

Letters to Robbie

Things You Should Know Before You Go Off to College



Introduction

What if you could send a letter to yourself back in time before something huge in your life occurred? Maybe it was a time write before something amazing was about to happen and so you wanted to let yourself know how to enjoy it just a little more. Or maybe it was a time when you were cut from the high-school baseball team and you wanted to let yourself know that life will go on even though you did not make the team. Or, maybe you had a tragedy in your life like the loss of a parent or a sibling and you wanted to let yourself know that God is still at work in your life and that somehow you picked up all the pieces of your shattered life and things are amazing. I don't know what you would say but I want to tell you that if I were to write to myself as a senior in high-school getting ready to go off to college, I would change a lot of things. I know my story is somewhat different from yours but I believe we all have a common backbone in experience and the "going to college" transition has not changed much in the eleven years that have elapsed since I graduated high-school. Just to "age-myself" I want you to look at some of the things that were important in 1999 that graduates now have no clue about:

- We brought CD players with us instead of I-Pods.
- Sperry's were not even popular.
- Most people wore a bunch of flannel shirts (not sure why).
- *SpongeBob Square pants* made its first debut.
- Napster debuts and people begin downloading music free (all be it illegally) on the internet.
- Britney Spears debuts with "Hit Me One More Time."
- Columbine Massacre occurs in 1999.
- Kings of Leon actually formed in 1999.

Some of that is useless information but some of it meant a lot to me at the time. Perhaps you are asking yourself, "What is the point of these 'letters' and how will they help me?" If you are reading this then you are either graduating or thinking about graduating from high-school. Advice is one of those things I do not take well and so someone *telling* me advice is about as effective as putting a fire out with gasoline. However, I do appreciate someone else sharing life experiences with me and discussing how those experiences shaped their lives positively and negatively. But is getting advice a bad thing? Consider these verses¹:

- The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man **listens to advice** (Prov. 12:15).
- Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those **who take advice** (Prov. 13:10).
- **Listen to advice** and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise (Prov. 19:20).

1. All Scripture will come from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.

→ Make plans by **seeking advice**; if you wage war, obtain guidance (Prov. 20:18).

DISCUSSION QUESTION: WHAT DOES EACH OF THESE VERSES SAY IN REGARDS TO ADVICE? WHAT ARE SOME ISSUES THAT DETER US FROM ACCEPT/RECEIVING ADVICE?

If you are still confused as to why we should have a study focused specifically for high-school seniors consider the research below done by the Barna Group:

At the same time, the Barna research underscores how fleeting that influence may be: twenty-somethings continue to be the most spiritually independent and resistant age group in America. Most of them pull away from participation and engagement in Christian churches, **particularly during the "college years."** The research shows that, compared to older adults, twenty-somethings have significantly lower levels of church attendance, time spent alone studying and reading the Bible, volunteering to help churches, donations to churches, Sunday school and small group involvement, and use of Christian media (including television, radio and magazines).

In fact, the most potent data regarding disengagement is that a majority of twenty-somethings - 61% of today's young adults - had been churched at one point during their teen years **but they are now spiritually disengaged** (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying). Only one-fifth of twenty-somethings (20%) have maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences. Another one-fifth of teens (19%) were never significantly reached by a Christian community of faith during their teens and have remained disconnected from the Christian faith.

For most adults, this pattern of disengagement is not merely a temporary phase in which they test the boundaries of independence, but is one that continues deeper into adulthood, with those in their thirties also less likely than older adults to be religiously active. Even the traditional impulse of parenthood - when people's desire to supply spiritual guidance for their children pulls them back to church - is weakening. The new research pointed out that just one-third of twenty-somethings who are parents regularly take their children to church, compared with two-fifths of parents in their thirties and half of parents who are 40-years-old or more (emphasis added).²

My first impulse is to ask why so many people are leaving the church after spending so much time in it? As a youth minister I could tell you the names of

DISCUSSION QUESTION: WHY DO YOU THINK SO MANY PEOPLE LEAVE THE CHURCH AFTER HIGH-SCHOOL?

2. The Barna Group, "Most Twenty-somethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years," (Ventura, CA: Barna, 2006): <<http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years>> Accessed March 5, 2010.



“I have different views about God now Robbie. I still believe in Him but so many things have changed.” (Former Youth Group Member)

people who were once leaders in my youth group but now do not

attend a church of any kind. I ask the question, “What is going on?” Have we failed somewhere? Could I have done something in my ministry to them that would have made them stay faithful? What if I would have done this or what if I would have done that; would that have saved them? Or is it simply their fault? We preach and teach that it is your responsibility to remain faithful and once you have been taught right from wrong it is up to you to make the choice. You are simply products of the choices you have made.

I think we should take a step back and perhaps (somewhat **boldly** I would say) we both need to accept blame. Relationships are never a one-way street and when a relationship fails it is because both parties were not fully doing their responsibility. I understand people get angry at the Church and say mean things about her with a tone of cynicism and sarcasm. I get that. But a church does not need to ignore the people entirely just because of a few accusations from an embittered heart. Those accusations, perhaps, are the outpourings of an exposed disease in a person’s heart. After all, hurt people, hurt people.

But what if we could prevent that? What if we could avoid the situations altogether by having a plan at which we will be able to stay firm in our beliefs while

being flexible at what is out there? Would you be interested?

Proverbs 29:18 in the

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Henry de Bracton, 13th century.

King James says, **“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”** The word for vision could mean divine guidance and the word for perish literally means people are left hanging. We are simply puppets hanging on a string if we have no clear plan in life. I would venture to say that many of us fall away from the faith because we have no plan to process what is out there.³

So what I have done is I have written different letters to myself addressing different topics like: faith, relationships, trust, finances, politics, churches, studying, health, etc. I originally wanted to entitle this, “I wish I would have know this when I was your age,” but it did not flow as well. I remembered a blog post by a friend of mine named Justin Gerhardt who wrote a letter to his seventeen year old self and I thought how therapeutic that would be for a youth minister to do the same thing except create some lessons from it.⁴ These are discussion based and spend a lot of time wrestling with some Scriptures on this. It is geared mostly towards preventing things from

3. When I say “out there” I simply mean life on your own away from your parents. Some go to the military, some go to college, some go to work and some take a break from it altogether. I am speaking to life after the sheltered state known as high-school. I dare not assume that all of you have not already been on your own but I simply mean life after high-school. It is the time in your lives when you have the most amount of freedom and the least amount of accountability.

4 . Check it out at <http://justingerhardt.tumblr.com/post/268999504/my-letter-to-17-year-old-justin>



happening but it also spends time teaching seniors how to make the most of their senior year.

I will say that some of the letters will get personal and I only share these things so that you will be able to learn from them and change or adapt. Below is a portion of a song by Rod Stewart that stuck in my head when I first heard it and thought you would benefit from.

*Poor old Granddad
I laughed at all his words
I thought he was a bitter man
He spoke of women's ways
They trap you, then they use you
Before you even know
For love is blind and you're far too kind
Don't ever let it show*

*I wish that I knew what I know now
When I was younger.
I wish that I knew what I know now
When I was stronger.*

Homework Assignment! I want you to go home and write a letter to your 8th grade self. Specifically it is the summer after your 8th grade year but before you start high-school. Think about what you would say and why you would say it. What advice would you give yourself to help you make it through the high-school years. This will help you focus on what is most important which is probably the last thing you thought about when you were going into high-school. Be honest in this exercise and be prepared to share your letter in class.

Lesson #1: It's Not About You!

Dear Robbie,

It has been a while since we have talked so I thought I would write you a letter to know how things are going and maybe give you a little advice. I know you hate advice but I think this will help since I have learned from your mistakes. Things are crazy right now as I am working as a youth minister for a church in Springfield, Tennessee. I know this is hard to believe as you probably think that the last thing you would ever do is work and relate with teenagers. I will admit that sometimes it is tough and there are those days I really question what I am doing but it is totally worth it. You are also married but don't get your hopes up, it's not the girl you're dating right now (that's another long letter I will write to you later). Also, be prepared for this, you have four kids who are 4 and under. Don't freak out though Robbie, you will be able to make it through this I promise. It is a good thing. But that brings me to my point of writing you this, life is not about you. I know you are gearing up to go to college and you have your whole summer of fun ahead of you. I know your life is weird right now since you have become a Christian and you are still trying to figure out who you are. I understand that and respect that but Robbie, it's not about you. Look at the whole of your life that you have led up to this point and how much of it has been about you? If you are honest with your answer Robbie, all of it has been about you. All of the trouble you have caused has come from your selfishness. The broken relationships that have plagued your every step have come from your own narcissistic tendencies. I know Robbie, everybody does it. I also know that the "youth group" you watch at the church you attend is just as selfish (if not more) than some of your friends who do not go to church. I know that is messed up. But you must set an example. You are getting better at this but it is something you will wrestle with the rest of your life. I still struggle with it. Please hear me out Robbie and trust me that this is something you need to listen to me about. If you master yourself, you master the world. I (I guess "we" but you know what I mean Robbie) have 5 people in my family that count on me to help them in this crappy world we live in. I have 30 kids or so that are watching my every move to see how I will respond to life's difficult circumstances. Robbie, it's not about you.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

You look at society and it becomes clear that people are extensively selfish and consider only what is best for them. But this has not been a new thing when it comes to the people of God. There are many instances of selfishness in the Old and New Testaments that come to mind as examples of people who sought only what was right for themselves:



DISCUSSION QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SELFISHNESS IN OUR SOCIETY?

