A person wearing a beanie, a light blue shirt, dark pants, and a large black backpack is walking away from the camera on a paved road. The road has a yellow dashed line on the right side. The background is a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise with trees and foliage visible in the distance. The overall tone is warm and contemplative.

LIFE'S TOUGHEST YEARS

RICK HUGHES

Recognition

Illustrations by Tim Chrismer

Cover by Jamie Boytor

Cover Image from jcomp-freepik.com

Photograph by Keith Coleman

***LIFE'S
TOUGHEST
YEARS***

RICK HUGHES

*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*



RICK HUGHES EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES, INC.
CROPWELL, ALABAMA
rickhughesministries.org



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 the book) so His supernatural ministry can empower you to live this unique life. Look up verses in the Bible, and by faith, believe and apply God's Word.

Think of studying as eating. Feed on God's Word daily to fuel yourself. Make studying a habit; if not, the rate of forgetting exceeds the rate of learning. Study under a qualified pastor, preferably in person; otherwise from accurate Bible studies. 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 my local church, I learned the principles I teach. Much thanks to my faithful Pastors who taught me God's Word. It was them that God the Holy Spirit used, and uses today, to guide me in my efforts to share Christ across America.

Without the abundant grace provisions of our Lord, 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, great things He has done.





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

The chapters follow the five days of discussion:

- Chapter 1 Embracing Authority Orientation
- Chapter 2 Living Like a Fool
- Chapter 3 Finding Real Happiness
- Chapter 4 Countering the Lures of the Cosmic System
- Chapter 5 Fulfilling Your Personal Destiny

Do these themes seem relevant? Reading this book may not be easy for you. There is a lot of information to consider. But if you will take time to learn the principles, and if you choose to apply them, your life will be changed forever. God's plan for you is so great, it will overcome any adversity in your life.

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...

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

(Proverbs 2:10-11)



Chapter 1

Embracing Authority Orientation



Thank you for starting to read *Life's Toughest Years*. I don't know your motivation, 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'll have what you need to prevail through life's toughest years. Are you in?

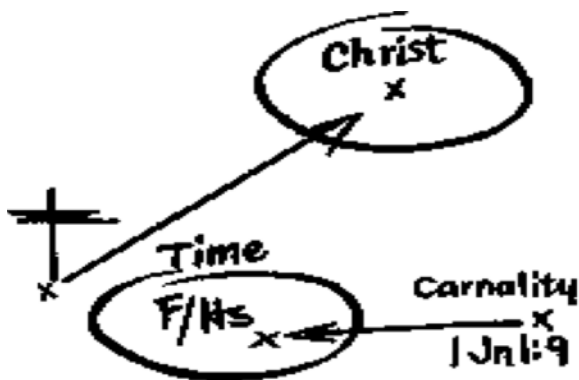
My intent is to present information, and you have the privilege to make your own decisions on how you want to live your life. Let's start with the most important decision/choice you have to make in life – to accept or reject the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

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

If you are a Christian, meaning you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior by faith alone in Christ alone (a thought/silent prayer), then you have a permanent relationship with God the Father who said, "*I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you*" (*Hebrews 13:5*). You can't lose your salvation.

If you are not a Christian, do you want eternal life? Do you want eternal security, knowing with certainty you will go to heaven after death? If Yes, then don't wait another second to accept God's grace gift of salvation. "*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*).

As a Christian, the permanent relationship you have with God is shown here 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 (carnality), your sin nature takes control, and you are no longer filled with (empowered by) the Holy Spirit.



Whether it is a mental attitude sin, a sin of the tongue, or an overt sin, you must go to God and confess your sin. 1 John 1:9 allows us to “rebound” and get back in fellowship with God the Father and be filled with the Holy Spirit, as shown above by the arrow.

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)

Confess means to admit and name. This is a prayer between you and God the Father, no middle man. Prior to studying, always start with a silent prayer. Use this opportunity to confess your sins to the Father 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.

This book may reveal flaws in your life, but mainly it will encourage you to pursue and live the plan God designed just for you. You'll want 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 easy to pay attention; however, when I explain things in the Bible, serious stuff, it may be hard to concentrate. Try not to get distracted. Push through reading this book even if it takes 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's something to remember. God gave you two ends -- one to sit on and one to think with. Success in life depends on which one you use.

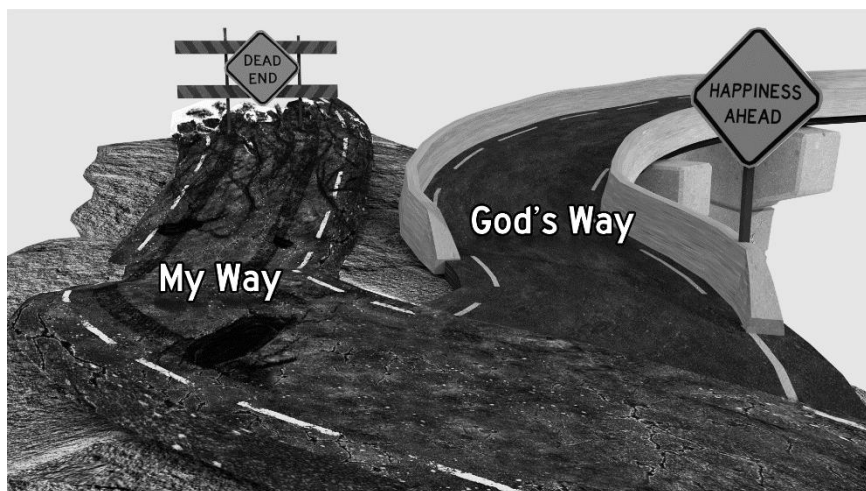
HEADS YOU WIN -- TAILS YOU LOSE

I will appeal to your mind throughout the book. The Bible says, "*As a man thinketh in his heart [mind], so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7). The real you is what's in your mind, not what you look like. Your image and style are not the real you. The Bible teaches us to learn to think as Christ thought. "*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, the lack of arrogance, 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 get on a bus and go to the 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 until I reached 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 that for a lot of guys. He showed me my potential -- what I was and what I could be. 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 where I sat and got nothing. I had always believed church was for little old ladies and weirdos. I got nothing from church, 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 for three months, but never understood how to be

saved. It wasn't until I was twenty-two, when I found myself in Bible study, that the truth captured my attention. 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 school assemblies in 1968. God still has me sharing the truth with students, faculty, radio 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 shoulder. You are determined to test your boundaries. The Bible says this about that:

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 under authority. So as long as you live under your parents' roof, God's Word tells you to obey your parents. This is our first real test in life -- facing authority -- be it fair or unfair. Every parent, teacher, administrator, or coach represents authority. Sometimes authority is fair, and sometimes authority is unfair. How do you handle it? Do you respond and obey, or do you react with arrogance?

