



31
DAYS
THROUGH
PROVERBS
TO
KEEP
YOU
FROM
ACTIN' A
FOOL

PROOF

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*To my father, my pastor and my best friend,
easily the most fool proof man I've ever known.*

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**IN-
TRO
GETTING
STARTED.**

INTRO

By the time I met Jesus, I had pretty much wrecked my life. Not surprisingly, one of the first things my pastor advised me to do was to find new friends by looking for seasoned, positive people who could deposit Godly wisdom into me. He knew that what I needed was truth in my life, and he told me that the right people would challenge me and, at the same time, push me closer to Jesus. So, that's exactly what I did.

I surrounded myself with men who knew Jesus and who I respected deeply, because I knew that I would glean from them in a major way. To this day, I look back on that season of my life, and I'm so glad that I followed my pastor's counsel. With their help, I completely reshaped my worldview, restructured my habits, and began to see things in myself that I had been blind to previously. Simply spending time with people who walked with Jesus was incredibly valuable to me.

The book of Proverbs is written for those who want to learn how to lead a Godly life. It's for people that want to **understand God's perspective** and who want to experience **life more abundantly**. But to attain all that Jesus has for us, we must have truth deposited into our lives. In humility, we need to be aware that there's much that needs to be reshaped and restructured inside of us. Our own foolishness can keep us from growing into who He wants us to be, so **we must be made foolproof**. To do that, we need practical, real-world instruction in what we should and shouldn't do. In other words, we're looking for *wisdom*. Whether we find it or not partly depends on whether we choose friends that either deposit wisdom into us or that steal it away. This is the main reason why our choice of friends matters.

In Proverbs 18 we're told that *there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother*. I now know that **friend is Jesus** and that He is the type of friend who gives us wisdom and understanding - both for His glory and our joy. If you've gotten this far in the introduction, then I'm guessing you're one (like me) that wants a little more wisdom in your life. So, it's my sincere desire that this 31 day devotional helps foolproof you. We'll begin each day by reading a chapter of Proverbs. Then, we'll unpack a small portion together. I'm praying for you, and I'm excited to journey through the book of Proverbs with you!

01

TO LIVE
WISELY.

DAY 01

If you think about it, everything in life has a beginning point, especially the events that are significant to you and me.

For example, the day you're born – it's the starting point of your life. For many of us, the day you graduate from high school feels like the beginning of adulthood. If you got your college degree, that was the likely the start of your own independence (and possibly the start of your loan payments). Getting married? That marks the end of your independence. It was short lived... But the point is, **significant events in our lives have a beginning.**

There are also spiritual beginnings. In the book of Proverbs, in the seventh verse of the very first chapter, Solomon says that the beginning of wisdom, that critical ability which allows us to see rightly and walk wisely, **begins with the fear of the Lord.** What exactly is this "fear of the Lord?" Fear of the Lord is the spiritual starting point where you actually start to see life as it really is. It's the fork in the road where we decide to walk wisely before God and begin to truly understand right from wrong. The fear of the Lord allows us to make Godly decisions instead of foolish ones. And all of this, Solomon says, is completely dependent on one simple thing: you and I must have a healthy fear of the Lord. **Essentially, to live wisely, we must first see God rightly.**

Now, part of the problem is that we live in a day and age when people's perspective of God is badly out of whack. The lack of wisdom is practically tangible – just scroll through your Facebook feed or watch some Reality TV! But Proverbs claims that all of this is easily fixable if we could simply adjust the way we see God. We need to see Him in a way that promotes a healthy, respectful fear.

Is the "fear of the Lord" simply being terrified of Him? Well, that can't be right, because the Book of Hebrews tells us that if we are His children we should come to Him boldly and confidently in order to find grace, comfort, forgiveness, and yes, even wisdom. If we're merely scared of God, that will just cause us to keep our distance from Him, which is certainly not His heart for us.

So, what's Solomon talking about? Actually, the fear of the Lord refers to a kind

of healthy reverence for God. It's a deeply rooted respect for Him and His laws – maybe even a kind of holy uneasiness. It's the proper posture that we should have when we stand in the presence of the Almighty, Eternal God. Out of sheer respect for His grandeur and power and majesty, we should acknowledge Him and Him alone as the Creator of all that is seen and unseen. After all, He gave you that birthday, saw most of us through high school, and is likely holding many of our marriages together! God holds everything in its rightful place, and the proper way to approach Him is with a highly respectful sense of awe. In other words, **we should have a very logical and highly appropriate fear.**

Unfortunately, we live in a society that has lost almost all fear of God. In fact, we're almost pathetically fearless, which ironically makes us foolish. Many loudly claim to fear nothing and have pretty much lost the ability to hold anything in high regard. Why? Because, ultimately, when we don't first hold God in high regard, everything else drifts out of balance. **This is what Proverbs 21 is describing when it says, "Wisdom cries aloud in the street, but they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord."** We can pin this attitude of "unhealthy fearlessness" on the culture outside of the church, but to be honest, those of us in the Church can be just as guilty of having a lack of Godly fear. We can look for wisdom anywhere we want, but true wisdom only comes from God. And the starting point of wisdom is always the same – a healthy, very appropriate, very reasonable fear of God.

"Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours."

- Psalm 128:1-2

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. How can a fear of God impact your daily life?

2. Do you feel like you have a healthy fear of God? If not, what could be keeping you from that?

3. What are things you can do daily to cultivate a healthy fear?

02

PRO-
TECTS
THE
WAY.

DAY 02

When I was younger, I used to enjoy the occasional round of competitive paint ball with some of my more militant friends. We'd all pull on our camo gear, disappear somewhere back in the woods, divide into teams, and then essentially play capture the flag while shooting high-speed pellets filled with paint at each other. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Now, to get nailed by one of these pellets not only meant you were out of the game, but it also meant something else - pain, potentially serious pain. And as clumsy as it felt as first, I learned real fast the importance of wearing some kind of protective, camouflage clothing while navigating through those woods in order to survive long enough to help lead the team to some kind of glorious victory. Obviously, there was a lot at stake, and most of it had to do with not coming home with a collection of brightly-colored bruises.

Although I kinda doubt paint ball was in vogue during Old Testament times, protecting yourself from unnecessary pain and damage apparently never goes out of style. In fact, in Proverbs 2:6 when Solomon speaks to his son, he tells him, "The LORD gives wisdom, from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He holds success in store for the upright, and **He is a shield** to those whose walk is blameless, for **He guards the course** of the just and **protects the way** of his faithful ones."

So, if I could encourage you to just take a second and read that again,¹ I'm confident you'll see that those are some **jaw-dropping promises**. It's incredible, but God is actually eager to give us wisdom and protect us from foolish mistakes. From my own perspective, this is probably the best part about wisdom. It can keep us from pain and, at times, loss in life. It's our absolute best defense again foolish words, bad decisions, financial chaos, and problems in our families and marriages. **The list goes on and on**, because wisdom can check our blind spots and help us navigate through both good times and tough times. Listen, it can

¹ And of course I know you will...

be tough enough walking through the valleys in our lives when things are not going well. The very last thing we need during times like that is to add insult to injury (literally) with a proverbial high-speed paint ball upside the head. Wisdom is protection and insight sent free-of-charge by God. It can make a good situation even better and keep a tough situation from becoming unbearable.

Of course, having all the protection in the world isn't enough. You have to use it! Trust me, about the last thing I wanted to do on a hot, August afternoon was put on a pile of protective gear, but I was thankful I did when that first paint ball hit me at about Mach 12. You have to get used to walking with wisdom, but above all, you have to practice using it. For us, God's wisdom is a supernatural protection. It not only guards us and buffers us, **but it can actually show us our errors in advance!**

One last amazing thing about God's wisdom. The more we use it, the stronger it gets! But again, that's the key: wisdom needs to be "worn" every day, and it needs to be used in order for it to grow powerfully into our lives.

"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you."

- Proverbs 4:6

03

DO NOT
DESPISE.

DAY 03

“This hurts me more than it hurts you.”

This is a statement that I would hear my father say when I was young (probably more often than I'd like to admit) when the surprisingly frequent need to discipline me arose. I can remember hearing him say this, and I can also remember wondering, how could this possibly hurt him more than it hurt me when I was on the receiving end of the whuppin'? It honestly it didn't make any sense.

When I got a little older, still puzzled, I asked him once or twice to explain just exactly how doling out a whuppin' could be more painful than receiving one. I would generally get a good, solid fatherly chat about how tough it is being a dad (all true, as I would later find out) followed by the closing argument that, “Sammy, it hurts me more than it hurts you, because I experience an emotional hurt. To see you in pain actually hurts me.”

Just between you and me, I never fully bought this explanation.

One day, many years later while in the surprisingly frequent process of disciplining one of my own sons, I found myself using the phrase, “this hurts me more than it hurts you.” It was that exact moment when I realized that all of those suspicions I had as a youth were really right on the money, because I really didn't mean what I was saying. Ultimately, it was not causing me great pain to discipline my son, and here's why - **because I knew that the discipline was for his benefit.** Sure I didn't like to see him in pain, but I knew that discipline would make him a better son and, eventually, a better man.

In the same way, we sometimes have questions about God's feelings as He's disciplining us. Is God sort of cringing His way through disciplining us? Is He hesitant to discipline us, even when we need it? Does our discipline “hurt God more than it hurts us?”

Proverbs 3 tell us that in fact, **nothing could be further from the truth.** “My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke,

because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies, nothing you desire can compare with her.”

What father would not take the time to carefully and lovingly discipline his children when the benefit of the discipline would **far outweigh any temporary discomfort to either party**? See, discipline brings about wisdom to those who receive it rightly, with repentance and with humility. The Lord disciplines us as any good father would (and should) discipline his children. He does it to show us the areas where correction is needed, where danger can be avoided, and where repentance is necessary. As a father delights in his son, so the Lord delights in his own children. And I’m going to be so bold as to say that it actually **delights God to discipline us**, because through discipline, great wisdom is produced.

And *that* is why Solomon challenges us to never despise the discipline of the Lord, but, instead, to readily accept it. Discipline is for our benefit, and our discipline actually displays the love God has for us. It doesn’t hurt God to discipline us one bit; it actually glorifies Him.

***“The Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”***

- Hebrews 12:6

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Did your own parents use Godly discipline as you were growing up? How did you view discipline then and how do you view it now?

2. Is everything bad that happens to us God's discipline?

3. Give an example of how God's discipline has benefited you.

04

ALL IN.

DAY 04

When I made the decision to go to college, I found myself suddenly in a long-distance relationship. This was because I was going to school in upstate New York while my fiancé Ruth was still in the suburbs of Baltimore, Maryland. As we anticipated getting married while I was dealing with the various stresses of exams and midterms and the like, I would daydream about just being with her. When daydreaming wasn't enough, I would call her up just to hear her voice.¹ And when just chatting on the phone wouldn't cut it, I would take any opportunity to jump into my dilapidated Chevy Blazer (that I reluctantly admit that I owned) and make the 7-hour ride from New York down to Maryland to be with her.

To clarify, the best way to describe my old Blazer was to use the word "dangerous." Even using it to get across town was kinda iffy, but driving 350+ miles in it, one way, was borderline crazy. I didn't have AC. I didn't even have a working heater (Imagine that on a cold, dark winter night)! The front end was entirely shot, as was the back end. Actually, as far as I can remember, so was everything else in between. The transmission overheated and slipped, the tires were beyond illegal, the engine was hanging on by a thread (you get the idea). Some of you have owned cars like this. Some have you have sold cars like this (shame on you).

Nevertheless, did any of this stop me from driving those seven hours to Ruth? They didn't stop me one bit, and here's the reason why.