- Cain, in Genesis 4, killed his brother because he thought he deserved what belonged to him.
- David was selfish when he looked at Bathsheba and desired to take her for his own (2 Samuel 11).
- Rehoboam was selfish when he refused to listen to the advice of his elders yet listened to the advice of his friends and the result divided the entire (1 Kings 11).
- James and John were examples of selfishness when they wanted to sit on the places of honor with Jesus (Mark 10:37).
- Simon the Magician, who was converted in Samaria, saw the apostles performing miracles and wanted to purchase the gift himself with money (Acts 8:18-19).

One of the greatest diseases is to be nobody to anybody.

Mother Teresa

I guess we could come up with so many more examples from Scripture. I firmly believe that the world's problems are a direct result of the selfish choices we have made along



the way. Think about every issue major battle or major contention in history and you will find (usually one man) that the core issue is nothing more than selfishness. William Gladstone (1809-1998) was a former Prime Minister of Great Britain and once said, "Selfishness is the greatest curse of the human race." Gladstone was on to something but the apostle Paul already knew this when he said, ***"all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God"*** (Romans 3:23). The Greek word for sin (*hamartia*) means to literally "miss the mark" so Paul is making a bold statement when he says that no matter how hard the human race tries, they will fail and continually miss the mark. It is the frustration of a bow-an-arrow specialist who tries to hit the target but every single time he misses the target. At the core, I guess, we are all selfish aren't we? I guess there are some who, ***"care only for themselves and not for what matters to***

Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:21).

The Scripture is against selfishness as it is a contradiction of sorts since being a Christian means we are a part of the church (which is a group). Take a look at some of the Scriptures below that speak against selfishness:



- “Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. **Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money.** Yet they lean upon the LORD and say, “Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us.” Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.” (Micah 3:9-12).
- “For everyone **who exalts himself** will be humbled” (Luke 18:14).
- “**Do nothing out of selfish ambition** or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Phil 2:3).
- “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not **be conceited**” (Rom. 12:16).
- “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be **lovers of themselves**, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.” (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

DISCUSSION QUESTION: WHY DO YOU THINK GOD’S WORD IS ENTIRELY AGAINST HIS FOLLOWERS BEING SELFISH? WHAT IMPLICATIONS DOES THAT HAVE ON OUR SPIRITUALITY? OUR CHURCHES?

Life after high-school becomes so complicated and difficult. Paradoxically, you are making choices that affect your life but it is never simply about your life. It is about something else bigger than your life! In his monumental work *Crazy Love* Francis Chan says that, “The point of our lives is to point to him.” He says that we live our lives as if we are the main part of the story. We want a God who caters to our needs, our desires, our plans, our ways and our dreams. Often our prayer lives reflect just how selfish we can truly be. It is like we are telling God what we want and then saying, “God, I hope you get on board with what I have planned for us.” One of the most misinterpreted Scriptures I hear at graduation speeches is Jeremiah 29:11, *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*

The problem with that verse is that we skip the context and assume that God is speaking to *us* about the prosperity. Jeremiah 29:4 says that he is speaking *specifically*



to those who are in exile in Babylon. Verse 8 says that they are not to let the prophets and diviners deceive them because the Lord God did not send these false prophets. God also told the exilic (fancy word meaning those in exile) community of Israel that they were going to endure being in exile for seventy years and *then* God would come to them to fulfill His promises. The plans for the people to prosper would come after they suffered for the selfish choices they had made as a nation. I doubt that at graduation someone would read this verse with the understanding that to receive the blessings of prosperity they just may have to suffer for it.

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.*

*"As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

Isaiah 55:8-9

DISCUSSION QUESTION: WHAT ARE SOME PRINCIPLES WE CAN HOLD ON TO THAT WILL HELP US REMAIN UNSELFISH IN THIS WORLD?

Principle #1 - The Greatest Commands

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt. 22:36-39).

To love God means you must love others and vice-versa. It is not a one-way street. In fact, notice what he says in verse 39 where he says *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* It is not bad to recognize how incredibly important you are as creatures of God (Gen. 1:26-28) but we are to love others like we love ourselves. Jesus recognized that we are selfish beings so he says that there are three commands: Love God, love others and love yourself. These are the greatest commands. When you go to college or wherever you go after high-school do you find yourself doing things based on a love of God and love of others or is it simply a selfish love that is self-seeking and baseless? This is an important question to ask.

Principle #2 - Humble Yourself

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (James 4:10).



“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:18).

Often we need a good slice of humble pie. It is hard if you are a teenager with good looks, an attractive personality, nice clothes, a decent car and your own credit card to appropriately understand humility. But know that if you base your identity on shallow things like physical attraction or clothes you wear, the older and older you get the more and more disappointed you will be. You are nothing! I know that sounds harsh but you are 1 in 150,000,000,000 people that have ever walked this planet and to think that you are more important than every person that has ever walked this planet is as selfish a thought as you could imagine. I don't know about you but I get tired of seeing coaches leave programs for more money and more esteem and more this and more that. Rarely do you find a coach who stays because it is the right thing to do.



Principle #3 - Seek to Serve

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Rom. 12:3-8).

Wherever you go and whatever you do make sure you are serving God in some capacity. What do you have to offer this world that nobody has like you do? Is it the ability to lead singing for a church that has only 30 members in it? Is it the ability to teach a toddler class in an education program at a church where you go to school? Maybe you can lead a Bible study for your dorm room or even your floor. Or maybe it is simply serving Christ everyday in unique capacities like helping a restaurant when there is trash everywhere or maybe a beautiful smile to a cashier whose day has been horrible.

*“I will spend all of my heaven,
doing good, while on earth.”*

Dorothy Day

Find something to do wherever you go but make sure you are a part of a church. A lot of people are cynical against the church pointing to her many character flaws and how things should be run that way and I can't believe the church wouldn't let us do that thing. Rubbish! Since when is the church about you friend? I believe in a God who is inviting me to participate in His church but that same God will still continue to bless the church long after I am gone!!! Matter-of-fact, God has done a good job so far in spite of my help! You cannot criticize something if you have no solution at how to address your criticism.

Homework Assignment: Do some research about the college you are going to attend or the places you think you will be and discover different churches in the area. Look at websites and click on different programs for each church. Then, write down a list of areas you think you would like to be involved in when you go to that church. Be specific and we will discuss this next week!

Lesson #2: Not Everybody is Right!

Dear Robbie,

How are things going in your life? I would say that things here are calm but that is simply not true as there is always something to do and always something to occupy my time. I want to prepare you for something that is going to happen to you this summer that will throw you for a loop but you have to prepare yourself. At the time, you will not know what to say but I want you to be strong nonetheless. One of your relatives is going to confront you about your faith and it is going to be earth-shattering for you. This person will question the validity of what you believe proposing that it is arrogant that you assume you are right and so many are wrong. "How can you say something like that?" is what this person will ask you in front of 15 or so of your cousins who will look at you waiting for an answer. You will not say anything and you will be embarrassed. I want to tell you something though Robbie that may provide a little comfort. Like most embarrassing moments in your life, they do not cause you to go into a corner and cry but it propels you and drives you to search even deeper. Some people turn away from a challenge but if you look at your life you have not been one to back down from challenges. You will go to Freed-Hardeman University with little to no knowledge of Scripture or even God himself but again, you will rise to the occasion and it will be fine. But it will be difficult. Not everybody is right Robbie. It will take some humility on your part to admit that you will not be right about everything and you will see that other people are not right as well. Does that mean truth is not attainable? Of course not! It simply means that you must search for the answers instead of accepting what everybody says. That also means that what your parents taught you may not be completely right. That will be a hard truth to confront but your parents would tell you that not everything they do or say is right. The problem in the 21st century now is that so many people are sacred to let someone know they are doing or believing in something that is wrong or incorrect. "P.C." or politically correct, says you cannot say things that make people feel uncomfortable which I can respect up to a point but at a deeper level you have to be able to look at an action and say it is wrong. Does that make sense? I know this is a lot to think about but hopefully you will listen to me. I am proud of you Robbie. You are so young and immature but you will get better. I will write you next week about life's struggles.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

If you were to ask people if truth is attainable you would probably get as many

answers to that question as the people you ask. As I look at all of the different philosophies, religions and even denominations I have often asked the question: "How could there be so many different views on truth?" I mean, who is right? Furthermore, by what standard can we judge where people are right and where people are wrong? The terrain out there is difficult and depending on your exposure it can be a daunting task to weigh what is true and what is false. In college there are different ideologies religiously, politically and socially. It is so much more than defending the existence of God (although this is a crucial part of it) but it is about not "buying-in" to everything people tell you. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, ***"Nothing in the world is more dangerous than a sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity."*** Think about that for a second. Paul said, in 2 Corinthians 1:8, that he did not want the Corinthians to be ignorant but the same could be applied to us today. I want you to know that you can know truth and that there is such a thing.

