

LIFE'S TOUGHEST YEARS



RICK HUGHES



Rick Hughes
EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES

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Rick Hughes Evangelistic Ministries, Inc. was founded for the purpose of communicating the Word of God to students and administrators in private schools and churches across the United States. This ministry is non-denominational in its thrust and is conducted freely without charge or obligation. No material is sold and no offerings are taken.

LIFE'S TOUGHEST YEARS

*Grown up in a generation so different, so strange
I find it rather hard to stand tall and resist the change
What's wrong is right and what's right is wrong
Sometimes I stumble in my ability to stay strong.
(Shannon Ireland, Dallas, Texas)*

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STUDYING ... GROWING ... LIVING

The Christian way of life is unique. To understand and live it, you need the unique resources God provides - the Holy Spirit and the Bible. Use them as you read *Life's Toughest Years*. Be filled with the Holy Spirit (explained in this book) so His supernatural ministry can empower you to live this unique life. God reveals His will to you in the Bible. This is why studying the Bible is so important.

Think of studying as eating. Feed on God's Word daily to fuel yourself. Make studying a habit; if not, the rate of forgetting will exceed the rate of learning. Study under a qualified pastor-teacher. Concentrate, take notes and read your notes often.

Learn to live - don't live to learn. You will have testing and suffering in your life. When it comes, consider it an exam, an opportunity to apply what you've learned. If you fail, use God's resources, the Holy Spirit and the Bible, and you'll ace the next one. Be encouraged knowing God's unique plan for you will pick back up where you left it. God will never abandon you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With appreciation to the faculty and students of Wayne Academy in Waynesboro, Mississippi, for giving me multiple opportunities to present principles from the Word of God. Their hospitality was gracious and positive volition apparent, as has been my reception at so many other school assemblies over the years.

Through the ministry of faithful pastors who taught me God's Word, I learned the principles I teach. It was them that God the Holy Spirit used, and uses today, to guide me in my efforts to re-present Jesus Christ through my ministry.

Without the abundant grace provisions of our Lord Jesus Christ, you would never have seen this book. He alone provided servants with talents and resources to make *Life's Toughest Years* possible. To God be the Glory.

Your interest in *Life's Toughest Years* is encouraging. This book is a compilation of information I discussed with students and faculty during a Spiritual Emphasis Week. Their positive response inspired me to present the same teaching to you.

The chapters follow the five days of discussion:

Embracing Authority Orientation	... 1
Living Like a Fool	... 15
Finding Real Happiness	... 31
Countering Lures of the Cosmic System	... 47
Fulfilling Your Destiny	... 65

Do these themes seem relevant? Reading this book may not be easy. There is a lot of information to consider, but if you will take time to learn these principles and choose to apply them, your life will be changed forever. God's plan for you is amazing. I hope this book will help you begin to understand it and live it.

My prayer is you will make studying, growing, learning and applying the Word of God a priority in your life. Are you in? Do you want to thrive during life's toughest years? Then let's get going ...

In His Matchless Grace,

Rick Hughes

THE FANTASTIC FOUR

Wisdom will enter your heart [thinking]

Knowledge will be in your soul [through learning]

Discretion will guard you [ability to make wise decisions]

Understanding will watch over you [discernment]

(Proverbs 2:10-11)

EMBRACING AUTHORITY ORIENTATION

Thank you for starting to read *Life's Toughest Years*. I don't know your motivation for doing so but I pray you are not undergoing tough times. If you are, then this book will help you orient and adjust to your circumstances. You may feel overwhelmed, trapped, or you may just be curious to see what this joker (that's me) can tell you that you don't already know. Why you're reading this book isn't as important as what you will choose to do with the information once you've finished reading. If you stick with me through the book, you will have what you need to prevail through life's toughest years.

My intent is to present information and you have the privilege to make your own decisions on how you want to live your life. Let's start with the most important decision you have to make in life - to accept or to reject the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

**Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ
and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31)**

You will spend eternity in heaven or in the Lake of Fire. The choice is yours. Let me ask you a question. If you died today, would you go to heaven? If you don't know, or want to be able to answer Yes with certainty, then don't wait another minute to make this most important decision. Silently, you can pray something such as this, "Heavenly Father, I believe Your Son Jesus Christ died on the cross for me. I accept Him as my Savior. Thank you. In Jesus Christ's name I pray, Amen."

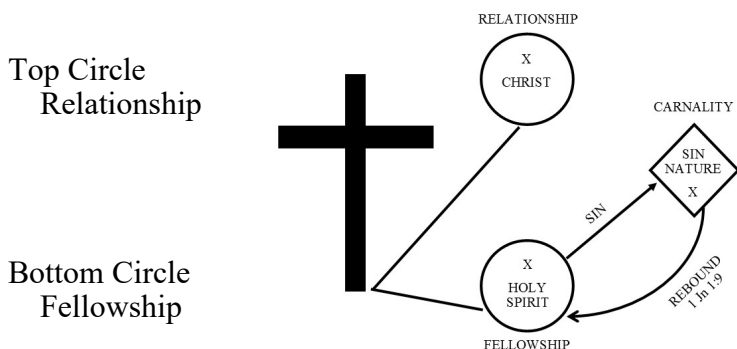
These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

Once Saved - Always Saved

Having accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have a permanent relationship with God the Father who says, "*I will never desert you nor forsake you*" (*Hebrews 13:5*). You can't lose your salvation. You are permanently in the family of God. **Salvation is God's grace gift to all.** You don't deserve it and you can't do anything to earn it. Works are not involved. It all depends on God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

As a Christian, the permanent relationship you have with God is shown below as the top circle. You can't get out of it. The bottom circle represents the filling of the Holy Spirit. When you sin, you break fellowship with God and your sin nature takes control. You are in carnality and no longer filled with, and empowered by, the Holy Spirit.



Whether you sin by something you think, something you say, or something you do, you must go to God the Father in silent prayer and confess your sin. 1 John 1:9 allows us to get back in fellowship with God the Father and be filled with the Holy Spirit, as shown above by the arrow. Rebound is the term I use for this.

Confess means to admit, to name. Rebound is your prayer to God the Father as the means to handle your personal sin. I suggest that prior to studying, always start with a silent prayer and use this opportunity to confess any known sins so the power of the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in you. The Holy Spirit will take what you read and help you understand and apply it. "Understanding" and "applying" are two critical factors we'll talk about in the pages ahead.

If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our [known] sins and to cleanse us from all [unknown or forgotten sins] unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

This book may reveal flaws in your life but hopefully it will encourage you to pursue and live the plan God designed just for you. You will get Biblical principles to understand your choices. If I can explain in *Life's Toughest Years* what your choices are, without playing on your emotions, then you'll have information to make wise decisions. If I share jokes you may find it easier to pay attention; however, when I explain things in the Bible, serious stuff, it may be hard to concentrate. Try not to get distracted or discouraged. Push through reading this book even if it takes you a chapter at a time. If you are positive to learning the truth, God will use the information in this book to talk to you, answer your questions, inspire you and give you a clear path for the way ahead.

Let's get started on how to understand your choices. Here is something to remember:

**God gave you two ends
One to think with and one to sit on
Success in life depends on which one you use

HEADS YOU WIN - - TAILS YOU LOSE**

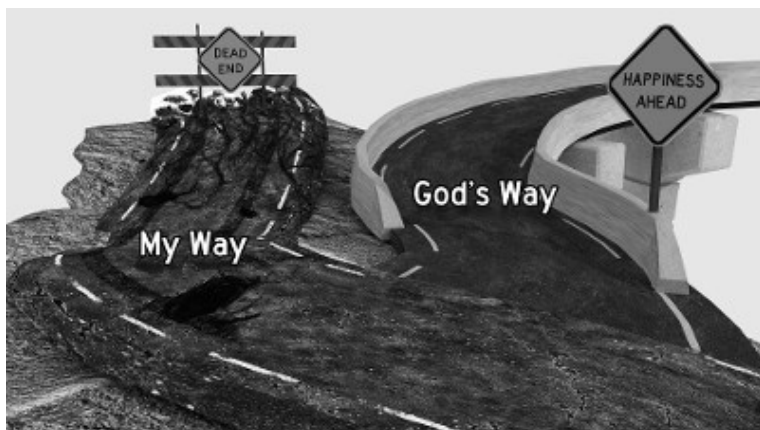
**As a man thinks in his heart [mind]
so he is. (Proverbs 23:7)**

I will appeal to your mind throughout this book because the Bible says the real you is what's in your mind, not what you look like or your image and style. God sees the real you and always knows what you're thinking.

The Bible teaches us to learn to think like Christ. This is how we change our thinking from human viewpoint to divine viewpoint. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 2:5). How did Christ think? He thought in terms of humility. Humility is the lack of arrogance and it opens your mind to learning.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

I never met my father. He divorced my mother when I was very young. I was raised by a single mom who walked every day to work at a hardware store. We lived in a government housing project in Birmingham, Alabama. My mom did not want me living in this environment, so she would ship me off to guardians during the week. I hated it. Every Sunday night, I would travel on a bus to a guardian's house where I'd stay and go to school; then on Friday, I'd ride the bus home. I went through four guardian homes prior to age thirteen, then I ran home. I didn't run away, I ran home. I told my mom, "No more strangers. I'm living with you." About this time, a football coach took an interest in me. He helped me. He became the closest thing to a real father I knew. He was like this for a lot of guys. He showed me what I was and what I could be. He pushed me to reach my potential. I played football at Woodlawn High School in Birmingham, Alabama, where I earned All City, All State and All American team recognition. After graduation, I went on to play football one year under the coaching of Paul Bear Bryant at the University of Alabama and we won the National Championship that year. Then I quit college and went down the My Way Highway.



For three years I drifted toward destruction. At the end of those three years, a girl I was dating took me to church. I had always believed church was for little old ladies and weirdos. I got nothing from the church service but after church she took me to a Bible study. A man from Africa was speaking and he got my attention. It wasn't that I was against God. I just had never heard the truth about God. When I was eleven, my mom had shipped me off to a summer camp on the Natchez Trace in Mississippi where I heard about God but never understood how to be saved. It wasn't until I was twenty-two that the truth captured my attention. Finally I heard the gospel message presented clearly and understood God's grace gift of salvation. I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior. I had no idea what was ahead for me. I went back to school at a Bible college in Birmingham. I became involved in Youth for Christ International and started speaking at high school assemblies in 1968. God still has me communicating the truth with students, faculty, radio and podcast listeners, congregations and now you. I'm so grateful.

Let's look at Ephesians 6:1-4. These verses will guide us toward understanding what goes on when we test our boundaries. My mom would say, "Don't do that" and I would immediately say, "I'm gonna do that." I wanted to be free and independent. I wanted power and authority over my own life. I was tired of living under someone

else's authority. When you get to a certain age you want to spread your wings and leave the nest. You want everyone to quit telling you what to do and stop looking over your shoulders. You are really determined to test your boundaries. Here's what the Bibles says about this.

Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and your mother that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
(Ephesians 6:1-4)

Here are the key words in this Scripture: **obey ... in the Lord ... honor ... well with you ... live long on the earth.** What does all this mean? The word *obey* in the Greek, the original language of the New Testament, means to comply under authority. So as long as you live under your parents' roof, God's Word tells you to obey your parents. **Our first real test in life is facing authority, be it fair or unfair.** Every parent, teacher, administrator or coach represents authority. Sometimes authority is fair and sometimes it is unfair. How do you handle authority? Do you respond and obey or do you react with arrogance?

I have four children. There have been times I disciplined one for something another one did. Only God is perfect. My wife and I certainly aren't perfect, and neither are your parents, teachers or coaches. They have to make decisions and sometimes the decisions are unfair. Respond with respect and don't judge those in authority.

Here's a good illustration. One day a football coach heard a bunch of kids cursing a teacher and he got angry. Waiting around a corner, he listened long enough then turned the corner, grabbed a kid by the back of the neck and escorted him to his office. Of course, all the other kids freaked out and scattered like a flock of quail. "I'll never tolerate that kind of language in my school. You understand that, son?" "Yes sir, " replied the boy. People said you could hear the paddle ring through the halls.

Ten years later at a reunion, a man approached the coach, "Do you remember the day you caught that kid cursing and you gave him a good paddling?" "I sure do," replied the coach. The younger man said, "You got the wrong kid, coach. I was the one who said those things." The coach found the young man who received the unfair discipline and apologized for his error. The coach asked him, "Why didn't you say anything?" The innocent one replied, "I knew arguing would do no good so I kept my mouth shut and took it. It was no big deal, coach." This is responding with humility.

How would you have handled this situation of being treated unfairly? "You wait til my daddy and his lawyers get ahold of you ... I'm quitting this dumb school ... You can't treat me like this." **Being able to handle unfair situations with humility starts at home. This is called orienting to authority.** God gave you parents to teach and orient you to authority so when you get out into the world and have independence, you can handle it. If you think the world will give you a fair shake, you're wrong.

<p>Authority is not always fair Neither is life</p>

I have a friend who opened a large national retail business in Birmingham. He had moved to Birmingham, bought a house, built and run the business for over three years when one day a guy from the home office walked in. The man said, "You're fired. Give me your keys. Get your stuff and a policeman will escort you out." What did my friend do wrong? Nothing. The company fired fifty-two managers across America in one day. It wasn't fair.