I have four children. There have been times I disciplined one for something the other 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. 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 the 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 said simply, "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 humbly starts at home. It is called orienting to authority. God gave you parents to teach and orient you to authority, so when you get out in the world, and have independence, you can handle it. If you think the world will give you a fair shake, you're wrong.

**Authority is not always fair
Neither is life**

I have a friend who opened a large national retail business in Birmingham. He moved to Birmingham, bought a house, built the business, and ran it for three years. One day a guy from the home office walked in the front door and 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; that 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 in silent prayer), He will give you the power to obey your parents even when they make decisions that aren't right. 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 that 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. I got out when I was eighteen. When you get 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 the parents that may have failed you.

Your happiness does not depend on your home environment

Parents sometimes divorce, so notice what the Bible says, *"Honor your father and your mother;"* whether they are together or split up, you are to honor each one. Sometimes divorced parents try to turn a child against the other parent. That is abuse, which the Bible condemns. You are always to respect your parents, divorced or not. 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.

**Obey your parents when you are under their authority
Honor your parents throughout your life**

The secret to a full and meaningful life starts when you learn authority orientation at home. People want to find the “Fountain of Youth” and live a long time. Here it is in Ephesians 6:2-3: *“Honor your father and your mother that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth;”* and Deuteronomy 5:16: *“Honor thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God has commanded thee, that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee in the land that the Lord thy God has given thee.”*

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 OK to not do something. Hormones are flowing; independence is knocking at the door. “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.

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

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 peers than to be honest with their parents. You will face similar choices. You may try to justify why it’s so important to go against things your parents taught you. This is arrogance, and it is sin.

Self-Justification leads to **Self-Deception** (lying to yourself) followed by **Self-Absorption** (doing whatever you want regardless of the rules) ending with **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 prisoners and presents opportunities for Bible study. Now there are over 700 prisoners across this country taking Bible study correspondence courses through his ministry. Some of them are studying a book I wrote called *Divine Pardon*. They are all in prison because they made bad decisions. Some will say, “I didn’t do it...it’s not my fault...it’s all my parents’ fault...my parents were mean when I grew up 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 parents. You point a finger at them, and three are pointed right back at you.

Circumstances are not an excuse

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

Dear Rick,

I’d like to say thank you. Before you came to our school, I had almost 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 burst out in tears and tell you my problems, but something held me 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 guess you could say I was never one to do this. I was raised in a Christian home, had Christian parents, high moral standards and values, and I knew I should never be the one to 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. I just couldn't stop. The weekend before you came to our school, one of the guys was having 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 even know if I'm pregnant or not. 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 knew God was using you as a witness to me. Thank you very much. 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 the arrogance path to self-destruction.

Authority orientation is critical 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 by saying, Yes, I will, or you can react by saying, No, I won't. It's up to you. Nobody can manipulate you

without you letting them. God gave you volition. You make your own decisions.

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 your parents or someone else in authority for doing something stupid? Why are you bitter? Why are you angry? The answer -- in arrogance you are reacting with your emotions. You 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 sit on and one to think with:

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 guys my friend talks to in prison. Some of the prisoners 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, and then making bad decisions, and now they are in jail. **Don't think this can't happen to you!**

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 have thanksgiving 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 decisions testing and 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 1950s, 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 the Lures of the Cosmic System; and Fulfilling Your Personal Destiny.

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

EMBRACING AUTHORITY ORIENTATION



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

Heads You Win - Tails You Lose

Your most important decision is to accept or reject
Jesus Christ as your Savior

Accept Christ, you have a permanent relationship with God
(top circle) and can't lose your salvation

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

Secret to a meaningful life is authority orientation

Authority is not always fair -- neither is life

Respond with humility or react with arrogance

Arrogant self-justification leads to self-deception, then to
self-absorption and finally to self-destruction

Circumstances are not an excuse

Happiness doesn't depend on your home environment

Key to a long life: obey and honor your parents

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

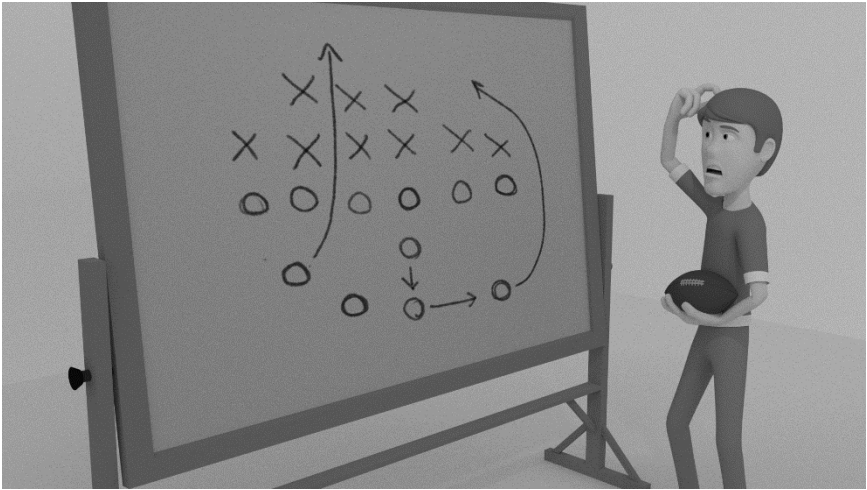
Bad Decisions Limit Future Options

Chapter 2

Living Like A Fool



The number one, most important decision to make in your life is to: *“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31)*. Everyone must make the decision to say Yes or No. I made the decision to believe in Jesus Christ when I was twenty-two. At the time, I didn’t see anything weird - no angels flying around the ceiling, no lights flickered; but as I took a Bible and began to read and learn, God revealed things to me I never knew existed.



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 those plays. If you don't, you will go through life doing right things in the wrong way. God has protocol. Protocol means doing right things 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 sins in your life, you are under the control of your sin nature and those sins will keep your prayers from ever reaching God. The Bible teaches: *"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"* (Psalm 66:18). I need to be in fellowship with the Holy Spirit when I inform you, and you must be in fellowship with the Holy Spirit to study, grow, and learn. I am in fellowship after I name my sins to God the Father and the Holy Spirit can then assist me in my prayers. He does this for you, me, and anyone who has accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. When you pray the right way, God hears and answers your prayers.