With Ruth, **I was all in**. I loved her, I wanted to be with her, and I would do anything it would take to get to her, even risking being stranded in the mountains of New York with no heater!

Now, when you and I read through Proverbs 4, we can't help but notice this same kind "all in" mentality that Solomon has. He takes the entire chapter to

¹ and of course I dump on her everything I was dealing with

emphasize our need for wisdom, and it's pretty extreme. In verse after verse, he stresses that as far as wisdom goes, **we need to be all in**, even at one point bluntly stating, "the beginning of wisdom is this: **get wisdom. Though it cost you all you have, get wisdom.**"

In my opinion, Ruth was (and is) worth being "all in" for. She was worth the risk, worth the time, and worth that long, risky ride (wait, did I mention I had no heater?). In God's opinion, wisdom is worth going "all in" for. It's worth the "risk" of doing things God's way, and it's certainly worth our time. In fact, there's no better way to pilot our way through life than with God's wisdom.

But the best part is that God's wisdom is not just a set of rules or some abstract philosophical guidelines. **God's wisdom is a person, and His name is Jesus.** Jesus freely shares His wisdom with us, which means He shares Himself. And because He is truly the source of all wisdom, **the wisest thing we can ever do is to establish a relationship with Him.** Of course, none of this can happen in a half-hearted manner. Listen, I wasn't planning on driving just halfway to Maryland, and far more importantly, Jesus wasn't planning on walking just halfway to the Cross. He's an all-in God, and He died so that nothing would stand in the way of our relationship with Him!

True wisdom is found in a living, ongoing relationship with Jesus.

***"But don't just listen to God's word.
You must do what it says.
Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves."***

- James 1:22

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Are you in a saving relationship with Jesus? If yes, describe the strength of your relationship with Him. If no, what stands in the way?

2. Would you consider yourself "all-in" with Jesus? Why or why not?

3. If not, what could you do differently to get "all-in"?

05

REDUCE
THE RISK.

DAY 05

After Ruth and I got married, the first thing to go was the Blazer.¹ After a lot of car shopping, I found one that seemed to be the perfect fit, a beautiful, garage-kept, four-door sedan with low mileage and all the records indicating regular maintenance. What I didn't see at the time, however, was that the car was a complete lemon. Everything about that vehicle, including the polish and detailing, was an utter facade.

Right from the get, I experienced more problems with that car than I possibly could have imagined and certainly more than I could afford to fix. And these were not small repairs. I'm talking big, engine-sized issues and complicated electrical stuff here. When that car's facade broke down (and it didn't take long), the whole experience proved to be an almost endless source of financial, emotional, and eventually even physical stress. I was truly sorry I had ever laid eyes on it.

In Proverbs 5, Solomon is waiving the cautionary flag for another kind of stressful, expensive deception. In this chapter, he addresses the issue of the adulterous woman and says, in very bold terms, that the lure of her beauty and the promise of her "joy" is **nothing but a facade**. Verse 3 tells us that even though her words are sweet as honey and her speech is smoother than oil, the attraction is fleeting. It is built on deception, and it is ultimately toxic.

Amazingly, the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* reports that 65% of husbands and 55% of wives will commit adultery. Why? Because many of them will be **fooled by the carefully constructed facade** and believe the lie that the adultery they're considering will enhance their lives. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Adultery lays utter waste to families, does lasting damage to our children, ruins men's and women's testimonies, and even cripples our relationship with Jesus. Although he or she may look like a low mileage, low maintenance beauty, be advised that the adulterous relationship is **unstable by**

¹ Aka, the death-trap of my bachelor days.

² Otherwise known as Lighthouse Church Senior Pastor Paul C. Foster. Just for the record.

its very nature and one of the most expensive sins possible. And like all sin (as my Pop² wisely says), adultery will “take you further than you wanted to go, keep you longer than you ever wanted to stay, and cost you way more than you were willing to pay”. This is exactly why Solomon says in verse four that in the end, the adulterous relationship is **bitter as gall**, warning that it’s “*sharp as a double edge sword, her feet go down to death and her steps lead straight to the grave.*”

Fortunately, Solomon also offers some powerful defenses to avoid the sin of adultery, starting with number one - **reduce the risk**. Verse eight says, “keep to a path far from her and do not go near the door of her house lest you lose your honor to others, and your dignity.” The safest, wisest path is to not even give it a foothold in your life.

Number two for those of us that are married is to faithfully **invest in your marriage**. If the grass always seems greener on the other side of the fence, it's time to water your own lawn! **Spend time with your spouse, make time for dating, and faithfully pray for each other**. Solomon (as much of a warning as a blessing) says in Verse 18, “May your fountain be blessed and may you enjoy and rejoice in the wife of your youth.”

And if all else fails, number three is to take a deep breath and simply **visualize the avalanche of damage that will inevitably follow if we fail to see past the facade of adultery**, including the financial destruction, the emotional train wreck and the even the physical misery that results from such unwise decisions.

But know that even if you’ve fallen into this trap, God’s grace extends to you. Through repentance and Jesus’ sacrifice, every sin can be forgiven. Jesus has something so much greater in store for us than living in guilt and shame. If we follow His path, true life in our homes and our marriages will be found.

***“He who commits adultery lacks sense;
he who does it destroys himself.”***

- Proverbs 6:32

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Have you ever made the mistake of believing in a facade in your life? How did that impact you?

2. Why do you think people sometimes fail to "see past the facade?"

3. What steps can you take today to help adultery-proof your marriage/ future marriage?

06

ANT
LIKE
FAITH.

DAY 06

Truth be told, I wish I was a “classroom” kind of learner.

In fact, I’ve often wanted to be the kind of student that could easily learn things from say, a college lecture or effortlessly absorb information from a textbook. As it turns out, I’ve never really gotten excited about learning stuff in a formal classroom kind of way. Instead, I’m definitely more of a “hands-on” learner or maybe even more accurately, a “prefers to be taught by an object lesson” type of learner.

For those of you who are in the same boat as me, Solomon gives us an object lesson in Proverbs 6 that teaches us how to avoid poverty and also skip the fallout of laziness. As always, **Solomon’s goal is to impart us with wisdom**, and he does so in the form of a rebuke for the sluggard. If you’re wondering what this word “sluggard” means (and why some of your spouses have been using it around the house), it means one who is habitually lazy, not taking care of his or her responsibilities and oftentimes idle when they ought to be busy. All kidding aside, God takes laziness very seriously, and in the early church, it was even known as one of the seven deadly sins, right up there with lust, envy, and greed. Yikes.

Sluggards will do just about anything to avoid the horrors of actual work and will refuse as much responsibility as they can get away with. We all know lazy people who, ironically, spend far more energy avoiding work than they would have had they actually just done it in the first place! This kind of sinful, unproductive mentality is really a form of rebellion, and it will eventually cost the sluggard dearly. This is why Solomon warns us so seriously about it.

So, what complicated, high-tech object lesson does Solomon use to warn us?

Actually, he uses... ants.

Yep, he uses good old, garden-variety ants. In Verse 6, he says to “go to the ant, you sluggard and consider its ways and be wise. It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest,” ending in a kind of amazement, “how long will you lie there, you sluggard?”

See, Solomon says that the life of the ant is a self-motivated, productive life in preparation for a winter season which **the ant has never seen before but anticipates in a kind of ant-like faith.** It doesn't need to be told what to do, and it doesn't need a commander. It simply gets out of bed in the morning, and gets proactive with what God's given it to do. Note that ants work first, then rest later. Lazy people tend to rest first and then never seem to get around to the work.

This is a lesson we can all learn from. The ant is the polar opposite of the lazy person who doesn't "believe" in hard work and prefers to lie around, sinfully idle. Sluggards are content to fold their hands to sleep, maybe just one more quick nap, but little do they know that all the while the misery of poverty is creeping up on them like an armed bandit.

In contrast, wisdom requires us to be **men and women of responsibility**, to be self-motivated people and to be **people who are driven by Godly goals.** Wisdom means being diligent in this temporary life, bringing honor and glory to our King through our actions. Jesus calls us into something so much greater than this world has to offer, and when we devote our lives to following Him, we can look forward to someday hearing Jesus Himself tell us:

"Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter into the joy of your Lord."

- Matthew 25:21

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Is there a difference between leisure time and idle time? If so, what are the differences?

2. Why do you think some people are unmotivated in life?

3. In what areas of your own life do you need to make better use of the time and energy God has given to you?

07

LEGACY

ROBBERS.

DAY 07

The older I get, the more I think about my legacy - I wonder what things I'll imprint on my kids, how I'll affect those that come behind me, and by which I'll contributions I'll be remembered. Your legacy is kind of like the fingerprints you leave after a lifetime of living. It signifies just what kind of impact you've made on this world. Sort of a big deal, isn't it?

In order to protect my legacy, I have to be aware of the "legacy robbers." These thieves come in the form of temptations, the sins that overwhelm us, and the distractions that lead us astray. Unlike any other book I know, Proverbs does an incredible job of **alerting us to the reality of legacy robbers** and then actually gives us **specific examples** to watch out for! Chapter 7 is a great example of this.

Now, to ignore the danger of these legacy robbers is to be what Scripture describes as being a "simpleton." In the context of Proverbs 7, a simpleton is one who's easily gullible and basically foolish in their dealings. There's a kind of shortsightedness involved, but it's an **intentional shortsightedness**. Simpletons allow themselves to be driven by their impulses, their appetites, and their feelings. They don't give thought to the consequences of their actions or worry about how their actions might affect other people; simpletons are typically comfortable living only for the moment.¹

Proverbs 7:7 says, "I saw among the simple, and I noticed among the young men one who had no sense." This young man is taking a leisurely stroll at night *towards* a prostitute's house. Solomon seems to describe someone *trying* to be tempted, a man without interest in protecting his reputation, which will soon be ruined.

Jesus Himself warned us bluntly that Satan desires only to steal, kill and destroy. Our adversary is not foolish or gullible. With whatever time is left, you can rest

¹ Sounds a lot like our sluggard in Proverbs 6.

assured that the Devil will remain a crafty, highly capable, and deeply deceptive enemy in his legacy-robbing campaign. For generations and generations, this enemy of ours has used tactics and strategies, easily identified throughout Scripture, to ruin the testimonies of men and women. It's every bit as tragic as it is avoidable.

But there's something else we need to realize. Jesus also said that even when our spirits are willing, our flesh is weak. **All of us, to some degree or another, have a propensity to be simpletons.** We can be shortsighted. We can be thoughtless as to how our actions might hurt those around us. We often feel driven to "live for the moment." How do we resist these constant temptations and protect our reputations? In His compassion and mercy, Jesus instructs us to "be watchful and pray."

Why do we pray? Because there is a **real Enemy of your soul and a real legacy to be lost.** Proverbs 7 proves a timely reminder that we need to continually walk in Godly wisdom so that we don't damage our testimonies or allow legacy robbers to take away what God intends to accomplish through us.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

- 1 Peter 5:8-9

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. How much energy do you spend protecting your personal legacy?

2. How much of the simpleton's lifestyle do you think is driven by pride?
By rebellion?

3. What steps should you be taking right now to protect your personal legacy?

08

A NOISY
WORLD.

DAY 08

We live in a noisy world.

A very noisy world.

So naturally, we exercise our God-given ability to place filters over what we hear and what we intend to block out. I know that many people do this in a myriad of different situations, all for the simple sake of survival.

For example, take talking with someone in a public place. I mean, you have to put some kind of filtering in place to block out all the chatter and background distractions so that you can actually hear what you want to hear. We do so in our work environments, in restaurants, and the like.¹ We have this inherent ability to put these filters in place that **block out the needless so that we can listen to what's needed.**

In my own case, I occasionally use what I call my "Dad Filter".² With Ruth and I living in a busy, active home and blessed with three kids ages eleven, nine and six, for my sanity's sake, I have to occasionally break out the Dad Filter. It allows me to hear what's needed and, at the same time, block out what's otherwise going to drive me insane. The great thing is that I can set that filter so that I can detect anything from the slightest whimper to an outright scream and know instantly if that situation requires my immediate attention.