Authority makes mistakes. **God's command to obey can't be followed without divine help.** This leads us to the next phrase *in the Lord*. This means if you will stay in fellowship with God by using rebound when necessary, confessing/naming your sins to God the Father in silent prayer, He will give you the power to obey your parents even when they make decisions that aren't fair.

Let's add a caveat here. What if your daddy sends you down to the liquor store to steal money? Don't do it. Obviously, this is not right; you shouldn't break the law. Any parent who tells a child to violate the law is abusing that child. The Bible says a great deal about child abuse. *"It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than he should cause one of these little ones to sin"* (Luke 17:2).

If you are being abused, tell someone you trust immediately - Don't just take it

We've discussed *obey*, so now we'll move on to *honor*. Honor here means to revere, to place value upon. Your parents are your most valuable possession. You won't always live with them. When you move out, you will not be under the authority of your parents anymore but God's command to honor your parents is with you your whole life. There is never a time when you are not to respect your parents, even parents you think failed you.

Parents sometimes divorce. Notice the Bible says, *"Honor your father and your mother."* Whether they are together or not, you are to honor each one. When divorced parents try to turn a child against the other parent this is abuse which the Bible condemns. You are always to respect your parents. If I had met my father, I would have said, "Yes sir, it's good to meet you." I would respect him since he's my father. **God's mandate is you are to obey your parents when you are under their authority and honor your parents throughout your life.**

I can hear you now, "I don't like authority." Well, authority is critical to your survival and success in life. The sooner you realize this, the better. You'll never really grow up until you learn to accept and orient to authority, whether it is fair or unfair. We all have to face authority. God may put you under unfair authority to teach you respect for authority. God ordains authority for our benefit or otherwise we would self-destruct. Legitimate authority is established by Scripture and the standards of our nation.

**The secret to a full and meaningful life
starts with authority orientation learned at home**

Many people waste time and money seeking the "Fountain of Youth" so they can live a long time. Here is the secret to long life as recorded in the Bible:

Be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. (Colossians 3:20)

Honor your father and your mother that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth. (Ephesians 6:2-3)

Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God has given you. (Deuteronomy 5:16)

Learning authority orientation is how you overcome your arrogant tendencies that will lead to self-destruction. Arrogance can't handle authority. Arrogance tries to justify why it's okay to not do something. Hormones are flowing and independence is alluring. "Let me out ... Let me test those boundaries ... I want to be my own person ... I want to make my own decisions!" You are tempted to violate the trust your parents have placed in you. If you are arrogant you think, "My parents don't have the right to tell me I can't go out this weekend." So you make up a lie and go anyway.

Not long ago, two girls from a private academy told their parents about a 'Christmas party at a friend's house.' The girls' parents agreed to the party as long as the host parents would be there. Turns out it was all a lie. It wasn't at a friend's house but rather it was at a local drinking spot. It wasn't a Christmas party, it was a drunken bash. Both girls got drunk and the one driving home fell asleep, ran off the road, hit a tree and killed her best friend.

You see, it was more important for the girls to be with their friends than to be honest with their parents. You will face similar temptations and choices. You may try to justify why it's so important to go against standards your parents taught you. This is arrogance and it is a sin.

Self-Justification

(justifying you are right and others are wrong)

Self-Deception

(lying to yourself)

Self-Absorption

(doing whatever you want regardless of the rules)

Self-Destruction

(destroying yourself through your bad decisions)

Yes, you have the capability to make enough bad decisions to destroy yourself.

BAD DECISIONS LIMIT FUTURE OPTIONS

One of my good friends has a tremendous prison ministry. He goes into prisons to talk to inmates and presents the gospel and opportunities for Bible study. There are thousands of inmates across this country taking Bible study correspondence courses through his ministry. Many of them are studying the book we developed called *A Divine Pardon*. These people are in prison because they made bad decisions. Some will say, "I didn't do it ... It's not my fault ... I didn't have a good home life ... It's all my parents' fault and that's why I turned out to be such a loser." If you turn out to be a loser in life, don't blame your circumstances or your parents. You point a finger at them and three are pointed right back at you.

Circumstances are not an excuse

You are responsible for every decision you make.
You can have the worst parents in the world and still grow up to be magnificent. Your happiness depends on who and what you are, not your circumstances or your parents. With permission, I want to share this letter:

Dear Rick,

I'd like to say thank you. Before you came to our school, I had hit bottom. I was so depressed and confused. It definitely was a gift from God you came when you did. The first day you were there, you spoke to me and told me I was a charming young lady. Right then I knew God was speaking to my heart. I wanted so much to tell you my problems but held back. The next day when you were speaking, I began to listen and apply some of the things you had been talking about. It was becoming clear what had been happening to me. I was beginning to follow the crowd. I was raised in a Christian home, had Christian parents, high moral standards and values, and I knew I should never give in. But I did. I began to go out with girlfriends and drink to the point that I didn't even know what was going on. I had gone too far and I knew it but I just couldn't stop. The weekend before you came to our school, one of the guys was giving a party and we decided to go. Before I even got to the party, I was drunk. To make a long story short, that was the night I lost my virginity. I don't even know who he was. I wanted to tell you this in person but I didn't have the guts. I've been stressed out since that weekend because I don't know if I'm pregnant. I realize where I went wrong so I rededicated my life to Jesus Christ. I wanted you to know you were the one who made me realize I needed to make changes. You spoke to my heart like no one had ever done before. I hope you will read this to someone and maybe I can be a witness to them. Sincerely ...

You can break your parents' hearts and ruin your life by making bad decisions and getting on an arrogance path. Arrogant thinking is one of the greatest enemies of any Christian. When you reject authority you set yourself up for a life of misery and unhappiness.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Hopefully you now realize authority orientation is necessary in your life. Accept it, learn it and apply it. Romans 13:1 says, *"Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God."* When it comes to authority, you can respond with humility, Yes I will, or you can react with arrogance, No I won't. Authority orientation is a critical life skill.

Respond or React

Responding requires humility. Humility forgives and appreciates. Reacting is arrogance which judges and criticizes. Let me ask you a question. Have you ever done anything stupid? Did you forgive yourself? Did God forgive you? If God forgave you, why can't you forgive yourself, your parents or someone in authority for doing something stupid? Why are you bitter? Why are you angry? The answer is that in arrogance you are reacting with your emotions. You'll become an emotional wreck when you let your emotions control your life. God designed you to think, not emote. Remember, God gave you two ends -- one to think with and one to sit on.

HEADS YOU WIN -- TAILS YOU LOSE

Thinking is the key. If you are going to live the life God designed just for you, you must be able to respond to authority and even forgive authority when they make a mistake. But if you react and say No and get all emotional, you're going to be a loser in life. You'll carry a grudge around and likely never lead a full and meaningful life.

You may even destroy yourself along the way just like the inmates my friend talks to in prisons. Some of them are stuck there for the rest of their lives because of one stupid decision. Many of them went against authority and did things they shouldn't have done. It started with lying to their parents and going against their instructions, then making bad decisions and now they are in jail.

**The decisions you make
determine the life you lead**

You are a product of your decisions. Understand this. Without authority orientation and respect for your parents, you can end up flawed for life. Yes, there are exceptions, but they are very few. You should be grateful for your parents' sacrifices. You live in a home your parents provide and you eat the food, drink the water and use the electricity paid for by them. You may even be driving a car with insurance and gas financed by your parents. Show them your appreciation. Find your parents, look them in the eyes and tell them, "Thank you, I love you."

Your volitional decisions start early. If you haven't already, you'll be faced with temptations pushing your boundaries. Be wise. Stay authority oriented so you don't look back in a few years and say, "I wish I'd never done that ... I hope no one ever finds out what I did." Back in the 1950's, there were tragedy songs called "Splatter Platters." These songs were about death, destruction, unhappiness, loss, "Where oh where can my baby be? The Lord took her away from me." One bad decision and you could be singing those tunes.

BAD DECISIONS LIMIT FUTURE OPTIONS

Here's what's ahead in the book: Living Like a Fool; Finding Real Happiness; Countering Lures of the Cosmic System; and Fulfilling Your Destiny.

Are you going to stay with me and continue reading? Awesome. Let's review:

EMBRACING AUTHORITY ORIENTATION

Your most important decision is where you will spend eternity - in heaven or the Lake of Fire

Salvation is a grace gift from God “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will have eternal life”

As a Christian you have a permanent relationship with God (top circle) - you can't lose your salvation

Stay in fellowship with God (bottom circle) through the use of rebound (confess your sins through silent prayer)

God gave you two ends
One to think with and one to sit on
Success in life depends on which one you use
Heads you win - - Tails you lose

Authority orientation is the secret to a meaningful life

Authority is not always fair - neither is life

Respond with humility or react with arrogance

Arrogant self-justification leads to self-deception, self-absorption and eventually to self-destruction

You are what you think

Bad decisions limit future options

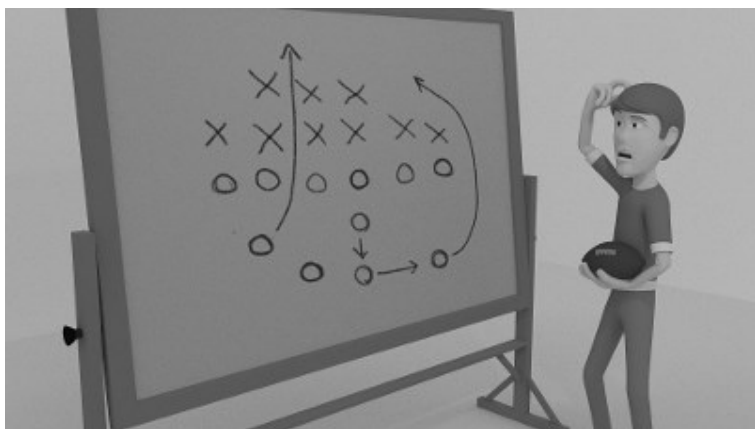
The key to a long life starts with obeying and honoring your parents

The decisions you make determine the life you lead

LIVING LIKE A FOOL

Don't be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:17)

The first will of God is for you and me to “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved*” (Acts 16:31). “*Jesus said, ‘This is the will of the One who sent Me that you believe in Me whom He has sent’*” (John 6:29). We are fools if we don't believe this. The next part of God's will is for us to live wisely by learning His plays.



For those who play football, you are familiar with the offensive set. There is a short pudgy guy in the middle (he's the center); you have your guards and good-looking tackles (that was me!); and you've got the tall guy with swagger known as the quarterback. In order for this group to be successful, they have to learn the plays. They must work as one unit toward the same goal. If one guy doesn't know the plays, then he makes no contribution to the team. If you don't learn the plays, it doesn't matter how fast you are, how agile you are, how strong you are or how good looking you are, you can't be useful to the team.

God has a set of plays. You must learn these plays. If you don't you will go through life doing right things in the wrong way. **God has protocol. Protocol means doing a right thing in the right way.** For example, is it right to pray? Absolutely. Is there a right way to pray and a wrong way to pray? Yes, there is. You can pray until you are blue in the face but if you pray in the wrong way, your prayers will hit the ceiling and go no further. What is the wrong way? If you have unconfessed sin in your life, you are under the control of your sin nature and this prevents your prayers from ever reaching God.

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. (Psalm 66:18)

I need to be in fellowship and filled with the Holy Spirit when I inform you and you must be in fellowship and filled with the Holy Spirit to study, learn and grow. I am in fellowship after I name my sins to God the Father and then the Holy Spirit can assist me in my prayer. He does this for anyone who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. When you pray the right way, God hears and answers your prayers.

Remember you have two ends, one to think with and one to sit on; success depends on which one you use. You must learn to think with divine viewpoint and you'll acquire this as you learn God's Word. The Bible can be used as a mirror. As I read my Bible, it makes me see the real me. When I was in high school, I never saw myself as I really was, I saw who I thought I was. This is what arrogant people do. **Arrogant people have an unrealistic self-image.** They think they are something special when they're really not. You often see this among athletes when an arrogant stud thinks he is going to score all the points and get all the pretty girls and the coach says, "Sit down, son, you're not what you think you are."

<p>Use God's Word, the Bible, as a mirror to see yourself as you really are</p>
--

Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise; making the most of your time because the days are evil. Do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is ... Be filled with the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:15-18)

Let's look at this verse in more detail. *Be careful how you walk* is God commanding you to be careful how you live your life. The word for *walk* means to regulate. So God is telling you to be careful how you regulate your life. This means being honest with yourself, discovering and understanding God's Word, and making good decisions from a position of strength. This is living wisely.

Carefully regulate your life with The Fantastic Four:

Wisdom will enter your heart [thinking]

Knowledge will be in your soul [through learning]

Discretion will guard you [ability to make wise decisions]

Understanding will watch over you [discernment]

(Proverbs 2:10-11)

Understanding requires you to have the right information. Here is an example. When you get sick, you may go to the doctor. The doctor makes a diagnosis and tells you about your condition or disease. You then go home and check out available information online so you understand why you are sick and what your choices are for treatment. You may even get a second opinion so you can better understand the way ahead. Prevailing through the toughest years of your life is no different. You are better prepared if you have information for choices and understanding for the future.