HEADS YOU WIN -- TAILS YOU LOSE

Remember you have two ends, one to sit on and one to think with; success depends on which one you use. You must learn to think. 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 who I really was, I saw who I thought I was. That's 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." When you see yourself as you really are, as reflected in the Bible, you see yourself as God sees you.

Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise; redeeming [making the most of] the time because the days are evil. Do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is ... being 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, be careful how you regulate your life. This means making good decisions from a position of strength (wisdom), being honest with yourself, and discovering and understanding God's Word.

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

(Proverbs 2:10-11)

Understanding requires you 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.

**You can get your information from your friends
or you can get it from the Word of God**

Consider this: Twenty years from now, our beloved nation will not be the same. There is a train wreck coming in America. I can hear the whistle and see the lights coming down the track. Our nation is in trouble. You are crucial to preserving America. You

must renovate (change with wisdom) your thinking in your soul, or you may fall victim to the cosmic system, Satan's devious plan to control Christians through human viewpoint and distractions. If you aren't *careful how you walk*, you will play right along with Satan, and lose everything your forefathers fought and died for. Freedoms we enjoy now will soon be gone if we continue on the road we're on now. America is in trouble. It's not who we elect as President. It's not the White House or Congress that can save this nation. It is you.

**You are crucial to the future of America
As goes your spiritual life, so goes our Nation**

This is serious. As goes your spiritual life, so goes the future of this nation. If you neglect God, if you are not interested in God or 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, 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 because 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's that possible? An atheist says, "Well, I just don't believe there is a God." That's faith. A Christian believes Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That 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 no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"* (2 Peter 1:20-21).

The Bible is a miracle God put together for you as a light for your life. If you will study and apply the Word of God, you will have the

path for a meaningful life free of heartache. Proverbs 1:7 says, “fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Let’s delve into three verses in the book of Jeremiah to gain information. Jeremiah is talking about Israel. He records the attitude of the people before Israel was destroyed by the Chaldean Empire around 722 BC.

Jeremiah 6:10, 6:15: *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; don’t 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 it exposes their sin.]

Jeremiah 4:22: *For my people are foolish; they know Me not; they are stupid children and have no understanding. They are shrewd to evil, but to good, they know not.* [They are stupid; they don’t care. They just want to live for the details of life, for the moment.]

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 evil, but to good, they know not.*” Today in this country, everything is upside down -- what was evil is now good, and what was good is now evil. We see this all across America today.

Reading *Life’s Toughest Years* means you are interested and want information. The question now is what will you do with it? Recall Ephesians 5:15-16, 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.*” Time -- your life is such a small moment of time compared to eternity. You can’t afford to waste your time. Seniors in high school are so excited about graduation. That’s cool, but what’s next? The next phase of your life, whether it’s a career, homemaker, school, or

military, you only have so much time. Not one person, no parent, teacher, or friend, nor you or me, has a guarantee we'll be here tomorrow. We think we will, we hope we will, but we do not know.

**Tomorrow is not guaranteed
Don't waste time today**

Why can't you afford to waste time? The Bible says, *the days are evil*. This is the cosmic system, Satan's plan for the world. Part of Satan's strategy is a cosmic vortex, always spinning around you, luring you. You have two ways you can think. One is human viewpoint which is the cosmic system's way of thinking, and the other is divine viewpoint which is learned from the Word of God. You have to choose how you want to think. You can understand who you are and what God has for you by learning His Word. 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).

**Happiness is related to your thoughts
what you have in your soul**

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, and you are living in the devil's world. Guess what the Bible says about this: "*The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour*" (1 Peter 5:8). Have you ever watched one of those TV shows where the lion catches a gazelle or something, and he eats his prey? After the lion's 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 people

read this and think it's just a funny joke. They have a good laugh. Well, buck up, it's 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" just like everyone else sooner or later, so the thinking goes, "As long as I'm here, I want to be happy and have fun." Danger! You are being lured with Satan's human viewpoint, the opposite of what you are told in the Bible. If you choose to be lured, you are living like a fool. *"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes"* (Proverbs 12:15). Satan is the manipulator of the cosmic vortex. Once you allow yourself to be sucked into this vortex, your life can spin out of control.



**If you choose to be lured by the details of life,
human viewpoint, you are living like a fool**

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 the peace and happiness in prison on death row I'm now able to enjoy is 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, respect 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 became involved in transporting and selling drugs across this 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 prisons, 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 would go through a fraction of what I've gone through and that you would accept Jesus Christ as your Savior.

A normal kid – lured into the cosmic vortex. You must understand how this happens 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. You will be able to do whatever you want and go wherever you want. How will you handle it?

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 that is the devil's playground. If you don't have Scripture in your mind, some divine viewpoint, 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. She had 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 pressures of the outside (lies) are greater than what you have inside (Truth from God's Word in your soul), then Satan's human viewpoint 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 and the pressure outside was greater than the pressure inside the sub. At some depth 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, *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 says He is the light of the world. He is the light of God. 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 can light a path for you, but only if you learn and apply what your pastor teaches. If you want additional information regarding your spiritual

life, you can always visit my website, rickhughesministries.org, listen to my radio shows, or order free additional Bible studies.

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. You won't have a clue. There could be a cliff in front of you, a pothole, or a snake. With darkened understanding, you've alienated yourself from God's plan for your life, you've 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. 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 were 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 parent's 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. When you get to this stage, you are beyond feeling conviction, guilt, or shame. You have given yourself over to lust with greediness

which is 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 a mind, a volition (ability to choose), a conscience. Your mind is where your intentions are, where you discern things, where you store your thoughts. When God looks at you, He looks at your mind to see what you are thinking: *"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). Living like a fool, you'll go down until you hit bottom.

The buildup of scar tissue means the loss of norms and standards, resulting in a shutdown of your senses. You no longer feel guilt or conviction, then comes addiction as a means of escape. But it's actually a means of entrapment leading to confusion and depression which can consume you. You may falsely believe there's nothing left, like people all across this country who turn to addictions to find comfort. Don't go there! Don't live 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

(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
(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 the details of life

Tomorrow is not guaranteed -- don't waste today

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

With nothing on the inside to equal the pressures from the
outside, you will be crushed

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

The Word of God will light a path for you

Heads You Win - Tails You Lose
YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK AND DECIDE
Bad Decisions Limit Future Options

Chapter 3

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 went on to play football in high school with some level of success – 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. All the money and all the 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. In Ecclesiastes we read Solomon sought happiness in pleasure, people, education, travel,

money, power, reputation, sex. He tried everything! Yet he found only frustration. “*For they sow to the wind, and they reap the whirlwind*” (*Hosea 8:7*). The emptiness and unhappiness in his soul remained. He eventually learned the key to happiness was having the Word of God in his soul, not having friends or being successful.