This is just one example where filters are a useful, normal part of our lives, but there are places where filters can be a very bad idea. Here in Chapter 8, Solomon cautions us specifically to never filter out the voice of God. Solomon illustrates what's really the promptings of the Holy Spirit as "wisdom calling out to us" in various places in our lives so as to instruct us and guide us. Solomon warns us here that God's wisdom needs to be heeded for our protection because He speaks to us with wise counsel, sound judgment, insight, and power. This is obviously not a voice that we want to ever filter out.

¹ Some of us also do this with rare skill in our marriages.

² Moms will occasionally claim to have invented this filter, but us Dads know better.

But the dilemma is that sometimes (because of bad timing, our sin, or because sometimes we just act like simpletons) **we can allow our hearts to filter out the very Spirit of God.** Of course, the last thing we want to do is take the wisdom of God and accidentally tune it out. Be aware that sometimes God's wisdom "cries aloud to us" as it does throughout this entire chapter, but sometimes He speaks to us in a still, small whisper.³ We need to be diligent to ask God to guide us in our daily lives through prayer and take time to listen to Him in solitude through meditating on His Word. Let's make sure we're listening carefully for His voice, with no filters in place.

"Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David."

- Isaiah 55:3

³ 1 Kings 19:11-13

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Can you remember a time when you intentionally "tuned out" the voice of God in your life? What were the repercussions?

2. How do you determine what gets safely tuned out in your own life?

3. In what ways can we cultivate a life that listens to the still, small whisper?

09

HAND-
FUL OF
LEGOS.

DAY 09

All three of my kids love to play with Legos.

They've sort of invented this interesting game where each one is allowed to grab one handful of Legos (as much as they can hold) and build something from it - no directions, no pictures, and no examples.¹ All they have to work with are their imaginations and the small pieces that they have in front of them. More often than not, what they come up with is really cool, and, at the risk of sounding slightly biased, highly creative.

I'm a big fan of Legos, because the whole idea of the toy is to teach kids to be builders with that which they've been given. The beauty is **that which they build is often an expression of who they are**. This is also why I believe that when Proverbs 9 says, "Wisdom has built her house, and carved its seven columns," Solomon means that when we're operating out of wisdom, we'll take whatever God gives us and create something that glorifies Him.

Sometimes we look for that "incredible moment" or the "once in a lifetime opportunity" to do something amazing for the glory of God. Of course, there's nothing wrong with that, but the truth is **every day He basically gives us the equivalent of a handful of Legos and challenges us to build something creative**. He encourages us not to constantly seek the spectacular but instead to just use the elements of everyday life provided to point people to Himself. But it's not enough to just have the parts. To really make something incredible to the glory of God, **we need the wisdom of Jesus so that we know what to build**. By walking with Him, we gain His perspective, and by His wisdom, we take the elements that we've been given and build something lasting and meaningful. This is what Paul refers to in Ephesians 2:10 when he said, "*We are God's workmanship. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*"

¹ And hopefully, no fistfights.

I encourage you take a second look at the handful of pieces that God's given you today. Take advantage of the ordinary opportunities to invest and encourage people. If we apply His great wisdom to our ordinary lives, then even in the common things such as our homes, our jobs, and our families, **we can assemble something that is uniquely us and, at the same time, of great value to Him!**

Now, as we push through the rest of Proverbs, God is gonna open a virtual fire hose of wisdom that covers a ton of topics. He's already talked about the **wisdom of fearing Him, the wisdom of purity, the wisdom of hard work, and the wisdom of protecting our legacy.** Now, He's going to be speaking in broader terms about wise, Godly living. Friends, get ready to "build your house with wisdom," because we're not going to want to miss any of what follows!

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

- Ephesians 5:15-17

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Who are the "builders" that you admire in your own life?

2. Why do you admire them?

3. What elements has God uniquely given to you to build with? How can you use them for His glory?

10

**FURTHER
AND
FURTHER.**

DAY 10

As they say, hindsight is always 20/20.

The more years you tack onto your repertoire, hopefully, the clearer your perspective gets. I know, by God's grace, that's how it's worked for me. See, I was one of those who, for much of my early years,¹ required a lot of discipline. And even though I required a lot of discipline and received it from people who clearly loved me, I heeded very little of it. Actually, **I hated most the discipline I received.** A big part of the reason I hated it was because **I saw discipline as something that would cramp my style** rather than ease my burden. **I thought discipline was designed to be a killjoy,** rather than actually *build joy* into my life.

So, for a long time (due to my own foolishness and disregard of discipline and wisdom), the very joy I aspired to get, I was never quite able to obtain.

Now that I'm older, God still has me surrounded with people who love me. Replacing my own faulty perspective with the perspective of my Savior has helped me to realize that discipline and correction, if we're wise enough to heed them, are the provisions that God gives us to bring us joy, to ease our burden, and to be an example to others. This is why Solomon says in Proverbs 10:17 that people who accept discipline **are on the pathway to life**, but those who ignore correction **are guaranteed go further and further astray.**

See, what Solomon is saying is that discipline is like a kind of guardrail - a system of flashing lights put in place to protect us from moving too quickly around the curves of life. When things start getting weird or even dangerous, **the safest thing to do is respond with obedience and humility to the warning signs and discipline sent to us by God.** When the discipline of the One who loves us and desires to protect us arrives, **it's never a coincidence, and it's never to be ignored!**

¹ We're talking about my grade school years. Well, and probably most of my teenage years. Okay, plus maybe my very early twenties too, but that's not really the point. Kindly focus on the text above.

This kind of perspective makes discipline incredibly valuable in our lives. But isn't it crazy that our pride can be so overgrown that the very thing that can slow us down, clear our heads, and help save our relationships (and sometimes even our lives) is the same thing that we resist and fight against? It's very unsafe to ignore the discipline of the Lord, and the fallout of doing so is described by Solomon in the latter part of the verse when he warns that those who ignore correction may well find themselves going over the cliff.

As a pastor, I routinely see people committing some of the same errors I committed (including ignoring God's warning and discipline), and it always results in destruction. **Even Christians can foolishly conclude that they somehow know more than God, that the guardrail is put in place for other people, that the flashing lights somehow don't apply to them.** Let's make sure we're heeding the advice of Solomon, knowing that disregarding God's discipline can be a very risky proposition.

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he corrects you because the Lord disciplines those he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as his own."

- Hebrews 12:6

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Can you think of a Biblical example of someone disregarding God's warning? What was the result?

2. Do you feel you have the kind of heart that listens to God's discipline? How can you foster that kind of heart?

3. Who do you feel serves as a kind of "warning system" in your own life?

11
MORE
TO
GAIN.

DAY 11

If you've ever been out in public and walked through the typical two sets of double doors you find at a department store or a mall entrance, you've hopefully done the right thing and held the door for someone who was directly behind you just to be polite.¹ And after you do, there's a reasonably high probability that the person for whom you just held the door will then turn around and hold the next set of doors for you. Is this a big surprise? Not really; when you do a small favor for someone, odds are they're going to feel like they should do a small favor in return. This is what's known as the Law of Reciprocity, and it's basically a truism stating that **as you treat others with acts of kindness or generosity, other people will tend to do the same for you.**

Belief in this law seemed so widespread that in the late 1980's the University of California at Berkeley decided to determine if the Law of Reciprocity was actually real. Sure enough, after several case studies, their findings confirmed that it is a societal truth. Of course, there's also a negative side to the law that equally stands true. When you're critical of others, when you hoard your possessions or act nasty, that's what you're likely to get in return.

Now, as terrific as UC Berkeley's Research Department probably is, the Law of Reciprocity shouldn't come as a huge surprise to anyone, because **it's exactly what Jesus taught about "sowing and reaping" some 2000 years earlier.** Since the same Holy Spirit has fully inspired both the Old and New Testaments,² we find Solomon echoing this identical idea in Proverbs 11:24 when he states, "one man gives freely **yet gains even more;** another withholds unduly **but comes to poverty.**"

Note that Solomon is not just speaking specifically about money here; this same truth encourages us to offer generous grace to others in our lives, to generously think the best of others, and to generously forgive people as we go about our day.

¹ I mean, you have the done right thing... right?

² All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, and equipped for every good work. 2 Tim 3:16-17

Of course, this is exactly how Jesus encourages us to treat others, as He generously offers us grace upon grace, generously considers us as His sons and daughters,³ and continually showers us with generous forgiveness! When we walk in this kind of spiritual generosity, Solomon assures us in verse 25 that “a generous man will prosper, and he who refreshes others will be refreshed.”

Simply put, a man reaps what he sows.

This has been so clear in my own life. When I make it a point to be refreshing to others, more inspiring to be around, and a little more gracious and generous, this is exactly what I receive in return! Others are refreshing and generous to me, and I can tell that Jesus’ favor is placed on my life. It’s just another way of daily **proving the law of sowing and reaping**, perfectly captured in verse 27 when Solomon states that, “he who seeks good finds goodwill, but evil comes to him who searches for it.”

***“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked,
for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”***

- Galatians 6:7

³ Wow!

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. What have you been sowing into others lately? Do you feel like you sow generously?

2. Would you agree that you're reaping what you're sowing? Think of a specific example.

3. What are some ways we can stay focused on sowing what God desires us to sow rather than what our old natures occasionally demand?

12

ENHANC-
ING
FORCE.

DAY 12

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

You may have heard this said. You may have even said it yourself. Most of us learned this expression from a very young age as a way to inform others that we’re tough, thick-skinned kids, and as such, we’re unmoved by the hurtful things said to us. It means, in effect, that words have no power over us.

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

Cute clichés aside, words can be incredibly powerful. Words can positively impact people’s images of themselves, and, at the same time, words can cause deep-rooted wounds of insecurity that can go years without being discovered and take many more years to heal. Words can build up, but words can also do catastrophic damage. This is why Solomon warns us in Proverbs 12 that “words can pierce like a sword.” Although they may seem to be just words, whether well thought out or casually stated, they have the power to change people’s lives.

I’ve talked to older men in their 60s and even their 70s who have worked hard and enjoyed impressive accomplishments in their lives. Many of them have built successful businesses, raised healthy families, contributed to society, yet some of them *still* carry a horrible sense of self-image because of words that were said to them decades ago. Sometimes it was something a parent said to them in a fit of rage; sometimes it was the thoughtless criticism of a classmate or a teacher. It’s almost scary how words can have such a lasting and destructive power over us.

Thankfully, as negative as they can be, **words can be even more powerful as a positive, life-enhancing force**, especially when they communicate the great love and grace of our Savior. In Proverbs 12:18, Solomon summarizes this reality by simply stating, “the tongue of the wise brings healing.” As a pastor,

I have the great privilege and responsibility to speak truth, life and hope to people – really, to speak Jesus to people! I see this simple verse proven over and over again. It never ceases to amaze me how Jesus-centered wisdom can free people, break the chains of their minds, and ultimately change their lives. **Jesus seems to love using mere words to mend broken hearts, to encourage forgiveness of long-ago offenses, and to see LIFE resurrected into places that have been long dead.**

Isn't it a little unnerving that God created us in such a way that as we speak, we can either build up or tear people down? Listen, for people like me this is even riskier, because I typically (and some might say unfortunately) think out loud.¹ At any given moment, most of what I'm saying directly ties into how I'm feeling, and how I'm feeling directly reveals the condition of my heart before God. Jesus said in Matthew 15, "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." Knowing that, do I need to be especially careful? Better stated, do we need to be especially careful? Absolutely.