<p>Where do you get your information? From your friends or from the Word of God?</p>

There is a train wreck coming in America. I've been saying this for awhile but now the whistle is louder and the lights down the track are coming into focus. Our beloved nation is in trouble. You are crucial to preserving America. You must renovate your thinking with divine wisdom or you will fall victim to the cosmic system, Satan's devious plan to control Christians through human viewpoint thinking and distractions. If you aren't *careful how you walk*, you will play right along with Satan's cosmic system and lose everything your forefathers envisioned, fought and died for. Freedoms we enjoy now will soon be gone if we continue on the path we're on now. It's not who we elect as President or for Congress that can save this nation, it is you. The future of our nation depends on you and your spiritual life.

As goes your spiritual life so goes our nation

Regulate your life with The Fantastic Four

This is serious. If you neglect God, if you are not interested in God and His plan for your life, then don't complain when you lose things God gave you because of the decline of our nation. About 90% of the people I talk with are not interested in anything God has to say. You're probably seeing the same among your friends. They are much more interested in what's going on this weekend and what to do for fun. I thought the same way when I was your age. I didn't understand my spiritual life impacted the state of our nation.

Getting back to Ephesians 5:15, it says to be careful how you live, and don't waste your time living like a fool. Someone once told me, "You shouldn't call anyone a fool," and I replied, "Tell it to the Bible. In Psalm 14:1, the Bible says, '**Only a fool says there is no God.**'" There is nothing more stupid than an atheist. Being an atheist requires faith, as does being a Christian. How is this possible? An atheist says, "Well, I just don't believe there is a God." This is faith. A Christian believes Jesus Christ

is the Son of God. This is faith. Both beliefs require faith. The atheist has faith in just his own perceptive abilities, that he is right and the Bible is wrong. An atheist thinks the Bible is a concoction of man's ideas. It is not.

No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for prophecy never came by an act of human will, but men spoke from God as moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)

The Bible is a miracle God put together to guide you. God's Word, the Bible, is the only absolute source of truth. The Bible is the light that makes the right path clear. If you study and apply God's Word you will have direction for a meaningful life free of stress. Proverbs 1:7 says, "***Fools despise wisdom and instruction.***"

Let's explore some verses in the book of Jeremiah to learn more about living like a fool. Jeremiah is talking about the attitude of the people before Israel was destroyed by the Chaldean Empire around 722 BC.

To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed and they cannot listen. Behold the word of the Lord has become a reproach to them; they have no delight in it. Were they ashamed because of the sin they have done? They were not even ashamed at all. [They don't like it or want to hear it. They don't want anything to do with it because the Word of God is a light that shines in the darkness and exposes their sin.] (Jeremiah 6:10, 15)

My people are foolish; they know Me not; they are stupid children and have no understanding. They are shrewd to do evil, but to do good, they do not know. [They are foolish. They don't care. They just want to live for the moment.] (Jeremiah 4:22)

If all you are interested in is living for the moment, the details of life, then you are wasting your time and your life. You are living like a fool. Note Jeremiah says, “*They are shrewd to do evil, but to do good, they do not know.*” Today in this country, everything is upside down - what once was evil is now considered good and what was good is now considered evil. We see this all across America.

Reading this book means you are interested and want information. The question now is what will you do with the Biblical principles you are learning? Recall Ephesians where we are reminded to make the most of our time.

Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise; redeeming [making the most of] the time because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16)

Time. Your time on earth is short compared to eternity. You can’t afford to waste this time. Seniors in high school are so excited about graduation. It’s cool, but then what? The next phase of your life, whether it’s a career, being a homemaker, or uniformed service, you only have so much time so don’t waste it. Not one person has a guarantee of tomorrow. We think we will have it, we hope we will but we do not know.

<p>Tomorrow is not guaranteed Don’t waste time today</p>
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Why can’t you afford to waste time? The Bible says *the days are evil*. You live in the middle of Satan’s world and his cosmic system. Part of Satan’s strategy is the cosmic vortex always spinning around you, luring you with human viewpoint thinking. **Divine viewpoint thinking which you acquire by learning the Word of God is the way to stay out of the cosmic vortex.** In contrast, if you buy into the cosmic system, then you will believe people and circumstances are the keys to happiness. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Jesus Christ says:

**Happiness belongs to those who hear
My Father's Word and keep it. (Luke 11:28)**

There is no greater happiness in this world than knowing you are in the center of God's plan and He is protecting you. How great is this - the ultimate safe zone! But when you step into the darkness outside of God's plan for your life and drift down the My Way Highway, you have no direction nor protection. No one is watching over you. You are on your own living in the devil's world. Here's what the Bible says about your adversary.

Be vigilant because your adversary the devil
prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom
he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith.
(1 Peter 5:8-9)

Have you ever watched one of those TV shows where the lion catches a gazelle or zebra and eats his prey? After the lion is full, he ignores the destroyed carcass and goes off somewhere to make lion poop. So that's one choice for your life - ignore God and go out in the devil's world and end up as lion poop. Some reading this will think it's just a funny joke and have a good laugh. Well, buck up, this is not a joke and it's not funny. This is a big deal.

Remember Satan's strategy, the cosmic vortex? Think of the world's system of happiness as a tornado. It's out there spinning around, luring you with lies Satan endlessly perpetuates, trying to suck you in. The cosmic vortex promotes the idea that happiness is related to people and circumstances, the details of life. It's an illusion that deceives those who are frantically searching for happiness. People know they only have so much time, so with what little time they have they want security, happiness, prosperity, fun, a good life. They know they will be "under the sod" sooner or later just like everyone else. So the thinking goes, "As long as I'm here, I want to be happy and have fun." Danger! You are being lured with human

viewpoint thinking, the opposite of divine viewpoint thinking as taught in the Bible. If you choose to be lured, you are living like a fool.



Satan is the illusionist and manipulator of the cosmic vortex. Once you allow yourself to be sucked into this vortex, your life can spin out of control.

**The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.
(Proverbs 12:15)**

If you won't buy into the dangers of being fooled by the lures of the cosmic vortex from me, maybe you will after you read the following letter from a man whose name I will keep private.

I am a prisoner on death row. The journey to this cell has been a long winding road. It is the road I want to share with you. The amazing fact is that even though I'm in prison on death row I'm now able to enjoy peace and happiness as a result of my accepting Jesus Christ as my Savior. I want to tell you about that also.

I was raised in a Christian home. I went to Bible School at my church. I had a good grasp on Christianity and what was right and what was wrong. I knew what was moral and what was immoral. I played organized sports, football, baseball and basketball. [Sounds like a normal kid to me.] This helped me develop discipline and mental toughness. I began military academy with the high hopes of attending West Point. This life I have just described to you does not sound like the first few years of the life of a man who has spent sixteen of his last years in prison and is currently on death row.

Unfortunately, that is the case. If I can share the successes I enjoyed while growing up, hopefully it will open your eyes to the fact that the potential for disaster awaits each one of you if you make bad decisions. [Remember, bad decisions limit future options.]

It was in military school that I began to crumble. At the start of a new semester, new students were arriving and they brought drugs with them. I had never considered using drugs of any kind, they scared me. But seeing these people who didn't seem like raving lunatics raised my curiosity and I began to experiment with downers. I found out responsibility was an undesirable part of my life. My drug use increased. I had more friends who used drugs. Concepts such as school, right and wrong, all became a thing of the past. [He lost all his norms and standards.]

The friends I came to know were doing more than taking a few downers, so I started experimenting with more drugs in larger doses. Our activities turned to crime in order to get money for the drugs. One bad decision opened the door to another bad decision and on and on. I become involved in transporting and selling drugs across the country. I committed burglary and

robbery, and I no longer saw anything wrong with what I was doing because I thought the police were wrong since they made drugs illegal [authority disorientation]. My criminal activities covered a vast range of crime. I had a rap sheet that looked like a law book. And I convinced myself that everything the authorities did was wrong [self-deception]. I adopted anything in my life that was wrong. By the time I was seventeen, my involvement with drugs covered anything you can imagine; any kind of crime was fine as long as I had money in my pocket.

Then another bad decision came my way. It was called the occult [the worship of Satan, demonology]. I swallowed Satan's lies hook, line and sinker. I thought the occult would make me happy. I was too blind to see that it was my own bad decisions that kept me in and out of prison, that kept me feeling miserable, and this continued until I wound up on death row convicted for a big crime.

A woman started writing to me while I've been in prison. I was not interested at first, but she kept writing. I started looking over my life and began seeing the mistakes I'd made and saw I was not the big, bad dude I thought I was. I needed help. I needed a Savior, and I saw Jesus Christ as He died on the cross for my sins. I heard Him say that if I believed, I could have eternal life.

I'm so tired of fighting everybody, so tired of fighting myself. My arrogance led me so far away from Jesus Christ. Now a woman shared her faith with me and led me back to the answer. I now find studying the Bible and learning God's Word can help solve my intense problems. Now I have more happiness than I've ever experienced. I pray that none of you will go through a fraction of what I've gone through and that you will accept Jesus Christ as your Savior.

A normal young person in a stable environment - lured into the cosmic vortex. You must understand how this occurs because **it can happen to YOU.**

Put this principle in your soul:

**There is real danger in
experimenting with things the world offers**

When you are on your own, no one will be looking over your shoulder or checking to make sure you get food and rest and make good decisions. You will be able to do whatever you want and go wherever you want. How will you handle it? Will you be wise or foolish?

The Apostle Paul lays this all out for you in the Bible. This is what living like a fool will do to you:

Walk not as others walk, in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness [lust], to work all uncleanness with greediness. (Ephesians 4:17-19)

The futility of their thinking or *vanity of their mind* means an empty mind. **An empty mind is the devil's hunting ground and makes you an easy prey.** If you don't have Scripture in your mind, divine viewpoint thinking, then Satan will sucker punch you and lure you into the cosmic vortex. You won't know what hit you until you end up as a big pile of lion poop.

The word *vanity* means vacuum. My daughter came home from school one day with a bottle, a peeled hardboiled egg and some tissue paper. She put the tissue paper inside the bottle, lit it on fire and then set the egg on the mouth of the bottle. "Watch this," she said. As the tissue paper burned, it was like an invisible finger pushed the egg inside the bottle. The fire used up the oxygen and

that created a vacuum. Since the outside pressure was greater than the inside pressure, that pressure forced the egg inside the bottle.

Get it? Your mind can be a vacuum. If there is nothing on the inside to stabilize you, if the temptations and pressures of the world (human viewpoint) are greater than what you have inside (truth from God's Word in your soul), then Satan's human viewpoint thinking will get sucked into your life.

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Here's another example. My close friend served in the Navy on a nuclear submarine chasing the Russians around the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. During one of his many deployments another submarine went down deeper than it should have. At the depth the pressure outside the sub was greater than the pressure inside, that submarine was crushed like an empty soda can. Everyone aboard died.

**When you don't have enough on the inside
to equal the pressures from the outside
you will be crushed**

Let's continue digging into this Scripture and look at *a vacuum in their mind* and *their understanding is darkened*. If you have a vacuum in your mind you lose the ability to understand. *Darkened* means blacked out. Jesus Christ is the light in a dark world. When you have the Word of God in you, it is like a flashlight that shows you where you're going. The Word of God will light a path for you, but only if you learn and apply what your pastor teaches.

This is why God gives you a pastor, to teach you the Bible. Your pastor has an incredible responsibility to God to study, prepare and accurately teach the Word of God to you. It's absolutely necessary for you to sit still, listen and concentrate when hearing the Word of God taught. Without this self-discipline you will never develop the spiritual strength you need in your soul.

The Word of God will light a path for you

Without the Word of God you will be blacked out in your soul. You will be wandering in the darkness of the devil's world. You won't have a clue. With darkened understanding you've alienated yourself from God's plan for your life. You've rejected and separated from His Word, because of what? Living like a fool ... not regulating your life ... not being honest with yourself ... not discovering and applying God's Word. God consistently put His treasures in front of you, and you rejected them for human solutions. Really?

When you allow a vacuum in your soul, stuff gets sucked into your life through bad decisions like addiction, promiscuity or criminality. These activities build scar tissue in your soul. Scar tissue will block out the norms and standards you learned from your parents, teachers, pastor and coaches. **These norms and standards are intended to protect you.** But if your heart (soul) becomes hard, then these norms and standards fade away and you are on a path to self-destruction; just like the man on death row knew better, but his norms and standards were erased by his addiction to drugs. His mind became clouded so badly he didn't see what he was doing to himself. Once norms and standards are gone, your heart is hard from the build-up of scar tissue/calluses. You won't see right from wrong. You will think like the man on death row did, "the police are wrong for making drugs wrong ... it's not my fault ... it's the policeman's, the teacher's, my parents' fault." No. It is your fault.