Here is the 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 to the Promised Land where God had promised them a *land full of milk and honey*. Moses sent in twelve spies to take a look at this land before they invaded it:

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 this wilderness. Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should 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 is not about the children. It was the fact they didn’t have the guts to do what God told them. 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 took one look at the situation that appeared to be tough, and they panicked.

You will face situations like this, too. There will be really tough, really hard situations that look impossible. If you look at the circumstances and not the solution, then you'll say, "I can't do this." That's what the children of Israel said. They were scared. They panicked and cried all night. They were thinking slavery was better than following God's plan.

**Unhappy people take their
unhappiness with them wherever they go**

Sadly, regardless of what they have or don't have, unhappy people's activities 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 are.

What makes you unhappy? People and circumstances 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, a new city – will make you happy, take off. But you will find your unhappiness goes with you. It's not where you are, it is you.

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. Your happiness is self-contained. In John 15:11, Christ mandates you to be happy: *"These things have I spoken unto you, that My happiness might remain in you and that your happiness might be full."* Divine

happiness is a state of the soul characterized by contentment and capacity for life, love, and blessing. It is not something someone can do for you or based on the details of life. Divine happiness is a relaxed mental attitude (RMA) you carry with you all the time.

**Happiness depends on what is in your soul
Happiness does not depend on the details of life**

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 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. Lasting happiness only comes from God.

God offers you real happiness in spite of your circumstances. Can you image anything more tragic and miserable than hanging and dying on a 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). It wasn't pleasant, but 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 that 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. You can look at life through divine viewpoint or through human viewpoint. Human viewpoint is people and circumstances are the sources of happiness. Divine viewpoint is *"Happy are those who hear the word of God and obey it"* (Luke 11:28).

A divine viewpoint produces lasting happiness

False happiness is the stuff Satan tells you and tries to sell you. Don't buy into it. False happiness (pseudo happiness) is Satan's attempt to counterfeit the happiness of God. False happiness can be a source of stimulation and entertainment, but it is not permanent. It is only momentary. It depends on pleasant circumstances or a pleasant environment. 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 can only provide temporary pseudo happiness.

Sex outside the boundaries of marriage will 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 experience are self-made; you'll mismanage your personal life, your money, your health, your friendships. Most of your suffering and problems are a result of your own bad decisions.



Bad Decisions Limit Future Options

True happiness comes from a relaxed mental attitude (RMA) you carry with you all the time. An RMA is a remarkable and wonderful thing. If you have a situation in your life making you miserable, an RMA will allow you to say, “I can get through this, I can handle it” because you rely on the promises found in God’s Word. The Bible contains over 7000 promises. Use them! Use the faith-rest drill whenever any negative situation or circumstance presents itself. If you learn promises and use them, they become a shield to protect you. Ephesians 6:13 teaches us to: *“pick up the shield of faith which is the Word of God.”* **Promises, the shield of faith, will protect you.** When Satan throws his fiery darts to discourage or distract you, ward them off using promises God gives us in His Word.

Happiness comes from a relaxed mental attitude (RMA)
Use faith-rest by relying on God’s promises

God’s happiness is intended to be a state of your soul, your mind, where you experience an RMA. With an RMA, you don’t have to worry, be afraid, or ever 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 God the Holy Spirit and God’s Word. Jesus Christ said He would send the Holy Spirit to live in you: *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever... He abides with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).* The Holy Spirit will mentor and guide you. You have this supernatural power to live a supernatural life. Isn’t this amazing?

Yet, very few Christians use their supernatural power, or have real happiness, because they can’t be consistent. They don’t stick with a qualified pastor. They don’t have a consistent spiritual life. They are easily distracted. For example, there’s a church in your neighborhood with a pastor who is teaching from the Word of God and a youth pastor working tirelessly to get you involved and learning. Do you even go? No. You are too busy; you are distracted. You think you have something better going on.

Here’s what Paul said about his source of happiness:

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13)

This is the super natural 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 that makes you miserable or hurts you; 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? That's life every day when you are focused on circumstances. There's a better way to live!

You can have a relationship with God by accepting God's grace gift of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. This relationship is permanent (the top circle). 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 that power. Satan would love for your sin nature to control you; then he can easily manipulate you, lure you, discourage

you, and you will be defeated. Note in Proverbs 3:13-18, real happiness is described:

Happy is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies. And all the things you may desire cannot compare with her. Length of days is in her right hand and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her. And happy are all who retain her.

And you thought happiness was related to people, money, education, and stuff? No! It is related to wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and understanding are the keys to happiness. That's why I'll never teach anything that seeks to play on your emotions. These lessons and stories are not designed to make you sad; they are designed to give you information to make you think so you can gain wisdom and understanding. Let me repeat:

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

Wisdom is more important to you than money. Some of the richest people I know 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.

God has a phenomenal plan for you. 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, and have radio shows across America. This never dawned on me. I didn't know then that God had a plan for my life. You are also in God's plan. He has amazing plans for those who seek Him. 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*" in Proverbs 3:16? Do you want to live a long life? Of course, but how? Simple -- with wisdom and understanding you won't destroy yourself through your own 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.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace [not turmoil and conflict]. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her. 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. That's 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 lies of the cosmic vortex. Satan will steal your happiness and feed your bad decisions with lies and illusions. You will chase Satan's tricks looking for happiness, and you will never find it.

HEADS YOU WIN -- TAILS YOU LOSE

Happiness is an extension of 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 is part of testing we all go through. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says you will never be tested beyond what you can handle, "*God is faithful, He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.*" 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. If He is the one testing, then He will also give you the strength to pass the test. **Testing is not an excuse to lose your happiness.**

Happiness is the absence of anxiety. It does not look back at failures or get depressed at flaws. Jealous people are never happy. Symptoms of unhappy people are a sense of despondency, sadness, complaining, or dismay at the unexpected. Note Matthew 6:25-27, *“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?”* Unhappy people don’t use 1 Peter 5:7: *“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”*

How do you identify unhappy people? Unhappy people often try to hide their unhappiness behind a mask. You may hide it from friends, family, and teachers, but inside you are miserable. You feel like bursting out in tears because the unhappiness is overwhelming. Characteristics of unhappiness include insecurity, loneliness, moodiness, and depression. All this brings us to this 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; that **is not** what God says. The Satan-laid ugly guilt and shame are what lead 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 OK, 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, took pills... Then I prayed and 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, please don’t have a nervous breakdown; please don’t cry all the time. I don’t want you to. 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 comes complete with an RMA and sharing the happiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. This wonderful life is right here, waiting for you, but you must:

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 grace and in the 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. (Matthew 11:29)

This is where wisdom and understanding live – in God’s Word. God established His church so you can study and learn His Word from a qualified pastor.