*"Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance."
(Confucius)*

*"The greatest ignorance is to reject something you know nothing about."
(Anonymous)*

Truth is not something that man makes up but truth must come from a higher authority. Why? Let's think about this for a minute: what if it were left up to man to be the mediator of truth? What if we were responsible for regulating what was right and what was wrong? The logical end to that discussion will eventually lead one to a Judges 21:25 mindset where ***"Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."*** Have you ever had a conversation like this?

SKEPTIC: I don't believe that there is a universal right or wrong and for you to say that there is such a thing is closed-minded.

YOU: Are you sure about that? So when the Nazi's exterminated an estimated 6 million Jews was that right or wrong?

SKEPTIC: Obviously that was wrong!

YOU: Based on what? Because **according to Hitler** and many in the Nazi regime what they were doing was morally acceptable. That was **their** right and **their** wrong. So if there is no universal right or wrong then it seems you cannot say it was wrong because you are being, well, closed-minded.

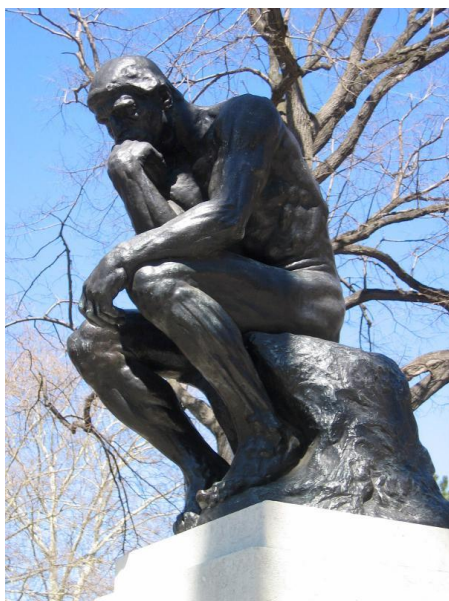
It just does not make sense to say that each person is entitled to believe whatever they want to believe in. That is not politically correct but who said that God was ever "politically" correct. Psalm 145:18 says, ***"The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."*** I went to Freed-Hardeman University which is a private Christian university but I have many discussions with people who go to public universities and sometimes they are confronted with some of the most difficult questions

about religion and philosophy. I have heard at Christians who were laughed at when they stated that the Big Bang Theory was false and God created the earth. I have heard of Christians who were scorned at because they stated that God was responsible for intelligent life forms and not primordial soup or macro-evolution.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Have you ever had discussions with your friends about truth, God and right and wrong? What were they like? How did you respond to their arguments?

J. Budziszewski wrote an excellent book called *How to Stay Christian in College* and he states that there are nine myths when it comes to the search for knowledge.⁵

Myth Number One: Thinking you know the truth is arrogant and intolerant.



Isn't it an arrogant claim and intolerant claim to say that in the first place? I have noticed that people do not like Christians because they say that they are intolerant yet isn't it ironic to say that since they the one thing "tolerant" people say they cannot "tolerate" is intolerant people? What is wrong with believing in something and having evidence to support that belief? When my daughter Madelyn had an ear-infection and we were told to wear masks in the doctor's office because of the H1N1 scare we did not scream at them and state that they were intolerant. We wore the masks. "But the Swine Flu was a matter of *fact* not *opinion* like God and truth." Wouldn't you say that people argue over whether Swine Flu was real or opinion? Who gets to say one is true while the other is false? The *truth* is that it is just as much an arrogant claim to say that Christians are arrogant.

Myth Number Two: The important thing in life isn't having truth, but searching for it.

What does exactly mean? If we search for something that we can never attain then what is the point of that long search? I understand there are some things we may never know but God has revealed to us some truths about this world and about what to believe. Why would God create a world yet have us walk aimlessly around like puppets on a string?

5. J. Budziszewski, *How to Stay Christian in College*,(Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999): 68-77. There is also a 2004 edition which is pretty good but I do not have that in my library.

Myth Number Three: Faith hinders the search for truth because it gets in the way of reasoning.

Did someone land on the moon? “Yes!” How do you know? Did you talk to them? Did you go with them? “Well, no, but we have pictures.” How do you know those pictures were not fabricated? “I guess I just trust them.” Another word for trust is “faith” and it actually works alongside of the search for truth. We all trust things to be true based on certain sources and certain people.

Myth Number Four: There isn't any truth.

“Not ignorance, but ignorance of ignorance, is the death of knowledge.” Alfred North Whitehead

Myth Number Five: Maybe truth exists, but we can't find it.

Myth Number Six: Maybe we can find out some truth, but not about the biggest and most

important things.

Myth Number Seven: Truth is whatever you sincerely believe.

Myth Number Eight: Truth is whatever people accept—or whatever you can get them to swallow.

Myth Number nine: Truth is whatever works.

I hope you have learned a little about the importance of truth and the importance of seeking what is right! We need to be like the noble Bereans in Acts 17:11 who would search the Scriptures daily to test the validity of a person's belief. In college there are many people with as many different viewpoints. It is frustrating but not everybody can be right.

Homework Assignment: Think about a difficult time in your life when you had doubts about God. What was (or is) it like? Come next week ready to talk about those doubts.

Lesson #3: Out with Doubt!

Dear Robbie,

Last week we talked about the fact that there are rights and wrongs despite what people will try to tell you. This week's lesson is a little more difficult to talk about because you will not struggle with this for a long time. At this point in your life everything has been smooth sailing and you have not had to face much in the form of adversity. Life has not always been easy for you but it has been relatively smooth compared to what most people will endure. Something happened to me a couple of weeks ago that I never thought would happen. You remember Johnny don't you? He lived next door to us in Marietta, Georgia and it was only a couple of years ago since he passed away. I bet you wonder why I am even mentioning his name as you are probably "over it" but something will happen years into your ministry that will cause you to think about Johnny. Matter of fact, you did not really mourn or grieve for Johnny like you should have and this will come back to hurt you. You really don't know what happened to him do you? You don't know the whole story and that is probably the toughest thing for you to deal with on a consistent basis. Could you have said something? Could you have changed him if you never moved to Chattanooga? I have preached many times before that it was God's providence that I came to Chattanooga, went to Boyd-Buchanan School, met a Christian girl and went to Freed-Hardeman University but why me instead of Johnny? Why did I have to "make it" and Johnny was the one who passed away in such a tragic and heartrending manner? These are the questions you don't have the maturity to answer right now Robbie. These are questions you will probably struggle with for a while but it is a good struggle. God is able Robbie! Things in this world sometimes just do not add up and to try to explain things seems like a defeating task but it is important. You will have doubts Robbie and it will be difficult. Start now, immerse yourself in Scripture and pray like you mean it! I love you Robbie and hang in there as God's glory will shine to you soon.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Where does doubt come from; in other words, when we start questioning God and his plan

If you are a Christian and breathing air then odds are you have gone through some period of doubt in your life. Consider the prophet Habakkuk when he said, "*How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!'*"

but you do not save?" (Hab. 1:2). That sounds like a prophet who has some serious doubts as to whether God even listens to the cries of His people. Habakkuk says God is not helping, listening or saving His people. Maybe you have not read this before or maybe this concept is foreign to you but not everybody in Scripture had **complete**

confidence in what God was doing. A popular phrase in Scripture is "How long, O Lord?" and is used numerous times in the Psalms asking God how long will the people have to endure persecution at the hands of their enemies. Asaph said in Psalm 79:5, *"How long, O LORD ? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?"* There is a real struggle with things going on in this world and reconciling that with God's ultimate plan. So where does doubt come from? Below are some examples:

Doubt Faith

- A recent traumatizing event like a sudden death in the family or some type of serious injury or disease (cancer).
- Mental issues (manic depression; bi-polar disorder; schizophrenia)
- False theology (in other words, a preacher or minister telling you that it is a sin to have doubts which, coincidentally, causes you to have even more doubts)
- Church issues (a split, hypocrisy, etc.)
- A lack of maturity (although this is hard to say is the ultimate cause. I would hesitate to tell someone that they are immature when they express their doubts as it would do more harm than good) What I mean by this is that a person's faith is simply not mature. They are still weak and their relationship with God is not strong!
- Philosophy (perhaps we just out think ourselves and come up with arguments that are against the concept of God)
- No reason at all. Perhaps there is no real cause for our doubts it is just there.