It's not enough to try to "watch our words" carefully. It's not enough to resolve to somehow "speak more kindly" or to desperately try to be life givers with our words. **To have Life in our words, we must first have Life in our hearts.** This is just another reason why our ongoing relationship with Jesus is so incredibly valuable. It's also why He specifically told us that **He, and He alone, is the Life we're looking for.** So, to have life in our heart without Him is impossible, but when Jesus reigns in our hearts, His truth will also reign in our words.

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

- Ephesians 4:29

¹ That's probably your cue to pray for the folks who work with me.

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. What opportunities do you have right now to use the power of words to bring good news and heal old wounds?

2. What impact does Scripture have in helping us “reign in” our hearts?

3. What role does prayer play in our ability to use words for good?

13

FOOL'S

COM-

PANION.

DAY 13

In the very beginning of Scripture we see that Adam was originally created alone. And you would've thought that his incredible relationship with God, as recorded in the book of Genesis, would have been more than sufficient.

Scripture records that Adam was given dominion over the whole Earth. Better yet, he also got daily one-on-one time with God, strolling with Him in the cool of the day and getting first-hand tips on how to properly handle running an entire planet. **You would think that such a close friendship with his Creator would've been enough to create complete relational health**, that it would be all good for Adam.

But you would be wrong.

God said that it was not good for man to be alone.¹

And because it was so "not good", He created a helpmate for Adam to do life with. That's always been curious to me - to think that God created us to need a relationship with Him, but, at the same time, to also need a relationship with others. We weren't designed to do life alone. Actually, it's very unhealthy and dangerous to try and do so.

Now, when it comes to selecting those that we choose as our friends and even our spouses, Proverbs tells us that there's ultimately only two groups to choose from. There are those who are wise and those who are fools. Here's another way to say it: there are those that push you towards a closer relationship with Jesus and those that pull you away from a relationship with Him (whether intentionally or unintentionally). Drawing from my own experience, before I met Jesus I loved the life of sin and the crowd of friends that I had even though they dragged me deeper and deeper into my heroin addiction. To be clear, I certainly had no intention of going into high school and cultivating a drug addiction that would

¹ Genesis 2:18

eventually lead me right to the very brink of death. At the same time, however, **I had no intention of surrounding myself with good people or wise people,** let alone people who knew Jesus or had a relationship with Him.

Since there are ultimately only two groups out there to choose from, the natural result of my decisions was that I became a companion of fools. Even though I was raised in a strong Christian home and was taught to be upstanding, **the wrong selection of friends at a young age quickly neutralized years of parental investment.**

Solomon says in Proverbs 13:20, "If you walk with the wise then you become wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." This is exactly what happened to me; I was a companion of fools, and, as a result, suffered life-threatening harm. Even worse, I eventually became that foolish friend who led others to experience harm in their own lives.

Scripture plainly teaches that bad **company corrupts good morals.**² This means that even if you have a strong, stable family, a good solid upbringing, and plenty of parental investment, carelessly surrounding yourself with a crowd of toxic and potentially deadly fools (at any age) **can single-handedly ruin all the good** that was sown into you early on. It's been said, "show me your friends, and I'll show you your future."

How true that is.

"The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray."

- Proverbs 12:26

² 1 Cor 15:33

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Are there any relationships in your life that might be potentially dangerous to your spiritual health? How should you manage those relationships?

2. How do you balance friendship with unbelievers with the risk of compromising your faith?

3. How has your choice of close friends changed since knowing Jesus?

14

**OUT OF
PATIENCE.**

DAY 14

Have you ever completely flipped out on someone, totally lost your temper,¹ and then after having made a total fool of yourself, looked back on the whole experience and thought, “You know, I’m *really* glad I lost my cool. That turned out well.”?

Yeah, me neither.

I can’t remember one time in my life that I’ve responded with a quick temper, and it’s worked out to my benefit. At no point have I been in a situation or in an argument where the best way to restore harmony was for me to 1) quickly lose my patience 2) blow up and then 3) say exactly what was on my mind (probably loudly). Typically, that kind of “strategy” creates even more damage which requires a ton of extra effort to clean it all up. Not to mention, every time I’ve given in to anger, I’ve felt a real sense of separation from God.

All of this is simply the result of **not operating out of patience**. This has proven to be a tough one for me, because as I mentioned in Chapter 13, I’m a “verbal processor” which means that I tend to think out loud (hearing my thoughts helps me organize them).² Nevertheless, however your particular processor works, Solomon says that “Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is *quick-tempered displays folly*.”

Let’s be clear: **quick tempers are expensive**. They can cost us separation from our friends, discredit us professionally, and wreck the peace we absolutely need in our homes. A quick temper can split marriages and has many times allowed Satan to drive a wedge into churches. Scripture gives us repeated examples of a quick temper developing into an ugly physical confrontation, or worse yet, even a murderous rage. All of this is avoidable, and Solomon emphasizes throughout Proverbs that **the antidote is patience**.

¹ And your dignity, as Pop frequently warns

² This is also a handy way of explaining that I sometimes speak without thinking. But that’s another chapter.

Like many of you, I've been consistently regretful on the occasions when I've lost my temper, even when I thought I was in the right. On the other hand, **I don't know if I've ever regretted exercising a little patience.**

Case in point, not long ago I found myself in a situation with a friend who was becoming increasingly argumentative. I was right in the thick of it and had so many things that I wanted to say – all of which I felt (key word, felt) were justifiable. **But the Lord's whisper told me to be patient.** By His grace and His grace alone I followed His lead, and in so doing, I suddenly realized my friend wasn't listening to me, and I certainly wasn't listening to him. Meanwhile, I was operating in haste to make my next point! It was the perfect storm of poor communication accompanied by flaring tempers, and it could have easily done serious damage to the relationship. Thankfully, the whole catastrophe was avoided by practicing a little patience.

A quick temper is an expensive habit, but patience is a powerful ally.

When in doubt, always err on the side of patience!

***"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city."***

- Proverbs 16:32

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Do you have a specific weak spot that triggers your temper? What steps can you take to help control those triggers?

2. Did you grow up in a peaceful home or a home full of tempers? What lessons did you learn from it?

3. What are you exercising more, a quick temper or a patient spirit? How can we develop a patient spirit?

15 GAME CHANG- ER.

DAY 15

One of the most famous characters in the Old Testament is Solomon's father, King David. The Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles all concentrate on him heavily, and an estimated fifty percent of the Psalms were written by him personally.

The story is recorded in 1 Samuel that soon after King David came to power, he ordered some of his military troops to guard Israel's borders. Strictly as a courtesy, these same troops would also watch over the shepherds that lived on the borders, protecting them and their flocks from wild animals and bandits. In exchange for such valuable military protection, the troops would occasionally request a small amount of food and water, which the grateful shepherds were, I'm sure, happy to provide.

But when David's troops happened to ask a very prosperous and blessed guy named Nabal¹ for something to eat after protecting his shepherds, Nabal sort of blew them off with a rude, arrogant answer and refused to feed them. To make matters worse, he also suggested that David might not even be a legitimate king. When word of this offense got back to King David, he was livid. He immediately commanded his best soldiers to strap on their swords and to go destroy the house of Nabal. And by all rights, that should have been the end of Nabal and his family.

But just at that point, in steps Nabal's wife, Abigail. This girl was a powerhouse. She was wise enough to know that Nabal had just managed to pronounce a death sentence on her entire family. Probably more for her kids than for her loud-mouthed husband, she prepared gifts for the King and actually met him on the way to destroy her family. Keeping her head together, **she reasoned with him in a very respectful tone, which cooled his wrath.** Ultimately, she saved the lives of her entire household.

¹ Nabal means "fool" in Hebrew. You can probably see where this is going

Its amazing how the right posture of our words can diffuse an explosive situation. So, it's no accident that Solomon leads off Proverbs 15 with the thought that "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." **This little verse can be such a game-changer.** So many times if we could just step back and **practice a little calm humility**, then when loud voices and harsh accusations surround us, we can respond with a kind of quiet confidence and take the edge off the situation. Harsh words are always easy to come by, **but a wise and gracious answer many times takes the supernatural power of God.** Listen, it's been my experience that **no one ever really wins a war of words.** I have yet to see it happen. Even if you can out-shout the other guy, it doesn't mean you changed his mind or really proved anything.

Next time you find yourself in a dispute with a friend or coworker, take the wise course of action. First, make an honest effort to **listen to what they're saying even if you don't agree.** And then whatever your response is, **make sure it's gracious and wise enough to actually be received by the other party.** Talk to other people **with the same level of grace God has offered you.** It doesn't matter how much truth you have to offer if it can't be heard because of the way you're saying it.

Any fool can produce harsh words and make a bad situation even worse, **and most fools do.** But it truly takes the Spirit of God to respond with a wise and gracious answer, especially when the pressure's on in a heated conversation.

***"Let your speech always be gracious,
seasoned with salt, so that you may know
how you ought to answer each person."***

- Colossians 4:6

16

BEFORE

A FALL.

DAY 16

In 2012, I went on a family vacation to Deep Creek Lake. While we were there, some of my relatives¹ talked me into riding a longboard down an enormously steep road near our cabin. When I was told that I might reach speeds of up to 40 mph, instead of saying, “Nah, I’m good,” as you might expect, I was actually elated. I was convinced this was going to be an incredible ride.

40 mph on a longboard, as it turns out, is not just fast. It’s very, very fast. The wind was whipping in my ears, and the road was just a blur below me. About halfway down that hill, I made my mistake; I very slightly transferred a bit too much of my weight from the center of the board to the left side. And when I did, I felt that board start to wobble. Gently at first. Then not so gently.

Right then and there I realized that at this speed and with my weight increasingly off balance, a crash was now inevitable. I don’t know if I’ve ever been so scared in my life. I knew what was about to happen. When the board finally flew out from underneath me, my impact with the ground broke my back in two places, bruised my left lung, tore large sections of skin off my body, and required a four-day hospital stay. All of this because I didn’t stay centered and ended up way off balance.

In a very similar way, Solomon warns us in Proverbs 16 that pride can so throw off our spiritual balance that, if not addressed, it can actually lead to our destruction. God says, “I remember your frame and that and you are but dust.”² He sees how frail and how dependent upon Him we are. **Out of sheer mercy, He cautions us not to think too highly of ourselves.** This is also why He says (in effect) that He upholds the humble in spirit, but for the proud... Well, they’re on their own.³

Thankfully, pride-based catastrophes are avoidable. I’ve heard Pop say about a thousand times, “A wise man learns from his mistakes, but a wiser man learns from another’s mistakes.” So, one way to avoid getting spiritually lopsided is

¹ Ruth’s side of the family.. Am I bitter? Not at all.

² Psalm 103:14

³ Proverbs 29:23, sort of.

to understand different types of pride. Here's three of them as described in Scripture. Take an inventory of yourself to see you're carrying any one of these:

ONE -- The "I'm better than you" pride (as outlined in Luke 18:11-13 with a group of people called the Pharisees as the examples). The Pharisees thought that they were superior to everybody else because of their supposed morality and their religious rules. Jesus exposed them for who they were (hypocrites) and warned them that **their proud, lopsided hearts were causing them to miss out on the grace** that God had for them.

TWO -- The "I can handle it myself" pride (as depicted in Luke 15 with a foolish, prodigal son deciding he can do life on his own terms with no regard for God). This kind of **false independence and arrogant self-sufficiency** will inevitably start the best of us to wobble spiritually. When things out of our control get difficult, we will quickly discover how dependent we are.