When you reject this, you are left with empty hands and minds and Satan can easily slip in with his lures. Listen to God’s Word:

You neglected all My counsel and did not want My reproof. I will laugh at your calamity. I will mock 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 shall eat of the fruit of their own way and be satiated with their own devices. For the waywardness 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, your choices, your decisions. 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.

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? Do you have the guts to move forward and stand on God's Word? Do you have the guts to know God's Word by studying, learning, and growing? Do you have the guts to apply God's Word to your life? Without that desire, the guts, the positive volition toward God, 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. Be filled with the Holy Spirit through rebound -- that is your power. Study, grow, learn, and apply the Word of God -- that is your path to finding real happiness.

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

Happiness comes from a relaxed mental attitude (RMA)

Promises, the shield of faith, will protect you

Wisdom and understanding are the keys to happiness

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

Suffering or testing is not an excuse to be unhappy

Desperate people do desperate things

Have the guts to trust God

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Chapter 4

Countering the Lures of the Cosmic System



The cosmic system is Satan's strategy as the ruler of this world to control Christians. There are so many distractions and lures to send you running around in a frantic race to catch something, and you likely 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! He wants to lure you into the cosmic system. Just like that hidden hook will be the death of the fish, Satan will hook you into his cosmic system. You will self-destruct by means of your own arrogance. You know the path:

Arrogance leads to self-justification, self-deception, self-absorption, and finally certain 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 a lure comes along, suckering them, and off they go chasing another lie.

Grasp this, God's justice is clear--anyone who reads *Life's Toughest Years* has the opportunity to hear God's Word and gain wisdom and understanding, by studying and applying it. Right now, you can learn accurate truths from the Word of God. Whether you seize the opportunity or not, put it to good use or not, apply it to your

life or not, that's 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 made his choice. 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 falls 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 prodigal [wasteful, extravagant] living. (Luke 15:11-13)

So, here we have two brothers: Fric, the older, and Frac, the younger. You'll see later on it's pretty clear the older brother, 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 a 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 gave 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 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? They don't like you for who you are. They liked you for what you had. Be careful! Don't fall into that 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.

HEADS YOU WIN -- TAILS YOU LOSE

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. 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 belly 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. God knows this and knows what you are thinking right now. God put divine discipline in Frac's life to get him back on track (enforced humility).

**Divine discipline is intended to get your attention
so you will see the need 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 wood shed. God will discipline you in a way that hurts to get your attention. He will introduce pain, physical or emotional, in your life intended for only 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. You get into dying discipline as a result of your arrogance toward God, hating and ignoring God’s discipline, and rebelling toward God to the point God says, “OK, that’s it. You are gone from life in time.” You will go to heaven, but your 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 -- 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, sin, and fall under control of your sin nature, God expects you to humbly confess your sin to Him. Old Frac would have died in that pig sty 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 left your relationship with God, and you broke fellowship with Him. God never turned away from you. God still considers you as a part of His royal family. He still loves you. You are the one that left and turned your back on Him. 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 His fellowship.

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 coming 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.

God is patient with you. He is waiting on you to recognize you blew it, you made a mistake; and to choose to come back by confessing your sin. Here's a wonderful thing about God. Once you are introduced into God's royal family, He will never disown you. You are still His child. The Lord said:

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

I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my 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. Take the journey home. Go to the Father. Confess your sins. Return to fellowship with God and He will indeed hear your prayers. By confessing your sins, you are allowing the Holy Spirit to regain control of your life, and now your prayers will be heard, and you will get direction for your life.

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

**Name your sins to God and He is faithful and just to
forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness
(1 John 1:9)**

Back to Frac:

But 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 merry except for the older brother, Fric. The older brother 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. He represents organized religion, the very group that killed our Lord Jesus Christ. They hated Christ because He said, *“I and the Father are one. He who has seen me, has seen the Father”* (John 10:30; John 14:9). The Jewish religious leaders (organized religion) manipulated people all the time, and Christ called them on it. They hated Him for it. 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.” That is not what the Bible says. The Bible 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 lured away from God’s plan.

How do you identify lures of the cosmic vortex? How can you recognize that “invisible spirit of the times” which is always spinning out there, always calling you, always trying to lure you away? This is Satan’s strategy as the ruler of this world to control you. How does he control you? Through your thoughts and your emotions.

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

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. (Romans 12:3)

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

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Your life is what you think. Why? Because the Lord sees through the outer stuff, whether it's your beauty or tough guy image. He sees what you are thinking. He knows what is in your heart. You can hide it all from your parents; hide it from your friends, your teachers, the coach; but you cannot hide anything from God. The cosmic system wants you to forget this fact. Satan uses this strategy to lure you with attractive baits so he can control your thoughts.

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 up. 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. He will lure you into thinking the grass is greener on the other side. He will lead you away by seeking to convince 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 way #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. I believe God's Word is the Truth. I believe God's Word is the inspired Word straight from God. Only through learning and applying the Word of God 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**

God's living words to us are in the Bible

You 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. "*Greater is He that 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). These are the *later times*. People believe the lies from Satan about humanism, cultural diversity, and progressivism. They are all around us today. Many of Satan's lies seem to focus on changing the course of American history claiming everything from the past is wrong. Everything in the past that was once good is now evil, and everything that was once evil is now considered to be good. This is Satanic-demon influence pure and simple. If you buy into this, you buy the lies.

The Bible warns Christians not to be lured by Satan. 1 John 2:15-16 says, "*Do not love the world or 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, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.*" Satan knows how to trick you and exactly what lures to use; for example, through lust. Some people lust for sex, money, or power; and some lust for

attention, praise, or recognition. People may act arrogantly and self-righteously so others will notice them, give them attention because they are acting ‘so good’ (or at least they think they are). This is a tool Satan will use to lure you away from God’s plan. Satan will appeal to your lust pattern whatever it is.

I’ve learned there are people you can’t trust with your money, some can’t be trusted with your girlfriend/boyfriend, the list goes on and on. There are many different lust areas that can destroy the trust others have in you. Be wise. Don’t love the world, and don’t love the things of this world, the lust of the flesh. Stay away from those things that lure you away from the plan of God for your life.

