes

By Jennifer Shaw

I knew this wasn't going to go well. As the car pulled in and I stared at the beach, the wind whipped at the beach umbrellas, and the waves were high. My girls were chattering excitedly in the back seat, eager to get on the beach, a favorite, but uncommon activity for our family from Ohio. I am a Christian recording artist and worship pastor, and we were on tour in Florida.

It had been a grueling and heart-breaking summer. My beloved father had just passed away after an incredibly slow and painful battle with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) which had taken all our time and emotional resources. At the same time, our son Toby's behavior was getting more and more extreme and frightening. I kept trying to convince myself he was just

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Toby was not quite two, and he had always been a difficult baby. He wouldn't let anyone touch him except his dad and me. He wouldn't eat anything, and he didn't learn to speak or play. As the summer went on, it got worse. If a drop of water fell on his pants, he would scream as

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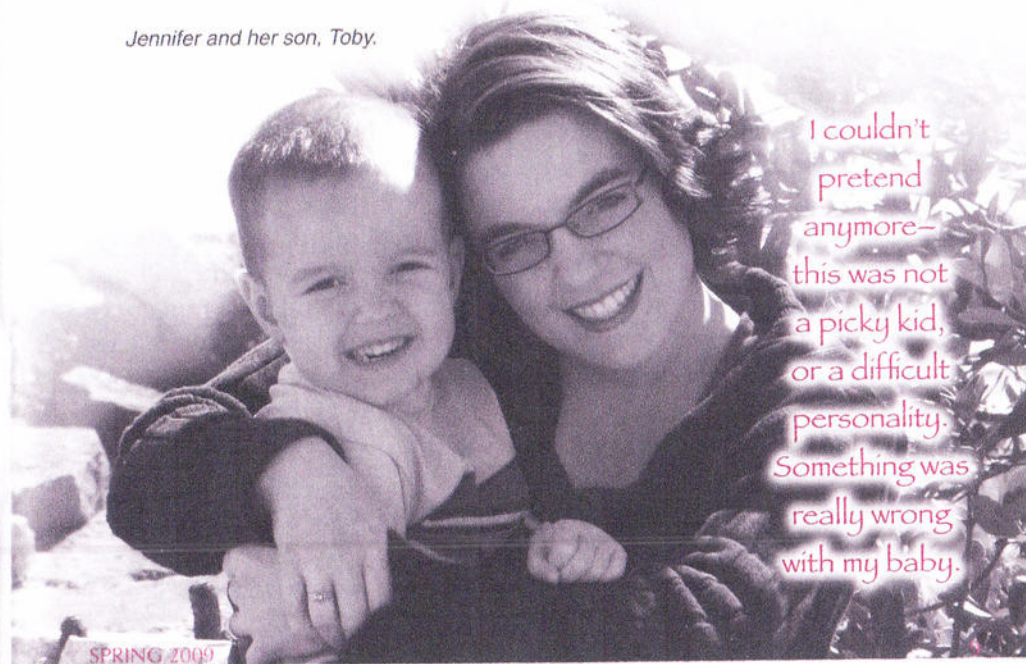
though he was being burned, and if there was a breeze, he would cry and try to hide inside my clothes.

I wrapped Toby in a towel to protect him from the wind. I told him we wouldn't touch the sand at all, because he couldn't stand any kind of crumb or "messiness." I told him we wouldn't touch the water. I sat with him, wrapped in a towel, on a beach chair under an umbrella, and still, my son screamed and cried, gripped by a panic I didn't understand. I gave up, and as I headed to the car with him, I began to weep. I couldn't pretend anymore—this was not a picky kid, or a difficult personality. Something was really wrong with my baby.

God's grace is amazing. That was the darkest time I've had in my life, grieving over my dad and son, but God knew that he had another plan for Toby. Isaiah 61 says that God will give us beauty for ashes, and that is exactly what he did.

When we got home from that trip, Toby started a speech therapy program. He had just turned two, and he could only make three sounds. There was an occupational therapist on staff, and she asked if we'd ever heard of sensory processing disorder. We had not, but Toby had all the classic markers. Basically, his brain did not process sensory input correctly. There are many forms of this, but in Toby's case, he was so extremely hypersensitive to touch that he really thought the water on his pants was burning him. Crumbs on his hands, food in his mouth, and

Jennifer and her son, Toby.



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a breeze on his skin "hurt." In short, his world was so scary to him that he was just shutting down.

We got Toby into therapy and the progress was incredible. After four weeks, my son said, "I love you, Mom." By Christmas, he was regularly speaking in full sentences. I can remember Toby trying to smile only a few times before his second birthday, but after that, he never stopped, and when he flashed his dimples, it was like the sun coming out. It was truly a miracle.

That spring, after nine months of therapy, we were back in Florida for a few shows. A family at one of the churches we were visiting generously offered to let us stay at their beach house. It was a kind offer, but honestly, I didn't want to go. Toby was doing so much better, and I didn't want a reminder of all the things he wasn't able to do. For the girls' sake, though, we accepted.

God does not just want us to survive. He wants us to have abundant life. John 10:10 says, "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full." God had a blessing for me, and he needed me to go to the beach to see it.

When we got to the house, we realized it had a perfect beach for therapy. The beach was wide and flat, with a lot of hard-packed sand, and almost no breeze. There were little

tidal pools to dip our toes in without splashing, and we took Toby out to try it. It took an hour of slow coaxing, but finally, Toby and I were standing at the edge of the water, watching his daddy and sisters swimming, and

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letting the waves wash over our toes. Amazing! Suddenly, a bigger wave came and splashed Toby to the knees. I turned to snatch him up from the water to comfort him, afraid that we had undone all our work that morning. Instead of panicking, though, he was laughing. He looked up at me with shining eyes, and said, "Look, mommy! I have fun!" And I realized at that moment what an incredible miracle the Lord had done in my son's life, and I was crying again on the beach. How much he loves us, that he healed my Toby, and then forced me to the beach to see it.

Toby is four now, and he is doing great. He is still in therapy for a few lingering issues, but his therapists tell us that by kindergarten, he will just be a totally typical kid. And every day, I have a walking, always talking reminder in my house of God's incredible love and goodness to us.

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Having (AND KEEPING) a good marriage

By Cynthia Petersen

Marriage is a gift from God, to be used to come closer to God. We either use our relationship to become closer to God, or we become engrossed in the things of life, which draws us away from

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God. Our focus is either upward or inward. You may have seen the illustration of a God-centered relationship—a triangle with God at the top and the wife and husband at each of the lower corners. As you become closer to God, you become closer to one another. But, of course, that's easier said than done.

One way to keep your relationship on the right track is to learn what to avoid—from someone else's mistakes. As a divorce attorney of 11 years, I see areas in clients' relationships that show a lack of trust and/or commitment, two of the most important elements to ensure a

healthy relationship. In finding these trends, my own marriage has been strengthened, as my husband and I try to avoid the pitfalls in relationships that have ended in the tragedy that is divorce.

Below are three of those trends. If you see them in your own relationship, reevaluate why they are there. Are they a sign of a lack of trust or commitment? Examine whether these are drawing you closer to or away from God and your partner.

1. Individual instead of joint bank accounts:

Over 90% of my divorcing clients have separate accounts. But it is not just the fact that the accounts are separate, it is the *reason* funds are separate that must be examined. Many say it's just that they want to have their own account or that the other person isn't good with money. But if you view your money as "mine" and "yours," if you don't work together to use the monies coming into the household, you