**You are a product of your
thinking and your decisions**

BAD DECISIONS LIMIT FUTURE OPTIONS

“Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness [lust], to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Ephesians 4:19). When you get to this stage you are beyond conviction, guilt or shame. You have given yourself over to lust with greediness which is a sin. Lust isn’t just sexual. The sin lust pattern also includes power lust (desire for praise or unreasonable ambition) and pleasure lust (putting pleasure above God).

You can destroy your life by putting things into your soul that don’t belong there. God created you with a soul. Your soul has mentality, volition (ability to choose), a conscience (norms and standards) and self-consciousness. Your mentality is where your intentions are, where you discern things, where you store your thoughts. God looks into your mind and knows what you are thinking. God sees the real you.

**As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.
(Proverbs 23:7)**

When your mind begins to shut down from the build-up of scar tissue, you can’t think clearly anymore. Take this test for yourself. Can you concentrate for thirty minutes or longer without being distracted? If you can’t concentrate, you can’t learn and you will drift. Your volition will begin to go negative toward God and you’ll start living like a fool. Instead of making good decisions, you’ll make bad decisions. Thinking you are smarter than everyone else, you’ll stop listening to your parents, your pastor, your teachers and most importantly, God.

**Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes.
(Isaiah 5:21)**

<p>Man looks on the outside God sees the inside</p>
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The build-up of scar tissue means the loss of norms and standards, resulting in a shutdown of your senses. You no longer feel guilt or conviction. **You have lost your sense of what is right and wrong, or worse, you don't care.**

This build up of scar tissue can lead to addiction as a pleasure lust or as a means of escape. But actually an addiction becomes entrapment leading to confusion and depression which can consume you. You may falsely believe there's nothing left to live for, like people all across the country who turn to addictions to find comfort.

Don't go there! Don't live like a fool.

Regulate your life with **The Fantastic Four**:

Wisdom will enter your heart [thinking]

Knowledge will be in your soul [through learning]

Discretion will guard you [ability to make wise decisions]

Understanding will watch over you [discernment]
(Proverbs 2:10-11)

Live wisely. Let's review:

LIVING LIKE A FOOL

Carefully regulate your life with The Fantastic Four:

Wisdom will enter your heart [thinking]

Knowledge will be in your soul [through learning]

Discretion will guard you [ability to make wise decisions]

Understanding will watch over you [discernment]

(Proverbs 2:10-11)

Learn God's plays or go through life
doing right things in the wrong way

As goes your spiritual life so goes our nation

There's danger in experimenting with things of the world

You're living like a fool if
you're lured by human viewpoint thinking

The Word of God will light a path for you

Tomorrow is not guaranteed - don't waste today

Happiness is related to your thoughts, what is in your soul

Where do you get your info - from your friends
or from God's Word?

Use God's Word, the Bible, as a mirror
to see yourself as you really are

When you don't have enough on the inside
to equal the pressures from the outside
you will be crushed

FINDING REAL HAPPINESS

I never knew my father and the closest thing I had to a dad was my football coach. He took an interest in me and thought he could make a man out of me. He did a pretty good job. I played football in high school with success, earning All City, All State, All American recognitions. I received a scholarship to play for the University of Alabama, but life was lonely and hard.

I remember lying in bed at night and there was something like a search light roaming around in my mind. It would show me the stupid things I'd done. I was ashamed. I didn't know how to make it go away. My life seemed empty and I didn't know what lay ahead for me. I was a young guy just wanting to live a full, meaningful life. I was so lonely. I thought no one really loved me. In my freshman year, the older football players bullied me a lot until I learned to take up for myself. You can relate. Likely you've been there or are now. Bullies like to make fun of people because it makes them feel better about themselves. Constant intimidation and criticism coming at you are horrible experiences and a tough way to live.

**Don't let people or circumstances
make you unhappy**

Elvis Presley was known as the king of rock and roll. Someone asked Elvis, "Are you happy? You wanted to be rich and famous, and now you are very rich and quite famous, so are you happy?" Elvis replied, "No, I'm lonely." We all know what happened to Elvis. He died a premature death on a frantic search for happiness. Money and fame did not bring him happiness.

Let's look at two examples of unhappiness in the Bible. Solomon, King of Israel, found only unhappiness when he searched for happiness in people and circumstances.

For they sow the wind and they reap the whirlwind. (Hosea 8:7)

In Ecclesiastes we read Solomon sought happiness in pleasure, people, education, travel, money, reputation, power and sex. He tried everything! Yet he found only frustration, emptiness and unhappiness. He eventually learned the key to happiness was having the Word of God in his soul, not having friends or being successful. Solomon learned happiness is self-contained. **Happiness does not depend on the details of life nor on people or circumstances.**

Here is a second example from the Old Testament. The Jews were in exile in Egypt. Moses was there to lead them out of slavery in Egypt, through the Red Sea and into the Promised Land where God had promised them a *land full of milk and honey*. Moses sent twelve spies to take a look at this land before they went in.

When they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days, they came back to Moses and Aaron and the children of Israel in the wilderness and brought back word to them and showed them the fruit of the land. They said, "We went to the land where you sent us and it truly flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land are strong and the cities are fortified and very large." Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "Let us go up at once and take possession for we are well able to overcome it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out. All the congregation lifted up their voices and cried and wept all night and they complained against Moses and Aaron and said, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt or if only we had died in the wilderness. Why has the

Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword,
so our wives and children become victims?
Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?”
They said to one another, “Let us select a leader
and return to Egypt.” (Numbers 13:25-14:4)

This was not about the children. It was the fact they didn't have the guts to do what God told them. They believed it was better to go back to Egypt and be slaves. They cried like babies and tried to overthrow Moses and Aaron and select another leader to take them back to slavery. They looked at the tough situation and panicked.

You will face situations like this, too. There will be really tough, really hard situations that look impossible. If you look at the difficult circumstances and not the divine solution, then you'll think, “I can't do this.” This is what happened with the children of Israel. They were scared and thought slavery was better than following God's plan.

<p>Unhappy people take their unhappiness with them wherever they go</p>
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Sadly, regardless of what they have or don't have, the activities of unhappy people are often nothing but a narcotic to deaden the pain of an empty life. They spend money they don't have, to buy things they can't afford, to impress people they don't even like. Unhappy people are often arrogant and have an unrealistic self-image. They see themselves as what they think they are, not what they really are as mirrored by the Word of God.

What makes you unhappy? You do. Circumstances and people don't cause you to be unhappy, it's your volition. **You choose to be unhappy.** If you are unhappy where you are now and you believe that going somewhere else, to a different school, a bigger home or a new city, will make you happy, take off. But you will find your unhappiness goes with you. Unhappiness is not where you are, it is you. Unhappiness is a state of mind.

Satan's myth is that people and circumstances can make you happy. This lie is like a mirage in the hot desert. The hot, weary traveler sees a beautiful cool spring, but it is only an illusion brought on by a confused and desperate mind. Such is the happiness the world offers. We chase it and never quite get it, regardless of all our efforts. We end up frustrated and miserable.

How then do you find happiness in spite of people and circumstances? **Happiness depends on what is in your soul.** Happiness is a state of the soul characterized by contentment and capacity for life, love and blessings. It is not something someone can do for you or based on the details of life. The lasting happiness I'm talking about is a relaxed mental attitude (RMA) you have all the time.

Jesus Christ mandates you to be happy.

These things I have spoken to you that My joy
[happiness] may be in you and that your joy
[happiness] may be made full. (John 15:11)

<p>Happiness depends on what is in your soul Happiness does not depend on the details of life</p>

Few Christians have this real happiness since they cannot be consistent in their spiritual life. Many are easily distracted and misdirected. **Satan's myth is that people and circumstances are the keys to happiness. Not true!** If you think finding the right man or right woman to marry will make you happy, you are wrong. Marriage compounds problems, it does not solve problems. Marriage can be a wonderful thing with the right person, but it's not easy; it takes work. **People and circumstances are not the source of happiness.** "If I just had a faster car, cooler friends, the latest gadget (if I just had more stuff) I'd be happy." This is a lure straight from the cosmic system that is trying to replicate what God has to offer with human viewpoint thinking. True happiness only comes from God.

God offers you this lasting happiness in spite of your circumstances. Can you imagine anything more tragic and miserable than hanging and dying on the cross? No, but Jesus Christ was not unhappy on the cross. The Bible says Jesus Christ *“for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame”* (Hebrews 12:2). He took the pain because He knew He was exactly where God the Father intended Him to be. He was sent to be our Savior, and He paid for the sins of the world. *“He who knew no sin was made sin for us”* (2 Corinthians 5:21). Paying for our sins was joyful for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your source of happiness is very clear. It is God and His Word. You can look at life through human viewpoint or divine viewpoint. Human viewpoint is happiness comes from people and circumstances. Divine viewpoint is:

**Happy are those who hear the Word of God
and obey it. (Luke 11:28)**

False happiness is the stuff Satan tells you and tries to sell you. Don't buy into it. This pseudo happiness is Satan's attempt to counterfeit the happiness of God. The happiness the world offers can be stimulating and entertaining, but it is not permanent. It is only momentary and depends on pleasant circumstances. Beyond the good times are the bad times, routine times, dull times; and what happened in the past will not bring happiness during those times. Details of life and experiences can only provide temporary happiness.

Here's a common myth - sex will make you happy. Sex outside the divine establishment of marriage can destroy you. Ladies, do not buy into that 'if you love me, you'll let me' line. It will scar your life forever. This is false happiness, a cosmic system lure that says sex is a key to happiness. This lie has been around for a long, long time and people keep buying into it and end up miserable. Realize most of the problems you'll experience are self-made; you'll mismanage your money, your health, your friendships. **Often the majority of our suffering and problems in life are a result of our own bad decisions.**



True happiness comes from the relaxed mental attitude you carry with you all the time. An RMA is a remarkable divine resource. When you have difficulties, an RMA will give you the confidence to say, "I can get through this because I'm relying on God's promises found in His Word." **The Bible contains over 7,000 promises. Learn some and use them!** Standing on the promises of God is how you develop trust in God and live a life free of stress. God's promises are your shield of faith to protect you from Satan's strategies and human viewpoint thinking. Ephesians 6:16 teaches us to, *"Pick up the shield of faith."* When Satan throws his fiery darts to discourage or distract you, ward them off using God's promises.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

God's happiness is intended to be a state of your soul. You don't have to worry, be afraid or be anxious. It's a new way of living. This is the Christian life. It's a supernatural way of living and you have the supernatural power to live it because you have the ministry of God the Holy Spirit and God's Word. Jesus Christ said He would send the Holy Spirit to live in you and guide you.

**I will ask the Father and He will give you
a Helper that He may be with you forever.
This is the Spirit of truth [the Holy Spirit].
He abides with you and will be in you.
(John 14:16-17)**

Isn't this amazing! Yet very few Christians use their supernatural power. Very few Christians have real happiness because they aren't committed to studying God's Word and growing spiritually. They are easily distracted. For example, there's a church in your neighborhood with a qualified pastor who is teaching the Word of God and working tirelessly to get you involved and learning. Do you even go? No. You are too busy. You are too busy. You are distracted with non-essentials. You think you have something better going on. You think you are smarter than God and His plan.

Here's the Apostle Paul on his source of happiness:

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means and I know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

<p>Blessings come and blessings go the Source remains the same</p>

This is the supernatural power available to you. Jesus Christ lives in you. With His strength and His power, by means of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, you can overcome adverse circumstances in your life that try to steal your happiness. Whether it's your parents, friends or job, whatever it is you think makes you miserable, whether you show it or it's hidden inside you because you are embarrassed about it, you are begging for someone to

just tell you how to handle it, how to make the misery and pain go away. Sound familiar? This is life every day when you are focused on your problems and circumstances. There is a better way to live!

Remember as a Christian you have a permanent relationship with God because you accepted God's grace gift of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. You can't lose your salvation. Recall the bottom circle, fellowship with Christ, and remember when you sin you will be out of fellowship. Your life is then controlled by your sin nature. When your sin nature controls you, you are easily lured into the cosmic vortex.

If you want to grow and learn and have the only happiness that really lasts, then you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. When you sin, go to God the Father and admit your sin to Him. The Bible clearly promises in 1 John 1:9, that when you name your sins to God, *"He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness."*

What sins need to be confessed? All of them. Worry, fear, anger, all those mental attitude sins you commit because you are unhappy. All sins need to be confessed, not just the observable ones. **Remember your power comes from the filling of the Holy Spirit and when you are out of fellowship because of sin in your life you are missing this power.** Satan would love for your sin nature to control you because then he can easily manipulate you, lure you and discourage you.

Finding God's real happiness is described here.

Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her [wisdom] profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her and happy are all who hold her fast. (Proverbs 3:13-18)

And you thought happiness was related to people, money, education and things? No! **Happiness is related to wisdom and understanding.** This is why I'll never teach anything that seeks to play on your emotions. These lessons and illustrations are not designed to make you sad; they are designed to give you information, to make you think so you can gain divine wisdom and understanding.

**Wisdom and understanding
are the keys to real happiness**

Wisdom is more important to you than money. Some of the richest people I knew took their own lives. Money is never the source of real happiness. People with money spend way too much time trying not to lose that money or trying to get more. It seems as if it's never enough. It's nice to have money; however, real happiness is gained from wisdom and understanding God's plan for your life.

When I was in high school I had no clue that one day I'd be in the ministry, informing students of God's Word by doing thousands of assemblies, writing books, producing a weekly radio show and a daily podcast across America. This never dawned on me. I didn't know then that God had a plan for my life. **God has an amazing plan for you also.** You will discover it by learning His Word. Only you can mess it all up by falling into Satan's trap, believing the lies, making bad decisions and getting sucked into the cosmic vortex.

What about *length of days*? Do you want to live a long life? Of course you do, but how? Simple - with wisdom and understanding you won't destroy yourself through bad decisions and arrogance. **You have the ability to destroy yourself.** When you justify why you don't have to obey the rules and can do whatever you want to do, you lie to yourself by thinking those in authority just don't like you or the rules won't let you have any fun. You are totally self-absorbed in what you want. You can produce enough trouble, frustration and misery to destroy yourself.

**It's easier to get yourself into trouble
than to think your way out of trouble**

When you first become a Christian, you are like a baby starting to learn the Christian way of life. Then you become a student Christian, and hopefully advance and grow to be an adult Christian. This is what God wants for you. He wants you to grow up to have a wonderful, full and happy life. News Flash - you can destroy this by being sucked into the lies of the cosmic vortex. Satan will steal your happiness and feed your bad decisions with temptations and lies. You will chase Satan's tricks looking for happiness and you will never find it.

**Keep on having happiness in the Lord at all times.
(Philippians 4:4)**

**Be filled with the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3:19)**

Happiness is an extension of using an RMA. Paul was persecuted, he suffered, but he was happy. Jesus Christ was happy. Yes, they killed Him, but He said, "Don't worry, it's all part of the plan." Will you suffer in life? Probably. Suffering may be part of the testing we can expect in life. God says you will never be tested beyond what you can handle.

**God is faithful and He will not allow you
to be tested beyond what you are able.
(1 Corinthians 10:13)**

God knows about testing. He designed it. If God has you going through some sort of testing in your life, it is for a reason. It is to prepare you for what lies ahead. Testing develops spiritual muscle when you respond to it using God's Word you have learned and stored in your soul.

Testing is not an excuse to be unhappy

Happy people don't dwell on past failures or get down about their flaws. We all have failed at some point in our lives. Happiness is the absence of anxiety. There is no reason for anxiety, worry or fear in the Christian's life. Take confidence in the following promises of God.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? (Matthew 6:25-27)

Unhappy people don't take advantage of 1 Peter 5:7, *"Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."* Symptoms of unhappy people include a sense of despondency, sadness, complaining or dismay at the unexpected. Unhappy people often try to hide their unhappiness. They may try to hide it from friends, family and teachers, but inside they are miserable. They feel like bursting out in tears because they are overwhelmed by their unhappiness. Characteristics of unhappiness include insecurity, loneliness, moodiness and depression. Here is a truism:

Desperate people do desperate things

The following newspaper article is probably the most difficult thing I will share with you. First understand there is never ever a need for you to do what this young girl did. Get this principle. It doesn't matter what you've done in your past. God loves you. When adversity hits and the smoke clears, and you are still alive, God has a plan for your life. There is no sin you have ever committed that Jesus Christ did not die for; no sin that God cannot cleanse from you. Satan is the one who steals happiness; he lays this guilt trip on you. He's the one that tells you what a

loser you are, how ashamed you ought to be but this is not what God says. God says you are His child. The Satan-laid ugly guilt trap is what leads people like this girl to do what she did.

A young girl, fourteen and nine months pregnant, opened her notebook, started with “Dear Mother” and then wrote three full pages. At twelve minutes before noon, a tiny light appeared far down the railroad tracks. Seconds later the crescendo of the train grew louder and louder as the engines pushed the train to over 100 miles per hour. The girl ran to the tracks, knelt down between the rails and clasped her hands in prayer. Her cousin saw this and tried to pull her back, but the girl was bigger and stronger. She pushed her cousin away. Then this young girl made the sign of the cross and on that warm Tuesday in rural Maryland, a troubled eighth grade girl and her unborn baby boy died.

The young girl had written to her mother, “You always asked me if there was anything wrong. I always said I was okay, but I was very depressed. I ran away from all my problems, and I’m taking the easy way out. I’ve decided I’m too weak, and I cannot handle the weight of life. I’m sorry to have put you through all these troubles. When I think of everything I’ve done, I drank and took pills. Then I prayed God would forgive me, but He won’t and I don’t blame Him.”

[This is a lie! It is straight from Satan. That’s how Satan used shame and guilt to convince this young girl that her life was not worth living anymore. God’s Word says when you go to Him, confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you every single time. Even if it’s the same sin again and again. You go to Him, He will forgive every time. Just name it, admit it to God and He always forgives.]

“Mother don’t have a nervous breakdown; and please don’t cry all the time. I want you to live just the way you want to. Please Mom, try to forgive me. I’ll love you always.” The train engineer had a daughter of his own. He looked up, saw this girl crossing herself and applied the brakes. He cannot bring himself to talk about it.

This tragic story is hard to comprehend. Be assured, it is not the life God has planned for you. God’s plan for you is wonderful and includes sharing the happiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God’s real happiness is characterized by tranquility, contentment, capacity for life and self-motivation. **Tranquility** of soul is inner peace and complete trust in God’s perfect plan. **Contentment** is being satisfied with what you have and who you are. **Capacity for life** comes from contentment. If you are content, you have the capacity for God to bless you. **Self-motivation** means your happiness comes from within. You do not sit around waiting on someone or something to make you happy.

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and
the man who gains understanding.
(Proverbs 3:13)

The key to finding God’s real happiness is to keep your focus on Jesus Christ and:

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)

Take My yoke upon you and **Learn from Me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:29-30)

When you reject this, you are left with an empty mind and alone in Satan's cosmic system. Satan can easily slip human viewpoint thinking into your mind with his lures.

You neglected all My counsel and did not want My reproof. I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on Me, but I will not answer. They will seek Me diligently, but they will not find Me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept My counsel, they spurned all My reproof. They shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own schemes. For the faithlessness of the naïve will kill them and the complacency of fools will destroy them. But he who listens to Me shall live securely and will be at ease from the dread of evil. (Proverbs 1:25-33)

It's your life. You need to determine how to live it. You've got one shot, that's all. You are fourteen only once. You get one shot at being sixteen, seventeen and eighteen. That's it. Everything Satan does is designed for one purpose, to destroy you. Jesus Christ said Satan is a murderer. Satan has been a murderer since the very beginning. He is a roaring lion roaming around seeking all he can devour. If you are a Christian, Satan can't have your life, but he can destroy your life as it was designed by God. Satan can't have your soul, but he can destroy your life if you let him into your thoughts, your emotions, your decisions. Your life is at stake. Your happiness is at stake. The future of this nation is at stake.

**Your Words were found and I ate them.
Your Words became for me a joy and
the delight of my soul. (Jeremiah 15:16)**

When things get tough and seem impossible, remember the Jews who said, “We can’t defeat those giants and take the land God promised.” God said, “I gave it to you. Go get it! I’ll handle the details.” They chickened out.

**Do you have the guts to trust God
and stand on His Word?**

Do you have the conviction to study God’s Word consistently and grow spiritually? Without this desire and positive volition to understand God by learning His Word, you will bounce from one lure to another to another seeking something you will never find.

The answer to finding real happiness has been right in front of you all along. It is you! Your happiness depends on what is in your soul.

CHOOSE TO BE HAPPY

**Stay filled with the Holy Spirit by
using rebound to handle personal sin**

**Use the ministry of the Holy Spirit
it is your power in life**

Study, learn, grow, apply the Word of God

This is your path to finding real happiness

Is this making any sense? Let’s review:

FINDING REAL HAPPINESS

Real happiness depends on what's in your soul

You control your happiness, not people or circumstances

Unhappy people take their unhappiness
with them wherever they go

Don't get lured by the world's happiness (details of life)

The frantic search for happiness, the cosmic vortex, will
suck you in and spin you out, miserable and frustrated

A divine viewpoint produces lasting happiness

You are what you think, not what you think you are

It's easier to get yourself into trouble
than to think your way out of trouble

Promises, the shield of faith, will protect you

Wisdom and understanding are the keys to happiness

Study ... Learn ... Grow ... Apply God's Word

Testing is not an excuse to be unhappy

Desperate people do desperate things

Have the guts to trust God and His Word

God's real happiness is characterized by tranquility,
contentment, capacity for life and self-motivation

COUNTERING LURES OF THE COSMIC SYSTEM

As the ruler of this world, Satan's strategy to control Christians is the cosmic system. There are so many distractions and lures to send you running around in a frantic race to catch something and often you don't even know what you are chasing. Satan uses lures to tempt you into his cosmic system.

Every time I go bass fishing I use lures. There are hundreds of different fishing lures including worms, spinner baits, crank baits and top water. They are all designed to lure and trick the fish into biting. Satan does the same thing using lures designed to trick you. They may look real, even smell real, but don't take the bait! Just like that hidden hook will be the death of the fish, Satan will hook you into his cosmic system through your human viewpoint thinking and arrogance. You know the path.

**Arrogance leads to self-justification then
self-deception followed by self-absorption
and ending with self-destruction**

Once you take the bait and are hooked into the cosmic system you won't even know what you are doing as you fall deeper and deeper into Satan's destructive cosmic vortex. Your life is far too meaningful and valuable for you to destroy yourself. Some of you who are reading this book will use it to study and grow. Others will give it a little thought, maybe even finish reading the whole book, and then lures will come along, suckering them, and off they go chasing another lie.

Grasp this, God's justice is clear. Every Christian with positive volition has the opportunity to gain wisdom and understanding from God's Word. Right now you can learn accurate truths from God's Word. Whether you seize this

opportunity or not is between you and God. Only you can decide. No one can do it for you. In Luke we learn about the lures of the cosmic system and a young man who allowed himself to be hooked. This is the parable of the Prodigal Son and it begins:

A certain man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that fall to me." So the father divided to them his livelihood. Not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with riotous [extravagant] living. (Luke 15:11-13)

So here we have two brothers, Fric the older and Frac the younger. You'll see later on Fric was a real jerk. He was always bullying his younger brother Frac. Finally Frac said, "Enough already!" He asked his daddy for his inheritance money, which as the younger brother was about one-third of his father's estate. Fric, the older brother, got two-thirds. The dad knew he could not change his younger son's mind, so he gives him the money. Frac takes off down the My Way Highway.



But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country who sent him into his fields to feed swine. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. (Luke 15:14-16)

Frac ends up in a party town. He spends all his money and *there arose a great famine*. In other words, Frac is broke. The Bible doesn't mention this, but I'd be willing to bet there is an invisible friend or two behind the scenes. Rarely does anyone do something this stupid without a 'friend' backing him up. I'm pretty sure there was someone who came up to Frac and said, "Hey man, you got some money. I know a place where we can go and party down."

In high school you may have a cool car, money and lots of friends hanging around. But what happens if you lose the car and the cash? Your friends didn't like you for who you are, they liked you for what you had. Be careful! Don't fall into this trap. It is a lure and there's a hook inside. Frac took the bait. His invisible friends saw his wallet and said, "Let's go party," and it didn't take long for Frac to spend every last dollar he had.

BAD DECISIONS LIMIT FUTURE OPTIONS

One weekend while I was playing football at Alabama, some of my buddies and I came up with this crazy idea to go to New Orleans and party. We took off to New Orleans and spent every last dime we had, and there was nothing left for food. One of my buddies suggested we take the spare tire out of the car and sell it so we had money for food. We did. We bought a few hot dogs on Bourbon Street. Can you imagine how stupid that was? Just like our friend, Frac, what next? What do you do when you are charging down the My Way Highway at full speed, and all your money and resources are gone?

Frac spent all his money *and there came a severe famine in the land*. He had no food, no money, no spare tire to sell, and by now, no friends. So he had to get a job! Bad luck for him, the only job he could get was feeding pigs. Get this, here's a Jewish boy who couldn't eat pork and now his job is to feed pigs. He's working for a Gentile, feeding pigs, and is compromising everything he had been raised to believe, and he is hungry. In verse 16, the Bible says, "*He would gladly have filled his stomach with pig food*" or as some call it, slop. Think for a moment just how far this guy has fallen.



As the parable continues, Frac recognized something. If you are a Christian, you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you get out of fellowship with God because of sin, like Frac did with his riotous living which sounds a lot like a drunken brawl, then your sin nature takes control. If you stay out of fellowship, you choose to stay in carnality, God sees this and He knows what you need! God put divine discipline in Frac's life to get him back on track. God will discipline you if you stay in carnality. This is called enforced humility.

**Divine discipline is intended to get your
attention for an attitude adjustment**

Divine discipline comes in three stages. When you commit a sin and don't recover by confessing it to God, He will put divine discipline in your life. The first stage is called **warning discipline**. Warning discipline may come from your pastor, your parents, your teachers or something you read (like this book). You will hear information from Scripture that God uses to send you a very simple message. It usually sounds like this - STOP. Stop what you are doing. You are on the wrong path and it will lead you to self-destruction. It will destroy you. You now have a choice between two things: positive volition that says, "Yes I'll stop" or negative volition that says, "No, I'll keep doing things my way." If you don't listen to warning discipline, get ready for intense discipline.

