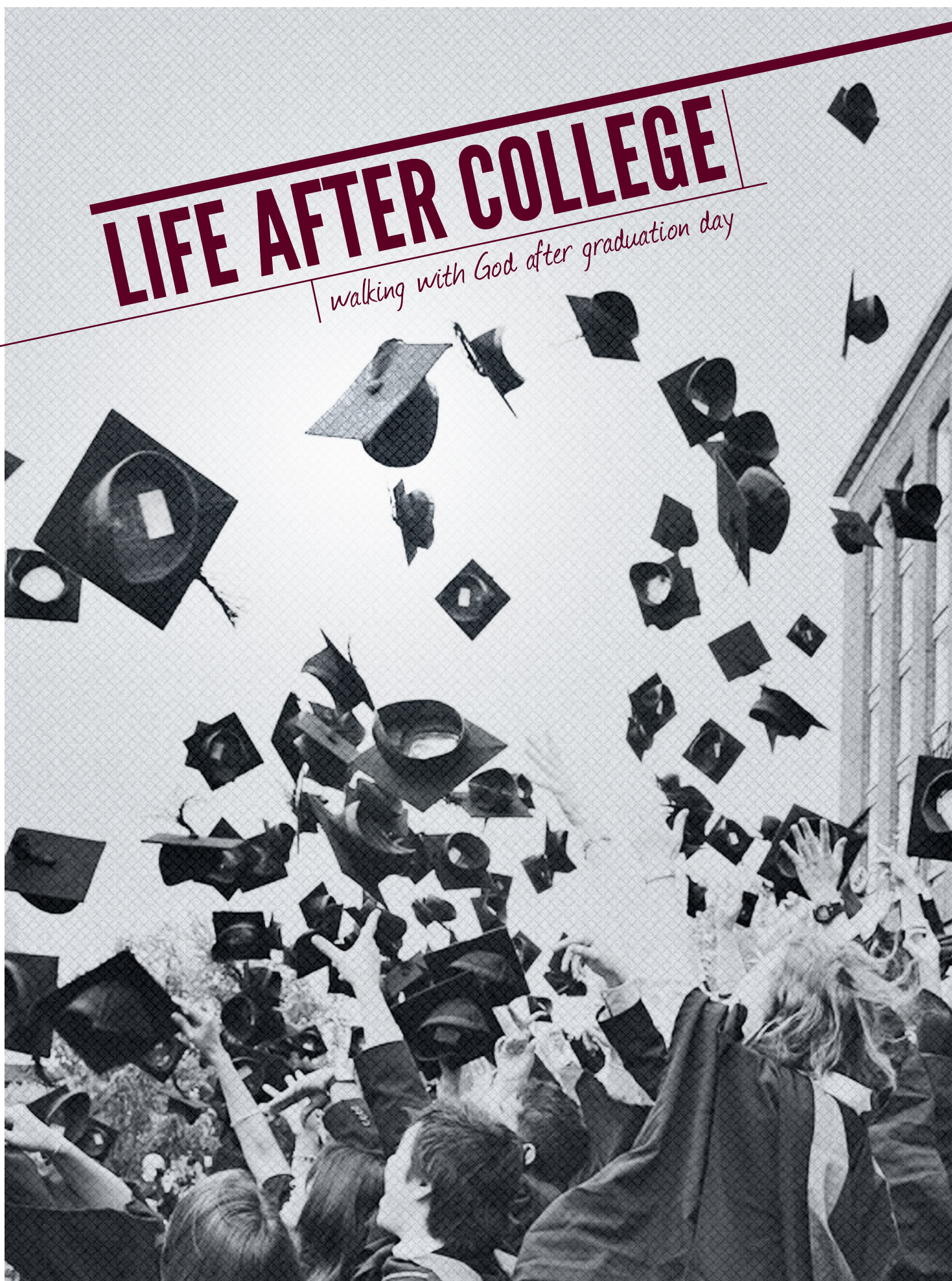


LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

walking with God after graduation day



LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

walking with God after graduation day

Grace Bible Church
College Station, TX

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LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

*walking with God
after graduation day*

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chapter one

PLOTTING YOUR COURSE

THE ROAD AHEAD

The movie *Castaway* revolves around the life of Chuck Noland (played by Tom Hanks), a FedEx employee who finds himself stranded on a desert island as the result of a plane crash. Separated from everything and everybody familiar to him, Chuck is forced to find ways to survive without any modern conveniences. Slowly, however, he builds a life of sorts on the island. He finds shelter in a cave, learns how to spear a fish for his supper, and builds fires using two sticks of wood. Despite his success at staying alive, he still longs to return to civilization and to the life he once knew.

After four long years, Chuck manages to escape the island and returns to his hometown of Memphis, Tennessee. But when he returns, he finds that the world has moved on without him. His fiancé has married another man, and everybody else in his life has long since written him off as being dead. He is forced once again to rebuild his life from scratch. One of the most poignant scenes comes toward the end of the movie, as Chuck stands at a literal fork in the road in a rural area. He looks to the left and to the right as if to say, “Now what?” He’s re-entered civilization, but without a clear idea of which direction to go.

In some ways, finishing college can make you feel a bit like Chuck Noland. For four or five (or more) years, you’ve been on an island of sorts, writing term papers and pulling all-nighters. You’ve created a life for yourself in this land they call college, even though those first few days as a scared freshman were tough. Think of how far you’ve come since then: the friends you’ve made, the character you’ve developed, and the things you’ve learned. What a difference a few years can make! And now you’ve finished your time there and are entering adult civilization. This is definitely a time for celebration and perhaps for a bit of reflection.

Which roads will you take as you pursue your future? What is in store for you around the next corner? Considering the future is exciting and frightening at the same time.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

Describe how you are feeling as you near the end of your college career (excited, scared, sad, happy, etc.). Why do you feel that way?

What are you most excited about as you look forward to the future?

What are you most anxious or worried about as you think about the future?

ARE YOU GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

Many people spend their entire lives moving in the wrong direction without realizing it. They build careers, accumulate wealth, and raise families without ever seriously considering life's purpose. As a result, they invest their time and energy in things that won't last forever. For sixty, seventy, or eighty years, they walk in the wrong direction, chasing the world's pleasures and promises instead of building a life that will matter for eternity.

How can you avoid that tragedy as you finish college and begin your transition into the adult world? By setting your direction now and deciding which priorities will guide your life. If you pursue God's priorities, and avoid distractions, you can have a life of lasting value. At the end of your life you will be able to look back and know that you have lived well. And you will be able to look forward and anticipate hearing those wonderful words from Jesus: "Well done, good and faithful servant." So what are God's priorities and how can you begin to pursue them even now?

GOD'S PRIORITIES FOR OUR LIVES

Carefully read the Scripture passages below. For each one, write down what that passage encourages us to prioritize with our actions and our lives.

◆ Philippians 3:7-11

◆ Hebrews 10:23-25

◆ Matthew 28:18-20

◆ Matthew 6:31-33

For just a few moments, honestly think about your time in college. Did you pursue God's priorities with your time and your resources? Why or why not?

What changes do you think you need to make in your life right now in order to more faithfully pursue God's priorities in the future?

As we examine the passages above, we can identify some of God's priorities for our lives:

◆ **God wants us to know Jesus.** Paul says in Philippians 3 that his accomplishments and personal pedigree pale in comparison to the value of knowing Jesus. Do you know that you have a relationship with Jesus? If so, is that relationship at the center of your life? Does it inform all of your decisions and actions? *Note: If you are not sure whether you know Jesus and have eternal life, talk to your leader about the free gift of eternal life.)*

◆ **God wants us to fulfill the Great Commission.** In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commanded his disciples to go and tell all the nations about Him. That task continues today through you and me. Until Jesus returns, we are called to let the world know that He died and rose again so that we can have eternal life.