**Where do you get direction for your life?
Does your thinking come from
human viewpoint or divine viewpoint?**

You have two clear choices to get your direction in life. Does your direction (thinking) come from human viewpoint, the cosmic system of Satan’s lies that fuel your arrogance? Or does your direction (thinking) come from God’s Word that appeals to your sense of humility?

Read what the Bible says about this in James 4:6-8:

He gives a greater grace. 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.

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 being face to face with our 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 funny -- when you are twelve or thirteen, you worry about what people think of you; when you are eighteen, you really don't care what people think about you; and 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 teenager, He studied and learned Scripture. By age twelve, Jesus had impressed everyone with His knowledge of the Bible. The Bible 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
--

Let's look at Matthew 4:1-11 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.

The temptation of Jesus by Satan occurred after He had fasted for 40 days and nights. Jesus was weak and hungry, and Satan came to tempt Him. It was a test He had to pass. If you want to grow up as a Christian, you will have to pass some test also. God will test your faith. When Jesus was weak and 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 the very Word 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 like you need to do today.

Counter the lures of the world with God’s Word

Then what happened? Satan quoted Scripture, “Throw Yourself on those rocks, for it is written, the angels will minister to you.” Caution: Lots of people will quote Scripture, often out of context. Organized religion can quote Scripture twisting it every direction 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 too, if you will learn Scripture and use it.

**Use Scripture, the Word of God
It worked for the Lord Jesus Christ, it will work for you!**

There are over 7000 promises in the Bible. These are as good as money in the bank! Yes, there’s a catch. You must learn and apply them in your life. Then you are armed to defeat the attacks that Satan 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 7000 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 for public ridicule. This promise will uphold you during those times of testing:

No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; 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. The devil is the ruler of this world, and he took control at the fall of Adam. He is the god of this world. Satan's claim is legit per the Bible, "*the god of the 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 knew this trick and He said, "*No! Away with you Satan.*" Using Scripture, Jesus says, "*It is written, worship the Lord your God only.*"

It is written is used three times as a sure defense against the three temptations of Satan. Three times Jesus responded with Scripture. This is why the Bible is so important to you. The devil was defeated, and he fled. *Then angels came and ministered to Jesus.* And guess what, you have angels watching over you, too. The Bible calls them *ministering spirits*, also known as guardian angels.

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

I remember one time I was driving home from a speaking engagement, and I went through this little town in Georgia. 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 beside 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 someone was definitely looking out for me. God will never forsake you. Even through the toughest of times, He will not leave you.

God will always be there for you

You may have left God and walked away from Him. Here is your chance right now to get it right. You can have fellowship with God by faith in Jesus Christ. Accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior is the single most important decision you will ever make. The Bible says, *"it is appointed once to die, then the judgement"* (Hebrews 9:27). By then it's too late. This decision is one you can't ignore or put off. You need to decide now. And it's really so simple. *"Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved"* (Romans 10:13). Just ask, He will save you. He loves you even if you have been a jerk. John 3:16 is so important: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

God put this book in your hands so you would have this opportunity to come home to the Father. He has given you His Son so you can have eternal security. He has given you His Word so you can learn and apply it in your life. Use God's Resources, the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to counter the lures of the cosmic system, and thrive during life's toughest years.

Let's review:

COUNTERING THE 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 lures of the world with God's Word

Where do you get direction for your life?

Cosmic system (human viewpoint)

God's Word (divine viewpoint)

For prayers to be heard and answered, be in fellowship with
God and filled with the Holy Spirit (confess sin)

God's Word, the Bible, is Truth

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

Christians have guardian angels

God's grace is amazing

God will always be there for you

Heads You Win - Tails You Lose

YOU ARE WHAT YOU THINK

Bad Decisions Limit Future Options

Chapter 5

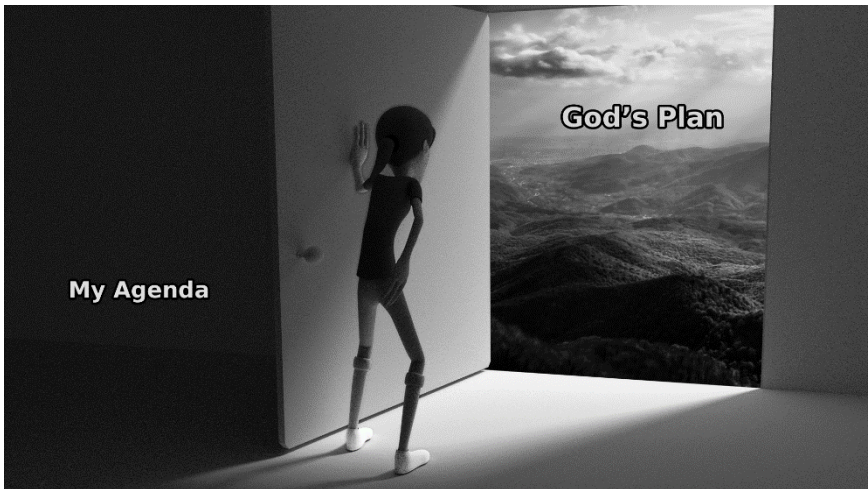
Fulfilling Your Destiny



Why do we study the Bible? Why pay attention to it? Why devote time and energy 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 tough times! It's up to you. You can have a full and wonderful life if you walk through the door, leaving your own agenda behind, and walk into God's very special plan for your life. This is called your personal sense of destiny.



Your destiny is God's special plan for your life

You live 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 specific plan for you? The answer is an exciting Yes!

Ladies, God has selected the man you should marry. 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 openly 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 people 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 he's a good kisser or she's a good cook. So, 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 that, nor do they 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 to open the way for you and your potential spouse. If you will follow His plan, marriage will exceed your expectations. That's your personal sense of destiny in only one area of your life.

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 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 serving God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ by presenting truth from Scripture to young people in as many schools as He opens doors and to listeners on as many radio stations as possible. That's my priority. At one point in life, I had to make a decision -- do I want to be a 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.

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

Every problem has a solution – every issue has a resolution. Isn't this encouraging? For young people, planning what to do after high school can be stressful, a problem. 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 Scripture? There's only one catch – you must read, learn, and apply God's Word and wait for God to show you the solutions.

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. The Bible shines a bright light toward the right path for each of us.

Every problem has a solution in the Bible
The Bible is a light that makes the right path clear

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 best 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, and a conscience. 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. Look at it this way. If you are not a Christian, you have a body, a soul and a dead (dormant,

doesn't work) 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 are now body, soul, and spirit. At physical death, the old body dies, and the soul and the spirit go to heaven where a Christian will receive a new body, a resurrection body. This new body will never be sick or grow old; it is a perfect body for all eternity -- forever.