Whatever the reason may be doubt is a serious issue that can either help or hurt our faith depending on how we react to it. I remember hearing a lesson one time by a preacher who said that if we have doubts about our faith and about God then we need to reconcile that immediately because no Christian "should ever doubt!" I thought long and hard about this and wondered if that applied to me since I had doubted before. This made me frustrated as he quoted a few verses to the congregation. Below are just a few examples:

John 20:24-29 ²⁴ Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." ²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." ²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" ²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."



Matthew 14:22-31 ²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸ "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the

"Four be the things I'd have been better without: love, curiosity, freckles and doubt."

Dorothy Parker

boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Mark 11:20-25 ²⁰ In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. ²¹ Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!" ²² "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. ²³ "I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. ²⁴ Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you

have received it, and it will be yours. ²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.

James 1:5-7 ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. ⁶ But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. ⁷ That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.

So each of these verses have a context and so quoting these or citing these without understanding their context is not appropriate exegesis (a term meaning what we get from the text). This is not the space for this type of study but suffice it to say that I do not believe the biblical writers are telling the readers not to have doubts *at all*. Perhaps they are stating that our lives *should not be characterized by doubt*. The same could be said by sinning and receiving forgiveness and our lives being characterized by sin and not receiving forgiveness. We should believe in God and have hope that God has a place for us now and forever and that he hears our groaning and our pain and suffering. But that does not mean we cannot struggle and question what is going on in this world. It means we struggle to find better meaning instead of accepting things the way they are and not moving on with it.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What can we do in our times of doubt that will help us?

Randy Alcorn wrote an excellent book called *If God is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil* that addresses some difficult circumstances in our lives.⁶ He talks about 5 things we do when faced with the idea of suffering and evil (also doubt)⁷:

- How we address the issue will radically affect how we see God and the world around us!
- Seeking answers should turn us toward Jesus in a fresh way (cf. Exod. 3:7; Judge 10:16; Rev. 21:4)
- We each bring our own burdens to the journey.
- The faith that can't be shaken is the faith that has been shaken (cf. 1 Pet. 1:7)
- God's Word is central to gaining an eternal perspective (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; Isa.

6. I do not agree with everything in the book so please read attentively just like you do this material ☺.

7. Randy Alcorn, *If God is Good*, (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2009): 1-5.

55:11).

So where are you in this journey? It is my prayer that you have confidence and faith in God for him to deliver you in the most difficult circumstances in your life! I like the words to the O.A.R. song "Shattered" even though it speaks to relationships I can liken it to a relationship with God.



*In a way, I need a change
From this burnout scene
Another time, another town
Another everything
But it's always back to you*

*Stumble out, in the night
From the pouring rain
Made the block, sat and thought
There's more I need
It's always back to you*

*But I'm good without ya
Yeah, I'm good without you
Yeah, yeah, yeah*

*How many times can I break till I shatter?
Over the line can't define what I'm after
I always turn the car around
Give me a break let me make my own pattern
All that it takes is some time but I'm shattered
I always turn the car around.*

Homework Assignment: Be prepared to talk about relationships next week. Think about relationships you have had (having) or relationships you have witnessed. This will be a crucial lesson!!!

Lesson #4: “He loves me...He loves me not!”

Dear Robbie,

At the time of this writing I have been married to the same woman for 6 years, 10 months and 9 days (Yes, I had to look it up)!!! I know that is hard to fathom for you right now but I want you to know something, the girl you are dating right now is not the girl I am married to! That is hard to grasp for you probably have told her how much you love her. Let's be honest, this girl has caused you to change your life to follow something you have never followed before. She was (and still is) and amazing person and right now you think you are going to marry her. Maybe you have said that to her and maybe not but right now you are enraptured by the simple mention of her name. But it won't last. Go ahead and try though, but sometimes people are just not meant to be together. God's plan for your relationship will be vastly different than your plan and I want you to seek Him in all of your decision-making when it comes to relationships. I want to ask you a question, "Robbie, if you were never to get married could you still be happy?" If you say you couldn't then you are not ready for a relationship and you need to work on your relationship with God. Too often I see teenagers placing so much stock in their relationships and when the relationships fail we wonder why they are not involved in church. Robbie, God comes first...that is not an option for you. God is not a trump card, a back-up plan or an after-thought...God is the Plan! Period. But it's not bad to go and search for people you like Robbie as there are plenty of amazing girls out there. Dating is a good thing to discover people you may enjoy and eventually develop a relationship with. What you do not need to do is to crawl in a corner like a hermit and ask nobody to go on a date with you. Relationships are so important because whoever you mix yourself with is usually a testament of your character. Do not mix yourself with the wrong people. That is what you have done for the duration of your life and it is wrong. Next week we will spend more time talking about our friendships. You will enjoy this one.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

It's in the movies, at the stores, on the radio, at your schools, in your workplaces and on the ball fields. Relationships! You cannot run away from them as they are a part of you as much as the air you breathe. God created us for relationships as one can see looking at the Genesis account where God saw the need for man to never be alone but to have a helper who can be with him as a companion (Gen. 2:20-22). From that point on earth has been in relationship (in one way or another) with each other. Relationships

have never been perfect as even Adam first blamed Eve when God caught him eating fruit from the forbidden tree.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Is it difficult to develop relationships with people? Why or Why not? In other words, what gets in the way of us developing a relationship with someone?

“Healthy relationships...are not created by sitting together in the same building or participating in the same activities, but by capturing Jesus’ heart for life-changing relationships.”⁸

Inevitably there comes the pressure from your friends, your family and other people to find “Mr. or Mrs. Right” wherever you go to school. Freed-Hardeman University was notorious for this as I remember many people getting married when they were freshman and sophomores (I married after I graduated but my wife was still a junior). With all of this pressure comes the tendency to make bad decisions when it comes to who we want to be with.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: When it comes to choosing a boyfriend or girlfriend what are some qualities we look for? Be honest about your answers.

It is without a doubt that most of us (especially guys) choose someone we want to be with because we are physically attracted to them. As a youth minister I am perceptive of teenage behavior and often I chuckle at some of the reactions guys have when a beautiful girl walks in front of them. We were at some youth event with a bunch of other churches when a beautiful girl got up and was walking toward the exit of the auditorium. I was sitting by a bunch of my youth group guys when she walked right in front of us. I was looking at them and saw that as she moved back so did their heads as they stared at her. The boy sitting next to me turned, and turned until he saw me staring at him and I looked at him and said, “Why don’t you focus on the lesson instead.” Guys are just wired differently but I would say that physical attraction is the number one component in wanting to date someone.

So when I was going off to college I was going with my girlfriend but I wonder what it would be like to go without one. If I would do it all over again here is a list of principles I believe would help in choosing a mate. So this lesson is divided into two areas: 1) principles for finding the right person and 2) dangers to avoid. This is not an all-inclusive list and I will give you the opportunity to add some at the end of this lesson.

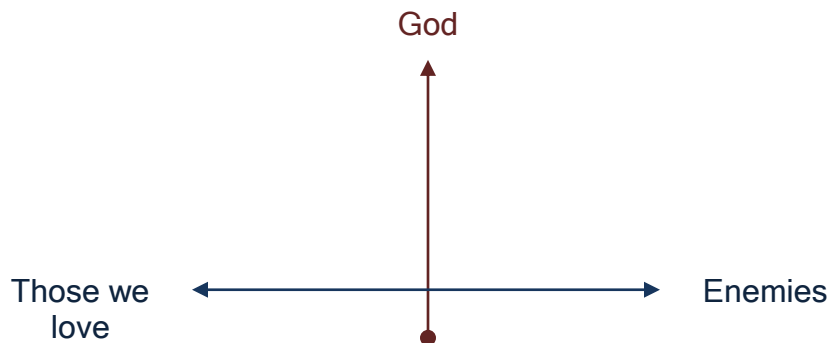
8. Wayne Jacobsen and Clay Jacobsen, *Authentic Relationships* (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2003): 17.