THREE -- The "It doesn't apply to me" pride. **This is where you judge others by their actions and yourself by your intentions.**⁴ Comparing yourself to others is always a losing game, because the temptation is to consistently come out looking better. If you find yourself thinking that it's other people that need forgiveness and grace and not you, you've got a classic case of "It doesn't apply to me" pride.

The prouder you are, the easier you'll start to wobble and the more serious the crash will be. Better we should stay close to Jesus and spiritually balanced, thanking Him for His forgiveness and asking Him for a healthy sense of humility in our lives.

***"Pride comes before destruction,
and an arrogant spirit before a fall."***

- Proverbs 16:18

⁴ If reading that didn't sting just a little... maybe read that again.

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Is all self-sufficiency necessarily pride-based?

2. Do you see one of the three types of pride in yourself? How can you fight against that?

3. Be honest. Was I just too old to hop on a longboard? Discuss.

17

**TESTING
PROCESS.**

DAY 17

The truth is I can't stand taking tests.

Written tests, final exams, pop quizzes, open book, it doesn't matter. I don't like 'em. I never did test well because of the stress of that whole "pass/fail" thing. In high school, I was horrible at taking tests even when I knew the information backwards and forwards. Despite all the studying, at test time, something in me would just sorta lock up, and the end result would typically be another unsatisfactory grade. Right around high school graduation as I was agonizing my way through a history final, I remember telling myself, "I can't wait to get out of here so I won't have to take tests anymore."

How wrong I was.

The reality is that life is full of tests, and there's practically nowhere you can go to avoid being tested in one way or another. Every stage in life has some kind of a testing process to determine if a particular opportunity is right for you, whether it be a job interview to determine if you're competent to fill the position, a fitness test by a personal trainer, or even a Friday night date to figure out whether you're even slightly compatible with each other!

Tests are also an important part of our journey with Jesus. Proverbs 17:3 states, "*The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, **but the Lord tests the heart.***" For the record, purifying metals takes a lot of heat, pressure, and energy.¹ For silver, that crucible needs to be at a blazing 1700 degrees Fahrenheit to properly test the silver ore and have all the impurities come to the surface, where they can be removed and discarded. The furnace for gold is even hotter (nearly 2000 degrees), but the goal is the same: **try it with fire, expose the impurities, and separate them from the gold.** For both metals, it's the testing process that ultimately produces a **pure, stable, rare, and highly valuable material** that will stand the test of time.

¹ And money. And patience. And time.

It's the perfect comparison for Solomon to make regarding the various tests that the Lord takes us through. And the reason He leads us through them is because **we're incapable of testing ourselves**. Our hearts can be so deceptive! We usually don't know our blind spots or our impurities, and even if we do **we can still tend to alternate between excusing our sin and refusing to accept God's grace**. We can grant ourselves an amazing amount of slack over serious sin and then 10 minutes later beat ourselves up over something relatively minor that was forgiven by God a long time ago. Jeremiah nailed it when he said, "The heart is deceitfully wicked; who can know it?"²

Some days I don't even know my own heart. I'm a fickle person,³ and I can be all over the map. It's hard for me to know the condition of my heart.⁴ **The great news is that the Lord is faithful to test us, to invest in us, and to purify us through His refining/testing process**. These tests come in all shapes and sizes including our relationships, our circumstances, the stuff that drives us crazy, and the blessings that we've received. All of these are designed by our Sovereign God (for His Great Glory) to produce **pure, stable, rare, and highly valuable souls** that will stand the test of time and far beyond. So, be encouraged! Whatever you're going through is being used by Jesus to refine you into the person He's called you to be.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

- James 1:2-3

² Jeremiah 17:9

³ But then again, I'm not sure...maybe I'm not.

⁴ Galatians 5:17 For the flesh craves what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are opposed to one another, so that you do not do what you want.

18

BEST

REFUGE.

DAY 18

Did you catch the part in Proverbs 18:10 where Solomon says, “The name of the Lord is a fortified tower and the righteous run to it.”?

This is easier to remember if you’ve actually lived it. I can clearly recall when I was a teenager living in sin.¹ In my case, the sin had developed into an addiction that brought with it a deep depression. This in turn, created feelings of loneliness which I could never really shake. See, not only was I an addict, but I also struggled with a melancholy temperament. Back then, I hated being by myself, because without some kind of distraction my thoughts would invariably become negative. So, in my mind, the solutions were limited. I would either:

- A) get high to distract myself from reality
- B) head over to my parent’s house
- C) get high first and then head over to my parent’s house.

Choice “C” was not a popular one with my parents. And I now recognize that my “solutions” seem kind of contradictory, because while turning to drugs would temporarily numb my feelings, turning towards home always gave me a real sense of security. **There was just this deep feeling of safety as soon as I got there.** Although home was just a small townhouse in not the best part of town, there was always such a sweet spirit there. I couldn’t find it anywhere else.

It would have never occurred to me back then to attribute that spirit to the Spirit of Jesus, **but I would later find out that’s exactly Who it was.** Every time I would go home, I would feel safe and loved. I would feel peace, comfort, hope, and even a sense of harmony. Even if I was getting bawled out by my old man, that was still my safe place. **It was safe and stable, because Jesus reigned in that house.**

¹ James 1:15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Proverbs 18:10 reminds me of how I felt at Mom and Dad's house. That verse encourages us to run to Jesus and call on His Name in our time of need. Wise advice, because **Jesus is the best possible refuge we will ever find.** He's the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, and **He's every pure, perfect, safe, and holy thing we've ever looked for or longed for in life.**

Colossians confirms that "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross."

Boom!

Talk to me. Do you feel unsafe? Insecure? Unstable? **You have an incredible Savior who is ready to relieve you of your fear and strengthen you.** Take refuge in Him and confidently call out to Him. When we bring our cares to Jesus, He exchanges our anxiety and instability for confidence and security in Him.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

- Matthew 11:28

19

**NEVER
UNNO-
TICED.**

DAY 19

Like many big cities, Baltimore is not the town it used to be. A poor economy has led to some tough times and some rough streets. Like many big cities, Baltimore has a large population of homeless people who are simply struggling to survive.¹ While many of these people somehow remain out of sight, there are some who are seeing the need and fighting to make a change.

I have a dear friend named Josh Handschuh who drove for Uber in and out of Baltimore. Night after night, Josh saw how incredibly difficult life can be for the homeless. One very cold night as he was shuttling people around, he saw a homeless person laying on one of the metal grates that line the streets trying to stay warm in the dark. In the 20° temperatures, the only “blankets” the man had were a discarded piece of newspaper and the clothes on his back. **Something about this “typical” scene shocked Josh**, and the next day he stopped by my office and mentioned what he’d seen. It was obvious to me that the homeless man’s plight had broken Josh’s heart. Although he didn’t know what to do, he felt compelled to do *something*. “I just don’t know where to start,” he told me. “There are so many, and I have such limited resources.” After praying together, Josh felt that he just start helping where he could and follow what was obviously the Lord’s leading.

And sure enough, that night before work, off goes Josh to Walmart.

He had a small amount of his own cash which got him a few sleeping bags, a few blankets, some hand warmers, and some nonperishable food. His plan was pretty simple: **drive in, pray for Jesus to lead him, avoid getting killed, and get the goods to those who needed them.** Simple, right? And guess what? That’s pretty much what happened.

Next night, he did the same thing. And then the same thing the next night. This continued until enough lives were being affected that it created a large enough buzz where people wanted to get involved.

¹ On any given night in Baltimore, some 3000 people are sleeping on the streets.

² A passel = about 100 volunteers. Don’t argue with me here.

And they did.

Fast forward 90 days, and you'll see Josh's first small act of obedience grow into an organization known as BeMoreCaring. Every week, a passel² of volunteers descend on the city to hand out hundreds of meals. They provide tents, furniture, sleeping bags, hand warmers, and food (including Thanksgiving dinners and Christmas presents). BeMoreCaring was recently recognized by the State of Maryland with a \$25,000 grant to continue the great work they're doing!

This is a great example of Proverbs 19:17 in action. Solomon says that *"whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord and He will reward them for what they have done."* Josh Handschuh has been rewarded with a successful ministry for cheerfully lending his time, his energy, and his money to people who will likely never be able to repay him.

Make no mistake my friends: when we give to "the least of these" (which means to those who have nothing, are down and out, and easy to ignore) **it may go unnoticed in the world, but it never goes unnoticed by God.** And when God sees how we love the poor, He promises to reward it as if we were doing it for Him.

***"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying,
'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty
and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and
welcome You, or naked and clothe You?' And the King will
answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the
least of these my brothers, you did it to Me.'"***

- Matthew 25:37-38, 40

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. When was the last time you felt the pull of the Holy Spirit to minister, serve, and sacrifice for "the least of these"? What did you do in that situation, and what was the result?

2. Do you tend to ignore the homeless or reach out to them? What are your personal reasons for this decision?

3. How did Jesus treat those who were outcast from society?

20

**POSITIVES,
NEGA-
TIVES, AND
NEUTRALS.**

DAY 20

I've often thought that in life there are three basic types of people: **Positives, Negatives, and Neutrals**. Positives are people that, generally speaking, add something to your life. Negatives, not surprisingly, are people that tend to subtract from your life. Neutrals kind of hang around, probably wearing a lot of beige, sort of waiting to be persuaded.¹

Now, this is probably gonna irritate some of the Negatives (and you Neutrals probably aren't going to want to make any fast decisions on this), but as Christians, **Jesus has called us all to be Positives**. This is why Jesus said that you are the light of the world. He compared us to a city on a hill, and He called us the salt of the earth. **What Jesus has sent us to do is to radiate His glorious, freeing, and life-giving light** into a dark world full of nervous, worried Negatives and unsure, non-committal Neutrals. Hear me friends: we can all tend to be Negatives or, at best, Neutrals when sin reigns in our lives. Our day-to-day can be saturated with our own foolishness and our immediate pleasure. When we live like this, you can spot us a mile away, because we are way more concerned with what we want rather than being thankful for what we have. We can talk a lot about ourselves² and not very much about Him. We can be constantly worried about what might happen instead of remembering how faithful He's always been.

Proverbs 20:27 says, "*The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord that sheds light on one's inmost being.*" Die-hard Negatives may not like this, but **when we first meet Jesus, we receive a new, bright, Positive spirit**. God says, "*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*"³ And it's this new spirit that sets us apart by empowering us to shine with the positive and bright testimony of **the best news the world has ever been given - and His name is Jesus**. After we meet Him, we ought to be different, because we belong to a different Kingdom.

¹ Neutrals can be sort of a cautious bunch.

² Or maybe even constantly about ourselves.

³ Ezekiel 36:26

Because He is the Light of the World, we can be confident that the lamp Solomon describes is the Spirit of Jesus, who alone can illuminate our minds, give us a new heart, and help us radiate a message of forgiveness to a dark and dying world.

Remember also that we have a responsibility to feed this new Spirit within us. I occasionally tell the story of a wise Sage who was approached by one of his students. The student said, "Teacher, it's almost as though two dogs inside me are fighting for control. I feel like one is a very good dog, and the other is a very evil dog." The Sage then wisely asked the student which of the dogs the student thought would win the fight? The student paused and then replied, "I suppose whichever one I feed the most."

The new spirit has got to be fed! We can do this by spending time in communion with Jesus, by reading and meditating on His Word, by singing songs of praise to Him, and, finally, by repenting of sin. All of this feeds the new Spirit, allows the lamp of the Lord to grow within us, and reveals to the outside world that we're radiant for a reason.

***"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature;
the old things passed away;
behold, new things have come."***

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Examine yourself. Do you tend to be a Positive, Negative, or Neutral in your social circles?