◆ **God wants us to participate in a Christian community.** This is more than simply attending church once a week. It involves praying for and with other believers (James 5:16), worshipping with them (Hebrews 10:23-25), and using your spiritual gifts to advance the mission of the Church (1 Corinthians 12).

Read the above priorities carefully. How might they affect your life in each of the areas below?

(Note: We will discuss each of these areas at greater length throughout this study).

◆ Career

◆ Church involvement

◆ Free time

◆ Money

◆ Friendships

◆ Dating relationships/Marriage

◆ Spiritual Life

Spend a few moments in prayer, asking God to orient your life around His priorities.

MEMORIZE

Many weeks we will provide you with a verse to memorize on your own or with a group. These verses will help to solidify the principles we are discussing in this study, so make sure to consider them and meditate upon them. This week's verse is Philippians 3:7 (NASB):

"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."

notes + thoughts



chapter two

MAKING WISE DECISIONS

One of the most popular restaurants in our town is Freebirds, where you can order a burrito with whatever ingredients you desire. Tortilla options include flour, corn, spinach, and cayenne. And that's only the beginning: Freebirds has two different kinds of rice, four types of meat, somewhere around half a dozen sauces, and a wide variety of vegetables and other condiments. We've never done the math, but it's likely there are hundreds of thousands of burrito permutations.

On the one hand, all those choices are great. After all, you can decide exactly what you'd like on your burrito. On the other hand, it's a bit overwhelming. From time to time, people simply freeze up, unable to make a decision. (Oh, and did I mention that they also sell tacos, salads, and nachos?) With so many good options, it's easy to feel paralyzed and think "what if I order the wrong burrito and send the rest of my life careening off course?"

If we have a hard time ordering the right burrito, how can we expect to make good decisions about the really significant stuff? As you graduate from college, you're facing some of the most important decisions of your life: where you will work, where you will live, whom you will marry, how you will arrange your time and money, just to name a few. How can you avoid decision paralysis and make wise choices? As a Christian, what principles and values ought to undergird the decisions you make?

CONSIDER YOUR DECISIONS

What major decisions(s) are you facing right now?

What are the core values that drive your decision-making process (e.g. financial security, faithfulness to the Scripture, consistency with your parents' desires)?

Do you have a process for making decisions or do you just “wing it”? If you have a process, describe it briefly.

STEP 1: PRAY

It's difficult for many of us to ask for help. We like to think we can make our own decisions and do everything by ourselves. But we worship a powerful and wise God, one who is far better at making decisions than we are. James 1:5 urges us to ask Him for wisdom, trusting that He is generous and will give us what we seek:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

If you're like me, it's easy to start planning and preparing for the future without ever asking God for His wisdom. Without prayer, our decisions will not be made from a spiritual mindset, and we're likely to choose poorly. When we pray, though, we submit our lives to God and trust that He will direct our paths..

- ◆ Spend a few minutes right now praying about the decisions you're facing over the course of the next semester and year. Ask God to give you wisdom.
- ◆ Spend a few minutes praying for the decisions of others in your group. You might need to pause and send each person a message or email to ask for prayer requests.

STEP 2: DETERMINE YOUR OPTIONS

Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Yet, it's surprising how often we forget to consider all the options available when we're making a decision. It's easy to let our emotions get the better of us, rather than taking the time to consider every possible choice carefully. In some cases, we find that there are open or closed doors that we had not considered.

For example, if you have a 2.0 grade point average and your major was underwater basket weaving, it's unlikely you are headed to medical school. That is not an option on the table for you. However, you are not required to be an engineer simply because that was your undergraduate field of study. You could pursue an MBA, or head toward vocational ministry, or seek to get a Ph.D. and enter a career in academics. Before making a final decision, it's helpful to at least know all the options on the table. It's usually a good idea to talk with wise counselors to get their perspective, since they might be able to think of options you have not yet considered.

Read Acts 16:6-10. How did God reveal His will to Paul and his companions? How does God reveal His will to us today (Col 1:9-10; Eph 1:16-18)?

After you have prayed and searched God's Word, how can you determine the options that are available to you?

Think of a major decision you are facing right now. Try to list all the options you have available to you.

STEP 3: SEEK COUNSEL

Before you pay for a movie, it's likely that you try to gather information about it by asking your friends for their opinion of the movie or reading reviews about it online. After all, nobody wants to waste money to watch something that isn't entertaining or enjoyable.

Amazingly, though, some of us neglect to seek counsel for major decisions. Before you take a job or move to a new town, it makes sense to talk to people who can help you think about the decision clearly. Sometimes we are too close to a decision to see all the facts objectively.

The book of Proverbs says repeatedly that wise people accept advice. Proverbs 12:15 says, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.” As you make decisions, seek to be a wise person, one who listens to sage advice.

Good advice comes from a variety of sources. First and foremost, of course, is the Bible itself. God’s wisdom, and the wisdom of the ages, is contained in the Scripture. Before asking advice from other people, ask advice from the Word of God. Second, receive advice from parents and other mentors. If your parents are unable or unwilling to provide you with input, talk to someone at your church who is wise, experienced and godly. Third, peers can provide input as well. They are in the same stage of life and might have a perspective that you haven’t seen. Just make sure you take their input cautiously – our friends don’t always know what’s best for us.

Have you examined the Bible for its perspective on your current decisions? Summarize below what you’ve learned.

Who can you trust for advice about your current situation? Write their names below. Then seek them out this week and ask about your upcoming decision(s).

STEP 4: ASK A FEW KEY QUESTIONS

◆ Is this course of action biblical?

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

You don’t need to pray about whether or not you should stay sexually pure before marriage. The Scripture is very clear on that issue. You don’t need to pray about whether or not you should pay your taxes. Again, the Bible is clear. That’s why it’s critical, as we’ve said before, to read God’s Word before making a decision.

◆ Is this the best use of my resources?

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

God has given you gifts, abilities, and resources. You will be held accountable for how you use them. If you are not gifted in administration, it's probably not a good idea to take a job as an administrative assistant. If you are gifted as an evangelist, consider a job that will allow you to interact with non-Christians on a regular basis.

Your spiritual gifts are one resource God has given you. You also have time, money, your body, and your relational network. Think about how you can best use those resources for the glory of God. There are probably many good ways to use your resources, but look for the best fit you can find. You won't be able to find the "perfect" job or the "perfect" spouse, but pray and seek God's best.

◆ What do I prefer? What does my "gut" tell me?

Although feelings and preferences are notoriously unreliable when overly trusted, you should take them into account. Don't marry somebody just because you feel you "should." God made your emotions and your desires, and He wants you to use them for His purposes. After you've searched the Scripture, asked for advice, and considered your gifts and resources, don't be afraid to think about what you want to do. God often works through our emotions *in conjunction with* our minds.

STEP 5: BE BOLD AND TRUST GOD!

Don't be paralyzed by fear. Once you are ready to make a decision, step out in faith and trust God to take care of your life. *Trying to avoid a decision is a decision in and of itself.* You can't steer around difficult choices, so seek to make them in the way that best honors God, and trust Him with the results.

We will leave you with this thought from Os Guinness: "We are not primarily called to do something or go somewhere; we are called to Someone." Seeking God's will for your decisions is a matter of recognizing His authority over your life and trusting Him in every aspect of the decision-making process.