PRINCIPLE #1 – God is #1

Thank-you—I know I sound like a broken record but I cannot stress this enough. Life is too short and humans cannot live forever and if the worst were to happen (losing a spouse or significant other) could you still have faith in God?

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matt. 22:37-39)

Do you see the paradigm there? Who are we to love first? (God!) Then we love others second. Look at the illustration below.



Our vertical relation with God stands most important but notice how our vertical relationship with God is balanced with our horizontal relationship with others. If you mess one up the other is affected in some capacity.

We need to work on our relationship with God *before* we can have a relationship with someone else. Personal devotion, Bible study and church participation must all be practices of a person who wants to have a successful and fulfilling relationship.

PRINCIPLE #2 – Only Date Christians!!!

I may lose a couple of you in this discussion and or even offend some of you and while I do not apologize for this I hope you understand why I am saying it. I do not think it is a sin to date someone who is not a Christian but I do not think it is wise. This, of course, makes me a hypocrite because I was converted as a result of dating a Christian. However, I think you will see that, for the most part, I am the exception rather than the rule. When you date someone you do not want a “project” where you will have to fix them while you are dating them. I remember talking to a former youth group student

who was dating a non-Christian and he had a horrible history of rough relationships. She told me, *“Robbie, he is different with me and I feel like I can change him. Besides, aren’t we supposed to be evangelizing people who are lost?”* She got me there and I backed off from that situation. He never was converted and he ended up treating her the same way he treated the other girls. I have seen it happen over and over again.

Let’s be honest here about the whole “I can evangelize my boyfriend or girlfriend” thing to start out with. Are you really evangelizing them? Are you taking them to worship, studying the Bible with them and talking about God with them? If we are honest, most of us do not do that and we simply want to help our consciences out by saying we want to evangelize but really, at the end of the day, we are physically and emotionally attracted to someone. Now you can have a happy marriage without being a Christian or adhering to Christian principles. Plenty of people have been satisfied without God and plenty more people will continue to do so. But if you want to be complete in your marriage...if you want to feel that sense of closeness and intimacy that you have never felt before...if you want to make sure your marriage succeeds so that you can have that love where “many waters cannot quench” it (Song 8:7) then I recommend choosing a Christian.

I know, not all Christians act like they should so this leads me to my final principle...

PRINCIPLE #3 – Make Sure They Pass the Test

There are a number of these tests you can do. They are not literal tests you hand to the person but they are things you keep in the back of your mind.

Number 1 - Do you parents like this person? Not that your parents know everything that is best for you but I would hesitate to going out with someone your parents do not like. They have known you for years and (hopefully) they know what is best for you and if they absolutely do not like a person then that should be a red flag for you! Most of the time a parent will approve of a person even if they do not like certain things about a person. Rarely will a parent disapprove of a person and it be a bad thing.

Number 2 - Do they pass the Psalm 15 test? I forget where I saw this but thought how powerful it was when I read the psalm and thought about choosing a mate. Read the Psalm...

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken.

Isn't that awesome? You could almost put a check list for this Psalm and ask:

Does my significant other...

- Walk blameless?
- Does what is righteous?
- Speaks the truth *from his heart?*
- Have no slander from their tongue?
- Does no wrong to their neighbor?
- Despise vile men?
- Honors those who fear (believe) in the Lord?
- Keep their oath even when it hurts?

If they do those things with integrity then odds are they are good people.

Number 3 - Do they pass your own personal test? What criteria do you have that they must meet in order for them to date you? This is personal but it is necessary so that you know the type of person you want.

Now that we have discussed some principles for finding the right person I want to (quickly) to discuss two dangers to avoid.

DANGER #1 — SETTLING FOR SECOND BEST

You are valuable to God and He does not want you to simply be satisfied! He wants you to be completely content in your circumstances. To be fulfilled. If something does not "feel right" in a relationship then get out. Period.

DANGER #2 — SEX IS FINE BEFORE MARRIAGE

Sex is wonderful and I am not going to lie and say that it isn't because it is. That may sound weird, creepy with a dash of awkward but I want you to know that sex is perfect when it is done God's way. We were created as sexual beings but when we do this before marriage we are missing the divine intent for our physical bodies. It is my experience that the church has not taught effectively about sex and about how to live a chaste life. We just have not done it. We teach the bible verses where it says sex is wrong and evil before marriage but miss the divine purpose for discussing sex. Our curiosity gets the better of us until we try it.

Do not let someone tell you it is ok to have sex before marriage rationalizing it as the next step in your relationship or when they tell you, “we are going to get married anyways.” That is not their mind speaking it is their lust and let me tell you something, in the heat of the moment when your pulse is rising and that person is beautiful and willing to go to the next step, that is the hardest moment to resist in. If they are willing to wait for you then this might be the right person.⁹ We should have the attitude of the Lover in Song of Songs 8:4, **“Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.”** Translation, “When the moment is right, then we will act on our love!”

I came across this group of questions to ask when considering a mate and thought it was very helpful.¹⁰ It is not my goal to scare you but to inform you. You deserve the very best person. There are amazing people out there who believe in God and want to follow Him first. Those are the people you need to seek out. Look at these questions and when you think about your mate think of these questions and see how they fair.

1. Is this person a Christian? You do not want to marry someone who is in a religion or has a belief that goes against what you believe as a Christian (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).
2. What kind of Christian is this person? Is he/she a Christian who has made the Word of God the final authority in his/her life?
3. Is this person truly committed to loving and obeying God?
4. Are you spiritually compatible?
5. Do you agree on the major doctrines of the Bible?
6. Do you agree on the church you will attend?
7. Do you agree on how you will spend your time and money?
8. Can you trust this person?
9. Have you ever been given a reason not to trust this person?
10. How does he or she handle adversity?
11. Does this person trust God or fall into unbelief regularly when challenges come?
12. Have you ever seen him or her angry?
13. Have you ever seen this person angry with you?
14. Did you resolve the conflict in a biblical way?
15. Was forgiveness asked for and granted or was the issue “swept under the rug”?
16. Ladies, does he have a way to provide for you?
17. Is he or she responsible with money?
18. Is he or she a good example?
19. On what issues do you agree or disagree?
20. Does this person have control over his/her sex drive? If a person does not exhibit self-control while dating, it is likely he/she will not have self-control in the marriage.

9. If I could recommend two books in this area it would be *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* by Lauren F. Winners and *Dateable* by Justin Lookadoo and Hayley DiMarco.

10. Creflo Dollar, “Choosing a Mate,” *Change Magazine* (October 2009). Accessed online at <<http://change.creflodollarministries.org/site/1000/choosingamate.aspx>> April 16, 2010.

I hope you enjoyed this lesson as it is a most important one. Relationships can make or break a person depending on who he or she is with.

Pray about it.

Homework Assignment: Be prepared next week to talk about our friendships. Today or tonight I want you to go home and pray about your future spouse. Don't mention any names because you just don't know at this point (unless you are married in high-school and odds are, it has been tough already). Pray that God will lead you in your decision and that you will know when the time is right to be with this person. Ask God to help you prepare right now to be His child first and then a husband or a wife second.

Lesson #5: My BFFs!!!

Dear Robbie,

You remember that time your eleventh grade year when you and a bunch of your friends were hanging out at your house when your next door neighbor had some friends over as well and one of them was hanging out of the window and fell down the side? You laughed your head off for a long time! Or what about that time you and Chris did a video project for Spanish II and ran over a squirrel and recorded it on the video camera? Or what about that time you and Ryan were wrestling in the front yard of Brett's house and Ryan put his head down in the grass only to discover that it was a big pile of dog poop instead of the grass? You had some good times in high-school that is for sure. I am laughing right now thinking about it and these memories I hold and cherish with me. I am writing you this letter to inform you that your friendships are about to drastically change before your very eyes. I know best friends make pacts before they leave high-school and they say that they will never let anything come between them and sometimes it works. However, you will change and grow apart and some of the friends you used to spend time with on a daily basis you will never see again. Now, there is this new invention years later called Facebook that will keep some of you in touch but it still not the same. I know this sounds horrible but you better enjoy every day that you have because the next day is nothing like it. Things change drastically before your eyes and God opens new doors which mean old ones become closed (partially or permanently). Just like the seasons change in order to bring new life sometimes our friendships change in order to bring new life. Your best friend right now, Chris Lowery, will not be in your life 12 years from now. As a matter of fact, the last time you will ever see him is on your wedding day. Adam Foster, another one of your best friends, will keep in touch to a point then will go his own way. I know that is hard to believe but it is the truth. I only tell you this because along the way you will meet a group of guys at Freed-Hardeman that will strengthen your faith and will uplift your soul for many years to come. Btw...you will stay in touch with these guys and things will be just fine. So Robbie, enjoy your time right now and live each day as a gift from God but also now that he is paving a road before you so you may walk on it and thrive!!! I will write to you next week about money.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

