

LIKE THE OPPOSING CORDS OF A TENT PULLED TIGHT, TENSION CAN  
CREATE MORE SPACE, ALLOWING GOD TO MOVE IN OUR LIVES.

# God Size Your Tent

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*Enlarge the place of your tent,  
stretch your tent curtains wide,  
do not hold back;  
lengthen your cords,  
strengthen your stakes.*

ISAIAH 54:2, NIV

I have good memories of sleeping in big tents. I know they are harder to carry but they are roomier and less constricting—plus in a big tent you can move your sleeping bag if there is a leak so you don't sleep in a puddle.

I have also learned it's important to tie the tent cords tight and to drive your stakes firmly into the ground. If you don't have your cords tight and stakes strongly in place, the roof of the tent might turn into a water collection area or the tent might fall over entirely.

The analogy of a tent—which is often used in the Old Testament—is helpful in understanding our spiritual lives. Our spiritual tents can be enlarged to make more space for God. When tent curtains are wide, winds of God can blow the stagnant, dank air out.

Another important part of the tent analogy is that the space inside the tent is created by cords and stakes pulling in opposite directions towards the four corners. That tension creates the space inside the tent, and by increasing the tension, you can enlarge the tent. This analogy from Isaiah 54:2 has helped me understand how I can create space for God when the cords of my life are pulled in tension.

In the last year or so I have experienced an enlarging of my spiritual tent. This has happened as I have used a very small but important word in my prayers—the word *and*. In all the places where I feel least open for movement and growth, the places where the tent wall needs to be stretched, I find using *and*—instead of *but*—makes a big difference.

I use *and* just as I might use cords on a tent to create tension and give God space to dwell in the tent of my life. When I pray, *and* holds together those contradictory thoughts and feelings that are often in tension.

In theology class, John Weborg told of a prayer he overheard in a prayer meeting during the early 1940s, when WWII was raging. The prayer reflects the anger and prejudice of the time and God's love for all people: "God bless

*When tent curtains  
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the Japs *and* you know I hate them."

When I pray using the word *but*, I don't hold all the pieces of my prayer and heart together before God—the *but* seems to negate the rest of the prayer. For example: "God I'm angry and I want you to show justice to the vandals that slashed my car top *but* I want your will and I know I should forgive them."

I don't know about you but sometimes I don't even give God a chance to respond to my anger because I've already jumped to what I think a good Christian should feel. So I pretend that I am not angry about my car being vandalized.

This prayer is a little more honest: "God, I want you to show justice to the vandals that slashed my car. And I am angry. And I want your help with this. And I don't even know if I want to stop judging them as jerks, and I want your help somehow to stop judging them, and I want to know what you think about all this. And I want you to care that I feel violated and angry."

When I pray like this I am much more able to let go of my anger, hear

from God, and sense his presence.

A while back I felt spiritually stuck. To use the tent analogy—no breeze was flowing through the tent and there was barely space for a gnat, let alone God. I felt I was in a spiritual version of the Fangorn forest in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. I felt stuck, frustrated, and angry. All I could muster in God's presence was a spiritual temper tantrum. During this time I was praying with someone who encouraged me to state everything using *and* not *but*.

So I prayed like that for twenty minutes, saying things like, "God I think I shouldn't be angry and I am. I want everyone who cares about me to drop everything and come running and I want to be alone and I want you God to show up with skin on right now. I am a walking ball of judgment and I like judgment because it makes me feel less helpless and powerless and I know I can't stop judging myself and others without your help and I want you to help me want your help."

When I was done something felt different. All my stream of honest un-Christlike feelings and thoughts held in tension with all my desires for God to show up and intervene. I realized that I had been flailing with such force that there would have been no way for me to hear God's voice. I could now hear what God was saying. I inexplicably sensed I was no longer throwing a tantrum. In fact I didn't feel frustrated with finding a way out of the forest.

So may you, God size your tent. As Isaiah tells us, enlarge the place of your tent, *and* stretch your tent curtains wide, *and* do not hold back, *and* lengthen your cords, *and* strengthen your stakes, *and* may all our mixed motives, spiritually stuck places, conflicting thoughts, and feelings be held together like a tent so God might dwell in the midst of it all. Amen. □

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