If you are not a Christian when you die, the alternative is bad. *"It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgement"* (Hebrews 9:27). *"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 you refuse to believe in Christ, you leave God no alternative. He sent His Son to die for you, to take your place. *"He who knew no sin became sin for you"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). The justice of God judged Jesus Christ on the cross for all sin, including yours and mine, so sin is not the issue. If you refuse to accept Christ, then the justice of God has to judge you. He will send you to the Lake of Fire not because He wants to and not because He doesn't love you. It is because He has no choice. You rejected the forgiveness He offered to you in Christ, the ultimate wonderful problem solver for the future.

The other area of your life where you can get off track is if you have apathy or indifference. 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 answers are in the Bible. Studying the Word of God and giving it to you in an understandable way is the job of your pastor. If he accurately teaches the Bible and you consistently learn, then you'll get information that highlights your choices. The Bible shows you what your choices are in life, *"If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourself whom you will serve...; but for me and my house, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15).

Your Choices = Your Life

To discover God's plan for your life, you must learn to emphasize and prioritize your relationship with God over your personal relationships with people. This is the most important thing for you to understand. **Your personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ must be first**, not your relationship with your friends.

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. 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 letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so if he found any who was 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, Sir?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." So, he, trembling and astonished, 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 directions. 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 actually 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. Satan wants you to remember your mistakes. What does the Bible say? “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). 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. It’s not an issue.” 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 those things behind. As Paul said, “I forgot the mistakes I made. I forgot what’s behind me. I press forward toward the call of the prize in Christ Jesus.” Paul had an RMA.

Forget the past... Press forward

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)

Correct prayer can be a source of peace. It’s good to pray, but you can pray the wrong way. Prayers done in the wrong way will not be heard nor 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 the sin nature (out of the bottom circle). The right prayer now is confession of sin so you will be restored to fellowship. Then the Holy Spirit can control your life, pray with you, and guide you.

Here's an example. Deacon Jones hates Deacon Smith. They had a business deal together that went sour. They 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 ministry of the Holy Spirit.

There is a proper mode of prayer. You never pray to Jesus. You pray to the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the proper procedure for all prayer.

<p style="text-align: center;">PROTOCOL FOR PRAYER Pray to the Father In the name of Jesus Christ Through the power of the Holy Spirit</p>
--

If you follow this proper procedure for prayer, *be anxious for nothing, God can, and will, give you peace*. What does this mean? God will give you confidence to trust Him. He is with you... will lead you... will guide you...will take care of you. Remember:

<p style="text-align: center;">Your objective is to leave your agenda behind and walk into God's perfect plan for your life</p>
--

Every Christian has a 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 some may even have a talent. The talent and the gift are not the same thing. Some people

can play the piano, sing, dance, or write – they have talent. It's 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. This is something God gives you as a gift so that you can serve Him.

A spiritual gift is something God gives you to serve Him

Check me out: I have a gift of evangelism. I didn't ask for it; I didn't want it, deserve it, or even know what it was. But back in the 1970s, a friend and I started this 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 years, and I've been doing evangelism for over fifty 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 pastors, teachers, administrators, missionaries, 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 and find your destiny, you'll drift down the My Way Highway until you run out of options. When the options dwindle to nothing, your state of hopelessness will lead you to consider stupid things, illegal things, end-it-all 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. Then you got a Bible and became a spiritual student. You go to church, you listen to a qualified pastor, and you start to grow up. Eventually, you become a spiritual adult. This is a

Christian who is prepared and ready to serve the Lord. It's a process. This is not overnight delivery; it doesn't happen with a click on a computer. It takes time and commitment. You can listen to all the praise and worship music you want, but you will never grow just listening to music. The only way to grow as a Christian is to study God's Word, learn it, and apply it to your life. A catchy way to remember this is LAG – Learn, Apply, and Glorify the Lord.

**The only way to grow as a Christian is
to study, learn, and apply God's Word, the Bible**

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

The more you learn and grow, the more you will develop your personal sense of destiny. 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.

**If you can trust God with your life
You can trust Him with the details – have faith**

If you want to know and to live God's destiny for your life, then you need to have faith. This means you must trust God to do what He says He will do. It won't happen with a snap of the fingers. Be patient: "*Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him*" (Psalm 37:7). As you study, grow, learn, and wait, God will show you what He has for you. Don't get impatient or get ahead of the Lord; that's a common mistake. Don't push when it's time to wait. If you charge ahead, you are impetuous. When you are impetuous as a Christian, you'll do things that aren't necessary and often end up being a waste of time and energy. Many, like me, had to learn this the hard way. I wanted to do stuff for God, but I had to learn to shut up and wait until God showed me what to do instead running ahead trying to direct God toward my plans. Your personal sense of destiny becomes reality when you grow up as a Christian.

Your destiny, God's plan for your life, is so great it will counter any troublesome thing that lies in your future any problem, heartache, uncertainty, or adversity

Let's discuss three stages you experience as you grow. When you are born, you must grow up as a human. This means that 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 or grandma to clean up after you, something is seriously wrong. You must learn to take responsibility for your mistakes and clean up your own messes. If you expect someone to bail you out when you keep making mistakes, you have a flaw. You need to grow up, learn to discipline yourself, and take responsibility for your life. Are you tired of others nagging and correcting you, trying to teach you through discipline? 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, daddy and mommy 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 take responsibility for your actions.

The next stage of growth is developing as a Christian. In Hebrews we read, *"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]"* (Hebrews 11:14). This is a huge challenge for pastors. Some people in the congregation need a steak while others still need the bottle. If you give them something that's too advanced, they choke on it. You must grow up as a Christian; that means studying, learning, and applying 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.

The third stage of growth may be marriage. During your courtship and after marriage, you must grow up together. You need to learn, grow, and understand your role and responsibilities as a

husband and father, or your role and responsibilities as a wife and a mother.

As you grow, recognize there are three categories of God's will for your life. The first one is the **directive will of God**. This is what God wants you to do when you are in fellowship with Him. The second one, the **permissive will of God**, 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, He won't stop you. Sampson is a perfect example from the Bible. 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. Finally, when 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, "*God, please 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 thousand 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. God was vindicated. The third category is the **overruling will of God**. This means that sometimes God steps in and stops you from self-destruction. He may overrule some of your dangerous decisions.

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 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 simple: "*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? When you learn and apply His Word, He will use your spiritual gift and talents, direct your life, and show you what you should be.

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 understand God's will for your life.

**Divine guidance comes from learning
and following God's will for your life**

Is there a way to know for sure where God wants you to be and what God wants you to do? 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 that 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. You are given three lights to guide you. If you will keep these lights aligned with your task, you will make it safely to the dock.