I was looking through my high-school yearbook to reminisce a little and I thought how things are so different now that I am over a decade removed from when I graduated. I thought everything was under my control and things were so important back then when it came to friendships. Some of the friends I had we spent amazing moments together laughing, cutting-up and mostly goofing-off as we just found things to fill the time with. Now, I don't even know these people! I have changed so much and the person who I

was in high school (in many aspects) is not who I am right now. I mean these were good friendships that changed in the blink of an eye. My buddy Chris and I spent all the time together playing tennis and watching movies and one night we were at his house and he found out his parents were getting a divorce. He cried the entire night I was over at his house and I had no clue what to do. We shared moments like that together but when I went to college things changed a little but when I got married they changed a lot.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *Why is it that even the best of friends grow apart after high-school?*

There are many factors to behind this but here is a list of reasons why I think friends grow apart (certainly not all of the reasons):

- 1. They go in separate ways! (Distance physically and emotionally separates us)**
- 2. Maturity levels change!**
- 3. Ideologies change!**
- 4. Lack of commitment!**
- 5. Boyfriend/girlfriend!**
- 6. Meet new (and better?) friends!**

Are new friends such a bad thing? I want to introduce a story about a friend whose loyalty superseded even the parent-son relationship. It is a story about Jonathan and David.

1 Samuel 17 is the famous David and Goliath story where David slays the huge Philistine gargantuan with only a smooth stone. Saul is so impressed that he inquires about David and eventually finds out he is the son of Jesse and he is from Bethlehem. What happens next is amazing...

1 Samuel 18:1-4 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

You just don't see this type of devotion between two friends. In Hebrew times to make a

covenant with someone meant you sealed the deal and to break a covenant meant you were guilty and punishable for all wrong-doing. Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved David.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *What type of friendship do you think David and Jonathan had if the text tells us they loved each other? Do you have any friends in which you “love” them? Why do you love them? What is it they do that makes you love them?*

One of the characteristics for me to be your friend is that you must have the quality of devotion. I do not want a friend that is going to drop me for a hobby, an addiction or something else but I want a friend who I can rely on when the “going-gets-tough.” Saul heard that the crowd loved David more than they loved him when the crowd proclaimed, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands” (1 Sam. 18:7). Then witnessing his son show David attention must have gotten under Saul’s skin and so the text says that he became “very angry.” Look at what happens next..

1 Samuel 18:9-11 And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David. The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, “I’ll pin David to the wall.” But David eluded him twice.

I have had some people become angry with me before but never to the point where my life was in jeopardy like David’s. David would spend much of his life running away from Saul (Psalm 59 shows the desperation he felt when Saul was chasing after him). At this point is where David needs someone who is devoted to him who, at just the right time, will help him.

1 Samuel 19:1-7 Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan was very fond of David and warned him, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.” Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?” Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.” So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

That is devotion and if I were to choose a friend I would make sure they were like Jonathan. But many of us choose friends who resemble Saul in that they have evil that walks before them and around them. So what do we do when we go to college looking

for friendships and companions who will be our “Jonathans” when the going gets tough?

1. *Find a common bond in Christianity.* Maybe you meet some friends who are Christians and go to your school and are along a similar path as you. This would also help your spiritual formation as they would only encourage you to do the right thing.
2. *Find friends outside of relationships.* I know that you want to spend all of your time with that one who makes you feel that feeling that you have never felt before. Great! But you need some sort of friendships outside of the relationship in case something goes wrong or even just to have someone you have more in common with. I had my guy friends that we did things on weekends with but also I would do things with Heather. I could go out to lunch with her on Saturday and we could walk in the park or something and then at night I could watch movies with the guys! It was a holistic approach.
3. *Avoid friends who bring you down.* Proverbs 27:19. I am talking about those friends who are always into trouble and seem to suck you into it. Or maybe they are always depressed and needy and make you feel guilty that you do other things with other people. Avoid them. Avoid people who party all of the time and who are consistent slackers in school. These people need Jesus as well and so perhaps you could do your best to minister to them but, as 1 Corinthians 15:33 suggests in the NIV, **“Bad company corrupts good character.”** I notice that no matter how good a person smells at the beginning of a day, if they hang around stink too long eventually they are going to smell like stink!
4. *Make memories that will last!* It is important that you make good grades but do not turn an amazing opportunity down to make memories. It was finals time and I remember I was particularly under pressure with one exam. A friend of mine asked if I wanted to go climb a water tower as a bunch of people were going but I told him I couldn't because of all of the studying I had to do. He laughed at me and told me to get my shoes on and go with him. I agreed and we climbed the water tower (15 of us!) and had a blast. The water tower is not there anymore yet I was able to say that I did it! I would like to say that I did well on that test but I think I made a B on it and it lowered my grade from an A to a B. But...I did not care because I made memories.

A famous philosopher in the 20th century by the name of Winnie the Pooh once said, **“If you live to be 100, I hope I live to be 100 minus 1 day, so I never have to live without you.”** That is a good definition for friendship. Perhaps, though, Christ had all beat when he uttered these words two thousand years ago: **“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”** (John 15:13).

Could you do that for a friend? Do you have friends like this? Seek to find this type of a person...they are few and far between.

Homework Assignment: Next week we talk about money! YUCK! Think about your spending habits, your saving habits and when you hope to retire. This should be exciting!

Lesson #6: Money, Money, Money!

Dear Robbie,

I am proud of you for hanging in there with all of these letters I am writing to you. Normally, you would have thrown them away and moved on to the next best thing that grabs your attention but to your credit you have hung in there. Speaking of credit, this letter is about something you have right now but I have little of. You are in the best financial situation you have ever been in and it only gets worse as you pile more and more debt on as it will be hard to do much when you get my age. That is why I want you to save your pennies and to not spend money on stupid things that really do not matter. Where does most of your spending go right now? You go out to eat, you buy stuff for your car, CDs, flowers for your girlfriend and other stuff that really just eat away at your finances. Debt is one of the major killers of a marriage and can quickly ruin your life if you are not careful. Most of all Robbie, if you are not careful, the money you lose by paying off your creditors is money that does not go to the Lord. How fair is that? I want you to start saving Robbie and delaying your gratification so that in the future you can have more opportunities to do things. It will be difficult and it will get worse before it gets better but you will persevere because you will surround yourself with God-fearing people who will take care of you. I know this letter is short but the lesson is quick to the point. Next week I will write to you about priorities and things that eat your time away.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

According to the U.S. Census Bureau there is going to be a projected 929 billion dollars in credit card debt. Another website said that only 2% of the homes in the United States are paid for. That means 98% of all people still have mortgages that they pay to the bank. Consider this graph done in 2006...no doubt the number has risen since...



All types of debt are up

Among those with debt:

Student loan debt is rising

Average balance:



2001 2006

¹ - adjusted for inflation

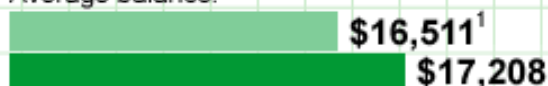
Revolving debt, including credit card debt, is rising

Average balance:



Installment debt, which includes auto loans, is rising

Average balance:



USA TODAY abc NEWS

WEEK ONE OF A SIX WEEK SERIES

Source: Experian analysis

Money is one of those discussions that you don't want to have but the problem is that money does not just appear before us and so this is a discussion that is necessary.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: What discussions have you had with your parents about spending, saving and money? Have you sat down and talked about checking accounts, savings, etc.?

In America it is difficult to manage our money because there is the tendency to "keep up with the Joneses" as one person has this neat toy and we want it to. It is not enough to have a vehicle we need a vehicle with GPS navigation. Or maybe it is not enough to have clothes but we have to wear the latest clothes in fashion. It is not enough to have a TV but we need a 61 inch 1080x resolution TV. Now they have come out with a TV that actually has 3D capabilities. The possibilities of what we want are endless which is what leads most of America into debt.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: At the end of the day what do we need?

"Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Isn't that all we need? I think of food, clothing and shelter and those are our basic needs and the rest of what we have are "extras." When we think about what we need a low-fat caramel macchiato from Starbucks is probably not high on the "needs" list. Or at least, it shouldn't be. The issue of greed is prevalent in American society more than most countries in the world. Why are we such a greedy nation? Has this thought pattern invaded the Lord's church? Are we just as guilty as society?

Below are some Scriptures that discuss the concept of money...walk through them and read them aloud. Discuss how each Scripture addresses the concept of money and how God speaks to us about our finances.¹¹

Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

Proverbs 22:7

"The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender."