Intense discipline is God's way of taking us to the woodshed. God will discipline you in a way that hurts to get your attention. He will introduce pain in your life, physical or emotional, for one thing, to get your attention. He wants you to wake up and realize what you are doing before you destroy yourself.

The final stage of discipline is **dying discipline** where God removes a Christian from this life. Those who are in this stage get into dying discipline as a result of arrogance toward God, hating and ignoring God's discipline, and rebelling toward God to the point God says, "Okay, that's it. You are gone from life in time." They will go to heaven but their time on earth is cut short. *"I have decided to deliver the one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved" (1 Corinthians 5:5).*

Let's get back to Frac:

When he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger. I will arise, go to my father and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:17-19)

So Frac *came to himself*. What does this mean? He had an awakening, an attitude adjustment. Frac had left in arrogance, “I’m tired of this town ... I’m sick of my brother ... I don’t like it here.” Then through divine discipline he came to humility. He was willing to admit that he made a mistake.

Would you ever have enough humility to admit you blew it, that you messed up? Would you have enough humility to go to God and say, “I’m sorry for what I did, what I said. I was wrong. I name my sins of ... ?”

In humility Frac decided to go home and confess his sins to his father. This is exactly what God expects from you. **When you go down the My Way Highway and sin, falling under control of your sin nature, God expects you to humbly confess your sin to Him.** Old Frac would have died in that pigsty surrounded by pig slop if he had not recognized his sin and humbly returned to his father. No one was going to feed him. No one was going to rescue him. His arrogance and sin brought him to this place, and the only thing that could save him was a return to his father. It took every bit of strength he had left to take that long journey back home.

**God will never throw you under the bus
even if you act like a jerk**

This is the journey many of you need to take today. You have broken fellowship with God because of unconfessed sin in your life. You have turned your back on God but God will never turn away from you. You are part of His royal family. He still loves you. You are the one that took the My Way Highway. God now loves you from behind. He didn’t leave you. He didn’t quit on you. He stands ready to hear from you. Confess your sins and be restored to fellowship with Him.

**God loves you
He always has and He always will**

Here's what happened to our friend Frac:

He arose and came to his father. When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion. He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and am no longer worthy to be called your son." (Luke 15:20-21)

It's like this. The father looked and saw his son walking toward him, coming home. He loved his son so much. He wasn't angry. The father knew he couldn't go after the son and drag him home. It wouldn't have done any good. **The father knew his son had to figure it out on his own.** He knew the son had to make his own decision. The father demonstrates God's patience.

**I will never leave you nor forsake you.
(Hebrews 13:5)**

God is patient with you. He is waiting on you to recognize you blew it, made a mistake and have chosen to come back by confessing your sin. Here's a wonderful thing about God. Once you are adopted into God's royal family, He will never disown you. You are always His child, no matter what you do. The Lord says:

I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one can snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:28-29)

You may think your prayers are not heard and never answered. If they are not being answered, it's because there is sin in your life and your sin nature has control. Before you can expect God to answer your prayers, you need to restore fellowship with Him by using rebound.

Take the journey home. Go to the Father and confess your sins and you will return to fellowship with God. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).* By confessing your sins, you are allowing the Holy Spirit to regain control of your life and now your prayers will be heard. Back in fellowship, you can pick up in God’s plan where you left it.

**If I regard iniquity in my heart
the Lord will not hear me. (Psalm 66:18)**

Back to Frac:

The father said to his servants, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him and put sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf here and kill it and let us eat and be merry for my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Luke 15:22-24)

They had a great celebration. Everyone was partying except for the older brother Fric. Fric heard the jubilation and asked what was going on. A servant told him that his younger brother had come home. Fric had a fit, “Why throw him a party? No one ever threw a party for me.” Now you can see the picture of an arrogant, self-righteous, religious jerk. This represents organized religion, the very group that killed our Lord Jesus Christ. They hated Jesus because He said:

I and the Father are one. (John 10:30)

He who has seen Me has seen the Father.
(John 14:9)

<p>Satan is the master deceiver of truth</p> <p>Satan uses organized religion</p> <p>to influence and manipulate Christians</p>
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Organized religion manipulates people by twisting God's policy of grace. Organized religion is very dangerous. It is Satan's tool. Organized religion says, "If you do works, be good and give money then you will go to heaven." This is not true. God says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not as a result of works, so that no one may boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Satan used cosmic system lures to get Frac out of his father's will. His father didn't want this. His father loved Frac and wanted him to stay. But this young man didn't care about his father. His home life was miserable because of his older brother's self-righteousness and he just wanted out. Frac went down the My Way Highway, probably with an invisible friend who encouraged him and went along with him. Frac had no intention of returning home; but God, using divine discipline, got his attention. Frac woke up and realized he had taken the bait, he'd been suckered and lured away from God's plan.

How do you identify lures of the cosmic vortex? How can you recognize the "invisible spirit of the times" which is always spinning out there, always calling you, always trying to lure you with enticing false promises of happiness and success? Satan can control you if he can get you to think human viewpoint. If he can get into your mind he can control you.

This is why the Bible says:

Stop thinking of yourself in terms of arrogance beyond what you should think, but think in terms of humility, as God has assigned to each one of us a standard of thinking from His Word. (Romans 12:3)

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:5)

<p>If Satan can influence your thoughts he can control you</p>

Your life is what you think. The Lord sees through the outer stuff, whether it's your beauty or tough guy image and He knows what you are thinking. He knows what is in your heart. Maybe you can hide your thoughts and intentions from your parents, friends, teachers and coaches, but you can't hide anything from God. The cosmic system wants you to forget this fact. Satan uses this strategy to confuse you.

**Satan never quits
The cosmic system never rests**

Years ago I was able to speak in public schools. Then along came a famous atheist who sued the public education system and the federal government backed her. As a result, prayer was kicked out of all public schools.

Attacks like this often come in two ways. In cosmic attack way #1, Satan exploits Christians by luring them into thinking the grass is greener on the other side. He will lead you away by convincing you your happiness is found in the details of life. This is a lie. Satan will use this lie to destroy you. In cosmic attack #2, Satan uses propaganda to promote hatred toward the grace of God, such as "the Bible is a lie ... the Bible is old ... you can't trust it." You hear this everywhere today. People say the Bible was written by a bunch of old men, and it was written so long ago it isn't relevant today. This is Satan's propaganda.

Don't be surprised if some people view you as a weirdo or a Bible-thumper when you say you are a Christian. You may hear all kinds of derogatory names and comments just because you believe God's Word to be true. The Bible is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is absolute truth. God's Word relates to every area of your life. Only through learning and applying God's Word will you have any hope of being victorious in this conflict with Satan.

**The only absolute source of truth
is God's Word, the Bible**

You may hear lots of talk about demon possession. Hollywood has made disturbing movies like *The Exorcist* about demon possession. **The indwelling of Jesus Christ guarantees a Christian can't be demon possessed.** If you are a Christian, you may come under demon influence when you are out of fellowship, but it is not possible to be demon possessed. Be reassured knowing:

Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

"The Spirit says in later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits" (1 Timothy 4:1). We are in the *later times*. Americans are believing the cosmic system lies of the greatness of socialism, humanism and cultural diversity. These evil deceptions are all around us today. Many of Satan's lies seem to focus on changing the course of America and claiming American history is wrong. What was good is now evil and everything that was once evil is now considered to be good. This is cosmic system influence pure and simple. If you go with these trends you are buying into the lies.

God speaks to you through the Bible
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The Bible warns Christians not to be lured by Satan. *"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father but is from the world" (1 John 2:15-16).*

Satan knows how to trick you and exactly what lures to use, for example, lust. Some people lust for sex, money or power, and some lust for attention or recognition. Those who have the lust for approbation may act flashy with self-righteousness so others will notice them acting so good, or at least they think they are. Satan will appeal to your lust pattern whatever it is to lure you away from God's plan.

There are many different lust areas and some can destroy trust among friends. I've learned there are people you can't trust with your money, your private matters, your girlfriend or your boyfriend. Trust is special. Live wisely. Don't love the world or the things of this world. Be aware of distractions that will lure you away from the plan of God for your life.

**Where do you get direction in your life?
From human viewpoint thinking
or from the Word of God?**

You have two clear choices to get your direction in life. Does your direction come from human viewpoint thinking, the cosmic system of Satan's lies that fuel your ambitions and arrogance, or does your direction come from the truth of God's Word that appeals to your sense of humility and desire for truth?

Read what the Bible says about this in James.

God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:6-8)

God gives greater and abundant grace. There is saving grace that was yours the very instant you chose to believe in Jesus Christ. There is living grace that provides everything you need in this life. Then there is dying grace that will be with you as you transition through physical death to being absent from this body and face-to-face with the Lord Jesus Christ.

What does *double-minded* mean? It's a fence-sitter. On Sunday you are all neat and tidy as you go to church but on Saturday night you are pitiful. You can't handle the rejection of the crowd, so you give in to the peer pressure of your friends because you want to be accepted and liked.

Isn't this interesting ... When you are thirteen you worry about what people think about you; when you are eighteen you really don't care what people think about you; then when you reach forty you realize they never thought about you at all. They were thinking about somebody or something else!

Resist the devil - temptations are everywhere. How did Jesus Christ, the man, handle temptations? When Jesus was a child and a teenager, He studied and learned Scripture. By age twelve, Jesus had impressed everyone with His knowledge of Scripture. It was written for Him and it was written about Him, but He still needed to learn it. You, too, must study and learn Scripture.

God's Word is the fuel to grow your faith
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Let's look at Matthew to see how the Lord was tempted and how He used Scripture to handle it.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He was hungry. When the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." Jesus answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down, for it is written, 'He shall give His angels charge over You' and 'In their hands, they shall bear You up.'" Jesus said to him, "It is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'" Again, the devil took Jesus up on an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away

with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve.’” Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. (Matthew 4:1-11)

The temptation of Jesus Christ by Satan occurred after He had fasted for forty days and nights. Satan tempted Him and it was a test He had to pass. If you want to grow up as a Christian, you will have to pass some tests also. **God will test your faith.** When Jesus was hungry, Satan showed up with the bright idea to turn rocks to sweet, buttery bread. What did Jesus do? He quoted Scripture, “*It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’*”

Do you think God would have let His Son starve to death? No. Do you think God will let you starve to death? No. Jesus countered the lures of Satan with Scripture He learned as a youth, just as you need to do today.

Counter the lures of the world with God’s Word

Then what happened? Satan quoted Scripture with a twist, “*If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written, ‘He will command His angels and on their hands they will bear You up.’*” Caution - Lots of people will quote Scripture but twist it until it says what they want it to say, not the way God intended. Jesus knew the Scripture, so He took Satan’s misuse of it and corrected him, “*You should not tempt the Lord your God.*” Jesus defeated the temptations of Satan by using Scripture. You can defeat temptations throughout your life also when you use God’s Word you have learned and stored in your soul.

<p>Use Scripture It worked for the Lord Jesus Christ and it will work for you!</p>

God gives you over 7,000 promises as recorded in the Bible. These are as good as money in the bank! Yes, there's a catch. You must learn some so you can use them when adversity strikes. God's promises are your shield to deflect the attacks the world will certainly send your way. Remember, happiness belongs to those who "*hear My Father's Word and keep it.*" Hear and keep. Do I know all 7,000 promises in the Bible? No, but I know the ones I've needed to pass certain tests. I know the ones that have sustained me through difficult times. Here's one for teachers, pastors or anyone who stands strong for the Lord and is open to public ridicule. This promise upholds all of us during times of testing.

"No weapon that is formed against you will succeed; and every tongue that accuses you in judgment, you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication is from Me," declares the Lord. (Isaiah 54:17)

Jesus was tempted a third time by Satan. Remember the devil is the ruler of this world and he took control at the fall of Adam. He is the god of this world and his claim is legit per the Bible, "*The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers so they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan could give this world away if Jesus would bow down and worship him. Jesus saw through this trick and said, "*No! Away with you, Satan.*" Quoting Scripture, Jesus said, "*For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve.'*"

It is written is used three times by Jesus Christ as a sure defense against the temptations of Satan. Three times our Lord responded with Scripture. This is why knowing the Bible is so important. Satan was defeated and he left.

Angels came and ministered to Him. And guess what, you have angels watching over you, too! The Bible calls them *ministering spirits*, also known as guardian angels. The Lord uses them in His promise of living grace provisions.

**As a Christian, you have a guardian angel
assigned to watch over you**

I remember I was driving home from a speaking engagement in Georgia and as I went through this little town some guys started following me. They got right up on my bumper, then they'd speed up, get in front of me and hit the brakes. They were trying to make me stop. I'd go around them, then it would start over again. Finally, I had enough. I slammed on my brakes, put my car in park, got out, stood there and stared at the four men coming toward me. They could have shot me, beat me up or just about anything because I was completely outnumbered. But for some unknown reason they turned around, ran back to their car and sped off. Why? It was just me standing in the road, so why did they run? I believe it was my guardian angel. I'll admit it was pretty dumb on my part to stop and get out of my car, but the Lord was definitely looking out for me.