2. What specific steps are you now taking to feed the new Spirit within you?

3. Are there Scriptural reasons to avoid wearing beige, or even light tan? Discuss.

21

**WHAT'S
BEST.**

DAY 21

This may sound a little unbelievable if you know me, but I can tend to be a bit of a control freak.

Now, I know you're shocked, but it's true. Some may call it having a Type A personality, others may call it being driven.¹ But as for me, I know deep down that sometimes it's just a simple unwillingness to depart from what I want.

At times, that unwillingness creates conflict in my walk with Jesus due to the simple fact that He's clearly organized our relationship along these lines - **He's the leader, and I'm not.**

The conflict can typically surface when I'm planning something. I think most of us probably have a set of plans, desires, or goals that we're pursuing. And most of the time, we're pretty sure that our plans and goals are good and that our timing is correct. With that confidence, we're convinced that God should bless all our efforts, (especially us Type A's). And that's fine, as long as we remember **that Scripture says very clearly that it's God who gets to decide what He'll bless and what He won't.** He'll make the determination about the wisdom of the plan, if it fits His timing, and if He'll bless it.

Proverbs 21:1-2 says that, "a person may think their own ways are right, but the Lord weighs the heart." This means that for us **to hear from God clearly, we must hold our plans loosely.** In fact, we should hold our plans so loose that we can change them or even abandon them if the Spirit so leads us. And we can make those tough choices knowing that **Jesus ultimately wants to give us what's best.**

See, when God "weighs our hearts," He sees right where we are in our walk and in our lives, and He sees (in a way that we can't) exactly what the outcome will be if we go ahead with our plan. At that point, He determines what's best.

¹ Some may call it "annoying."

Professional Type A's like myself occasionally have a hard time with the whole "hold your plans loosely" thing. Allowing God to make the final call can be difficult for me. **But, I've discovered in my own walk that if I practice a daily discipline of holding onto to the small things loosely, then it's much easier to hold the big plans loosely.** In other words, if I rely on Him to help me exercise a little trust and patience with the little things (the sudden surprises, the unexpected guest, the little "interruptions" that are actually the invitation of God) then it becomes second nature to surrender the big, life-changing decisions to Him.²

This is much easier to do with some practice. So, go to God with your plans and dreams, (hold on to them loosely) recognizing Him as the leader and understanding that He knows best. Because God weighs the heart, we can be one hundred percent confident of this - **life always goes better for us when we invite God into our decisions.**

***"The heart of man plans his way,
but the Lord establishes his steps."***

- Proverbs 16:9

² Remember how in the parable of the talents, handling "the small things" correctly was rewarded with the Master's comment: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Master!"

22

HIDE
YOUR-
SELF.

DAY 22

When we're studying Proverbs, we tend to think of the verses as good, practical advice that's mostly geared towards day-to-day living. And of course, they are.

But much of Proverbs also has a **deeper spiritual meaning** that directly relates to our relationship with Jesus. For example, check out this little gem in Proverbs 22:3,

*The prudent sees danger and hides himself,
but the simple go on and suffer for it.*

On the surface, this is a quick reminder that you should wisely keep your eye on a potentially dangerous situation instead of foolishly ignoring danger and plowing forward¹ But the verse's secondary meaning alludes to **something far more significant and eternal**.

The "prudent" in this case also refers to the spiritually prudent. These are people who have been alerted by the Holy Spirit as **to the brevity of life and the certainty of final judgment**. They understand how serious it would be to appear, unforgiven, before the judgment throne of God and have their lives reviewed with no Advocate² to speak on their behalf and no sacrifice to pay for their sins. **We can't even comprehend how terrifying such a meeting would be** knowing that the end result is final judgment and eternal separation from God.

Unlike the "simple" in the second half of the verse, the "prudent" do something in the face of danger - **they hide themselves**. Now, on the surface this might seem to be kind of a cowardly way of dealing with the situation. But it's actually a very practical idea depending on **where the hiding takes place**. Here's what I mean. Hiding behind excuses would be pointless; **trying to hide behind our**

¹ Likely with no Godly counselors, little humility, and even less prayer. See Chapter 26 for more on this.

² Literally, "to speak on behalf of another."

good works or some supposed sense of morality would be, if we're honest, outright ridiculous. However, having our life "hidden in Jesus" is not *only* a reasonable strategy, it's the only strategy that is **guaranteed to protect us from the fury of God's final judgment.** And this strategy also makes sure that we're found forgiven and able to enjoy a relationship with Jesus for all eternity. Why would we want to hide anywhere else?

This is why the Apostle Paul writes:

*"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and **your real life is hidden with Christ in God.** And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory."*

On that great and terrible day of His Judgment, my real prayer is that you will have **made peace with God by accepting the sacrifice of Jesus as payment for your sin.** The best course of action is for us to swallow our pride, confess our sins, and then thank God in grateful humility that we are found "hidden" in Jesus as sons and daughters of the Living God.

"For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.' So then each of us will give an account of himself to God."

- Romans 14:11-12

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. How real is the final Day of Judgment to you? Is it a factor in the day-to-day decisions that you make?

2. What does being "hidden in Christ" mean to you on a practical basis?

3. Why can't God just forgive sin without the need for sacrifice or payment?

23

HEALTH-
IER AND
STRON-
GER.

DAY 23

It has been said, “you are what you eat.” If that stands true (and I believe that it does) then you and I have a pretty large say in whether we’re healthy or unhealthy. But let’s be honest, in the day and age we live in, it’s not easy to eat healthily. The good news - **food in this century is historically cheap**, and the labor required to get it is historically low. The bad news - our food is also historically unhealthy.

A lot of our groceries are over-processed and filled with hormones, toxins, ten different kinds of sugars, and a whole slew of chemical preservatives that we can’t even pronounce.¹ So, if you (like the majority of people) just grab your food off the grocery shelf based on price alone without even considering its ingredients, then you’ll likely end up (like the majority of people) unhealthy.

However, some are wiser than that. They don’t want to eat toxins, and they know that strong health can’t be built on processed foods. These people tend to read the labels to see what they’re buying. They consider what ingredients the food is made of, and they’re cautious about eating stuff they can’t pronounce. **Since the food they eat is of greater purity, they benefit by being healthier and stronger.**

This same principle “you are what you eat” applies to the life of the believer. Solomon says in Proverbs 23:12, “*Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.*” What he means is that **we should be very intentional about what we allow to enter our hearts and minds.** If we consume junk information throughout the day that contradicts what is True, then we’ll become spiritually weak. But if we’re careful to “check the labels” on what we’re listening to, reading, or watching by making sure that we’re receiving Biblical instruction and Godly knowledge throughout the day, this will invariably lead to better spiritual health.

¹ Who’s up for a nice hot mug of butylated hydroxyanisole with a side order of dilauryl thiodipropionate?

The great news is that by giving us His Word, **the Lord has given us instruction and knowledge of the highest possible purity. God's Word is the ultimate spiritual power food.** Jeremiah 15:16 confirms this concept of purity by declaring, *"When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name Lord God Almighty."* When it came to spiritual health, Jeremiah understood very clearly that, *"you are what you eat."*

My charge is that we start eating right. Let's clean up our spiritual diet by ridding ourselves of worldly, toxic junk food. Let's stop binging on random information overload and concentrate on what's actually useful. In other words, **let's focus on applying our hearts to instruction and giving our ears to knowledge by spending time with Jesus in His Word.** No other source provides us with such a concentrated diet of wisdom, insight, and spiritual perception as does the Word of God. As Hebrews 4:12 reminds us, *"the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

***"Why do you spend money for what is not bread,
and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen
carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight
yourself in abundance."***

- Isaiah 55:2

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. What is one item you could remove from your current spiritual diet that would help you to immediately feel healthier?

2. Why do you think people continue to consume foods that they know are bad for them?

3. How does your answer to the second question apply to your personal spiritual diet?

24

RISE

AGAIN.

DAY 24

There's this pivotal scene about Peter in Luke's Gospel that I find fascinating. In it, Peter's had sort of a confusing day. Hours before the arrest of Jesus, Peter has very publicly vowed to everyone, including Jesus,¹ that he would never abandon Jesus, no matter what. However, mere hours later when the soldiers came to make the arrest, Peter, like the rest of the Disciples, ran for his life to save his own skin. After the arrest, when Peter (aka "The Rock"²) is accused of being one of Jesus' followers, he not only flips out and denies knowing Jesus. He acts indignant at even being associated with Him. Right in the middle of this display of cowardice and disloyalty, **Jesus looks right at him**, and, sick at heart, Peter ends up weeping.

Now, with any other religion or following, that probably would have been the end of it. Call it bad luck, bad faith, or bad karma – Peter's out. **But because of God's grace, Peter gets (yet) another chance.** When he next meets Jesus, our Lord has now triumphed over Satan, sin, and death. He has risen from the dead, and, from a distance, Peter recognizes Him in total awe, no doubt remembering that look Jesus gave him. Peter has to be wondering - will Jesus be angry? Will He disown him? Will He punish him?

As it turns out, Jesus does the unthinkable. He cooks him some breakfast. There's no anger, no drama, and no punishment. Peter receives some wise advice about life, and the sweet fellowship they had is restored. The entire scene is in total keeping with Proverbs 24:15 where God tells us that **"the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity."**

I clearly remember one of my own "Peter moments." One morning after being strung out and missing for days, I was walking home, again needing the safety of my parents' townhouse. Both Pop and Mom were out searching for me as they had done countless times before. As I turned the corner, I saw his car coming towards me. I couldn't help but wonder what he would say to me. How angry was he going to be? Would he tell me to not bother coming home like I deserved?

¹ and maybe especially Jesus

² Renamed by Jesus Himself in Matthew 16:18 "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The car pulled up to me, and Pop rolled down the window. I braced for the worst. And then, despite all the heartache and grief I had caused them, he did the unthinkable. He sort of smiled at me and said, "Sammy, when I grow up, I wanna be just like you." It was easily the most graceful thing anyone has ever said to me, given the agony of worry I caused them. Outside of God's intervention, **it did more to turn around my addiction than anything else.**

Because of what Jesus did, **we are now "the righteous" of Proverbs 24.** With all of our sins - past, present, and future - forgiven, we're no longer merely trying to escape punishment. Instead, our new hearts are trying to please Him. The only thing that makes us different from the "wicked who stumble in calamity" is the finished work of Jesus Who gives us:

A Hope – that we're not only forgiven, but deeply loved, highly valued, and objects – not of God's wrath – but of His rescue.

A Helper – who is the Holy Spirit. He empowers us, illuminates us, and equips us to understand Truth in order for us to grow closer to Him and share Him with others.

A High Calling as sons and daughters of the Living God. Peter later wrote that "we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people³ so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Who better to proclaim God's forgiveness than those were formerly the "wicked" but are now know by Him as the "righteous"? What a transformation! All because our Heavenly Father loves us enough to have sent His Son on His great rescue mission.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

- John 3:16

³ Some, of course, a bit more peculiar than others. Present company excluded.

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. How do you define grace? What is the difference between grace, mercy, and forgiveness?

2. What's the most grace anyone (besides God) has ever extended to you?

3. Do you easily forgive and offer grace? How do we become better at extending grace?

25
BURN-
ING
COALS.

DAY 25

If I've said it once, I've probably said it a billion times.¹ **I can't stand just "playing church"**. Just going through the motions, claiming that I believe in the Gospel but not living a life that demonstrates my convictions, literally scares me. And, out my fear of being the hypocrite (all show and no go, as they say), I truly desire to lead a life of impact.

Scripture says in Second Corinthians that we are "*called now as followers of Jesus to be ministers of reconciliation*" and that God uses us to draw people to Himself. When I think about how fast life goes by and how powerful the Gospel is, I want to do all that I can to live up to that calling.