11. It is said that some 800 Scriptures address the issue of money. I chose these scriptures from DaveRamsey.com which is an excellent site to browse. I recommend Dave Ramsey's book *Financial Peace: Revisted* which helped shape how I look at money from a Christian perspective.

Romans 13:8

"Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Proverbs 21:20

"In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has."

Proverbs 21:5

"The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty."

Proverbs 28:20

"A faithful man will abound with blessings, but he who hastens to be rich will not go unpunished."

Psalms 62:10

"...if riches increase, do not set your heart on them."

Matthew 6:21

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Proverbs 23:13-14

"Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell."

2 Thessalonians 3:10

"For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

Proverbs 22:26-27

"Do not be one of those who shakes hands in a pledge, one of those who is surety for debts; if you have nothing with which to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you?"

Psalm 109:11

"Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder his labor."

Psalm 37:21

"The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous shows mercy and gives."

James 4:14

"For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

Proverbs 14:29

"He who is impulsive exalts folly."

Ecclesiastes 6:7

"All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied."

Colossians 3:23

"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men."

Proverbs 3:27-28

"Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it.' When you have it with you."

Proverbs 22:1

"A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold."

Matthew 5:40-42

"If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you."

Philippians 4:6-7

"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 4:19

"And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

Psalms 24:1

"The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness..."

Matthew 23:23

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

2 Corinthians 9:7

"...for God loves a cheerful giver."

1 Corinthians 13:3

"If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."

Malachi 3:8

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings."

AN EXAMPLE...

To illustrate how you can have control over your money is say that you get \$1500 for graduation. It seems that you have two options...

- 1) Blow it all by buying new clothes, PS3 games, I-Tunes, new system for your car or whatever.
- 2) Be smart and save it for 30 years under a fund that yields 10% yearly.

Option #1: After 30 years you receive nothing!

Option #2: After 30 years you receive \$26,174.10. So when you retire and open up your graduation money you can buy a brand new car...or you can pay for your children's tuition. That is not putting anything in. Say you add \$100 a month which means \$1200 a year you will have, at the moment of retirement: **\$243,306.21!!!**

CAR PAYMENTS?

Could you use that amount of money if you wait 30 years!?!?!?!

Or...let's do this! Do you want a car someday? Most of you do but most people take out a car loan which is crazy! I DID AND IT WAS STUPID!!! Let me explain. Say you purchase a vehicle for \$23,000 (all-inclusive) and you make payments at 6.6% interest and pay it off in 6 years or (72 payments).



At the end of your loan you paid a total of \$4,916.16 **TO THE BANK!!!** So really, you paid \$27,916.16 for the car!!! Your payment was \$387 a month.

Option #Smart! Buy a junky car that will last a while. Then save \$350 a month in a fund that yields 10% a year and in 5 years you will have \$28,000 to buy a new car **IN CASH!!!** You get the interest not the bank.

Which option is smarter?

A CHALLENGE

There is so much we could talk about when it comes to money but at the end of the day it is about being smart so that we can give back to God. What are you doing right now that allows you to give the most back to God? When you get a check, money, or whatever what is the first thing that you want to do with it?

“Live like no one else, so that later in life, you can live like no one else.”

Dave Ramsey

The answer to that question says a lot about how you spend and view money.



Homework Assignment: Look at how you spend your time and keep track of those hours. Be ready to discuss time management next week.

Lesson #7: Time is Not on My Side

Dear Robbie,

Squirrel!!! I thought that would distract you! Both you and I know that you have ADHD and I am writing to let you know that it is something that will not go away for the rest of your life. Caffeine, technology and the nature of my job do not make the distractions any easier as it is difficult to stay on task. I wish you would have listened to dad when he sat down with you and talked about prioritizing your time because that is a skill that will hurt you if you are not careful. When you get to college you will do really well at this but sometimes you focus too much on things that are not important. You have heard the phrase, "make the most important thing the most important thing" right? If not then that is something you desperately need to focus on. If you think about the tasks of your day what is involved? Probably you have this schedule:

6am	Wake-up/Breakfast
6:45am	Leave for School
8am	School
3:15pm	Practice/Game
5:00pm	Leave for Home
6:00pm	Work
10:30pm	Home again

Sound pretty accurate? How's that working out for you? Pretty soon you are going to realize that all this stuff you are doing is going to make you hit the wall and pretty soon you will become depressed. It is going to happen so get ready for it. Here's what you can do: focus on what is important, act on it, and let the not-so-important stuff take care of itself. It's not easy but you can't do everything. Next week we are going to talk about people in a fallen world.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

Time-management. Those words seem to be an oxymoron as time is something that nobody can stop, start or control. Notice though that it is incredibly different to say that you are managing your time and controlling it. I firmly believe that only God controls the time (see 2 Pet. 3:8) yet we can manage our time to give God more glory.

Jesus was a master at prioritizing his time and maximizing his purpose on this earth. Luke 19:10 says that Jesus' purpose on this earth was to "seek and save the lost." The bookends of Jesus' ministry were grounded in prayer. Read the gospels for yourself and I think you will discover that whatever Jesus did and wherever he went a relationship with God was foremost on his mind.

Jesus began his day with God...

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (Mark 1:35)

Jesus often went to pray with God...

But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. (Luke 5:16)

Jesus ended his days with God...

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (Luke 6:12)

***DISCUSSION QUESTION:** In your daily planning where does God go? Is he first on your schedule, last or somewhere in between? How could scheduling God in your day vastly improve your time management?*

What does the Bible say about Time Management and what is the point? Consider some of these Scriptures and talk about them.

The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. (Psalm 90:10)

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! (Psalm 90:17)

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce. (Prov. 3:9)

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. (Ecc. 3:1)

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matt. 6:33)

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. (Matt. 24:36)

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? (Luke 14:28)

So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:26-27)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Eph. 5:15-16)

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (Col. 4:5)

You can greatly influence others and accomplish more by learning how to plan your days and maximize your time. This means that you have to learn how to say no!

“Keep in mind that you are always saying ‘no’ to something. If it isn’t to the apparent, urgent things in your life, it is probably to the more fundamental, highly important things. Even when the urgent is good, the good can keep you from your best, keep you from your unique contribution if you let it.”¹²

Do you understand what that means? If you are in a youth group and you say yes to this sporting event, that shift at work or this school event then you are saying no to perhaps something that is more important like a youth activity, time with your family or personal rest. You only get to be with your family once but there will always be things to do in your life like activities and such.



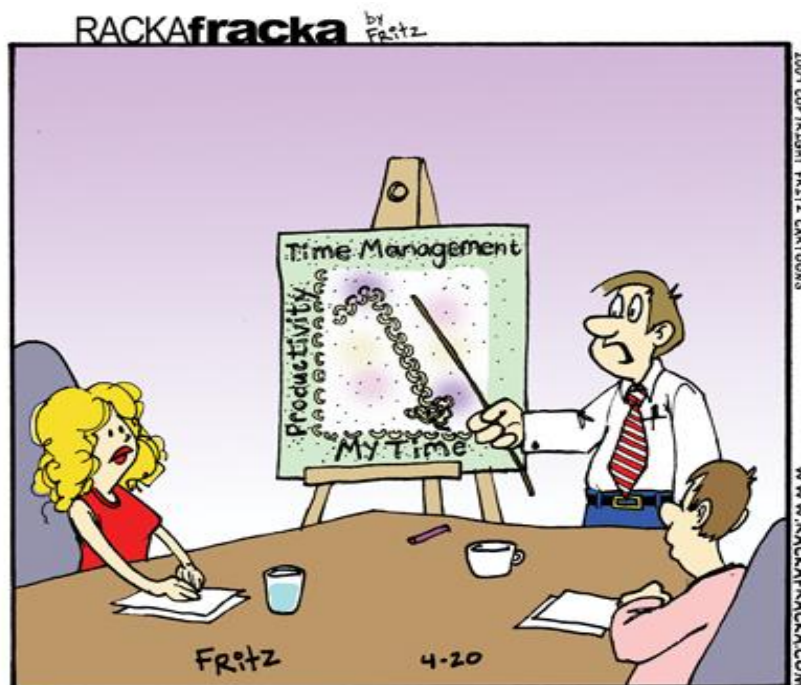
12. Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1989): 157.