God will always be there for you

God will never forsake you. Even through the toughest of times, He will be with you always. You may have left God and walked away from Him but He will never leave you. Here is your chance right now to get it right, if you haven't already. Accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior, by faith alone in Christ alone, is the single most important decision you will ever make. The Bible says, "*It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27).*"

By then, when this judgment comes, it's too late. This decision is one you should not ignore or put off. You need to decide now. This is straight-forward:

**Whoever calls on the name of the
Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.
(Romans 10:13)**

You are loved

God provides salvation to you. It's yours for the asking. Just express belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and you will have everlasting life. **God loves you. He always has and He always will.** God's love is perfect, unconditional and never changes because it is based on His righteousness and His justice. God's love is patient and forgiving. This is God's expression of His love:

For God so loved the world that He gave His uniquely born Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.
(John 3:16)

God put this book in your hands so you have this opportunity to get to know Him better. He gave you His Son as your Savior so you can have everlasting life with Him in heaven. He gives you divine resources, including the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to counter lures of the cosmic system. God gives you His Word so you have truth and direction for life.

Are you still with me? Great. Let's review:

COUNTERING LURES OF THE COSMIC SYSTEM

If Satan can influence your thoughts he can control you

Arrogance leads to: self-justification ... self-deception
self-absorption ... and finally self-destruction

God uses divine discipline to get your attention

Counter the lures of the world with God's Word

Where do you get direction in your life?
From human viewpoint thinking
or from the Word of God?

For prayer to be heard, be filled with the Holy Spirit

God's Word, the Bible, is Truth

Use Scripture - It worked for Christ
It will work for you

You have a guardian angel

God speaks to you through the Bible

God will never throw you under the bus

God's love is perfect and unconditional

God loves you - He always has and He always will

Satan never quits - The cosmic system never rests

FULFILLING YOUR DESTINY

Why do we study the Bible? Why pay attention to it? Why devote time and energy to learning Scripture?

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart [thinking] keep my commandments; for **length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you**. Do not let kindness and truth leave you ... **Trust in the Lord** with all your heart and **do not lean on your own understanding**. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.
(Proverbs 3:1-6)

Here it is - God's door to your future - how to thrive in life's toughest years. It's up to you. You can become the man or woman God intends for you to be by choosing to go through the door, leave your agenda behind and walk into God's very special plan for your life. This is how to discover and fulfill your personal sense of destiny.



You'll find your personal destiny by learning what God's plan is for your life. Where does He want you to be? What does He want you to do? Does He have a mission for you? The answer is an exciting Yes!

Gals, if you're destined to be married God has the man for you and guys, God has the woman for you. Just as certainly as God created Eve for Adam, He has designed just the right spouse for you. If you allow God to guide you, and you actively seek His will for your life, there could be a fantastic, loving, nurturing marriage awaiting you in your future. You can have a life of happiness and fulfillment, or you can do what so many young folks do today. You rush into a marriage with a beautiful mouthful of teeth or a package of bulging biceps and think you have found your soul mate because she's a good cook or he's a good kisser. You leap to the altar, get married and it's not too long before it starts falling apart and the divorce attorney is making money. Nobody wants this nor should you want to raise children without a mother or a father. What makes a good spouse is what's in the soul, not what's on the outside. It is how that person thinks. Be patient and wait on the Lord. Focus on being the right person while you wait for Him to bring the right person. If you follow His plan, marriage or single bliss will exceed your expectations.

Leave your agenda behind - Walk through the door into God's plan - This is your destiny

There are places God wants you to be and things God wants you to do. To figure out your personal destiny you must leave your agenda behind and go through the door into learning and living God's plan for your life. Here's an illustration. I'm a really good bass fisherman. I could have been a professional bass angler competing in national bass fishing tournaments and making lots of money. But bass fishing is a passion in my life - not a priority. My priority is re-presenting the Lord Jesus Christ as He opens doors for me to communicate the gospel and Biblical principles to as many listeners as possible.

At one point in life I had to make a decision. Did I want to be a professional fisherman or a fisher of men? I chose to serve God. This has brought so much more happiness and fulfillment into my life than if I had won lots of money in fishing tournaments. Sure, I would love to have all that money in the bank. Who wouldn't? But it's not the source of happiness and professional fishing is not the destiny God designed for me.

**Priority or Passion?
Do you live by priorities
or follow your passions?**

Every problem has a solution stated in the Bible and every issue has a divine viewpoint resolution. Isn't this encouraging? For young people, planning what to do after high school can be stressful. Once you get out of high school (whew!) are you working ... going to trade school or college ... serving in law enforcement or the military ... getting married and starting a family? Big city or small town? Some people can't wait to leave the town where they were raised while others wouldn't think of leaving the place where they've spent their whole life. So if every problem has a solution in the Bible, isn't it comforting to know answers for these problems are found in the Scripture? There's only one catch, you must listen to God's Word being taught and learn God's problem-solving devices.

When I fish at night I use a powerful flashlight to help me see how to tie lures or to see the bank to make sure I don't get caught up in something. The Bible is a light that will make the right path clear for you.

**Every problem has a solution in the Bible
God's Word is an antidote to anxiety
The Bible is God's playbook
for how to live your Christian life**

Caution - there are two areas of your personal life that will cause you to get off the right path and miss the discovery of your personal sense of destiny, God's very special plan for you. The first area is rejection of Jesus Christ (negative volition) and the second area is apathy or indifference to God's Word.

In your soul you have mentality, volition, a conscience and self-consciousness. Your soul is the invisible, immortal (can't die) part of you. Your physical body will die. It has to die because it won't work in heaven. We are all born with a dead, dormant human spirit. When you come to Jesus Christ and receive Him as your Savior, you are born again. Your body and soul aren't reborn; but your human spirit, which has been dead since birth, is made alive by God the Holy Spirit who now dwells inside you. As a Christian you now have a body, a soul and a spirit. At death, your physical body goes to the grave and your soul and spirit go to heaven where you will receive a resurrection body. This new body will never be sick or grow old. You will have a perfect body for all eternity - forever.

If you are not a Christian when you die, the future is terrible. *"And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).* This is the second death. If someone refuses to believe in Jesus Christ he leaves God no alternative. God's justice demands he live forever baking in the Lake of Fire.

The justice of God judged Jesus Christ on the cross for all sin, including yours and mine. **Sin is not the issue in salvation.** If someone refuses to accept Jesus Christ, then the justice of God has to judge him. God will send him to the Lake of Fire not because He wants to or doesn't love him, but because He has no choice since he rejected the forgiveness God offered through Jesus Christ.

**He who knew no sin became sin for you.
(2 Corinthians 5:21)**

The other area of your life where you can get off track is if you have apathy or indifference to God's Word. I bet you have a Bible at home, probably more than one. How many times do you go to the Bible to find the answers you need? Do you ever search for a Biblical way to handle this problem or that crisis?

The job of your pastor is to study the Word of God and give it to you accurately in an understandable way. **The Bible is a textbook, it is not a novel. God designed it to be taught to you by your pastor.** If your pastor accurately teaches the Bible and you consistently learn, then you'll get the information you need for your answers. The Bible shows you your choices in life.

Your Choices = Your Life

Let's go to the Scripture and look at how Saul got his wake-up call. Saul was a murderer, a known killer of Christians. After Saul got his wake-up call and became a Christian, his name changed to Paul and he wrote over half of the New Testament. But prior to this, Saul was a real terror to Christians. In Acts 9 we read where Saul was looking for men and women who were *of the Way* to arrest them and take them to trial. Anyone *of the Way*, the term used to identify Christians, was in danger of being tried, convicted and executed. Saul received authorization to arrest Christians in the town of Damascus and take them back to Jerusalem, where they would be tried and stoned to death, killed for believing in the Lord.

**It's never too late
to make a course correction in life**

Watch what God did. This is really something. God may do something like this in your life. God woke Saul up in an unbelievable way. Saul was headed one way and God turned him completely around to go in the other direction and take a totally different course in his life.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might arrest them and bring them to Jerusalem for trial. As he journeyed, suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. He fell to the ground and heard a voice, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." So, trembling and astonished, he said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" The Lord said, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:1-6)

Immediately Saul changed direction. Once he realized what he had been doing, he chose to change the course of his life. This takes plenty of courage. There were Jews back in Jerusalem now hating Saul, who had become the Apostle Paul. They wanted to kill him simply because he had joined with those he was sent to arrest and kill. Paul became a leader of *the Way*, a leader of Christians. This is what Paul said about his life once he came under persecution:

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)

I bet you've made mistakes. I know I have. Satan wants you to never forget your mistakes. Satan will keep throwing your mistakes back at you to try and get you to live in guilt and shame. **Guilt is a sin, so don't go there.** Satan wants you to remember your mistakes. This is why rebound is so important.

When you go to God and confess your sin, He forgives you. If you keep confessing the same sin, God will say, “What sin? You confessed it the other day and I forgave and forgot it.” Don’t promise God you will never do it again, you probably will. This is why discipline is so good. You make a mistake, you receive discipline, you can put it behind you and move forward. Move on. Forget your failures. As Paul said, “I forgot the mistakes I made. I forgot what’s behind me. I move forward *“toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*”

Forget the past ... Press forward
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God’s grace provision of rebound solves our dilemma of personal sin. The acrostic NICE may help you remember the process to handle your personal sin and press forward.

N - Name It. Name your sin to God the Father in silent prayer. A lot of folks say, “I don’t feel bad about it, so how can I confess it and be forgiven?” Confessing doesn’t have anything to do with how you feel about it.

I - Isolate It. Don’t let one sin expand into others. Don’t be a chain sinner.

C - Clear Your Conscience. Forget the sin. Don’t have guilt.

E - Execute. Move on in executing your spiritual life. If you aren’t progressing, you are regressing.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Prayer can be a source of peace. God tells you to pray and it's good to pray, but you can pray the wrong way. **Prayers done in the wrong way will not be heard or answered.** God expects you to follow protocol (proper procedure) in prayer. Just because you pray to God does not mean you will get an answer. The most common reason for unanswered prayer is being out of fellowship and under the control of your sin nature because of unconfessed sin. The right prayer now is confession of sin so you will be restored to fellowship and the Holy Spirit can guide you and help you in prayer.

Here's an example. Deacon Jones hates Deacon Smith. They had a business deal that went sour and have never forgiven each other. They are angry. They can't even look at each other in church. The pastor calls on Deacon Smith to pray and he prays a beautifully worded prayer. It's an empty prayer that goes nowhere. Why? Deacon Smith has sin in his life - bitterness, jealousy, hatred toward Deacon Jones. Deacon Smith did the right thing through prayer, but it was done in the wrong way. He forgot God's first requirement for proper prayer, you must be in fellowship with Him by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit.

There is a proper way to pray. God designed the correct way to come to Him in prayer. It is His protocol for how to enter His throne room of grace. You never pray to Jesus. God's protocol is to address your prayer to God the Father, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and close in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

GOD'S PROTOCOL FOR PRAYER

Pray to God the Father

Through the power of the Holy Spirit

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ

Be patient and persistent in prayer

God answers in His timing not yours

Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Call upon Me and come and pray to Me and I will listen to you. (Jeremiah 29:12)

As you follow God's proper procedure coming to Him in prayer, *be anxious for nothing*, God will give you tranquility of soul. What does this mean? The more you come to understand the God you know, the greater your confidence in Him will be. He is with you ... He will lead you ... He will guide you ... He will take care of you.

Every Christian has a personal sense of destiny. Don't run around in a tizzy, "I don't know what it is ... I don't know what it is." You can know. As a Christian you have a spiritual gift and you may even have a talent. Your talent and your gift are not the same thing. Some people can play the piano, sing, dance or write - they have talents. This is not a spiritual gift. God can use your talent to glorify Him, for example in your church or community, but your spiritual gift is different.

**A spiritual gift is something
God gives you to serve Him**

Check me out. I have the gift of evangelism. I didn't ask for it, I didn't want it and I didn't deserve it or even know what it was. Back in the 1970's a friend and I started a ministry. He was the evangelist and I was more like a Bible teacher. One day over a stack of pancakes we were discussing our work and realized we had it backwards, my friend was the Bible teacher and I was the evangelist. He went on to be a pastor, now over forty-five years, and I've been doing evangelism for over fifty-five years. I had to figure out what my true destiny was. You will also.

You have a destiny. There is something God will equip you to do. Go figure - me, Big Rick, an accomplished athlete in my high school of over 2,500, ended up in the ministry. This was God's destiny for me. Chances are

some of you who are taking the time to study this book will become pastor-teachers, administrators, missionaries, Sunday school teachers, fathers or mothers.

**God has a destiny for you
You must pursue and find it
before you can live it**

If you don't pursue finding your destiny by getting serious about studying God's Word you'll drift down the My Way Highway until you run out of options. When the options dwindle to nothing, your state of hopelessness may lead you to consider stupid things or illegal things. Why? Because your life has no meaning for you. Without a sense of God's destiny in your life, you will never find the purpose of why you are here.