Now, all that's well and good when it comes to sharing with people that we like and actually enjoy being around. But engaging people that you honestly don't like is a completely different ball game. And it's definitely not easy to be the hands and feet of Jesus and a "minister of reconciliation" to those that might even treat you like their enemy.

Yet, this is precisely what Jesus calls us to do. Solomon says in the Proverbs 25:21-22, "*if your enemy is hungry give them food to eat, if he's thirsty give him water to drink. In doing this you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you.*"

This is very important because when you bless your enemies and when you love those who hate you, **then you join a special group of people who can love in the face of hatred.** Your love becomes something supernatural, holy, and much prized in the eyes of God. It's a heavenly love, because it's the kind of love God shows mankind all day long. His love remains when people don't bother to thank Him or even when people seem to hate Him for no reason.

¹ Alright, a thousand times, but still.

Throughout history, people have rejected God's prophets, disobeyed His laws, and even murdered His innocent Son. For some reason, mankind tends to treat Him as our enemy.

But through it all, God continues to love us.

Therefore, we're called to demonstrate this same supernatural love for one simple reason: **to point people to Jesus**. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus plainly said, *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

To really reach the lost and make disciples, **we need to love our enemies the same way Jesus did**. Our great High Priest, Jesus, didn't just say it, He lived it. He didn't just tell us to love others, He demonstrated that perfect love on the Cross. So, for us to be impactful followers of Jesus, we have to be loving to those that maybe don't even like us.

Straight up - are we all show and no go? **Or are we imitators of Jesus as God commands?**

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. and walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

- Ephesians 5:1-2

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Do you make a habit of intentionally loving those that you don't like or even your enemies?

2. In humility, can we see a lot of our old or even our present selves in the words and actions of the "unlovables"?

3. In what ways can we become better imitators of Jesus in our encounters with others?

26

HOLD

LOOSELY.

DAY 26

Life can be risky. This is especially true for King Uzziah whose story is tucked away in 2 Chronicles 26.

It seems like it'd be tough to be made king at a mere 16 years old as Uzziah was, but somehow this teenage ruler made it work. As soon as he took the throne, everything just went right for Uzziah. Under his reign, the kingdom expanded, the people were happy, and his military campaigns went off without a hitch.

Again, this kid was 16 years old! How is this even possible?

It was possible because Uzziah held his plans loosely, letting **God make it work on His behalf**. He blessed Uzziah with wise counselors and a stable kingdom and empowered him to rule over Judah like a pro. The key to Uzziah's success is found in verse five of this same chapter where it states that he, *"sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success."*

Of course, no one would possibly mess with such a winning formula. Right?

Wrong. Unfortunately, **things started to unravel for Uzziah as he foolishly** began to rely more and more upon himself and less and less upon God. He blew off his counselors, **stopped seeking God**, and **starting holding tightly to his own plans**. Uzziah eventually got so full of himself that he tried to take over the Mosaic sacrifices in the temple (a *major* no-no in the Jewish religion). Only certain priests, for a limited time, were allowed to serve before God in the holy place, but Uzziah barged in like he owned the joint. The result of all this pride was that God afflicted him with poor health, and he was permanently banned from the Temple. His son, Jotham, had to take over the running of the Kingdom,¹ and Uzziah, in effect, got spiritually impeached.

¹ 2 Chr. 26:21 "King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house --leprosy, and banned from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land."

Proverbs 26:12 says very simply, *“Do you see a person wise in their own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for them.”* **Friends, this is a strong statement, because as you may have noticed, Solomon is no fan of fools.** Uzziah ends up being sort of the “poster boy” of fools because he became so wise in his own eyes. He thought he could run the kingdom and the temple single-handedly which ultimately cost him everything.

Although we may not be a king, many of us have jobs, ministries, and families that rely on our actions, decisions, and leadership. How can we avoid the errors of Uzziah? Briefly, let’s look at some the defenses God gives us to help us become more fool-proof in our own lives.

Stay in Touch with Wise Counselors. Proverbs 15:22 says plainly that “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.” This is a critical part of wise living. Paying attention to and seeking guidance from people who have been around a while is a great way to learn from their mistakes and avoid your own.

Stay Humble Before God. The Apostle James states that “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Not much that I can add to that!

Stay Close to Jesus by making sure you’re reading His Word and talking to Him through prayer. There is no defense stronger than a close walk with the One who created us.

Fortunately, as sad as Uzziah’s story is, **it’s highly avoidable.** If we listen to Godly counsel, stay humble and prioritize our relationship with Jesus, we are very likely to avoid the errors of this once mighty King.

***“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes,
but a wise man listens to advice.”***

- Proverbs 12:15

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Do you have Godly counselors in your life that you trust and are willing to consult with? If not, who can you depend on to give you encouragement and guidance?

2. Can you think of a time when Godly counselors could have saved you a lot of grief?

3. Why do you think it is difficult to confide in others with our issues?

27

**A BIG
DEAL.**

DAY 27

Andrew Carnegie was one of the richest men to ever live. In the early 1900's he started Standard Oil (now Exxon) and was America's first billionaire. Despite having such a huge fortune at his disposal, he gave a shocking answer when a reporter asked him, "How much money is enough?". Carnegie paused for a moment and replied,

"Just a little more."

Think about that for a second. Very few people seem satisfied with their lives. More often than not, we're really not content with what we have. Instead, we're constantly wanting "just a little more." Think about this though - if we're always focused on "just a little more" and never really satisfied with what we have, then is the problem with the stuff or **is the problem with us?** Somewhere along the line, we're being scammed. From Hollywood to Wall Street, more stuff never equals more satisfaction. However, being satisfied and thankful is **a big deal to God**. This is because if we're not thankful to Him, we're not only robbing ourselves of joy, **we're robbing Him of glory**.

There's this idea out there that Heaven will be everything we've ever wanted and as much as we want of it for as long as we'd like. But even if that were true, how would Christians who walk by the Spirit possibly enjoy such a place? What a busted, worldly kind of Heaven that would be! Instead, the Word says that Heaven will be a place where we will finally be satisfied. Why? **Because we'll be with Jesus**.

Friends, we should carefully consider when Solomon says in Proverbs 27:20 that *"death and destruction are never satisfied and neither are the eyes of man."* Strong words, but true. We'll keep falling for the lie that *"just a little more"* will finally make us happy until we realize the problem is never with what we have. It's that we're truly not thankful for what we already have. Since developing the habits of contentment and thankfulness are so critical, I'm going to suggest

three ideas that will help us practice being joyful and thankful people.

The first suggestion is to **understand that your flesh (or your old nature) will never, ever be satisfied.** No matter how much you have or how much you gather together, the old nature will always want “just a little more.” *Always.* The good news is that if you realize that your old nature really can’t be satisfied, then you can just stop trying. The answer must be somewhere else.

The second suggestion is to intentionally practice gratitude for **what you have right now.** When we step back and see how generous God’s already been to us, it’s really kinda incredible. We should just STOP every now and then and thank God for all the good things in our lives. I mean, it stands to reason that if we’re ever going to develop into joyful, grateful, and satisfied people, at some point we’re going to have to get in the habit of thanking Him. No other method will work. Take an inventory of the blessings in your life (health, friends, a home, whatever it may be) and then thank God sincerely for His generosity.

Third, **understand that we can only find real, lasting satisfaction in God.** Even if you never acquire one more possession, realize that His presence alone is priceless. Nothing in this life can compare to the sense of peace, safety, and security found in a close walk with Jesus. That’s why Paul can say with such confidence, *“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.”*¹

Contentment is not found in piling up more and more goods. Real satisfaction **is found in Jesus** and in showing thankfulness for the good things He gives us.

“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”

- 1 Timothy 6:6

¹ Phillipians 4:12

28

**SUPREME
GIVER.**

DAY 28

Some of the most blessed people I know are also some of the most generous. These are people who, across the whole socioeconomic spectrum, make a point of being givers. Some of them are very well off financially, some of them struggle to make ends meet, and some of them are as Pop might say, “so broke they can’t afford to pay attention.” Yet, all these different kinds of people find themselves blessed by God because of their giving hearts.

God’s emphasis is always on **the attitude of our hearts when we give**. For example, take my dear friend who’s a multimillionaire. He’s made it his life’s purpose to look for opportunities to bless others with what God has given him, and God continues to bless him abundantly. I have other friends who may not be able to give the same amount but give but with the same spirit of generosity, and I know that pleases God every bit as much.

God loves a cheerful giver!¹ Why? **Because God is a cheerful giver!**

And He has promised to bless those who give.

We all know people who scrimp and save, hang on to every penny, and never dare give any of it away. Although it seems contradictory, Proverbs says over and over that true riches can’t be attained without truly generous giving.² So many people try to collect blessings without ever giving one out, not knowing this incorrect posture of the heart causes them to miss God’s blessing. Proverbs 28:22 really nails this concept when it warns, “*a stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him.*”

But Jesus encourages us to live a greater way when He declares, “**it’s more blessed to give than to receive.**” I think all of us have, at one time or another, experienced the blessing in being generous. The feeling you get when you give someone something that they want or need is almost euphoric. I think this is a universal experience because **you and I were ultimately created to be givers**

¹ This phrase was not invented by a desperate preacher; it’s straight outta 2 Cor. 9:7

² Proverbs 11:24 *One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.*

- to be generous and to actually find joy in giving.

The reason I say, “we were created to be givers” is because we were created in the very image of God who is **the Supreme Giver. It was the pinnacle of generosity** that “God did not spare his own Son but gave Himself up for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Think about it, the Supreme Giver sent His Son into the world to pay off the entire sin debt of mankind at His own expense. He then opened His Kingdom for all to enjoy. **It’s the most lavishly generous act ever recorded** and, at its core, is the **generous, giving heart of God.**

My father taught for many years that **giving is an act of worship** and is much more closely related to the heart than the wallet. What he meant was that unless God’s Spirit moves upon us, giving will seem risky, wasteful, foolish, and short-sighted. In contrast, Solomon says giving is **holy business**, a wise use of the funds God has entrusted us with, and **a foolproof investment in the Kingdom.**

Note that we should never give out of pressure; **God does want or need that kind of giving.** We should never give reluctantly; **God will not bless that sort of half-hearted giving.**³ But when God urges us to be givers, our response should be one of obedience, excitement, and gratefulness **that we’re imitating His generous, giving Son and being a light to a dark world.**

***“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
and He will reward them for what they have done.”***

- Proverbs 19:17

³James 1:6-8 because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.

29

IDENTI-
TY.

DAY 29

I read an article recently that said fashion trends in the United States are now changing almost weekly. This is a major increase from just a few years ago when the fashion industry tended to introduce new styles seasonally. The reason change is occurring faster and faster is because of the demand created by our consumeristic culture. This article further stated that many sociologists believe consumers are pleased with the rate of change because **they're not just looking for the latest fashion. They're looking for an identity.**

From the clothes we wear to the car we drive to the phones we carry, many people are spending, doing, and saying whatever it takes to win the desperately needed approval of others. Not only is this exhausting¹ but Scripture calls it **dangerous**. Proverbs says it best in Chapter 29 verse 25, *"The fear of man will prove to be a snare but whoever trusts the Lord is kept safe."*

Scripture gives us many examples of how the fear of other peoples' opinions can lead to a kind of bondage. Fearing other people's opinions is like a prison, and **fear of man can lead you to do the craziest things**. You may well find yourself spending money that you don't have to buy things that you don't need simply to impress people that *you don't even like!*² Keeping up with Jones' is an expensive, wasteful way to try and prove your value to others, especially when Scripture emphasizes that every individual is intimately valuable to God.

At its root, the fear of man stems from an identity crisis. When people don't know who they are, most of them will do just about anything to find out. This is why it's so important to know what Jesus says on the matter. **Allowing God to give you your identity is the sanest and (as Solomon says) the safest place for us to be.** We can try to make up our own answers, but intentionally excluding our Creator from the formula is not just offensive and foolish. It's dangerous.³

¹ and expensive

² another Pop expression

³ Psalm 14:1 The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."

See, the quickest way to forget what God thinks about you is to be obsessed with what others think about you. So many times I've been there, looking for others approval, imagining and fearing what they might say while forgetting that the only opinion that really matters is that of Jesus.

The beautiful thing is that we don't have to earn Jesus' affection. He already showed His love for us when He died so that we could have a relationship with Him. It's crazy how we so easily overlook His unfailing love, **but the fear of man will do that to you every single time.**

Avoid this trap and trust God's opinion of you over the opinions of others. And if we're going to obsess over what anybody thinks about us, let's make sure it's Jesus and Him alone. Know that Jesus will never change His mind about you⁴. His love will never fail you⁵, and He promised that He will never abandon you.⁶ We never have to fear the approval of men when we find our safety, rest, and identity in Him.

***"I, even I, am He who comforts you.
Who are you that you fear mere mortals,
human beings who are but grass?"***

- Isaiah 51:12

⁴ Jesus Christ is same yesterday, today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

⁵ "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself." Jer. 31:3

⁶ Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20

⁷ Kiddin', sort of

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. Do you tend to depend on the opinion of man or the opinion of God?

2. What specific strategies can be used to stop the "fear of man" habit?

3. Can a devotional have just too many footnotes? Discuss.⁷

30

JUST

ONE

WISH.

DAY 30

Have you ever played the game, “If I had just one wish”? I used to play this with my brothers which would entail all three of us getting one shot to make that perfect wish. Me being me, I always figured that if I only got one wish then I’d just wish for infinite wishes! Booyah! That’s how you beat the system.

But now think about this for a minute. If you really did have the opportunity to ask for just one wish, what would you wish for? The answer to that question **speaks volumes about your character**. It indicates what you hold in high regard and what you value as a person. Would your wish be wise or foolish? Jesus said in the Gospels that wisdom really isn’t so much about what you say or what you think. **Ultimately, wisdom is proven by our actions and decisions.**¹

The 30th chapter of Proverbs was written by a very wise man named Agur, who most scholars believe was a contemporary of Solomon. Although it’s really more of a prayer, in that chapter we read that Agur makes his own “wish” or request to God in verses 7-9. **The nature of his request tells us a lot about his character.**

Is Agur all show and no go? You tell me:

“O God I beg favors from you; let me have them before I die. First, help me never to tell a lie and second, give me neither poverty nor riches. Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny You and say, Who is the Lord? And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God’s holy name.”

What a demonstration of wisdom and evidence of what I believe are two of the most important products of living wisely: **integrity and dependence**. First, Agur knows that the safest way to have a healthy, ongoing relationship with God is first to be a person of integrity. People of integrity say what they mean, and they do what they say. Does it take courage to be a person of integrity? Yes, but it also takes fear. Not a fear of man **but the fear of God**.

¹ Luke 7:35

Second, Agur understands that a posture of humility and dependency before God is mandatory. Being dependent and humble go together. It's incredibly humbling to know that we're completely and utterly dependent upon Jesus for everything, from the many blessings He gives us to the very next breath we take. He holds our very lives in His hands. Humility requires that we, like Agur, acknowledge Him just as Agur did as the giver of all things. Compared to Him, we're just dust ("**proud dust**" as **Pop would say**). So, like Solomon, Agur's wisdom encourages us to be people of integrity and dependency and given the impressive transparency of his "wish" above, even people of honesty.

In fact, Proverbs from front to back is really a book of encouragement. Among everything else it offers us, Proverbs encourages us to be truthful in all of our dealings and in our relationships with others. Most importantly, Proverbs encourages us to have a strong foundation for Godly, wise living, and this means we need to have (going all the way back to Proverbs 1) **a healthy fear of God**. This is the starting point of all wisdom, knowing that we're dependent on Jesus for every aspect of our lives. It's God's desire that we have life and life more abundantly in Him. And part of that abundance is the great wisdom that He offers so freely which only be found in Him.

"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing."

- John 15:4-6

JOURNAL BELOW:

1. If you had one wish, what would it be? Don't over-spiritualize this!

2. What does healthy dependence on God look like to you?

3. What does living a life of integrity mean to you?

31

MADE

NOT

BORN.

DAY 31

By Ruth Foster

Proverbs 31 starts off with the phrase “...an inspired utterance his mother taught him.” This is confirmation to mothers everywhere that our voices are heard by our children! That’s a powerful thought, which underscores the impact we maintain as moms.

We live in an age where motherhood and marriage are under fire. Magazines, ads, social media, friends, books, and TV shows are constantly questioning, “Can a strong, independent woman be devoted solely to her husband and children?” We’re told that as women, we should always be taking on *more*.

There are multiple roles for us that will make our lives complete. Look your best, only cook organic food, seek your dream job, be a Pinterest inspired crafter...the list goes on. Women’s magazines and daytime talk shows tell us we should make our self-realization and self improvement the greatest priorities; it’s okay if everything and everyone else comes in second. Our culture continually suggests that being *just* a wife and mom will not fulfill our limitless potential as women.

This attitude is the antithesis of Proverbs 31 which states, “A wife of noble character is hard to find...when she is found she is a treasure more valuable than rubies.” This clearly communicates that women are key players and vital in the health our families and communities. Virtuous wives are not a dime a dozen, something simply stumbled upon and worth little. They’re a treasure! Describing a good wife as a treasure means that what we do as women **is valuable to Jesus** and to the world around us.

This chapter shows that our daily, monotonous tasks have eternal impact in our homes and beyond. I think that beyond the daily grind, we Proverbs 31 women should also be masters of simplicity. A little “less is more” attitude goes a long way towards sanity in our homes. If you look closely, you realize that a Proverbs 31 woman *is* a master of simplicity. She understands that focusing on what’s important deposits **a lot of life** into her family.

I find myself questioning every new opportunity that comes my way. *Is this a priority or a distraction? Is this a good thing but perhaps for another season?* There are many good causes and ministries out there, but they don't all need our involvement. When we prioritize Jesus, we learn to prioritize our family. This allows us to wisely choose the *right* activities in which to become involved.

I often remind myself when things are getting too hectic, "Ruth, there are dozens of women out there who can lead a Bible study, help the PTA, or start a community group, but no one else can be Asher, Lucia and Silas' Mom, and no one else can be Paul's wife."¹ I need to be on guard and keep things Jesus centered, **not allowing culture to shape my role in life**. Every time I consider committing to or signing up for something, I always consider the following questions. *Is this beneficial for our family? Is it life giving and purposeful? Will this fit the construct of our family and bring peace and quality time?* If the answer is no, it will likely drive us all in different directions and halfway crazy. We know that when we say "yes" to one thing we're saying "no" to another.

In Proverbs, we see a woman with her priorities in order. Her husband is fully confident she won't max out their family emotionally, physically, or mentally. She's not just busy; **she's busy with the right things** (Although I just hope she's not doing all the things listed in Proverbs 31 at the same time)! I love the line that describes this incredible women as "*clothed with strength and dignity... she laughs at the days to come.*" Why isn't she anxious and scrambling to prepare for the future? I think it's because she's **ordered her priorities ahead of time**.

Right now is where we're tempted to throw up our hands in defeat and think, "*Okay, but this women was born a Type A, uber organized superwoman, and as a normal human being, I just don't stand a chance.*" I'm here to tell you that's simply not true. **A Proverbs 31 woman is MADE not born**. Becoming that woman *does* require wisdom, which we acquire by **seeking Jesus**, who designed us and has a noble plan for us as HIS daughters.

¹ We as women are exceedingly valuable to our husbands, even when we don't feel like it. Maybe even mostly when we don't feel like it.

FOOL PROOF

Please understand that Jesus never sets you up for failure. Whatever Jesus asks you to do, **He equips you to accomplish**. Becoming a Proverbs 31 woman is completely attainable! Sometimes we get there while making a ton of mistakes, a few u-turns, getting back on track, and most importantly **never giving up**. I hang my hat on the verse that says, “the righteous may fall seven times but they continue to get back up.”² God encourages us to get up and try again and again and maybe again! In our failures, we learn valuable lessons about what’s important and what’s not. Hopefully the next go around, we avoid the pitfalls we fell into before and then warn others to avoid them as well.

The Proverbs 31 woman opens her arms to the poor, provides good food for her family, and makes things with her hands and her mind that are profitable for the good of her family. (This means you office workin’ mamas deserve a special shout out!) She’s a wise and loving counselor to those who need her.³ She doesn’t waste time doing things that don’t bring fruit to her family or community. And **listen to this**... ultimately those kids she assumed weren’t listening to her will rise up and call her BLESSED.⁴ Even though she fell seven times, **she got back up**. The Proverbs 31 woman **prioritizes the family**, just like my own mom did so well. Her husband recognizes her loyalty and faithfulness saying, “Many women do noble things but you surpass them all.” Even at the city gate, the men who know her husband speak respectfully about her. You could say that her reputation precedes her, because **she keeps focused on what God requires and not what culture dictates**.

This takes time and focus ladies. **Maybe even a lifetime** of seeking after Jesus for His will and plan for us. So, don’t you **dare** give up! Go for the gold and know that God calls **YOU** to be a Proverbs 31 woman. It may look a little different for each woman, but the principles will be the same! As a Proverbs 31 mama, know that at the end of the day, our kids are listening. Hopefully, one day, they’ll be wiser because of our own Mom “inspired utterances.” Who knows, one day they might even write a chapter in a book about us!

² Proverbs 24:16

³ Every woman has the opportunity to be a Mom role model in our communities, families and friends. There is so much need out there! If yours are all grown up or if you haven’t given birth to one of your own, Jesus can use you to bless and serve those who might not have had the blessing of a mother role model.

⁴ Or maybe gave her the eye roll!

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

- 2 Corinthians 12:9

*"And Jesus came up and
spoke to them, saying,
'All authority has been given
to Me in heaven and on earth.
Go therefore and make
disciples of all the nations,
baptizing them in the name of the
Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that
I commanded you;
and lo, I am with you always,
even to the end of the age.'"*

- Matthew 28:17-19

EPILOGUE:

I can't thank you enough for taking time out of your busy life to spend time with me working through the Book of Proverbs. I hope the time invested was as beneficial to you as it was to me! It's pretty amazing to think that God loves us so much that He would equip us with tools to help us actually foolproof our lives (and do so in such a detailed fashion). As we've seen, Proverbs gives us a roadmap to deal with our relationships, our priorities, and even the words we use (and when to say them). All of these bite-sized sayings and lessons were written to help us find the life He intended us to have. His love is an extravagant love.

Now, with all 31 days behind us, I hope we can agree that's it been quite a journey! But if you're anything like me, you probably feel like you're just getting started. In fact, when I first sat down with the Book of Proverbs, I quickly realized it would take more than a lifetime to reach its unfathomable depths. What we've done so far is merely scratch the surface; **immense truths still await us in this God-given book.**

The whole point of this small devotional is to encourage you to chase after Jesus harder, to listen to Him more closely, and talk to Him more frequently. And if I could leave you with one thing it would be this. As you continue to foolproof your own life, don't just keep it to yourself. See, there's a principle here that states whatever you celebrate you'll replicate. So, my challenge to you is to **be a herald to others and show them all that God has shown you** in order that they might learn to foolproof their own lives. In this day and age, so many people often play the part of the fool. In contrast, we can walk in wisdom in this new life, freely and lovingly given to us by Jesus.

And that's worth sharing.

I love you guys.

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