GROUP ACTIVITY

This week, spend a few minutes in your group discussing your key decisions. Pray for one another, that you will each have wisdom and patience as you wait for the Lord to give you direction.

notes + thoughts

A black and white photograph with a halftone dot pattern. It shows a person's hands raised in a gesture of surprise or awe. The hands are silhouetted against a bright, out-of-focus background. A white rectangular box is overlaid in the center, containing the text 'chapter three' in a cursive font. There is also a smaller white rectangular box in the upper right corner, which is empty.

chapter three

CHURCH & COMMUNITY

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Even with the best of intentions, communication can go awry real quickly. For example, here are some of my favorite church bulletin mishaps ...

1. At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be “What is Hell?” Come early and listen to our choir practice.
2. For those of you who have children and don’t know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
3. Next Sunday a special collection will be taken to defray the cost of the new carpet. All those wishing to do something on the new carpet will come forward and do so.
4. Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 p.m. Please use the back door.
5. The eighth graders will be presenting Shakespeare’s Hamlet in the Church basement Friday at 7 p.m. The Congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.
6. Weight Watchers will meet at 7 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church. Please use large double door at the side entrance.
7. Ladies, don’t forget the rummage sale. It’s a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don’t forget your husbands.
8. Barbara remains in the hospital and needs blood donors for more transfusions. She is also having trouble sleeping and requests tapes of Pastor Jack’s sermons.

Now even in our super sensitive and politically correct culture today, it is highly unlikely that anyone would write off a church in light of any of the above announcements. If a visitor walked into a church and saw one of these in print or heard one of these in the beginning of a worship service, it would be an unfortunate mistake to base one's first impression of a church's identity and mission upon such a superficial (and funny) error.

Yet, one's first impression often does heavily influence people's judgment of a church or an individual. The challenge then is that we shape our first impression of a church not upon superficial values but upon the most important values for a church.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

In a short time, you will graduate and likely move to a new city where you will be looking for a new church. While there are no perfect churches out there, it is vitally important that you know what to look for. Statistics shows us that people will tend to bounce around visiting many different churches over a period of months and sometimes years. Such a consistent tendency not only threatens one's spiritual life greatly but it also reveals a sense of uncertainty in people's perspective on church. Do you know what makes a good church? In contrast, do you know what makes a bad church? Answer the following questions ...

What are the most important things that you should look for in a church? Specifically, what has the church been called to be and to do?

What factors do people tend to overvalue as they look for a church?

What factors do people tend to undervalue as they look for a church?

How long do you intend to visit other churches before getting involved?

GOOD DOCTRINE AS GOOD HYGIENE

One of the primary callings of the church continues to be to preach the Word in order to draw men and women to a greater understanding of the Scriptures and of God Himself. As a result, the Word of God remains indispensable in our spiritual lives as we are transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. With this perspective in mind, answer the following questions ...

What impact should the Word of God have in our spiritual lives? (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:12)

Conversely, what happens when the Word of God is dismissed or taught incorrectly (cf. 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 19; 4:1-5; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:14-18; 4:3-4)?

Interestingly, the Greek word that our Bibles translate as “sound” to describe one’s doctrine or teaching is the same word from which we get our English word for “hygiene.” As a result, “sound doctrine” then directly leads to spiritual health and hygiene for churches and individuals. Therefore, it is imperative that you know what a church believes as you begin to attend. Be sure to ask church leadership for a Statement of Beliefs. Often, you can simply find one online and feel free to compare it to Grace Bible’s Statement of Beliefs (www.grace-bible.org/about/who-we-are/what-we-believe). It may be helpful to know that you shouldn’t compromise on the following essential beliefs of the Christian faith: the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, the grace of God in salvation, the relationship of believer to the Holy Spirit, the inerrancy of Scriptures, and God’s eternal plan for His future kingdom.

NO LONE SCOUT PROGRAM

One of my (Trey) favorite seminary professors was a son of missionaries who moved from one remote area to another throughout his childhood. At the age of 11 and stationed on the island of Madagascar off of the African Coast, he had a desperate desire to join the Boy Scouts. In fact, so great was his desire that he had read the Boy Scout manual from cover to cover. But he had one simple problem ... there were no Boy Scout troops on the island of Madagascar. So his dad did a little research and discovered that the Boy Scouts had a Lone Scout program for just such cases. As much as his dad tried to reproduce the Boy Scout experience for him, it just seemed like something was missing ... he could go on campouts, but he was alone. He could roast marshmallows across a camp fire, but he was alone. He could tie knots and call troop meetings to session, but he was still alone. Frankly, the Lone Scout program was a sweet idea in theory, but in practice it was just ridiculous! The essence of the Boy Scout experience is a communal one, and it can't be reproduced without other Boy Scouts physically present with one another.

In much the same way, the essence of the Christian experience is a communal one. Despite our American emphasis on individuality and self-sufficiency, there is no such thing as a Lone Scout program in Christianity. God didn't design us or the spiritual life to be lived alone! As a result, He designed the church, or the Body of Christ, to be a community because we need one another! Answer the following questions about this spiritual community ...

What kind of diversity do we find within this spiritual community?

(cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-18; Ephesians 2:11-14; Colossians 3:11; Titus 2:2-8)

What characteristics and activities should be true of this spiritual community?

(cf. Acts 2:44-46; Ephesians 4:15-16; Colossians 3:9-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)

What characteristics should be true of the leadership of this spiritual community?

(cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-13; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3)

SHARED MISSION

There is no shortage of groups on our campus or in our country who gather with one another to share life experiences due to a common belief or shared interest. In fact, tens of thousands of A&M students and alumni gather as a community countless Saturdays each Fall at Kyle Field to share a love for Aggie football. So what separates the church's experience of community from a Saturday at Kyle field with 80,000 or so screaming fans? What difference exists between the fellowship of Christian believers and any other club or organization that also has a common interest or perspective on life? The primary difference between these community experiences centers on the calling and impact of the Christian church upon the surrounding community.

Read the following verses to identify distinct components of the church's calling to those within the Body and to those outside of it ...

◆ Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8

◆ Colossians 1:28-29; 2 Timothy 2:2; 3:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 2:8-9

◆ 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Ephesians 4:11-13

◆ Matthew 25:35-40; Acts 4:32-35; James 1:27-2:4; 1 John 3:16-17

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

Again, it is important to stress that there are no perfect churches. Each church will tend to be strong in certain areas of its calling and deficient in other areas. So keep the big picture in mind as you look for a new church. Do they teach sound doctrine? Can you find community there? Are they emphasizing evangelism and discipleship locally and globally? Can you find a place to serve? Are the poor and marginalized protected and valued? Once you find a church that meets those basic requirements, then get involved! As you search for the right church, it is wise to place a limit on the amount of time that you will church hop. Too many recent college graduates wander for too long from church to church. In the meantime, their spiritual lives suffer greatly in this new life stage. Also, be sure to ask any church leader for a church recommendation in the city you are moving to after graduation. Having walked through this lesson, now answer the following questions from the beginning of this lesson again ...

What are the most important things that you should look for in a church? Specifically, what has the church been called to be and to do?

What factors do people tend to overvalue as they look for a church?

What factors do people tend to undervalue as they look for a church?