The very fact you believe in Christ is the beginning of your destiny. Having accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you became a spiritual baby in Christ. Likely you got a Bible, found a church, listened to a qualified pastor and started growing up. You are now a spiritual student. Eventually, if you stick with it, you will become a spiritual adult. This is where you are prepared and ready to serve the Lord. Spiritual growth is a process. It's not an overnight delivery and it doesn't happen with a swipe of a finger on a smartphone. It takes time and commitment. You can listen to all the praise and worship music you want, but you will never grow spiritually just listening to music. Here's a tip - if you go to a church where the song service is longer than the teaching, you're being gypped.

The only way to grow as a Christian is to study God's Word, learn it and apply it in your life. A catchy way to remember this is LAG - Learn, Apply and Glorify the Lord. Advancing in spiritual growth is how you fulfill your personal sense of destiny.

**Learn ... Apply ... Glorify the Lord
(LAG)**

Like you, Paul had to learn God's Word in order to develop his personal sense of destiny. When Jesus Christ blinded him on the road to Damascus, he had no idea he would write over half of the New Testament. He didn't have a clue what was ahead in his life, but he had faith.

You also need to have faith. This means you must be diligent in developing your spiritual life and trust God to do what He says He will do. Be patient. *"Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him"* (Psalm 37:7).

As you study, learn, grow and wait, God will show you what He has for you. **Don't get impatient and try to get ahead of the Lord.** This is a common mistake. Don't push when it's time to be patient. If you charge ahead, you are impetuous. When you are impetuous as a Christian, you'll do things that aren't necessary which often ends up being a waste of time and energy.

**If you can trust God with your life
you can trust Him with the details
Have faith**

Many, like me, had to learn this the hard way. I wanted to do great things for God, but I had to learn to shut up and wait until God showed me what to do instead of running ahead trying to direct God toward my plans. Your personal sense of destiny becomes a reality when you advance to the point where you keep your focus on the Lord Jesus Christ rather than on yourself. You've left your personal agenda behind you and you've walked through the door into God's agenda. This is where you begin to understand God's plan for your life. **Your life takes on meaning and purpose.** You know why you are here. Now you are on God's agenda not your own. A personal sense of destiny motivates you to get your priorities right.

**There are many plans in a man's heart
but the counsel of the Lord will stand.
(Proverbs 19:21)**

Let's discuss growing up. You grow physically and eventually you must take responsibility for your decisions. When you are a baby, your mom, grandma or sitter comes along and cleans up your mess. If you are fifteen and you are still making messes and expecting mom or dad to clean up after you, something is seriously wrong! **You must learn to take responsibility for your actions, including your mistakes, and clean up your own messes.** If you expect someone to bail you out when you keep messing up, you have a flaw. You need to learn self-discipline and take responsibility for your life.

Are you tired of others nagging and correcting you? Simple - discipline yourself so no one else has to. As a teenager, if you get in trouble, a teacher, coach or police officer will probably call your parents. While you are still under the age of eighteen, dad or mom end up having to pay the price for your bad decisions. The time is coming soon when no one will pay for your mistakes, other than you. When you get in trouble, you'll be on your own. You need to be responsible.

Another stage of growth is developing as a Christian. Hebrews 5:11-12 says, "There are a lot of things I'd like to teach you, but I can't because you can't handle meat. You still need milk [you need a bottle to suck on]." This is a huge challenge for pastors. Some people in the congregation need a steak while others still need the bottle. If the pastor gives them something that's too advanced, they choke on it. **Your objective as a Christian is to grow to spiritual maturity.** This takes being consistent in studying the Word of God. God's Word should always be free. Be careful of those who use God's name to make money. If God is in it, God will pay for it.

Relationships are important in life but prioritizing them is even more important. **Your relationship with God must come first in your life.** If you can do this, everything else will stay in proper perspective.

<p>Your relationship with God must be first over your relationships with people and things</p>

You may be wondering, how do I know God's will for my life? This is part of growing up as a Christian. As you advance in spiritual growth, recognize there are three categories of God's will for your life. The first one is the **directive will of God**. This includes: where does God want me to be, what does God want me to think and what does God want me to do?

The second category is the **permissive will of God** and this is what God allows you to do, including allowing you to make bad decisions. Remember, you have volition and you make decisions based on what is in your mind. If you choose to go down the My Way Highway and think with human viewpoint, He won't stop you.

Sampson is a perfect example of God's permissive will. The Bible records in Judges that Sampson couldn't keep his mouth shut and he couldn't leave the women alone. He was physically the strongest man on earth, but he had major flaws that ended up costing him his life. Eventually he was brought before the Philistines, surrounded by jeers and laughter, and chained between the pillars of the temple. After being blinded, when his eyes were put out, Sampson experienced an attitude adjustment. Sampson prayed, confessed his sins, and said, *"O Lord God, please remember me and please strengthen me just this time [Give me the courage and power to destroy these enemies.]"* (Judges 16:28).

God answered his prayer. Sampson pulled those pillars of the temple down to destroy several thousands of the Philistines, his final act of bravery. God allowed Sampson to go his own way and permitted him to make bad decisions. It cost Sampson his life and God was vindicated.

The third category is the **overruling will of God**. This means that sometimes God steps in and stops you from destroying yourself. He may overrule some of your dangerous decisions.

BAD DECISIONS LIMIT FUTURE OPTIONS

**Where does God want me to be?
What does God want me to think?
What does God want me to do?**

There are three checkpoints for knowing the directive will of God. Use them throughout your life to stay on course in God's plan. First is the **geographical checkpoint**. Where does God want you to be? Where does He want you to go?

The second one is the **viewpoint checkpoint**. What does God want you to think? The answer is, "*Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 2:5). God wants you to think like Jesus Christ thought. The personality profile of Jesus Christ was humility - no arrogance, no self-centeredness.

Third is the **operational checkpoint**. What does God want you to do? As you grow spiritually by learning and applying God's Word, He will direct your life. He will also show you your spiritual gift and how to use it in service to Him.

Jesus Christ came to fulfill a destiny. He knew His destiny was to go to the cross and die for the sins of the world. He let nothing stop Him from fulfilling His destiny. You, too, have a personal sense of destiny to fulfill. By learning God's Word and following His geographical, viewpoint and operational checkpoints, you will come to know God's directive will for your life.

**Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
(Psalm 119:105)**

Is there a way to know for sure what God's will is for you? Yes! If your task is to maneuver a large ship from the ocean, through a channel, into a harbor and up to a dock, how do you do this without running into dangers or running aground? It is night, you have no electronics to guide you and you must steer this ship safely without crashing into something. There are three lights in the channel to guide you. If you keep these lights aligned with your task, you will make it safely to the dock.

<p>Witness of God's Word Witness of Circumstances Witness of the Holy Spirit</p>

These are the three lights to use as you validate knowing God's will for your life and how to live within it: the Witness of God's Word, the Witness of Circumstances, and the Witness of the Holy Spirit.

The **Witness of God's Word**. God talks to you and directs you by His Word, the Bible. Let me give you a personal example. I was in a group reading the Bible and this verse caught my attention, "*Pray for me that I may open my mouth boldly*" (*Ephesians 6:19*). It was God telling me my destiny. This witness of God's Word sent me to Bible college. I could have returned to Alabama to play football. The Bear and coaching staff wanted me back, but I chose Bible college instead.

The **Witness of Circumstances**. Here is an illustration of how this worked in my life. Initially, my college tuition was paid for by a scholarship to play football. Bible college costs lots of money and I didn't have it. As I was trying to figure out how I would pay for Bible college an older gentleman stepped up and said, "If you go to Bible college, I'll pay for it." There's the witness of circumstances. God paid for my tuition by means of the grace of this gentleman.

The **Witness of the Holy Spirit**. This is the peace and contentment you'll have from knowing you are on the right path in God's plan and living God's agenda. There is no greater joy than knowing you are living directly in the middle of God's will for your life.

God will lead you in fulfilling your destiny as you keep in focus the three checkpoints of God's directive will and use these three witnesses. When you get impatient and try to do things based on your agenda, not His, or try to push doors open that were closed, you will get out of alignment with God's will. It might be the right thing, but the wrong time. Wait on the three lights to align and then you can safely move forward.

Here is an example of how this worked for the Lord's disciples.

As He walked by the sea of Galilee He saw Simon [Peter] and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Jesus said, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed Him. (Mark 1:16-18)

Something about Jesus Christ was so compelling, so majestic, so powerful, that the fishermen immediately walked away from everything to follow Him. **Similarly, when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior it is a life changing event.** Your eternal destiny is guaranteed. By leaving your agenda behind, just like the disciples did, and walking into God's plan, your new life will emerge. The Bible says,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away and all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Never forget, God loves you and He wants you to be happy and content. God's will for you now is:

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a worker that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and **learn from Me**; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Think about this. What has God asked of you? Become a missionary and go to the jungles of Africa? No. Give up everything and go live among the monks? No. What does God want you to do? Study. Grow. Learn. Apply. **God is not asking you to do anything you can't do.** It's not hard. I pray you will want to discover and fulfill the destiny God designed just for you.

Always remember:

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Thanks for staying with me and finishing this book. Now you know more about God and the resources He gives you to thrive during life's toughest years.

Life is a journey. God's Word is your guide. All I've done is given you principles to point you to God's Way. You will decide your path and do the walking.

When you choose to leave your own agenda behind and walk into God's plan, you will have more happiness, more contentment, more satisfaction and more fun than you ever could imagine.

Go for It - - Seize your Destiny!

FULFILLING YOUR DESTINY

You Are What You Think

Your destiny is God's special plan for your life

Do you live by priorities or follow your passions?

Your relationship with God must be first
over your relationships with people

Every problem has a solution in the Word of God

The Bible is the light that makes the right path clear

Forget the past - Press forward

Pray to God the Father, through the power
of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ

God gives you a spiritual gift to serve Him

Checkpoints for knowing God's directive will:
Where does God want me to be?
What does God want me to think?
What does God want me to do?

Your choices = Your life

You trust God with your life, trust Him with the details

Leave your own agenda behind
Walk into God's plan

Study ... Grow ... Learn ... Seize Your Destiny!

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GOD'S PROBLEM SOLVING DEVICES

REBOUND

FILLING OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT

FAITH-REST DRILL

GRACE
ORIENTATION

DOCTRINAL
ORIENTATION

PERSONAL SENSE
OF DESTINY

PERSONAL LOVE
FOR GOD

IMPERSONAL
LOVE FOR ALL
MANKIND

SHARING THE
HAPPINESS
OF GOD

OCCUPATION
WITH CHRIST

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If you, or a loved one, are incarcerated
and want to study the Word of God contact:

PHILIPPI FREEDOM MINISTRY

PO Box 552
Chesterfield, Missouri 63006-0552
philippifreedomministry.org
314-435-2957

Philippi Freedom Ministry presents the Gospel message of Faith Alone in Christ Alone and teaches Basic Bible Doctrines to those who are incarcerated. The purpose of this ministry is to make doctrinal Bible teaching available without charge or obligation.



RICK HUGHES, founder and President of Rick Hughes Evangelistic Ministries, Inc., communicates clear and concise Biblical principles for people to apply in their lives. For over 50 years, Rick has presented the truth to thousands of students and spoken at hundreds of schools and churches. He has authored books and training publications and hosts *The FLOT Line*, a weekly radio broadcast that is also available as an archived podcast library. All of these resources are available free of charge on his website, rickhughesministries.org.

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Rick was raised in a modest, single-parent home. He distinguished himself through excellence in athletics, being named to the High School All-American football team and setting state records in the shot put and discus. The University of Florida offered Rick a full football scholarship, but his SAT scores were too low. Challenged by a coach to overcome this failure, Rick applied himself in the classroom as he had done on the field. He seized the challenge, earned a second chance, and entered the University of Alabama as a football player under the training of the prestigious coach Paul “Bear” Bryant. The team won a national championship that year. After just one successful year, however, Rick quit school and drifted down *the my way highway*. Rick emphasizes that *bad decisions limit future options*, and that *God gave you two ends: one to sit on and one to think with. Success in life depends on which end you use. Heads you win—tails you lose*. Many of Rick’s personal experiences vividly illustrate these principles.

Rick’s turning point came when he accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, by faith alone in Christ alone. This is the most important decision in your life, also. Rick’s decision opened a new path, not of football, but one personally designed for him by God. Through the ministry of Berachah Church in Houston, Texas, and its pastors, R. B. Thieme, Jr. and now R. B. Thieme III, Rick learned principles and promises of God’s Word that directed him into a life of Christian ministry. Rick’s life is proof that when you leave your own agenda behind and walk into God’s plan, you can have fulfillment and happiness beyond your imagination. “For with God, nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

LIFE’S TOUGHEST YEARS

Life’s Toughest Years presents information you can use to orient and adjust to your circumstances and make decisions on how you want to live. If you choose to apply these Biblical principles, you’ll have what you need to stay off of the *My Way Highway* and thrive during life’s toughest years. Happiness depends on what is in your soul, not on people or circumstances. “As a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Every problem in life has a solution in the Bible. By studying and applying God’s Word, you will learn how to fulfill your personal destiny, God’s special plan for your life. His plan is so great it will overcome any adversity you face now or in the future.