Below is Stephen Covey's "Time Management Matrix" which attempts to categorize where and how we spend our time.¹³

	Urgent	Not Urgent
IMPORTANT	<p>I</p> <p>ACTIVITIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Pressing Problems • Deadline Driven Projects 	<p>II</p> <p>ACTIVITIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention • Production Capability Activities • Relationship building • Recognizing new opportunities • Planning, recreation
NOT IMPORTANT	<p>III</p> <p>ACTIVITIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions • Some calls • Some mail • Some reports • Some meetings • Proximate • Pressing Matters • Popular Activities 	<p>IV</p> <p>ACTIVITIES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia • Busy Work • Some mail • Some phone calls • Time wasters • Pleasant Activities

Most of us spend our time in Quadrant III in that we do things that seem to be important because they are urgent. Urgency does not necessitate worth. Quadrant IV people are the slackers where their days are filled with Facebook, MySpace, texting, TV, music and things that do not matter. Quadrant I people seem to be the right fit but those are the stressful people who operate on chaos. The more they focus on crises the more crises that come about. Everything turns into deadlines and catastrophes.

We need to focus on Quadrant II in that we address the urgent when needed but prevention is the main thrust. We concentrate on only what we can affect and the other



AND AS YOU CAN SEE, MY PRODUCTIVITY SANK LIKE A STONE RIGHT ABOUT THE TIME I MADE THIS MACARONI AND GLITTER TIME MANAGEMENT CHART.

13. Ibid., 151.

unimportant activities we minimize.

CONCLUSION

I want you to take control over your time or others will take control of it for you. Make God the most important thing and try to balance your time as best you can knowing that sometimes God throws kinks into even the best of plans.

Homework Assignment: Read Matthew 26:30-35 then read 26:69-75. Be prepared to talk about people in a fallen world.

Lesson #8: People are Still People

Dear Robbie,

This is the hardest letter I will write to you and I am not sure how to express what I feel onto this paper. Ever since the Adam and Eve this world is plagued with people who make poor decisions and often we are collateral damage mixed with those decisions. Now you have done some stupid things in your life and you will continue to do stupid things but what will hurt the most will be the way people use you to get what they want. At first it seems so inconspicuous and unobtrusive but then their devious plan comes clear when you find yourself crying on your back porch one day wondering what happened. Something really difficult is going to happen to you in that all of your closest friends will abandon you because of your decision to follow Christ. You are good at bottling emotions so this will not affect you immediately but after a while you will break down. I am breaking down right now as I write these words to you. I wish I could be there to help you and I wish that I could change what will happen to you but it will form you into an amazing person but right now it is really tough for you. Our dad once said, "Robbie, I don't care if it is a church or a business, people are still people and often you will find that some people will only think of themselves and will use you to get what they want." When I was your age that didn't mean much but now that I am older I have been able to see that. I have witnessed three of my friends go through a divorce, youth ministers lose their jobs because of horrible choices and brothers and sisters in Christ gossip, bicker and label each other after a church split. At times, to be honest with you Robbie, I just want to throw in the towel. I just want to give up because I disappoint myself and others disappoint me and it seems that the harder I try the worst things get. I know I shouldn't throw this at you but it is a reality that you will see over and over again. As long as this world is in existence Satan will execute his diabolical plan to choke God's people from breathing the air of the Holy Spirit. Hang on, sit tight, be patient, smile, cry and move on...people are still people. I love you Robbie, be strong.

Blessings,

RE Mackenzie

"And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever'" (Gen. 3:22). It was at that point where people started disappointing God and in the next chapter Cain murders his own flesh and blood by killing Abel. That makes for a frustrating creation as you witness your people sinning against each other and sinning against you. I wonder how God feels knowing we disappoint him all the time. My son Kaleb looked me in the eyes the other day and lied to me about something he had said to one of his friends. I knew he lied to me and I let



him know that I knew the truth and he broke down in tears. Truth be told...so did I. I believe I experienced in infinitesimal proportions what God experiences daily.

You will leave high-school and you will experience some of the following:

- Someone may lie to you
- Someone may lie about

you

- Someone may cheat to get ahead of you
- Someone may cheat on you
- Someone may talk behind your backs
- Someone may not talk to you at all
- Someone may treat you unfairly because of what you look like

DISCUSSION QUESTION: *Discuss a time when someone disappointed you? What were the circumstances? How did it make you feel?*

I want to share a recommendation letter I wrote for a student a few years ago. This student was a leader in the youth group and a passionate person for God and I was so thankful for his influence in my life. So I wrote these words...¹⁴

To Whom it may concern:

My name is Robbie Mackenzie and I am the Youth and Family Minister at the Main Street church of Christ in Springfield, Tennessee. I am writing a recommendation letter for Greg Stevens. I have known Greg since July 31, 2004 when I started working for the Main Street congregation. I have been involved with his life as a minister and as a dear friend. Immediately I knew that Greg was an individual who exemplified a high persona of work ethic, diligence, care and

14. I changed the specifics for privacy but everything else remains the same.

concern for people. I could tell you of his grade point average (3.8), his superb involvement in academia (numerous college prep classes), his competence in various fields of athletic competition (tennis, etc.) but that is not what intrinsically epitomizes what Greg represents.

Greg, first and foremost, seeks to be a man after God's own heart. You may be concerned as to the relevance of this with society but keep in mind that the second greatest command given in the Bible is to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Greg is involved with the community in Robertson County and has made this a service in his life. He has given up countless hours to help wash windows, wash cars, give out water to drink, visit people in the nursing home, visit people in the hospital and so on and so forth.

Greg, secondly, is a respectful individual who works hard in whatever he does. I have worked hands on with him on various jobs, mission trips, and service opportunities. The Scriptures indicate, "Whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord" (Col. 3:23). Greg accomplished this task with ease and a willingness to learn. When we go to Mexico in the Summer time we construct buildings for the local church members. We do this from the foundation all the way up to the roof. We work between 7-8 hours every day we are down there. Greg never ceased to amaze me as he set his mind to the task and accomplished it.

Greg, finally, is a man who has dreams that are yet to be fulfilled. Greg has plans of becoming a chemistry teacher and hopefully will serve in a community somewhere in the United States. Nothing can quench his thirst for success once he has placed his initiative in his heart. The dreams can come to fruition if you grant Greg this opportunity for scholarship. I give him my full recommendation to you with every bit of confidence that, in him, you will not be disappointed nor will your funds be thwarted in vanity. Your money will actually be an investment that will accrue benefits long after the days of university. I encourage you to consider Greg for this scholarship.

Sincerely,

Robbie Mackenzie
Youth and Family Minister

My heart aches even now as the person I wrote that for no longer attends a church regularly and has struggled mightily with his faith. He and I spent hours laughing, praying and sharing moments together and now I do not get a phone call and when I call him I get nothing. I partly view this as my fault as perhaps I could have done a better job ministering to him but then there is that advice my dad gives me, "Robbie, people are people."

I can't help but to think of all of the people I have wronged in my life and how disappointed people must have been in me.

It is a difficult thing to be wrong...it is infinitely more difficult to know you have wronged someone else.

³¹ Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." ³² But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." ³³ Peter replied, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." ³⁴ "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." ³⁵ But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. (Matt. 26:31-35)

DISCUSSION QUESTION: How would you respond to that? In other words, if Jesus were to tell you (a devoted Christian) that you would deny him three times how would you respond?

"Peter, you are loyal to me. You were the first to confess my name among the disciples. You have taught many things in my name. By the way, you will deny me and that is part of your spiritual formation!"

What is up with that? Peter, of course, will not have any part of this and completely denies the thought of him even denying Jesus. "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."

Mom told me a long time ago and maybe your parents did the same thing, "Be careful what you say!"

⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. ⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. ⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:54-62).

I like Luke's account the best because he points out that Peter made eye contact with Jesus and wept bitterly. Think about it. Peter did not just let Jesus down but the whole

group of apostles. He was a chief leader among them. Look at Matthew 26:35 again, **“But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the other disciples said the same.”** They followed his lead and perhaps that is why Jesus was so prophetic in what he did. Perhaps Jesus was showing the disciples that even the greatest among the disciples is susceptible to sin and temptation. Nobody was “above the Law of Christ” and had special privileges just because they were disciples and I believe Jesus is sending them an important lesson.



People are people...

So Peter wept bitterly...

“Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up” (James 4:8-10).

That word “wail” is the same word in Greek for what Peter did in Luke 22:62 except Luke adds that he wept bitterly.

People disappoint us...

We disappoint God...

What can we do?

1. Realize that we live in a fallen world (Rom. 3:23).
2. Take Care of Yourself (1 Cor. 10:12)
3. Do not simply give your heart away (Prov. 4:23).
4. Forgive, forgive and forgive (Eph. 4:31-32).
5. Put your anxieties at the feet of God (1 Pet. 5:6-7)

Homework Assignment: Go to a concordance or Biblegateway.com/keyword and look up the word “discipline” and see how God views it. Be prepared to talk about what you learned.