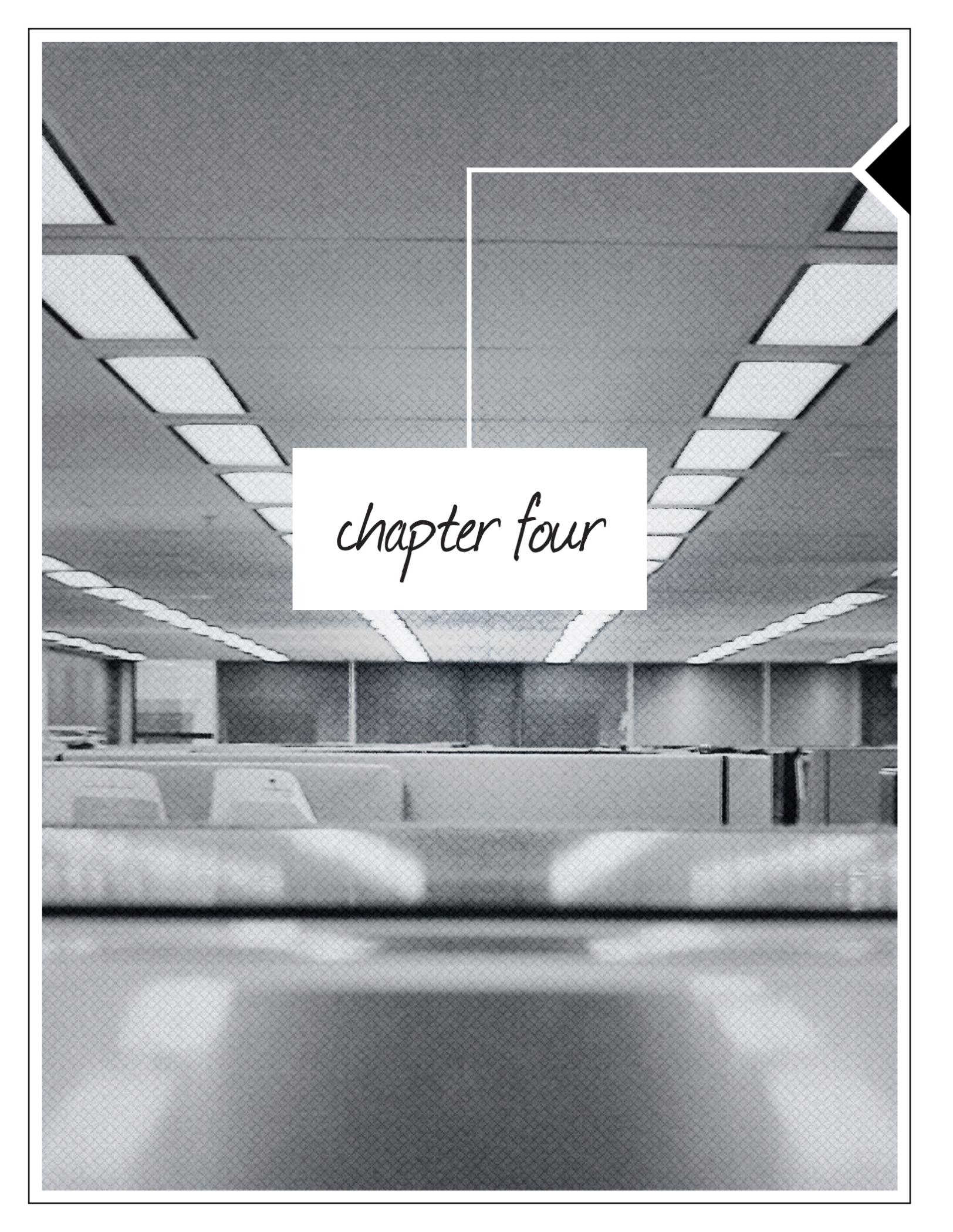
How long do you intend to visit other churches before getting involved?

MEMORIZE

This week's verse is Hebrews 10:24-25 (NASB):

"Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

notes + thoughts



chapter four

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

My (Trey) first real job experience came in high school as a cashier for a men's shoe store. This had seemed like the perfect situation for a first job. It was a store that had tons of athletic merchandise that I could buy at discount, and it had 6 TVs constantly displaying at least 3 different sporting events at a time. What else could a high school guy want in a first job?

Yet, few experiences ever turn out like one's initial dream. You see, the salesmen at this store collectively began to introduce me to all of their customers as "Skillet." Then, they began to explain a fabricated story that I was a troubled youth who had made a series of poor decisions and had landed in juvenile prison with a rap sheet. Despite my checkered past, this shoe company believed youths like myself were worthy of a second chance. As a result, I was one of the first juveniles they had taken on as part of a work release program from juvenile prison. Finally, the salesmen would depart leaving me alone with a shocked and very hesitant customer at my register.

The personal embarrassment would only proceed from bad to worse as it was my responsibility as a cashier to take the customer's residential information for our advertising mailers and their credit card info to complete the sale. Every time, a mom would huddle her kids under her arms in a stance of protection and would surrender her credit card info and residential address with the gravest concern possible.

All in all, my first job didn't go anything like I had hoped. In fact, it created in me a dread to enter the "real world" that only got more pronounced my senior year in college. Furthermore, this first job experience produced a series of questions as seen below that I still found myself asking in preparing to graduate from college. How would you answer the questions on the following page yourself as you prepare for your first job outside of college?

How do I find the right job? What job best fits my abilities, passions, etc?

How do I interact with coworkers?

How do I submit and honor bosses who I may even disagree with at times?

How do I honor the Lord and even make an impact for eternity in the workplace?

So many college graduating seniors dread finding a job and entering the “real world” because they have yet to realize the privileged calling and inherent significance that a career provides under God’s direction. As we build a biblical viewpoint on career in this lesson, it is imperative to go back to the very beginning of God’s dealings with man and with all of Creation in the opening chapters of Genesis.

COMMISSION AT CREATION

In fact, our first biblical glimpse of God’s activity and relationship with Creation centers on work. As you read Genesis 1:1-2:3, 2:15, and 3:16-19, answer the following questions ...

What do we learn about work from the activities of both God and man?

How has the curse of sin impacted our experience of work today? Is it still good?

What do we learn about God's attitude to work even after the Fall? (See Colossians 3:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12; Revelations 22:3-5.)

The biblical narrative of Creation in Genesis 1 and 2 sheds much light on the calling and value of work. Over the 6 days of God's work of Creation, God had "made," "separated," "placed," "created," and "blessed" the entirety of the Creation. In fact, He was so pleased with His work that He then entrusted Adam and Eve with the privilege to work as well in His creation as they were to "subdue" and "rule over" it. Even though work falls under the curse of sin like everything else within God's Creation in Genesis 3, we discover that work remains good and can still honor God's Creation and Himself today.

CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY

God's divine commission to humanity to work very much resembles the esteemed commissioning of an artist to produce a work of art for the benefit and satisfaction of a community. In fact, some of the most renowned artists of the Renaissance period were Christians who saw such divine calling and joy in their commission to work. With this perspective in mind, answer the following questions ...

What motivation(s) should drive our work (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12; Ephesians 6:6-7)?

In what manner(s) should we work (cf. Colossians 3:22-23)?

The story is told of Alexander the Great who one time came upon one of his soldiers who looked pitiful, wearing sloppy clothes, unshaven, and reeking of alcohol. When his commander asked for his name, he replied, “Alexander, sir.” Glaring back the commander replied, “Soldier, either change your name or change your behavior!” This soldier uniquely represented his commander and therefore needed to serve accordingly.

While we may tend to dissociate the secular workplace from our spiritual life, coworkers and even employers inevitably link our professional life with our professed relationship to Jesus Christ. The internal motivations behind our work and the manner that we approach our work each reflect upon God who has divinely called us to work for Him! It is in this sense that Dorothy Sayers’ comments in an essay titled “Why Work?” are so rich:

“The Church’s approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. What the Church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables ... Let the Church remember this: that every maker and worker is called to serve God in his profession or trade – not outside of it.”

CARING ABOUT COMPENSATION

We will end this lesson where many people begin as they consider a career or a job opportunity. Unfortunately, many people initially pursue careers and remain in jobs strictly due to monetary compensation. Obviously, monetary compensation is an important factor and legitimate benefit for work done but it isn’t the only compensation that results from work. As a result, answer the following questions ...

What primary “compensation” does Paul seemed concerned with in Titus 2:9-10?

How can monetary compensation be appropriately used (cf 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philippians 4:15-18; Proverbs 3:9-10)?

What “reward” does Paul have in mind in Colossians 3:24? Is it temporal or eternal?

Aside from the tangible compensation that a career can provide in the present or for eternity, we often overlook the sense of personal joy and fulfillment that the right job can provide us under the Lord’s direction. It is in this sense that Frederick Buechner comments,

“To believe that a wise and good God is in charge of things implies that there is a fit between things that need doing and the person I am meant to be.”

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

This lesson primarily looks at a career that you will have after graduation. Nonetheless, the principles from this lesson greatly apply to your job as a student now. With this parallel in mind, answer the following questions ...

How can your job as a student in school or employee in the workplace honor God?

As you pursue a job after graduation, what factors are most important as you consider different job options?

MEMORIZE

This week’s verse is Colossians 3:22-24 (NASB):

“Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”

Suggested Resources:

- ◆ Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work, by Tom Nelson.
- ◆ Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work, by Timothy Keller.
- ◆ Going Public with Your Faith, by Peel and Larimore.
- ◆ Dorothy L. Sayers's essay, "Why Work?" in her book *Creed or Chaos*

notes + thoughts



chapter five

DATING & MARRIAGE

When I (Matt) graduated from college, I didn't have a wife, a fiancé, or a girlfriend. To be honest, I didn't even have any prospects. My final two years of college were devoid of any encouraging progress at all in that area. As I watched several of my friends get engaged and married, I felt a bit of panic. It didn't help when I attended a banquet for graduating seniors and the speaker told us that finding a spouse would be much more difficult after college than it was during college.

Of course, God is more powerful than the odds and statistics. About a year after finishing college, I began dating my wife Shannon and the rest, as they say, is history. Of course, your story might not look like mine. You might already be engaged or married. You might remain single for many years after college. You might remain single for your entire life. For most of us, dating and marriage are topics that generate excitement and anxiety at the same time. Our movies and popular music talk about romance constantly, but many of us are uncertain of the purpose for it. Some of us even question whether true love and happy marriage are even possible.

So how do we approach the topic of dating and marriage in a way that honors God, whether we are in a romantic relationship or not? We'll examine that question in this lesson.

EXAMINE YOUR ATTITUDE

How do you feel about dating and marriage right now? Are you discouraged, hopeful, excited, or bitter?

What do you think is purpose of dating? Of marriage?

What are some of the biggest misconceptions people in our world have about dating and marriage? Are you ever tempted to believe those misconceptions?

WHY DOES MARRIAGE EXIST?

Read the following passages: Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33.

Based on those passages, what was God's purpose in creating marriage?

How does the purpose for marriage relate to the purpose for your life that we discussed in the first lesson? In other words, do you see any connection between God's purpose in marriage and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)?

BUT I'M NOT MARRIED YET!

Talking about the purpose of marriage is important and helpful, but what if you are single? What if you are uncertain of God's plans for your future in this area of your life?

The good news, of course, is that God uses single people as well as married people. Many have pointed out that both Jesus and the apostle Paul were single. Contrary to popular opinion, the book of Ruth is not primarily about how to find a husband, but is instead the wonderful story of one

widow's faithfulness and kindness in the face of unexpected singleness and poverty. Whether you are married or single, you are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and called for His purposes. Assuming that you know Jesus as your Savior, He can use your life in amazing ways whether you get married when you're 20 or remain single until you're 95.

If you are single, do you ever feel like you are just "killing time" until you get engaged or married? Why or why not?

Write down three or four concrete ways in which you can serve God and His people now, whether you are single or married (e.g. go on a mission trip, start a Bible study at work, visit a nursing home).

How can you manage the loneliness and sexual temptation that often accompanies singleness? Use appropriate Scripture to discuss this question with your group (Hint: Romans 6-8 is a good place to begin).

DATING WELL

Once we understand the meaning of marriage and embrace your purpose as a follower of Jesus, we can begin to discuss how to approach dating. The Bible doesn't directly discuss the topic, of course, since dating as we know it did not exist in the ancient world. (Their parents arranged their marriages. While many cultures still practice arranged marriages, I'm guessing that most of you will not find your spouse this way.)

Although the Scripture does not directly address dating, God's Word provides principles that we can apply to all of our relationships.

Read the passages below and discuss how each one applies to your dating relationships:

◆ Proverbs 3:3-4 (NASB: “Do not let kindness and truth leave you...”)

◆ Ephesians 4:25

◆ 2 Corinthians 6:14-15; 1 Corinthians 7:39 (NOTE: We recognize that 2 Corinthians 6 is not directly discussing dating and marriage. However, we also feel that marriage qualifies as a “yoke,” so this passage is applicable to the marital context in addition to other relational contexts.)

◆ 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7

◆ Matthew 7:12

◆ 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

As you look at these passages, are there ways in which your own dating relationships fall short of God’s standards? If so, what is one concrete way you can improve your relationships to conform to His desires?

SUMMARY

- ◆ God created marriage as a way for people to demonstrate the love between Christ and His people (Ephesians 5). When marriage works as it should, the world sees the character of Jesus Christ and is drawn toward Him. (That is why Christians are commanded to marry other Christians rather than unbelievers.)
- ◆ Although marriage is important, it is not the primary purpose of our lives. We exist to know God and to fulfill the Great Commission. Whether you are married or single, God wants to use you to accomplish His purposes.
- ◆ The Bible contains relational principles that apply to our dating relationships. Kindness, truth, sexual purity, and unconditional love are a few of the character qualities we should cultivate and bring to our relationships.

MEMORIZE

This week's verse is Proverbs 3:3 (NASB):

"Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."

notes + thoughts



chapter six

BIBLICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

WHEN CHRISTIANS CLASH

Olivia de Havilland and Joan Fontaine are two well-known actresses from the “golden age of Hollywood,” which stretched from the 1920s until the 1950s. Because of their different last names, many people don’t realize that they are sisters. de Havilland and Fontaine are the only pair of siblings who have *both* received the Academy Award for Best Actress. By most measures, the pair is extremely successful. They have what most of the world craves – fame, fortune, and talent.

Yet there is one fact about Fontaine and de Havilland that casts a dark shadow over all of their successes: the two women have not spoken to each other in nearly 40 years. What began as a typical sibling rivalry grew as they got older, until the two women decided to cut off all contact. Family squabbles, highly publicized snubs, and professional competition all contributed to the decline of their relationship. Neither is, apparently, willing to forgive the other. Both of them are currently in their late 90s. If nothing changes, they will go to their graves carrying their hatred and bitterness with them.

It’s a tragedy when family members fight and quarrel and eventually part ways. Sadly, it happens in God’s family nearly as often as it happens in biological families. Too often, Christians decide that they can’t get along. They argue, gossip, and harm each other, all the while believing that their point of view is the right one, and that their rightness justifies dissension. Christians easily forget that God has forgiven our terrible transgressions through the work of Jesus. Consequently, we fail to extend that forgiveness to others.

Why does forgiveness matter? How can we work toward extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us? We’ll look at those questions in this week’s lesson.

CONSIDER YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Are there any relationships in your life that have been marked by anger and bitterness? Whom do you need to forgive?

Have you wronged anybody in a way that requires you to apologize (may need some explanation of what “requires” an apology)?

Why do you think forgiveness and reconciliation are so difficult for us (people in general or us as Christians)?

EVEN GODLY PEOPLE FIGHT SOMETIMES

Sometimes we are tempted to believe that godly people will never have disagreements. For example, it can be easy to think that a great marriage doesn't really involve conflict. The truth, though, is that any of us can find ourselves in the midst of conflict at any time. Because we are human and imperfect, we *will* sometimes disagree.

Read Acts 15:36-39 to see how Paul and Barnabas, two of the Bible's most devoted followers of Jesus, had a major conflict. If those two are susceptible to conflict, then it follows that you and I are as well. For that reason, we need to pay careful attention to the biblical principles of conflict resolution. As we look at the Word of God, we will see several motivations and methods for resolving conflict and living in peace.

THE MOTIVATION FOR UNITY

Read Colossians 1:19-20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17-19.

Why did we need to be reconciled to God?

How did God accomplish that reconciliation?

What are the implications of that reconciliation for our lives?

Read 2 Timothy 2:23-26.

What is the benefit of being a person of peace? What will peace allow us to accomplish in and through the church?

What are some possible consequences if we allow unforgiveness and quarreling to destroy our relationships?

THE PATH TO UNITY

Celestin Musekura knows that forgiveness is difficult. In 1998, he discovered that several members of his family, including his own father, were slaughtered in cold blood in Rwanda. His village had been targeted for revenge killings following the genocide of 1994. What made it especially difficult was that some of the killers claimed to be Christians. (This was true on both sides of the Rwandan conflict. Those who called themselves Christians often failed to connect their beliefs with their actions, and there were terrible consequences for that). Celestin says that forgiving those who

murdered his family was one of the hardest choices he made, yet it provided him with joy and peace like he had never known before. Today, he leads a ministry dedicated to helping Christians find reconciliation with one another, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Most of us agree that extending forgiveness is a critical part of walking with Christ. When we fail to do so, we create division within the body of Christ and we distract others and ourselves from making disciples.

Although forgiveness and reconciliation are never easy, here are some practical principles that can help you as you seek to live in peace:

◆ **First, be humble.** Remember that the important thing is not whether you win or lose. The important thing is that you and I reflect Jesus and seek peace.

Read Philippians 2:5-11. What does humility look like? What can you emulate from the life of Jesus, especially in terms of humility?

◆ **Second, don't spread the conflict.** In other words, keep your mouth shut! Talking about the conflict with other people can just make things worse. If you need to seek wisdom, find *one* trusted third party (preferably a pastor or counselor). Even then, be very careful not to slander or gossip about the other party involved in your conflict. In Philippians 4:1-3, we learn about a conflict between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. The conflict had obviously been aired publicly, which was why Paul addressed it in a public letter. It would have been better for them to resolve the conflict privately instead of showing up in the Bible for future generations to read about!

◆ **Third, seek help if necessary.** As we said above, you might need an objective third party to guide you through your conflict. In some cases, you might even need to contact a Christian mediator. Don't allow the conflict to escalate unnecessarily when seeking help might prevent further problems.

◆ **Fourth, ask for forgiveness and extend forgiveness.** Forgiveness means that you no longer demand repayment from the other person or wish to see that person punished. It doesn't mean that you approve of that person's actions, but instead that you choose to leave vengeance and judgment in God's hands.

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

Why do you think the man in Jesus' parable refused to forgive, even when he had been forgiven so much?

What were the consequences of his unforgiveness?

Is Jesus saying that we will lose our salvation if we don't forgive others? Why or why not?

What are the consequences for our lives if we fail to forgive others as Jesus has forgiven us? Feel free to refer to other relevant passages of Scripture.

APPLICATION

Refer back to the list of relationships in your life that require reconciliation. Choose one or two that seem especially critical to deal with now.

Spend some time in prayer, asking the Lord how to approach reconciliation in those relationships.

This week, take the time to seek forgiveness or extend forgiveness. Write a letter, make a call, or visit someone personally for the purpose of reconciliation.

notes + thoughts



chapter seven

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Some years ago, one of our college interns – whom we will refer to as Danny – confessed that he had a giant crush on a girl! However, he faced 2 primary problems in the hope that his crush would ever materialize into something more. First, the girl was clearly way out of his league to an extent that many of us finally told him, “Danny, who are you kidding here?” Second, she had a fairly serious boyfriend at the time. So this romantic crush sadly was nothing more than a hypothetical pipedream!

Yet as God would have it, trouble began to brew in this girl’s dating relationship, and she actually began to come to Danny as a trusted confidant and friend for “romance” advice. Now Danny faced a challenging predicament. Specifically, how could he graciously help this troubled dating relationship come to its rightful end while maintaining his integrity? Then how could he later enter back into the picture as an interested suitor to date her himself? If you were Danny, what would you have told this girl? No matter how unbiased and pure Danny’s motives and advice may have been, Danny clearly faced a conflict of interest that would only be exasperated by the fact that he would later marry this very girl.

Interestingly, a similar perceived conflict of interest exists when the church begins to instruct its congregants about their responsibility to give sacrificially of their finances. No matter how pure and blameless a pastor’s motives may be, many people cringe as such instruction clearly benefits the pastor himself.

Despite the perceived conflict of interest, the church’s silence on this topic can be even more damaging. In fact, our Bibles talk more about the topic of money than any other topic, even salvation. There are actually around 2,350 verses that address the topic of our money and possessions. Few topics are as critical in our lives especially as you prepare to graduate, start a job, and finally begin to receive an actual income for the first time in life!

WORSHIP AND OUR WALLETS

While we so often tend to dissociate our spiritual lives from our secular jobs, money, possessions, time, or even talents, we see over and over again through the Scriptures that such a divide doesn't exist at all. In fact, there is a very close relationship between our wallets and our worship! In this regard, answer the following questions ...

In what way(s) does our money reflect what we worship and how we worship?

(cf. Proverbs 3:9; Matthew 6:21, 24; Philippians 4:18-20; 1 Timothy 6:10, 17-19)

How does our money also reflect our appreciation for those who lead us in worship?

(cf. Luke 10:4-7; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Philippians 4:10-16; 1 Timothy 5:17-18)

CONTENTMENT IN THE PRESENT

Our finances are clearly a powerful asset in our personal worship of God. Also, they can enable us to establish worship where it may not currently exist as we invest in world missions. Yet, we often forfeit these great opportunities due to a lack of contentment in God's present provision in our lives. It is impossible to track the ever increasing statistics on consumer and even national debt as we constantly borrow from tomorrow to purchase today's latest and greatest. The Scriptures have much to say on these topics ...

What perils await those who fail to remain content with God's provision?

(cf. Eccl 5:10-12; Prov 18:10-11; 23:4-5; 30:8-9; Matt 13:22; Luke 12:15; 1 Tim 6:6-10)

How can we grow in contentment with God's present provision in our lives?
(cf. Proverbs 30:24-25; Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; Hebrews 13:5)

When our hearts kneel before the idols of money and materialism, we will never experience true contentment. The secret to contentment lies in the realization that Jesus is ENOUGH! Jesus alone satisfies ... Jesus alone is worthy of our life's worship and pursuit! If we begin to worship the very thing that we were designed to offer as an asset in worship to God, then our lives experience unthinkable tragedy. It is this tragedy of discontentment and greed that Ralph Winter identifies within our American culture as he poignantly writes,

"America today is a save-yourself society if there ever was one. But does it really work? The underdeveloped societies suffer from one set of diseases: tuberculosis, malnutrition, pneumonia, parasites, typhoid, cholera, typhus, etc. Affluent America has virtually invented a whole new set of diseases: obesity, arteriosclerosis, heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, venereal disease, cirrhosis of the liver, drug addiction, alcoholism, divorce, battered children, suicide, murder. Take your choice. Labor-saving machines have turned out to be body-killing devices. Our affluence has allowed both mobility and isolation of the nuclear family, and as a result our divorce courts, our prisons and our mental institutions are flooded. In saving ourselves we have nearly lost ourselves."

CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE

Our willingness to give of our finances sacrificially in worship to God reflects not only a contentment in God's present provision in our lives, but it also reflects a confidence in God's future provision in our lives. The manner in which we handle our finances directly reflects our belief in the character and activity of God Himself. With this in view, answer the following questions ...

How do the Scriptures depict God in relation to money and possessions?
(cf. Psalm 50:10-11; 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Philippians 4:19)

How do the Scriptures depict man in relation to money and possessions?
(cf. 1 Chronicles 29:14-16; Matthew 25:14-30)

The same college intern, whom we referred to as Danny at the start of our lesson, not only found himself in romantic conflicts of interests but he also used to borrow and subsequently misplace church property on a routine basis. One week, it would be a church laptop. The next week it would be a church projector locked in his trunk oblivious to him. Finally, he returned a personal book to my (Trey) library with coffee stains seemingly on every page. To this day, I still can't imagine how coffee could have gotten on so many pages but it was clearly time for a conversation. Danny needed to realize that handling someone else's property necessitated the greatest of concern and care.

In much the same way, we need to realize that our money and possessions aren't ultimately in our personal possession. They belong to God who has entrusted us with their management for His glory. When we realize that we are but stewards of His resources, it completely re-orientes how we view and manage our money and possessions!

HOW TO MAKE A BUDGET

Many people falter financially because they don't have a clear idea of their expenses and income. A budget is a tool designed to help you use your money wisely.

Add up your monthly expenses in the table below. Now, compare that to your monthly income from all sources. Try to assign every dollar to some purpose, so you don't find yourself spending extravagantly. At first, you will be guessing on the amounts of some expenses, but with some practice and experience you ought to be able to refine this better.

Rent/Mortgage	\$
Groceries	\$
Utilities (electric, gas, water)	\$

Phone	\$
Eating Out	\$
Saving (10% or more recommended)	\$
Giving (churches, charities, missions)	\$
Clothes	\$
Entertainment	\$
Car (payment, gas, maintenance, insurance)	\$
Student Loan Payments	\$
Miscellaneous (cleaning supplies, pet food, gym membership, grooming, etc.)	\$
Life and Health Insurance	\$
TOTAL	\$

FINANCIAL TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

◆ When you write down your income, don't forget to exclude taxes, since you won't be taking your full paycheck home with you.

◆ If your expenses exceed your income, you're going to end up in debt.

◆ For some people, it's better to pay for certain items with cash, particularly if you struggle to be disciplined with your money. For example, if you find that you spend a great deal of money eating at restaurants, allot yourself a certain amount each month (e.g. \$150) and withdraw that amount at the beginning of the month. Once it's gone, you're finished with restaurants for that month! That will help you keep your spending under control.

◆ Pray about how you will give to your church, charities, and missionaries. Although the Old Testament required 10% of one's income to go to the Temple, the New Testament only commands us to give as much as the Lord leads us (1 Cor 16:1-2). For many people it will be possible to give more than 10%, and we encourage you to do so if you can. Regardless of the amount you give, make it a top priority – once you begin to spend your money in other ways, it's very hard to make giving a habit later. If you wait to see how much is left at the end of the month, there won't ever be enough left to give!

- ◆ As quickly as possible, build up a small emergency fund (at least \$1,000), so you won't be tempted to use your credit card in case of emergencies.
- ◆ Eventually, you will want 3-6 months of income saved, in case you lose your job or experience a serious medical emergency.
- ◆ Once you have an emergency fund in place, take advantage of your employer's 401k match, if there is one. Try to save as much as possible for the future.
- ◆ Don't underestimate the importance of sufficient health insurance (and if you have a family, purchase life/disability insurance as well). Unexpected medical bills drive those without insurance to bankruptcy. If your employer does not provide health insurance, shop around for an individual plan. At the very least, buy catastrophic insurance in case you have a serious illness or injury.
- ◆ When it comes to purchasing cars, be practical and wise. It's always better to pay cash if you. If you must finance, it's generally better to buy a used car with 30,000 to 50,000 miles. You will avoid the new-car depreciation and still have a reliable vehicle for years to come.
- ◆ Don't fall into the trap of trying to match somebody else's lifestyle, particularly when you can't afford to do so. Many new graduates try to buy houses that are as big and new as their parents' homes, forgetting that their parents saved for many years before buying their house. You can easily end up spending so much for a house that you have little left over for other items. The same principle goes for a car, clothes, and any other item.

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

What would others conclude about your worship of God if all they observed were your monetary patterns?

What steps can you take this week to grow in simplicity and contentment?

Ways to Give at Grace Bible Church

As we have seen in this lesson, we have the wonderful privilege to utilize our financial resources to worship and to further advance the kingdom of God. Specifically, giving to your local church should be one of your primary priorities as you give on a consistent basis.

If you are interested in giving to Grace Bible Church, then simply go online to www.grace-bible.org/give to find out how to start giving. There are a variety of methods available based on an individual's preference. In addition, one may choose to give to a series of ministry needs including the General Fund, Debt Retirement, Campus Improvement, and even College Intern Support.

As a church in which over 65% of our congregation is made up of college students, our college interns annually raise support in order to serve and lead within our college ministry. If you have been blessed by their ministry, then prayerfully consider giving to Grace Bible Church through the Intern Support fund.

MEMORIZE

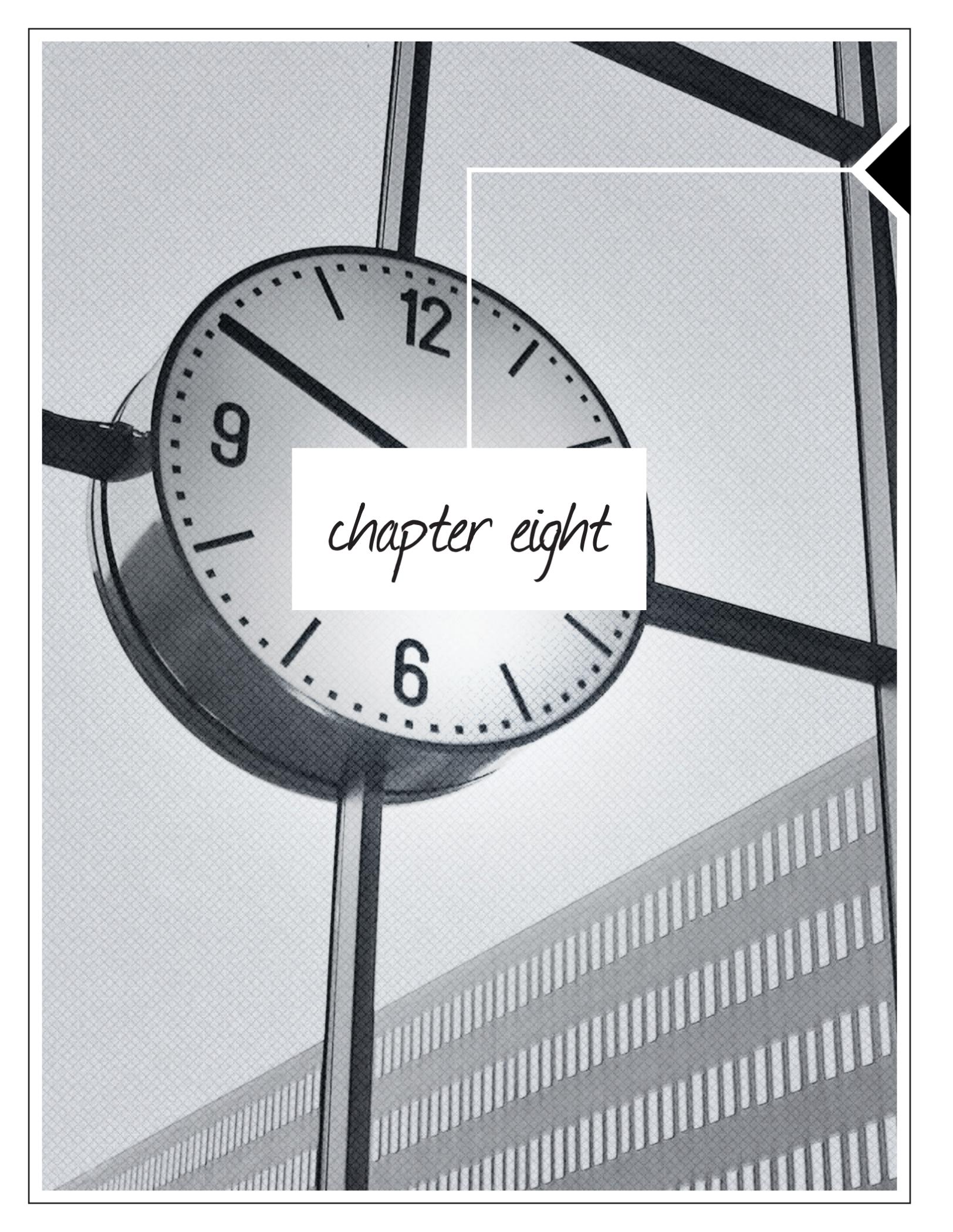
This week's verse is 1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NASB):

"Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed."

Suggested Resources:

- ◆ The Treasure Principle, by Randy Alcorn.
- ◆ Crown Financial Ministries (www.crown.org) has great resources.
- ◆ Mint (www.mint.com) is a great, free online tool to set budgets and manage expenses.

notes + thoughts



chapter eight

On October 23, 2008, a Japanese woman was arrested for murder. Her husband had suddenly divorced her, and in her anger she killed him. “I was suddenly divorced, without a word of warning. That made me so angry.” It was a crime of passion and revenge, the stuff of movies and cheap paperback novels.

This murder, though, was different from many of the killings we read about in the papers. What set this crime apart was that the “husband” was not real. He was an avatar in an online video game called “Maple Story.” He was simply a figment of one man’s imagination. In order to “kill” the character, his virtual wife had to hack into his computer and delete the avatar. She was arrested and charged with hacking into somebody else’s computer and manipulating his data.¹

At first glance, this story made me laugh. It’s such a ridiculous example of how the line between reality and fantasy can become blurred when we spend too much time playing video games. As I reflected on it further, however, I was troubled. What a tragic waste of time! How many hours did this man and woman spend planning and developing a fake world, with fake relationships? How much energy and emotional investment went into an activity that was totally separated from reality? Our lives are made of time, so the way we spend our time matters immensely. To waste our time and our abilities is a tragedy, one that has consequences for now and for eternity.

As you graduate from college and enter the real world, using your time and abilities well will be one of the greatest challenges you will face. You won’t only face the temptation to waste your time and energy in obvious ways, like watching too much television or playing video games. You also

¹ <http://www.findingdulcinea.com/news/technology/September-October-08/Virtual-Maple-Story--Murder-Reveals-Online-Lives-Gone-Too-Far.html>

face the temptation of doing “good” things with no real purpose, of spending hours and days and years engaged in frenetic activity without ever stopping to develop a plan for your time and your life.

We want to use our lives in ways that bring glory to God, as we’ve discussed throughout this study. God has called you and me to represent Jesus with what we think, say, and do. Our bodies and our minds and our time have been given to us as precious resources, and we will one day be held accountable for how we use them. In this lesson we will talk about how to use those gifts well.

CONSIDER YOUR LIFE

If you had to give yourself a grade for how well you use your time, would you give yourself an ‘A,’ an ‘F,’ or somewhere in between? Why?

What talents and abilities do you have that you can use for God’s purposes? (If you are uncertain, ask a family member or close friend to help you).

Do you feel that your current career plans will allow you to be a representative of Jesus with your time and abilities? Why or why not?

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

Luke 19:11-27 records a story Jesus told to His disciples in order to stress to them the importance of using our resources well. (A very similar parable is recorded in Matthew 25:14-30). In this story, Jesus made the point that we will one day face an evaluation of our lives.

Read Luke 19:11-27. Why did the nobleman (i.e. God) reward the first two men?

Why did the nobleman chastise and punish the third man?

What reward did the nobleman give to the first two men? What do you think this reward represents in God's kingdom?

Read 2 Timothy 4:7-8 and James 1:12. How does Paul describe the rewards God will give to faithful Christians?

(Note: It's important to recognize that eternal life is an absolutely free gift, one that God graciously gives to everybody who trusts in Jesus Christ for forgiveness (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:16). The rewards discussed in Luke 19 and in the epistles of Paul are given to believers who remain faithful. Although every Christian will receive eternal life, the Scripture indicates that only those who persevere will receive the authority and the crowns described in these passages).

What are the "minas" God has given to you, resources that He wants you to use for His purposes?

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR TIME

As we mentioned above, time is one of the most precious gifts we have been given. Our lives consist of time, and too often we squander our time without carefully considering it. On the other hand, when we use our time effectively, in God's service, He gives us the opportunity to participate in His kingdom in amazing ways.

Read Ephesians 5:15-17 and write down the main idea of the passage. In other words, what is Paul's primary point about time?

What does it mean to "walk as wise men"? Where can we acquire that kind of wisdom (see Proverbs 9:10; 13:10)?

REFLECTION & APPLICATION

Look again at your answer to first question in this chapter. If you did not give yourself an 'A' for using your time well, what are some specific ways you can use it better?

This week, make a chart of how you use your time (you can use a computer spreadsheet, or simply draw a daily calendar using ordinary printer paper). Divide your week into 30-minute increments. Every 30 minutes, write down what you have been doing (e.g. "reading the Bible," "watching television," "talking to friends."). At the end of the week, look at your record and see where you need to make adjustments. If you spend an inordinate amount of time playing video games, yet you never pray or read the Bible, make a plan to seek God each day. If you sleep late every day, but neglect your family or your roommates, figure out how you can wake earlier and make better use of your time.

Consider your career plans for after graduation. Will your plans make the best use of your abilities? Be honest with yourself and with your group: Have you chosen your plans based on how well you can represent Jesus in your chosen career? Or have other factors dominated the planning process (e.g. money, your parents' opinions, personal prestige)? Talk to your pastor or group leader about how you can pursue a path that will make the best use of your abilities.

MEMORIZE

This week's verse is Ephesians 5:15-17 (NASB):

"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

notes + thoughts

