

CONNECTION POINTS

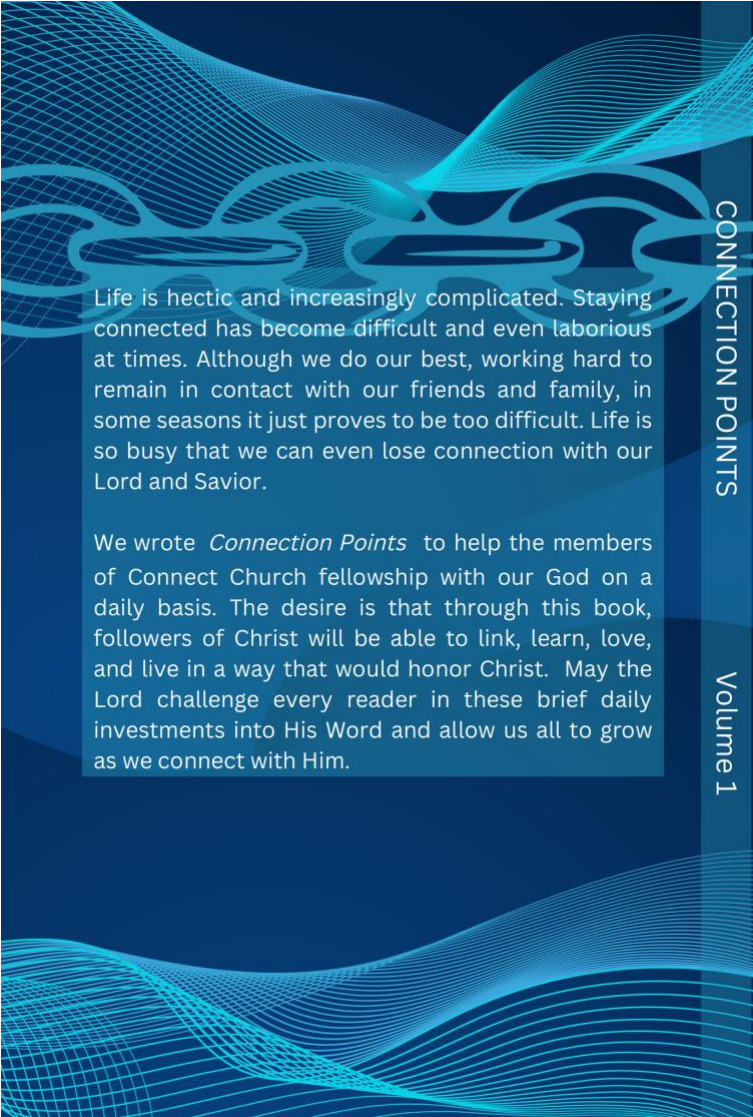
Volume 1

Connection points

A 5-Day Week
Devotional

Volume 1





Life is hectic and increasingly complicated. Staying connected has become difficult and even laborious at times. Although we do our best, working hard to remain in contact with our friends and family, in some seasons it just proves to be too difficult. Life is so busy that we can even lose connection with our Lord and Savior.

We wrote *Connection Points* to help the members of Connect Church fellowship with our God on a daily basis. The desire is that through this book, followers of Christ will be able to link, learn, love, and live in a way that would honor Christ. May the Lord challenge every reader in these brief daily investments into His Word and allow us all to grow as we connect with Him.

Connection Points

A 5-Day Week Devotional Book

By

Heath Ferguson

Contributed To and Edited By
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Volume 1

Houston

Lulu Online Publishing

To my church family
and my wife, Jamie
and daughters, Katelyn, and Ashlyn
without whom I'd be lonely every Sunday
and lonely in life.
I thank God for every one of you.

Dear Friends,

This devotional book is created and designed specifically for you. It is a simple guide to reading Scripture every day with the intent to fulfill our desire to link, learn, love, and live. As we do this together as a family of believers, we are linked together by a collective study of Scripture. At the same time, we learn what the Bible says as we read, meditate, and write our thoughts. Over the course of faithful study, we will love the written Word and the God who gave it to us. Lastly, we can begin to live the truths of the Bible as we allow it to speak to us while changing us at the same time.

To utilize this devotional to the fullest extent, we will follow the HEAR method. The acronym stands for “highlight,” “explain,” “apply,” and “respond.” Each devotion is accompanied by a page for your notes regarding the chosen passage for the day. This method is a simple way to engage Scripture on a personal level and will build confidence in your own biblical knowledge.

Lastly, I love you. Because of my love for you, I desire for you to have a genuine relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. While pastoring early in my ministry, I encouraged our church to read the Word. The problem was that we did not provide a way to make that happen. I became convicted that my responsibility is to equip others for personal growth on their walk with God. That conviction turned into commitment. Thus, this devotional book, and subsequent books, are for you. It is an expression of my love for you and my commitment to God and His Word. Enjoy it. Commit to God’s Word. Watch yourself grow in the Lord.

Your friend,
Heath

Highlight – Which verse stood out to me in the chosen text?

Explain – Why was it written and to whom? How does it fit with the verse above and below? What is the intended meaning?

Apply – What does this mean today and how can it help me?

Respond – What action does it inspire? How will I be changed?

Day 1 – 2 Corinthians 5:16-19 – Date: _____

There's nothing quite as promising as a new beginning. New Year's Day is celebrated by fireworks at the stroke of midnight. There are parties all over the world. Countdowns, ball drops (even an acorn in Raleigh, North Carolina), concerts, and much more accompany the hope and excitement of a new year.

The birth of a baby is celebrated by family and friends. In the same way, each birthday is commemorated. Why? Because a new life and the start of another year of growth bring hope and excitement.

Paul is sharing with the struggling Corinthian church the truths that they need to survive in a worldly society. He calls the church to unity with one another and with himself. Paul is writing a personal defense regarding his own relationship to Christ as an apostle. Concepts build upon one another as evidenced by the use of the word *therefore* four times in chapter 5 alone (vv. 6, 11, 16, and 20). As a part of his teaching, Paul says that those who have a relationship with Christ, or are "in Christ," are a new creature. That is, we are a "fresh original" when we trust Christ as our savior. We are something completely new in the eyes of the Lord as He makes His own into new creations.

Just like so many things are worthy of celebrating because they are new, so are believers in Christ. If you have accepted Christ, you have been recreated by God into something new. The "old" you does not exist anymore. God created you with all the natural characteristics, talents, and abilities that you possess. When He made you a "new creature," it is the new spiritual beginning that is needed for God to use you for His purposes. It is worthy of celebrating. *You* are worthy of celebrating.

Thank God that He allows us a fresh start. Before we know Christ, we are spiritual disasters. The Lord takes all of our natural abilities, fixes us spiritually, and uses our natural self for His spiritual purpose. As this year begins, will you allow God to use you for His spiritual purpose? Will you celebrate the fact that the old you is old news and the new you is fit for God's service? Embrace yourself as the new creation of God and make yourself available to God's service today.

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Day 2 – Matthew 7:24-27 – Date: _____

The Manhattan skyline is an impressive expanse of skyscrapers, ranging from residential brownstones to the massive Freedom Tower and Empire State Building. The city is surrounded by the Hudson River to the West and the aptly named East River. In between is one of the most bustling cities in world; however, there is more to the skyline than just what can be seen.

What the world sees above the ground mimics the foundation that is out of sight. The bedrock below Manhattan dictates the potential height of any building above. Thus, there is a portion of the city between Midtown and Lower Manhattan where the buildings are noticeably shorter. The foundation determines everything.

Jesus teaches about the foundations of one's life in Matthew 7. He states that "these words of mine" are the foundation of life and each person has a choice as to how to respond. People who "act on them" (His words) are like a man whose foundation is a rock. Those who do not choose sand as their foundation.

The similarities of the two are noticeable. Both build homes. Both go through storms. Both have potential for disaster. It is the difference of foundations that separates those who clean up a few downed limbs and those whose homes are left in shambles. The guarantee of destruction was determined long before the storm clouds formed.

It is appropriate that early in the year, we take the opportunity to focus on the foundation of this year and ultimately our lives. We have the ability to build our homes on the words of Jesus. It is not enough to simply "know" them, but we also need to "act" upon them. That is, they are to go beyond knowledge all the way to the core of our being. The Word of God becomes a part of our daily lives as we take the written truths and apply them to real-world situations.

Will you take the truths of God's Word to heart this year, or will you be content to simply know them? As we pray at the start of this new year, let's ask God to help us to learn and to live. The storms are coming, and the foundations are chosen. Whatever happens next depends on what our lives are built upon. Choose to build on the Word of God.

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Day 3 – Revelation 19:1-9 – Date: _____

Professional sports are a results-based, “what have you done for me lately,” cut-throat business. Our Houston Astros have been to the playoffs for six consecutive seasons, winning the American League Western Division five times in those six years. They’ve won three AL pennants and one World Series. That is quite a bit of winning, making the Astros one of the most successful sports franchises in recent years.

No matter which professional sport you choose, only one team hoists a trophy at the end of the season. All the other teams have fallen short, and some would view all those teams as failures. All the Spring Training, off-season workouts, strict diets, weights, and cardio work exist for one reason: to be the champion at the end of the year. Every player and every team begin the year with the final game in mind. The difficult truth in sports is that winning that last game belongs to only one team. The rest end the season disappointed.

Revelation 19 describes the “marriage supper of the Lamb.” It is a great time of praising God and being united with Jesus, the bridegroom, for all of eternity. Those who have trusted Christ as Savior will forever be in His presence. This is the time that there is no more sorrow, pain, or tears. There will be no more separation from other believers, and this will be only the beginning of eternity in Heaven with God.

Thinking about the final reunion with Jesus and other believers is so important to do from time to time. We are reminded that there is more than this life that we currently live. This world is a passing wind that will vanish away one day, but eternity will be spent in the presence of God for those who have trusted Him.

As the first week of the year is passing, keep in mind the “end of the season.” It is why we work, prepare, and serve. It is our focus as we start and when the days get long. Life can be difficult and full of trouble. If we can remember that the end contains a great celebration, it’s all worth it. Pray that God will give you strength to keep on as we see the celebration in the distance.

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Day 4 – Hebrews 11:1-6 – Date: _____

What do we put our faith in? Whom do we put our faith in? The answers may seem simple on the surface, requiring little thought. Perhaps the answers consist of our family, our friends, our jobs, and other people (or things) that have proven over time to be able to be “counted on” as reliable. However, the problem is not found in the answer, but more in the question.

We tend to use “faith” and “trust” interchangeably. We trust our family, friends, jobs, etc., but our faith is to rest in just one: God. The difference can be witnessed in a simple illustration. This book is being written (and probably read) while being seated. There was not a single thought taken at the moment of sitting that the chair would fail. It has been relied upon countless times before and has never broken apart. The chair is trusted. There is a sense of confidence and reliance that are placed in the chair. However, there is no “belief” or “devotion” that is awarded the chair. The chair is trusted, but our lives are not based upon or lived in devotion to the chairs we sit upon.

In the same way, we trust our families around us, and some may inappropriately base their lives and devotion on them, but God is to be the sole object of our faith. We trust God, taking our lives a step further in devotion and belief to place our faith in Him

In what is affectionately and appropriately called the “Hall of Faith,” Hebrews 11 lists Old Testament believers that demonstrated their faith in God and how it played out in a practical and physical sense in their lives. These men and women are immortalized because their belief in God dictated the manner in which they lived. They had a living faith. Why? Because they lived with a desire to please the Lord (v. 6) and lived a life of proof. *That* is faith.

Allow this year to be one of faith. As you are growing and learning in a relationship with Christ, ask how that relationship should be reflected in everyday living. Perhaps one day your family will define your life starting with the words, “by faith.” It is that faith in God that will dictate our lives and lead us in a relationship that pleases the Lord.

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Day 5 – 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 – Date: _____

Timex watches have been produced since 1854, but nearly a century passed before the watchmakers saw the success that they desired. It was in the 1950s that Timex began to put their watches through a series of “torture tests” and created an ad campaign to show their durability. This included Mickey Mantle swinging a bat with a watch taped to it, an opera singer belting out a note that shattered the glass, and even sumo wrestlers slamming into each other with a watch in between. The ads all end with the same slogan: “Takes a licking, keeps on ticking.”

The image shared in the commercials is that the Timex watch is dependable, strong, and ready for you as soon as you need to know the time, no matter what has unfolded. In a spiritual sense, we would say the watch is faithful. Nothing can deter the watch from working; as soon as it is needed, it is ready.

Paul expresses to the Corinthian church that as servants of Christ, as stewards of the mysteries of God, it is required that they be found faithful. That is to say, when the time comes, at the moment at which they are needed, they are going to be ready and willing to do their part. When he says “required,” He uses wording that says we are to be in a state “to be sought.” In other words, we should be the ones who are looked for in the moment of service.

A personal definition of faithfulness is this: “being and doing what God intends for me today, trusting that God has a plan for the future.” What is God desiring of you today? What small areas of your relationship with God need focus today? It may be reading His Word or spending some time in prayer and pondering. Whatever is needed, take the time to invest in that relationship because God has a plan for the future.

Avoid the mentality of doing the amazing when we should be focusing on the importance of remaining faithful. If we are to be ready in the moment of service, it is because we have invested in the preparation of the servant. Pray that God will prepare your heart and life to be used by Him when the moment calls for one who can be trusted as His faithful steward.

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Day 6 – Isaiah 55:8-9 – Date: _____

Because of the vast difference in emotions that the thought can bring, the future is an interesting concept to consider. The future can be “bright” for the up-and-coming star, or it can be horrifying for the child who’s been told, “Wait until your father gets home.” The difference is found in the perspective of the one who is looking. Some organizations have seen that their best days are in the past, while others say, “The best is yet to come.” No matter your perspective, one thing remains common: the future is the great unknown.

In the final installment of the epic *Back to the Future* trilogy, Marty finds himself in the Wild West. This is a major issue for him because he belongs in 1985 and is trapped in 1885. While there, his great-great grandmother, Maggie McFly, says to him, “I hope you’re considering your own future, Mr. Eastwood.” (She believed his name to be Clint Eastwood.) Marty replies, “I think about it all the time.” Being 100 years from his own time, the future was all he thought about.

How would you write your future? If you could choose your own path and control the outcomes of every decision, what would you choose? The interesting truth is that the future belongs to God. We have faith, and remain faithful, but the future belongs to Him. Not one of us can know what lies ahead, nor would we always be able to see what is best for us...but God does.

Isaiah makes a beautiful admission in chapter 55. He says that our thoughts and ways are no match for the Lord’s. His ways are so much higher than our own. When we have a personal relationship with the One who not only knows the future but also knows what we need for that future to be for our best, there is rest.

We stand at the front end of a year. The rest of the year is the future. Place the future in God’s hands. Ask the Lord to direct your future in the ways that He already knows you need. Whom will you meet? What opportunities will you be presented? What struggles will you face? Trust these to the Lord and prepare yourself to be the servant He desires for you to be, for now and the future.

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Day 7 – Mark 15:40-47 – Date: _____

Coffee lovers have diverse tastes. There are four different types of coffee beans: Arabica, Robusta, Liberica, and Excelsa. Within those types of coffee, there are various ways that the coffee can be served. From espresso to latte to mocha and beyond, the coffee drinker has many options to enjoy.

When speaking of coffee, boldness is a measure that is commonly used to describe the taste. A bold coffee has intense flavor and rich aroma due to dark roasted coffee beans. Typically, a bold coffee can be recognized from the first sip or even before by its smell alone.

Colors can be bold. Fashion can be bold. **Font can be bold.** That word is used to describe so many different things. We don't need a description of what "bold" means; we usually know it when we see it (or taste it). Typically, if something is "bold," it makes us uneasy.

When Jesus was crucified, very few of His followers remained at the scene. Most of them disappeared and did not want to be publicly affiliated with Him. After Jesus died, someone had to claim the body. Agreeing to a very public affiliation with Jesus in the face of an angry mob, in steps Joseph of Arimathaea. Mark records that he "went in boldly to Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus" (Mark 15:43).

This boldness would be recognized by Pilate and many others as an act of a man without fear. This type of boldness is the opposite of a fear that paralyzes. This is a boldness that drives behavior, even when the actions would be considered unacceptable, and it comes out of a deep-seated belief in something or someone.

Joseph of Arimathaea had this deep-seated belief in Jesus. Does your belief in Jesus generate this type of boldness? Would you be willing to associate with Jesus while the world is openly rejecting Him and His followers? If we are going to be bold, the world will know it when they see it. Ask God to give you Joseph-type boldness. Let the world know that you are a follower of Jesus all the way to the cross.

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Day 8 – Acts 4:13-14, 27-31 – Date: _____

The people who have been the most challenging and inspirational on a personal level are those that have boldness to speak up for Jesus in any situation. Once a friend of mine shared Christ with a famous college athlete on the field after a game. The same man shared Christ at a gas pump while refueling his car. Now, as a pastor, that same man leads people to Christ on a regular basis because of his boldness to share.

Is there anything special about these types of people? Are they more articulate than others? Do they have a secret formula for reaching others for Jesus? No. They are regular people who love the Lord that have a true boldness in sharing. Their boldness overcomes the fears and anxiety that accompany spiritual encounters. So, what is the secret to becoming a person of great boldness in speaking for the Lord?

In Acts 4, Peter and John were involved in healing a sick man and later tossed into prison. They had the opportunity to speak, and they did so with boldness, but not without explanation. First, they had been with Jesus (4:13). In other words, others could see that they had a real relationship with Christ. Secondly, they spoke “in the name of Jesus” (4:18). It wasn’t their message; it was God’s message. Thirdly, they were filled with the Spirit (4:31). That is to say, the Holy Spirit had full control of their lives, including their mouths. They were clean and holy servants of the Lord.

As a result, they “began to speak the word of God with boldness” (4:31). Boldness for the Lord is less of a choice and more of a side effect of a real relationship with Jesus that realizes the message is not our own, but God’s. A rejection of the gospel is not a personal rejection of you; it is a rejection of God Himself. Peter and John shared the message because it was an extension of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who was bold with you in sharing truth? Did God use that person to make a difference in your life for eternity? If so, who are we sharing with, boldly, to change their lives? Ask God to draw you closer to Him and to give you the boldness to share His story with the world.

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Day 9 – Matthew 28:18-20 – Date: _____

If you ask most Americans how long a meter is, they will say, “roughly a yard,” or “about three feet.” As Americans, we do not really know how long a meter is because we use inches, feet, yards, etc. We were not raised to use centimeters, meters, kilometers, and other metric system measurements. However, if you ask a scientist, they may have a different description of a meter.

By definition, a meter is the length of the path travelled by light in a vacuum during a time interval of $1/299,792,458$ th of a second. There is a set standard for the measurement, which makes sense. How can a distance that is described as “about three feet” have any accuracy to the measurement?

In the same way, Jesus is the standard for all acts of evangelism. Jesus is the measure by which we spread the gospel. In this passage, we have the “Great Commission.” Typically, the teaching on this text begins with verse 19. However, verse 18 sets up the truth that the other verses depend upon. Jesus says that “all power” or “all authority” belongs to Him, that all of this—the world, the people, the work of God, and everything else—is His. So, what are we to do with this information?

If we are followers of Jesus, if we belong to Him, then we become agents of His message. This is where verses 19 and 20 explain that we make disciples as we are going through this life. As we follow Jesus, He is the standard that is set. We measure our success in terms of our obedience to his authority and power. If it all belongs to Him, and we follow Him, then we make disciples for Him. Jesus is the cause and Jesus is the reason.

Reaching the lost is what we do because we love our family, friends, and our community. We want everyone to choose Christ and be in Heaven. The most powerful motivation is service to our all-powerful authority, the Savior of the world. We should love our neighbor, but we serve because of our Savior. May we live in obedience to our Savior today as we love those around us.

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One of the greatest games that we played as kids was hide-and-seek. To summarize the game, if you've never played it, one person is "it" and hides while everyone else looks for that person. It is a simple premise that children of all ages understand. When someone found that perfect hiding spot and could hear all the other kids running around, there was a sense of joy that you were the best "hider." That moment paled in comparison to being the one who finally found "it," tagged him or her, and won the game.

While passing through Jericho, Jesus caught the eye of a certain chief tax collector named Zaccheus. Most of the story is presented as this short man climbing a sycamore tree to see Jesus over the pressing crowd. What is typically left out is the emphasis that Zaccheus would have been a much-despised man. Tax collectors were typically hated due to their extortion of others, and he was no exception. In this text, as part of his attempts to make amends, he gives money back four-fold to those he had extorted.

Thus, the crowd would be surprised, and perhaps disappointed, to see that Jesus would be willing to interact with Zaccheus, much less go to his home. This man, who claimed to be the Messiah and the Son of God, would never spend his time with sinners, right? We know that Jesus not only came to spend time with sinners, but to seek after them for the sake of saving them. This is great news considering all of us, without exception, are, in fact, sinners.

Verse 10 tells us that the purpose of Jesus' coming was to "seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus is not playing "hide and seek" with us, as we know that He knows exactly where we are. However, He is spiritually seeking everyone so that He can save us. The question is, will people be willing to be found?

What is our role in this process? If we are followers of Christ, and if we are committed to His great commission, then we will also reflect His heart. The heart of Jesus is to seek the lost. As we follow Christ, we seek the lost as well. Who is "it" in your life that is hiding and needs to be found? Who are you seeking to share the gospel with as you go? If the Son of God is seeking, then the children of God are seeking too.

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The United States has 168 ambassadors that serve in embassies around the globe, representing the United States in whatever corner of the world they are found. Ambassadors maintain diplomatic relations with the receiving state and promote foreign policy strategies through international organizations. In other words, ambassadors act on behalf of the home country (in our case, the United States) in a foreign land.

In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul is expressing the temporary nature of living on this earth and the eternal home of the believer in Heaven. As a part of the transition from Earth to Heaven, we will all stand in judgment before the Lord. Because we know this to be true, we persuade people to know Jesus. When we accept Christ, we become new creations, putting the past in the past and putting on an entirely new person. This allows for the reconciliation of man with God. Therefore, we, as believers, are ambassadors for Christ in this world.

Just as American ambassadors are the representative of our nation to the world, Christians represent our God to the world. We speak on behalf of the Lord, begging people to come to know Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Think for a moment about the responsibility that is included in that truth. We have been entrusted with the message of our eternal home and our Heavenly Father. We speak His truth to the unbelieving world in an attempt to persuade others to trust Christ with their lives. Now think of the honor that we have been given. We are ambassadors. Out of over 330 million citizens, the United States has only 168 that have been chosen to serve our country. When we follow Christ, He chooses us to serve Him as well.

Knowing our role, our responsibility, and our honor to serve, let's ask one more question: are we embracing and fulfilling our duty as ambassadors? Are we working to find people with whom to share the great truths about our homeland, Heaven, persuading them to join us there one day? Let us stand in our place of service and proclaim the greatness of our God so that others may see it and join us in Heaven.

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Years ago, our family was working in ministry with college students. As a toddler, Katelyn loved approaching students to ask what became her little catch phrase: “Who’s your friend?”

As they do on every college campus, the young people would pair off into dating couples. Of course, who each pair included tended to change from month to month, but a lot of “friendship” was going on, and those who stuck it out for more than a few days always caught the attention of a particularly perceptive three-year-old. Even her little eyes could see that these two people belonged together because you didn’t see one of them without the other.

The book of Proverbs is full of insights about our friendships, and in today’s verse we see just how important it is to surround ourselves with the right people. If those around you can identify someone as your friend because of the time you spend together, the odds are good that you’re being influenced in some way by that friend. We all have a very real need for friends—for community, accountability, fellowship, and more—which is why choosing the people to play these crucial roles in our lives is such a big responsibility. Not only do our friendships impact who we are and what we believe, they make a statement to the world as a reflection of our values and priorities- not something to take lightly, especially in these days of passive online “friendships” that impact our thinking but are rarely accompanied by actual, real-life “togetherness.”

The verse is clear: walk with the wise, and you’ll have wisdom. What a promise! Walk with the kind, and you’ll be kinder. Walk with the joyful, and you’ll have joy. This sounds great, but there’s a shadow side: “a companion of fools is destroyed.” Our friends can literally make or break us. Consider who your friends are and, just as importantly, consider the kind of friend you are. Are you a loving influence who speaks truth into the lives of your friends? Or is there negativity or harm you’ve explained away for too long? Ask the Lord to help you find and strengthen godly friendships in your life and to be that kind of friend today.

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“Once upon a time...” As children, our pulse raced at the sound of those words. And, truth be told, even our grown-up attention is caught by them. Why? Because people of all ages are drawn to a good story. From Tolkien to Disney, the best storytellers are able to showcase the human condition, exploring universal themes like love, goodness, fear, and betrayal. We love to read about the triumph of good over evil, the victory of the underdog team, and endings where the good guys always win. As children it seemed inevitable, but even now a part of us longs for “happily ever after.”

Jesus knew the value of stories. The Bible shows us that He often used parables to teach the lessons He wanted His followers to learn, weaving tales that still today teach us about consequences, faith, justice, and more.

In the streak of cynicism that can be a part of adulthood, we sometimes question the value of fictional stories. (Nothing sells a movie or book like the tagline “Based on a True Story!”) But just because something didn’t happen doesn’t mean it isn’t true. Whether in literature or in the inspired words of Scripture, there is truth and goodness to be found in stories if we will only look for them.

And, of course, there is no story we are more closely connected than our own. It can be difficult to see the full arc of our personal narratives since we don’t always have the benefit of times or distance from a situation. But if we look back over our lives, both the good chapters and bad, we can see that God’s grace is on every page. There are many things we might change about our stories if we could—decisions we regret, relationships we would mend or maybe avoid altogether, choices that have come to define us in painful ways. But in each and every moment, there was greater storytelling at play than we knew. God is the ultimate Author of our stories, and we can rest in the knowledge that His thoughts and ways are higher than ours. Like C.S. Lewis’s Aslan (a beautiful fictional depiction of Jesus), we know that “He isn’t safe, but He’s good.”

Consider the many “plots twists” you’ve experienced in life. Trace the hand of God in each of those unexpected or even unwanted seasons. Your story may not be the one you would have written yourself, but it is at its most beautiful and perfect when God is holding the pen.

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One of the most comforting phrases in Scripture is the description of Jesus as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). When we are grieving, even if other family members or friends are walking through the same loss, it can be a uniquely lonely experience. Sometimes grief means losing a loved one, which is tragic at any age or circumstance. Sometimes we grieve the loss of a relationship, a missed opportunity, the end of an era with a job or community, or even the loss of our financial security.

A death in our family plunges us into the darkest days we can imagine. An unexpected diagnosis creates panic where there had been peace only moments before. A betrayal can send us reeling when those closest to us hurt us most deeply. There are so many levels and layers to grief, and our mental, emotional, and even physical reactions vary greatly from person to person, even those grieving the same thing. This is one reason why it can be such a lonely season. Adding in hurt feelings, relationship dynamics, or other sensitive aspects means that sometimes we truly feel we have nowhere to turn in our grief.

But then...Jesus. We know that our Savior was “tempted in all points like we are” and that He experienced very real grief in His time on earth. Famous for its brevity, John 11:35 tells us simply, “Jesus wept.” He grieved the loss of his friend Lazarus and the pain that Mary and Martha felt. Even in the moments leading to His arrest and crucifixion, He was in such distress that He sweat drops of blood. Jesus was grieving over the pain and darkness that lay ahead. He was grieving the loss of fellowship with His own Father. No matter what circumstance we are facing, our grief will never compare to the agony that Jesus went through—and He accepted it all for our sakes. Beyond making a way for our salvation, Jesus “bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.” He did not just bear the weight of His own suffering but also took on, quite literally, the weight of the world.

We cannot explain or wish or even pray away our grief. We may be sad or even despondent. But God is near to the broken-hearted, and we are never, ever alone.

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In the novel by Eleanor H. Porter (and the 1960 movie adaption), Pollyanna is a little orphan girl who's come to live with her rich aunt, a fairly grumpy woman who basically runs their small town. Pollyanna comes across the pastor of the local church practicing his very fire-and-brimstone sermon and innocently suggests the "glad passages" her own father used to preach from before his death. Throughout the movie, she encourages the pastor and others to play the "glad game" with her: always looking for the good in everything and everyone around them, even when it becomes almost impossible.

In this particular scene, though, she shows the pastor her necklace that is inscribed with these words: "When you look for the bad in mankind expecting to find it, you surely will." That's where we are, isn't it? We look for the bad and are pretty much never disappointed!

It would be quite a day in this country if we would recognize and understand that there is not a single person that Jesus did not die for. There is no one across any political aisle from us that Jesus loves less than He loves you or me. We are not more highly favored to God because we believe a certain way about anything. We base what we believe on what He says in Scripture and try to live that out, but He doesn't love us more because of it. Every single person, no matter what their stance is on any single issue, is created in the image of Christ, is fully loved and known by Him, and is eligible for His saving grace.

"Even if...?" Yes, even then. That is God's creation you're talking and posting and commenting about. Even them. If loving our enemies, even "those who persecute you," is good enough for Jesus, it has to be good enough for us.

At the end of the movie, the pastor, a very changed man because of Pollyanna, says to her with tears in his eyes as the transformed townspeople look on: "We looked for the good in them and we found it, didn't we?" May God help us to remember that those around us are created *imago Dei*—in His image—and He called His creation very good.

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Little kids tend to mix up their words, inadvertently coming up with phrases that take on entirely new meanings. One of my favorites from a little girl I know is “Can I tell you a question?” (Whether they’re asking or “telling,” kids love their questions!) But I love this because I think we often “tell” questions instead of asking them—putting them out there but not pausing to really listen to the answers or dismissing them when we don’t get the response we were hoping for. And we’ve all experienced someone who is looking for input or advice or answers but has the mindset of, “Don’t tell me what I need to hear; tell me what I want to hear.” Unfortunately, that way of thinking stifles growth and rejects truth.

On the other hand, asking (or being asked) questions can come across as intrusive, nosy, or combative. Even when someone is just curious or genuinely seeking to understand a situation, we can get defensive when we’re questioned or start to doubt ourselves. Of course, questions can be presented in a passive-aggressive way (“That’s what you’re wearing?”) and not asked in good faith. Sometimes we have more questions than answers, and often we just want to do our own thing without any pushback.

Jesus was the ultimate Question Asker. His questions were thoughtful and incisive and, most of all, clarifying. Not for Him, of course. The most fascinating thing is that He already knew the answers! Every time! He appeared to be “curious” when, truly, He was making others aware of what He already knew. As early as the Garden of Eden, He asked Adam and Eve, “Where are you? What is this thing you have done?” (Genesis 3). He knew exactly what had happened—the fall of man—but He was allowing Adam and Eve the chance to admit their sin and restore fellowship with Him.

There are so many other examples, including, “Do you love me more than these?” (John 21) “What do you want me to do?” (Luke 18) “Why do you call me good?” (Mark 10) “Do you want to get well?” (John 5) In each of these and the countless other times that Jesus asked questions, He was giving people the gift of clarity as they answered.

Asking questions can be tricky, but if we strive to do it like Jesus, it can be the kindest thing in the world, for ourselves and for others, especially if we really listen to the answers.

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The sound of an alarm may very well be the worst sound in the history of mankind. No matter the particular harsh noise or melody that is played, it is startling to the system. This means that every morning, most of us wake up with our hearts racing and in a bad mood because the beautiful night's sleep that we were experiencing has come to a screeching halt.

What is the fix for waking up in such a fashion? A nap. Sometimes a nap is the only reason worth getting out of bed in the first place. The way people nap is as individual as a fingerprint. Some nap on their couch or recliner. Some get back into their pajamas and climb all the way back in the bed (the scene of the “alarm clock crime” from that morning). Still others try to take a “power nap” at their desk while holding a pen in their hand (when you drop the pen, it's time to wake up). No matter how we sleep or nap, one truth remains: we need rest.

Genesis 1 and 2 is the Creation account. God speaks every aspect into existence *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing.” Sine God in no way was exhausted because of His speaking, the question that persists is this: did God have a need for resting? Genesis 2 specifically lets us know that God rested from “all His work....” If God wasn't tired, and if He is never needing of rest (Psalm 121), why would He record this for us? Because it is a message to all men that if God took the time to rest, then it is imperative that we make the time for our own rest.

Are we resting? Not just simple sleep, although that is included, but true rest. Are there times in your week that you are able to disconnect from the world and allow your mind as well as your body to disengage with the exhaustion of the tasks at hand? It is scientifically proven that lack of sleep clouds judgment, slows reaction time, can cause depression, ages the skin, and leads to many other issues.

We want to be at our best physically and spiritually. A pastor friend once said, “Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is take a nap.” Take this truth to heart today and the rest of this year and make sure you give yourself the best opportunity to serve the Lord by being rested. You will be at your best, but only if you rest.

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If you were to describe the most “at rest” you have ever been, what would that look like? This would include physical rest, but consider more of the entire package: rest to point of being relaxed, at peace with your situation, without worry despite having responsibility, etc. When, if ever, was the last time you experienced that type of rest?

For me it was on a cruise ship barreling through the Gulf of Mexico for five days. It wasn’t the other-worldly Mayan blue water, the perfectly prepared plates of exquisite meals, or the exploration of ancient civilization ruins on a Caribbean island. The rest did not come from something that we did or had. The rest came from what we did NOT have: cell signal. For a five-day span, there was complete disconnection from the world without even the possibility that a meal would be interrupted with a poorly timed text message.

Moses is the leader of the nation of Israel. As you can imagine, leading God’s people through the wilderness with no destination in sight would create unrest in anyone. Moses takes a moment to remind the Lord that Moses has favor with Him and that these people are God’s people. Moses was seeking direction and comfort from the only one who could offer it in this moment. God’s response to him was, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” God’s answer to the rest that Moses desired was not the information Moses sought; it was a simple reminder of His presence.

Moses responds, “If your presence is not with us, do not lead us out of this place.” He was simply stating, “We need your presence; don’t leave us!” The word rest literally means “settle down.” God’s presence was all that Moses needed to be “settled” in his spirit. Therein lies true rest.

For me, it was what we did not have that gave me rest for a few days. For Moses, it is what he did have that settled his spirit. Lasting rest, enduring settling, comes from the only one whose presence can give it, and that is God. Real rest is found when we spend time in the presence of God and trust that He is with us despite the uncertainty that is ahead. We can stop looking for rest in the uncertain waters of the world and begin looking for rest in the God who knows all things and is in control of all things.

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As a child, when someone got too bossy, there was a pre-prepared statement that almost all of us had: “Who died and left you in charge?” Perhaps your favorite response was, “You aren’t the boss of me!” Either way, all of us have probably used both a time or two in our adolescence. Truth be told, we have thought it during our adult years as well!

No one enjoys being bossed around. At the same time, there never seems to be a lack of people interested in telling you what to do. I live in a house with three females and a dog. Someone is constantly telling me what to do or standing at the back door just waiting to be let out. I know he’s not using words, but he’s ordering me around in his mind.

Authority is an issue that is seldom discussed but always on display. Speed limits display authority. Office structures display authority. Even the places people chose to sit in the car or at the dinner table display authority. If authority is such a large component of human life, then it is reasonable that God would address it in His Word for us.

God is the ultimate authority in the world. That is where we like to leave that statement. If we bring the truth closer to our own hearts, we should say, “God is the ultimate authority of my life.” Romans 13:1 tells us that “there is no authority except from God.” We don’t have a problem agreeing to this until we consider the context of this verse. Paul is explaining the governments of the world and how their authority is established by God. That is a tougher pill for us to swallow.

However, let’s consider a truth: God is the authority of the authorities. There is nothing that happens in this world without the guidance or permission of almighty God. Therein is true authority. The only real question is, do we recognize God for who He is and embrace Him with our own lives?

Who is the “boss of you” today? Who gets to determine what is right and what is wrong? Let us bow to the almighty authority of God and not to the lesser authority of ourselves. If we embrace the authority of God, then serving Him today becomes a simple act of obedience to the highest power in our lives.

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When my wife was giving birth to our second daughter, an unexpected scene began to unfold in the birthing room. For context, I feel the need to set the scene for you. We arrived the night before and it wasn't quite time for the baby to make her arrival, so the doctors made us walk. I got to wear a cool badge that said "Coach" on it, and I took my job very seriously. We walked for what had to be miles through the labyrinth of corridors in that hospital, but the next morning, it was baby time.

The process began and the room was flooded with nurses. Still wearing my "Coach" badge and holding my wife's hand, something washed over me. I'm not sure if it was excitement, or hunger, or exhaustion from being up all night, but I got weak-kneed and my body was flushed with heat. I said, "I think I'm going to pass out!" Worst "Coach" moment ever.

The nurses all left my wife—mid-birth—and ran to my side, getting me cool rags and a cup of water. Not one nurse remained for the true patient, the trooper, the hero of the story, the mom giving birth for the second time. Nope, it was all about me in that moment. So, I leaned up in my seat, reached through the nurses, patted her on the leg, and said, "You got this." It was my weak way of letting her know that I still saw her, and I knew she could do it.

Today, you may find yourself in one of two situations: needing to be encouraged, or able to offer encouragement to someone else. Like Israel in Isaiah 41, in times of need and difficulty and discouragement, we have each other. The Lord has been gracious enough to put a loving group of people around us that can pick us up when we are down. There are days when you are that "loving group" reaching out to others, letting them know that they are loved and they can make it.

Don't allow the day to end before you take the time to encourage someone else. Sending a card, a phone call, or a simple text message just to say, "I'm praying for you, what can I pray for?" goes a long way to lift one's spirits. If you find yourself in need today, know that this is for you. You are loved so much that this book is for you. These passages were written by our God who loves you so much He allows us the opportunity to link together and love one another. "You got this."

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Parents have an interesting way—some may even call it an opportunity—of explaining to children why something needs to be done. Instead of explaining to a child that a pile of wet, filthy gym clothes that remains on the floor for long periods of time can develop mold and be a breeding ground for flesh-eating bacteria, we simply say, “Pick up your clothes.” The inevitable response from the disenchanted teen is, “Why?” Without the long explanation, the response becomes, “Because I said so.”

That phrase tends to end all discussion. It is not a true explanation, and not one that is always well-received, but it is often given. If the parent returns to the steaming pile of slowly rotting clothes in the corner of the room, two emotions rise to the surface: anger and sadness. Anger because the job was not done as required and sadness that the child is unwilling to obey the simplest and most straightforward instructions.

For parents, grand gestures are nice but not always necessary. Parents desire for their children to simply obey. The prophet Samuel had the important task of sharing the word of God with King Saul in 1 Samuel 15. In short, King Saul had disobeyed the Lord in a wartime scenario by pardoning some people and animals and was unwilling to follow God as He had spoken. When Samuel arrives, he gives word to the King that God knows of Saul’s disobedience.

As we all do, King Saul argues with Samuel, saying, “I did obey the voice of the Lord...” But this was incomplete obedience. Samuel replies, “To obey is better than a sacrifice.” Sacrifices were seen as great acts of service and selflessness to God from His people, but Samuel contradicts popular thought and emphasizes the importance of obedience.

Does God experience the same anger and sadness as the disobeyed parent in our lives? We make excuses and argue, but if we are honest with ourselves, we are guilty of incomplete obedience or even outright rebellion.

How can we obey God today? Reading these verses is a great start, but what else is God speaking to you about? Ask God to open your heart to His leading today and then obey when you feel the nudge in your heart. Our obedience is more important than anything else we have planned for today.

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One of entertainment’s most famous figures is Fred Rogers, the unassuming, gentle man who quietly but powerfully revolutionized children’s television. “Mister Rogers” devoted decades to teaching kids across America, spanning generations with his influence and using songs, stories, and “The Land of Make-Believe” to share values that were rooted in his own deep faith in God. Fred Rogers died almost twenty years ago, but our “neighborhood” today could certainly benefit from the goodness of this minister from Pittsburgh.

Mister Rogers wrote original songs for nearly all of the music in his thousands of television episodes, and one of his song titles is such a powerful little phrase all on its own that it makes a pretty good motto to keep in mind: “Sometimes Isn’t Always.” Whether it’s a behavioral stage of one of our children, a seemingly endless string of car trouble, or a struggle with anxiety, it helps to remind ourselves, “Sometimes isn’t always.”

Since Mr. Rogers was a devoted Christian, I don’t think he’d mind if we connected this idea to a corresponding Scripture. The passage above goes on to name a variety of the seasons we experience: laughter and mourning, birth and death, gains and losses, silence and speech. What all of these seasons have in common is just that—they are seasons. They don’t last forever. Good or bad, things won’t always be the way they are now.

Are you grieving? Have you been betrayed? Does your toddler have you convinced their tantrums will lead to a life of crime? Is your daily life an inner struggle that isn’t obvious to anyone else? Sometimes isn’t always. These things don’t define you. They don’t get the final word. Jesus does.

My favorite part of these verses is Ecclesiastes 3:11: “He hath made everything beautiful in his time.” The uncomfortable emotions we feel, the shame we hide, the loneliness or exhaustion or fear—these are not permanent. Those seasons are all part of a story that God is writing about our lives. Our hearts can be encouraged knowing that He makes it all beautiful, and He is always good.

Read through the seasons described in Ecclesiastes 3 Ask the Lord to help you through this “sometimes” season and be mindful of the way He is making it beautiful—in HIS time.

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There's a funny old quote that says, "If you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans." While I don't really think God is up in Heaven scoffing at our desire to plan out our day, week, or even year, it is true that whether we use a beautiful notebook or a high-tech app, even our best-laid plans can go awry. The best thing to do, then, is to write them in pencil.

We can plan. We just have to be able (and willing) to begin again. You're still doing the planning. You're not giving up, giving in, checking out, or going under. You're planning, dreaming, doing—but it's not set in stone. It's not written in pen, which is messy when you try to scribble over it. Writing in pencil means you have the option, whether by necessity or desire, to flip the pencil over and erase what was there.

We believe lies about ourselves. People we care about let us down. We feel imposter syndrome, decision fatigue, and burnout. Gifts begin to feel like burdens. We put away childish things and say goodbye to misbegotten dreams. The down-to-the-minute schedule that has us arriving right on time is derailed by something as small as a missing shoe or spilled coffee. And a lot of these things that alter our plans are written not in pencil but in a big black magic marker on our souls.

Writing in pencil lets us adapt. We don't have to throw the entire day or month or life away. We erase and start over, dream again, wipe up the coffee. As Jon Acuff says, we "pivot, don't panic."

What we know is this: the God of Heaven is in control. He is sovereign, kind, and always good. With His gentle guidance, we can write the plans for our days knowing that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." We can give ourselves grace when we need to erase and also trust that by being fully who we are and who He made us to be, the desires of our hearts will lead us in the way He wants us to go. Despite the head-spinning changes and bewilderment that is life in these days, we can write in pencil with strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, knowing that God is not the author of confusion and that His plans are best.

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It's impossible to say how this was calculated, but there is a statistic out there that claims we spend about six months of our lives waiting in some way: in line, in traffic, etc. (That figure has to be higher for Houston drivers, right?) Even though smartphones have given us the ability to be productive or entertained while waiting, and certainly I'm not complaining about being able to read a book, send an email, or listen to a podcast while sitting in the (aptly named) waiting room at the dentist, waiting just isn't something we enjoy or look forward to. Whether what we're waiting for is something to dread (a root canal!) or something to look forward to (kids at Christmas, or French fries in the Chick-fil-A drive-thru), that in-between, "I'm stuck here for now" state of being is not ideal.

This feeling is exacerbated many times over when we're not waiting in a physical line but in some way that goes beyond listening for our name to be called in a restaurant or doctor's office. Maybe we're waiting on answers for an unexplained illness, waiting on a wayward child to make her way back home, waiting for a relationship to mend, waiting for an addicted loved one to get the help they need. Maybe we're waiting for our finances to be looking up or our busyness to be settling down. Or, perhaps most difficult of all, maybe we are waiting on an answer to prayer.

God doesn't always answer our prayers immediately. In fact, it's probably fair to say that He rarely does. This could be why Scripture tells over and over again to wait on the Lord. We might feel frustrated at that—what choice do we have? He's the all-powerful God of the universe and doesn't work on our timetable. But why do we need to wait on Him? What makes this particular waiting make sense? Even in our impatience, we answer our own question. We can and do wait because, quite simply, He is God. We don't wait mindlessly or without anticipation. As Psalm 130:5 says, "I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope."

Even when our entire being—body, soul, and mind—feels unable to make a move until God intervenes in our situation, we are able to hope. He is always moving, always working for our good, and the outcome, friends, is worth the wait.

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Of all life's emotional seasons, disappointment might be one of the trickiest. It's a missed opportunity, not a huge tragedy. It's a personal regret, not the loss of a lifetime. Or it's spiraling with "what ifs" and, admittedly, not some insurmountable trial.

But oh, can it hurt. In a world that already doesn't often leave margin for true grief or loss, a world that moves on from the most horrendous news with the swipe of the next day's cycle, a world that doesn't seem to know how to sit in the discomfort avoided by the ever-present appeal of toxic positivity.... Well, in that world, who's got time for your disappointment? Or mine? You need to move on, get over it, let it go. Onward and upward!

But sometimes, in the quiet moments of those disappointments that seem small to everyone but not to your own soul, you don't want onward and upward. You want backward and inward. Or maybe no movement at all. Just a little time to acknowledge that things did not turn out the way you wanted them to. It's no great loss, maybe, to anyone but you. And that can feel terribly lonely.

There's a reason Proverbs 13:12 says that "Hope deferred makes the heart sick." Isn't that the most perfect definition of disappointment? Not "they forgot my Chick-fil-A sauce" (although that hurts!) but true, painful heart-sickness. It's real, manifesting in so many ways. And we aren't bad or weak for feeling it, especially when it's personal and tender, like a bruise, and we don't want to be That Person and be vague about our problems so we pretend it's fine even when, for whatever reason, it's simply not.

If you're in a season of disappointment, you don't have to immediately parrot the usual "everything happens for a reason" responses to yourself. You can sit with the sadness and disappointment. But even while feeling like you should be "over" something you are very much still "under," there are small pieces of light and grace and hope to be found if only we will look. The Psalmist prayed many times over, "Hope thou in God, my help and my salvation." He's with you in the disappointment, and He's ready for you to put your hope back in His hands where it's safe. Ask Him for the courage to hope again.

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Looking back on a situation that unfolded in our lives can be a two-edged sword. On the one hand, when we look back, sometimes we say, “I am who I am today because of how all of that unfolded.” At other times, we look back and think, “I wish I would have acted differently there.” Typically, the response depends on how we view the scenario as time has marched on.

In one of my lowest moments, looking back, I am ashamed of how I acted and treated some people who I love very much. Almost immediately, there was remorse and regret (some of which still haunts me to this day). Riddled with guilt, it is still difficult to wear the clothes that I had on that day. Sounds crazy, right? Not to me. It sounds like the guilt and pain of a man who wishes his “looking back” could be a “going back” to change my actions.

Guilt is not the worst feeling we can endure. Yes, it’s painful and embarrassing, but it is a common emotion and lets us know that God is at work in our lives. Psalm 32 speaks of those who have transgressed and describes God’s hand as “heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.” But it was because of that feeling, that guilt, that sin was acknowledged and confession was made, leading to a beautiful thing: forgiveness.

If we aren’t careful, Satan will use guilt as a means to beat us down and make us feel that we have done something so awful that not even God can forgive it. What Satan does not want to recognize is that guilt is used by the Holy Spirit of God to convict us in the areas that we need to be forgiven. God’s “heavy hand” is not designed to destroy us emotionally. It is a loving squeeze on our hearts to draw us back to Himself if we will only respond in acknowledgement and confession.

Are you experiencing guilt of any kind? Is God lovingly speaking into your heart, letting you know that there is something that can change in your relationship with Him? Feel it, listen to it, and let God expose to you a needed area of improvement. And when you seek forgiveness from those you may have hurt, let God forgive you as well. Embrace the feeling and then allow God to take it away. Only God can heal us of our guilt and render us not guilty...and that is a beautiful thing.

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Every now and then, we have little flashes of self-discovery that switch on a light bulb in our brains and make us think, “Well, that explains a lot about me.” For some people, learning about the five love languages (gifts, quality time, physical touch, words of affirmation, and acts of service) is exceptionally eye-opening. For example, if your love language is words of affirmation, you may have had one of those “aha” moments when you realized it. “Oh, is that why I can remember compliments word for word from a decade ago?”

Even if you have a different “official” love language, we all respond to the words of others, both positive and negative. The downside of remembering the words we’ve received, though, is that we don’t just remember the good ones. We can rattle off those negative comments, cutting remarks, and third-grade taunts just as fast as we can the good stuff (and maybe even faster). The words we say, text, type, and send to each other have a tremendous impact. The book of Proverbs is full of wisdom regarding our words and just how powerful they really are. (Today we could probably update “the tongue” to include “the fingers,” as so much of what we “say” is online or in a text message.)

Death? And life? Those are both heavy options. We obviously don’t want to bring death to anyone with our words, but even the thought of giving life with them feels like a big responsibility. Whether it’s giving advice to a friend, trying to navigate a sensitive subject with a family member, or the constant “teachable moments” that parenting provides, we can do a lot of good—or bad—with our words.

We have so much life to share—kindness, encouragement, and, ultimately, the good news of the gospel. Choose someone in your life to uplift in a specific way. Maybe it’s a friend who needs to hear she’s not a complete failure as a parent (hint: we all need to hear this). Maybe it’s a coworker who did a good job on a project and could use some positive feedback. Or maybe it’s someone you know who is struggling and needs to be reminded of the love of Jesus. You don’t have to be “over the top” or fake, but a genuine compliment or a few words of kindness can go so far. Give life with your words today!

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Not many people enjoy taking tests, especially if there is a chance that the test could be bombed! The simple way around this is to cheat. Some people live by the motto, “If you aren’t cheating, you aren’t trying.” This is bad advice to say the least, but it is something that we have witnessed many times over.

In a high school chemistry class, a test was given over the periodic table of elements. At the time, there were 112 elements that were included on the table, and all 112 had to be memorized and written back as they appear on the table. The proper location, the element name, atomic symbol, number, and mass all had to be included. So, a classmate of mine wrote the entire table on his hand. He was surely “trying” for all that “cheating” he was doing.

In college, the art of the “super cram” became a thing. This is spending about three minutes in intense, undistracted, focused studying of material to remember it just long enough to vomit it back out onto an exam. It is not the recommended method of preparation for a test, but at the time, it seemed like the best option.

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul expresses a different mentality when it comes to preparation and study. In verse 15, he tells Timothy to “study” or be “diligent” to show himself “approved of God.” He further explains that a student of this kind is like a workman that has no need of being ashamed when his work is inspected. The beautiful part of this context is that it is not regarding a periodic table (which is “super cram-proof” by the way); it is regarding the study of Scripture.

What is your commitment to having a Scriptural understanding of truth? Would you be “ashamed” if your knowledge of the Bible was put to the test? Don’t fret; many would be, including those who we think may know all of it! What the text is encouraging is a desire, a commitment, a decision, to study the Word with all we have. This will help us and those around us to know the truth and avoid the wickedness and lies that permeate our world.

If you have made it this far in this book, your commitment is commendable. This is week 6 of a 52-week year. Let me encourage you to keep going. With God’s help, you can make it. In the meantime, you are learning and growing, always looking to God for His approval!

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When your trashcan gets full and you have just one more item to get in there, what do you do? Do you take the trash out and put a new bag into the can, or stick your foot on the top of the trash and cram it all down to the best of your ability? Have you ever said in your mind (or even out loud), “I can get one more thing in there—watch this.” There’s always room for one more thing if you aren’t scared to get a little dirty.

Life in American society is crammed full. Schedules are jam-packed with school events, sports, entertainment, travel, and work. And this list only scratches the surface. There is no limit to how busy and overwhelming our scheduling can be. However, even though life can be overflowing with things that are beneficial and pleasing, it is possible that something may be missing.

In this passage, Jesus begins sharing about His relationship to His followers. He is the vine, and we are the branches. It is the responsibility of the branch to remain in the vine in order to produce the fruit that comes from the vine. Jesus is sharing these truths so that His disciples can experience His love—the same love that came from the Father—so their lives can be filled with joy.

When we are making our list of things that fill our lives, joy doesn’t always make the list. Please understand, you can’t schedule joy as part of your day. What you can do is determine whether or not joy is included with what you are doing. How did Jesus equate joy to our relationship with Him?

Joy is a part of being found in a close, connected relationship with Jesus Christ. If our joy is connected to us through another avenue in our lives, it is possible for our joy to be stolen. This happens from time to time when life takes unexpected turns and our source of joy is affected. Being connected to Jesus and making Him our source of joy creates another truth.

Life can be crammed with joy. When Jesus says in John 15:11, “that your joy may be full,” it literally means “crammed.” This means that no matter how the hours are filled, life can be crammed with joy. What is your source of joy? When our daily relationship with Christ is the focal point of our joy, no matter the schedule, we can retain our smile. Pray that God would fill your life with joy so much that others can see it spilling out.

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“How many licks does it take to get to the Tootsie Roll center of a Tootsie Pop?” Your answer is going to be determined by your knowledge of a particular commercial dating back to 1970. A shorter version of the commercial is still being broadcast as recently as November 2022. In summary, a child is looking for the answer to this age-old question and approaches animals that have no idea how many licks it takes. Each animal sends the child to another until he makes it to Mr. Owl, whom Mr. Turtle calls “the wisest of all.” Mr. Owl takes the Tootsie Pop, licks it three times, then bites it off. He proudly proclaims, “Three!” The narrator then says, “How many licks *does* it take to get to the Tootsie Roll of a Tootsie Pop? The world may never find out.”

The owl is viewed as the wise one who would know the answer to life’s great questions. Wisdom is something that we know when we see it because it directs the actions of the wise in difficult situations. But what is it? Is it knowledge? Is it understanding? They are included, for sure, but it is beyond these things. Wisdom is the practical ability to properly apply truth-based knowledge to life situations. Take a moment to read that sentence again.

James asks, “Who is wise and understanding?” He states that the wise will prove it in their behavior. He then makes a distinction between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. It is possible to be “street wise” and not possess wisdom according to God’s Word. God’s wisdom loves peace and is pure, gentle, willing to yield, merciful, unwavering, and free from hypocrisy. These traits come down from God and are contrary to any earthly and selfish wisdom that exists.

We desire knowledge and understanding, but if our desire stops there, we only have a portion of what we need to navigate the pitfalls of the world. If wisdom comes “down from above,” as James says, then we need to ask the only one who is able to give it: God. As you start your day, ask God to bless you with the appropriate wisdom for the day. Each day has its own set of challenges. God has the answers that we need. Why would we approach anyone else to find the answers of life when we already know “the only wise God” (Jude 1:25) and He will help us when we call on Him?

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Read the Bible Through in 365 Days
NT and OT Book Format
6 Weeks – Days 1-42

- ▣ Day 1 – Genesis 1-2, Matthew 1
- ▣ Day 2 – Genesis 3-5, Matthew 2
- ▣ Day 3 – Genesis 6-8; Matthew 3
- ▣ Day 4 – Genesis 9-11, Matthew 4
- ▣ Day 5 – Genesis 12-14
- ▣ Day 6 – Genesis 15-17; Matthew 5
- ▣ Day 7 – Genesis 18-19
- ▣ Day 8 – Genesis 20-22; Matthew 6
- ▣ Day 9 – Genesis 23-24; Matthew 7
- ▣ Day 10 – Genesis 25
- ▣ Day 11 – Genesis 26-27; Matthew 8
- ▣ Day 12 – Genesis 28-29; Matthew 9
- ▣ Day 13 – Genesis 30-31
- ▣ Day 14 – Genesis 32-33; Matthew 10
- ▣ Day 15 – Genesis 34-35; Matthew 11
- ▣ Day 16 – Genesis 36-37
- ▣ Day 17 – Genesis 38-39; Matthew 12
- ▣ Day 18 – Genesis 40-41
- ▣ Day 19 – Genesis 42-43
- ▣ Day 20 – Genesis 44-45; Matthew 13
- ▣ Day 21 – Genesis 46-47
- ▣ Day 22 – Genesis 48-49; Matthew 14
- ▣ Day 23 – Genesis 50; Exodus 1-2; Matthew 15
- ▣ Day 24 – Exodus 3-4
- ▣ Day 25 – Exodus 5-7; Matthew 16
- ▣ Day 26 – Exodus 8; Matthew 17
- ▣ Day 27 – Exodus 9-11
- ▣ Day 28 – Exodus 12; Matthew 18

- ▣ Day 29 – Exodus 13-14; Matthew 19
- ▣ Day 30 – Exodus 15-16
- ▣ Day 31 – Exodus 17-19; Matthew 20
- ▣ Day 32 – Exodus 20-21
- ▣ Day 33 – Exodus 22-23; Matthew 21
- ▣ Day 34 – Exodus 24-26
- ▣ Day 35 – Exodus 27-28; Matthew 22
- ▣ Day 36 – Exodus 29; Matthew 23
- ▣ Day 37 – Exodus 30-31
- ▣ Day 38 – Exodus 32-33; Matthew 24
- ▣ Day 39 – Exodus 34-35
- ▣ Day 40 – Exodus 36-37; Matthew 25
- ▣ Day 41 – Exodus 38-39
- ▣ Day 42 – Exodus 40; Leviticus 1