**Witness of God's Word
Witness of Circumstances
Witness of the Holy Spirit**

Here are the three lights for guidance in the Christian way of life: Witness of God's Word; Witness of Circumstances; and Witness of the Holy Spirit. Light number one is the **Witness of God's Word**. God will talk to you and direct you by His Word, the Bible. This is what happened to me. I was in a group; we were sitting around 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 what my destiny was to be. It was the witness of God's

Word that sent me back 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. Light number two is the **Witness of Circumstances**. At Alabama, my college tuition was paid for by scholarship to play football. Bible college costs money; lots of money I didn’t have. 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 third light is the **Witness of the Holy Spirit**. This is peace and contentment from knowing you are on the right path, doing the right thing.

God will lead you toward your destiny. He will speak through His Word; circumstances will work for you; and the Holy Spirit will give you peace. The three guides will work for you. If you get impatient, however, manipulate things according to your plan, or try to push doors open that were closed, you won’t be aligned 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)

Something about Jesus Christ was so compelling, so majestic, so powerful, the fishermen immediately walked away from everything they had ever known to follow Him. You may have heard about Jesus Christ your whole life, but have you accepted Him as your Savior? Receiving Christ is life changing, starting on the inside, *“For as he thinks within himself, so he is”* (Proverbs 23:7). Your eternal destiny changes, and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, you now have the opportunity to live a new, different life. By leaving your agenda behind, just like the disciples did, and walking into God’s plan; by learning and applying God’s Word, your new

life will emerge. The Bible says, *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Do you want to know the will of God for you? Learn and apply these three verses:

Study to show yourself approved to 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 lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11: 28-30)

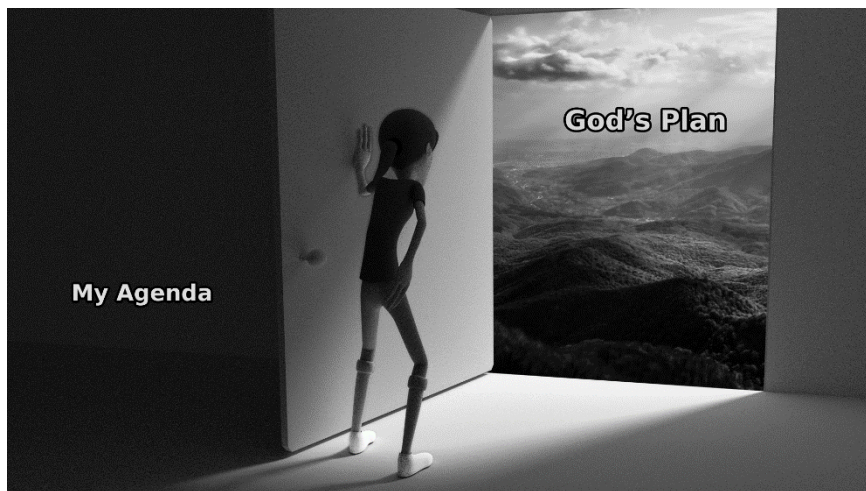
God guides you through His words, His thoughts as recorded in the Bible. Study... Grow... Learn to understand God's will for you.

Think about this. What has God asked of you? Become a missionary, and go to the jungles of Africa? No. Give up everything you have, and go live among the monks? No. What does God want you to do? Study. Grow. Learn. *My yoke is easy; my burden is light.* God is not asking you to do anything you can't do. It's not hard. Until you pursue and find your destiny, you will never truly be happy. You will be frustrated.

Remember how we started our discussion? God gave you two ends – one to sit on and one to think with. Success in life depends on which one you use.

HEADS YOU WIN -- TAILS YOU LOSE

Thank you for staying with me and finishing the book. Now you know more about God and how you can apply His Resources to thrive during life's toughest years. Life is a journey. God's Word is the guide. All I can do is give you principles to point you to God's Way. You must decide on 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 thought possible.

Go for It -- Seize your Destiny!

FULFILLING YOUR DESTINY



Your destiny is God's special plan for your life

Do you live by priorities or follow your passions?

Your relationship with God must come first in your life

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

God gives you a spiritual gift to serve Him

Learn... Apply... Glorify the Lord [LAG]

Checkpoints for understanding God's 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

God's plan will overcome any adversity in your life

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

**Leave your own agenda behind
Walk into God's Plan**

Rick welcomes hearing from you!
Let him know what you think about *Life's Toughest Years*



Contact Rick or request information via:

Rick Hughes Evangelistic Ministries, Inc.
P.O. Box 100
Cropwell, Alabama 35054-0100
www.rickhughesministries.org
800-831-0718

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.

Additional Books by Rick Hughes
A Divine Pardon
Understanding Your Soul
Practicing Your Christianity
A Crash Course in Basic Christianity
Christian Problem Solving Workbook

For other accurate Bible studies contact:

Berachah Church
2815 Sage Road
Houston, Texas 77056-6002
www.berachah.org
713-622-6922

R.B. Thieme Jr., Bible Ministries
P.O. Box 460829
Houston, Texas 77056-8829
www.rbthieme.org
713-621-3740

Financial Policy: There is no charge for any material from Berachah Church or R.B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries. Anyone who desires Bible teaching can receive our publications, DVDs, and MP3 CDs without obligation. God provides Bible doctrine. We wish to reflect His grace.

RICK HUGHES, founder and President of Rick Hughes Evangelistic Ministries, Inc., communicates clear and concise Biblical principles for hearers to choose to use in their lives. For over 50 years, Rick has presented the truth to thousands of students and spoken at hundreds of schools and churches. Rick has authored several books and hosts a weekly radio broadcast, *The FLOT Line*, all available, for free, 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 shot put and discus. The University of Florida signed Rick to 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, got a second chance, entered the University of Alabama as a football player under the training of prestigious coach Paul “Bear” Bryant, and won a national championship that year. After just one successful year, however, Rick quit school, and drifted down the My Way Highway. Rick emphasizes bad decisions limit future options. Many of Rick’s personal experiences help to vividly teach this principle to the reader who currently faces life-changing decisions during life’s toughest years.

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 wildest dreams. “For with God, nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

LIFE'S TOUGHEST YEARS

presents information you can use to orient and adjust to your circumstances, and to make decisions on how you want to live. If you choose to apply the principles, you’ll have what you need to thrive during life’s toughest years. Happiness depends on what is in your soul, not on people or circumstances. 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. “As a man thinketh 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.



Rick Hughes
EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES