

# 52 LESSONS TO BE A BETTER PERSON



THE PERFECT GIFT  
FOR SOMEONE ELSE



*Get all the advice and instruction you can,  
so you will be wise the rest of your life.*

Pro 19:20



**"They say opposites attract. There must be  
plenty of good-looking, intelligent girls around."**

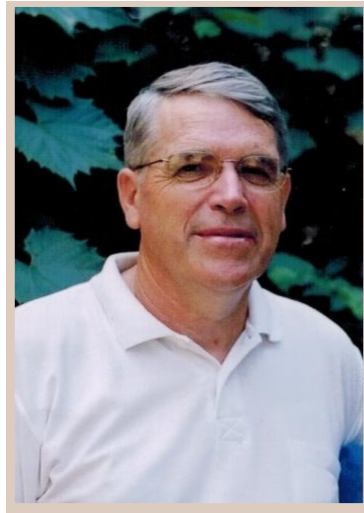




# Dedication

This book is dedicated to my dad. He didn't always get it right, but he tried. He was very dedicated to God, his family, and making the world a better place as he was very generous with his time, talents, and money. He was an excellent provider as he always gave his kids what we needed and enough of what we wanted without spoiling us. Whenever I performed on stage, he was always the first to laugh and he was very good at giving me the space I needed to discover through both success and failure. I wouldn't be where I am today without him in both his life and his death.

As a kid, I remember my dad would receive one of the Herman Treasuries for Christmas and later in the day we'd hear him burst out laughing from his room. Thank you to the late creator for giving me one of my favourite memories of my dad (and his licensing company for the permission to use four of his comics from the first treasury for my book to share the brilliance).





Fun fact, this was my dad's entire elementary school. Even crazier, his mom was the teacher of this one room schoolhouse, so it was like homeschooling on steroids. His one brother is in the middle row, left side and the other is top row, two from the right while my dad is in the middle row, middle spot – the youngest is always the center of attention (or we should be because we're awesome). It's amazing how time passes; what's new today is soon old, and what's young soon passes away.

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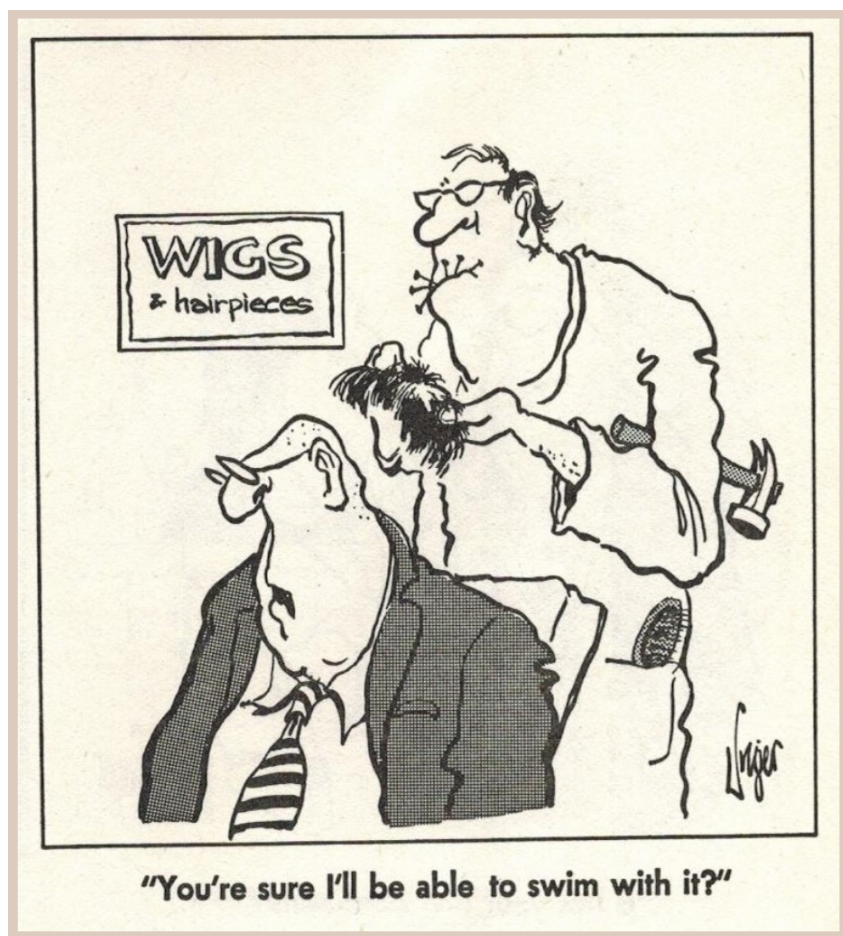
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*The tongue of the wise makes knowledge appealing,  
but the mouth of a fool belches out foolishness.*

Pro 15:2

Here's hoping you find this book to be the former and not the latter.





The cast of characters often inspiring my lessons:



## Introduction

When my second daughter was born, the attending nurse told me that 50% of all babies are accidents or as kind people say, “unplanned.” (Notice how I went with “accidents”? I need to work on my kindness.) As the third born, my mom said I was an “added blessing,” which takes “unplanned” to the next level – I’m that special. What’s interesting is this means if you meet a mean person there’s a 50% chance they weren’t even supposed to exist. How’s that for a kick in the pants? (Encountering mean person) “You’re a miserable person; is that because you were an accident or are you just a big disappointment?” Words you should definitely say to someone who’s rude if you want to change their behavior... to something worse. Whatever your status, it’s up to us to figure out how to manage a life with accidents and disappointments, especially if we’re in one of those categories.

This idea leads to an interesting question: If we are born with genetics we didn’t choose and then we are raised in a certain home environment and at a socio-economic level that we also didn’t choose, how responsible are we for our lives? As a grownup, 100%. Whether we’re an accident or on purpose, whatever our genetics or childhood, it’s up to us how we choose to live our life. ***Your actions are your responsibility.*** It doesn’t matter whether we’re sick, injured, or in a bad emotional spot; it’s up to us for how we respond. Do we get to treat others like garbage because we feel like garbage? It’s an option – not a good one if we want friends. If we treat people like garbage, how can we expect them to treat us any differently? ***People tend to be***

***mirrors; they give back what they are given.*** If we're not good to people, there's a high chance they won't be good to us, and we'll soon find ourselves very alone, which will only make things worse. How we choose to live will have a huge impact on how life around us will respond.

If you're reading this book, you're on a good path because it means you're looking for ways to grow. This is something we should all be doing. We don't want to be the same at 40 as we were at 20, or we're just weird. Sure, I grew up in the generation where we chanted, "I don't want to grow up; I'm a Toys'R'Us kid," but I should be a grown up with kid-like moments (aka I have moments of fun and joy) and not a "kid" with grownup moments (aka an irresponsible, lazy, incompetent leech who never learned to fend for himself).

Writing this book is part of my own growth journey. I'm not some brilliant guru who has all the answers ready to dispense like some manly, charming, and handsome PEZ dispenser in a loin cloth (although a guy can dream... the first part; not the loin cloth part – that was a kid-like moment where I was trying to gross you out). These lessons were all discovered one moment at a time... and then forgotten and relearned... and then forgotten and relearned again (wise advice is surprisingly hard to remember... at least for me). Each lesson started with me learning or relearning lessons myself. Sometimes this happens with life slapping me in the face and other times it's more subtle with a simple question. For instance, I was recently asked, "How do I know if I'm a good person?" Simply put: Your actions. ***Being a good person means responding with patience, kindness, and self control (aka you make life better for those around you).*** The great thing is the better I try to be today, the easier it'll be for me to be better in the future because it'll feel more natural and be more of a habit.

Let's take this a step further than just a good person: What makes a *great* person? A great person also sees the positive. This doesn't mean being a pushover and then saying, "Thank you for taking advantage of me." What I mean is even in difficult situations we can see the good that is there (i.e. we see the silver lining). For instance, both my

daughters were planned – I’m that organized. Not only were they planned, they took one time each. That’s like one step away from Immaculate Conception (maybe not). It’s as if my wife was like “I want kids, but let’s avoid the fun part and get to the diapers and lack of sleep.” Two times and two kids! Are you kidding me? It’s like my wife’s uterus was shouting, “I’m not picky. I want puffy ankles and bizarre cravings!” A statement that might explain why my wife’s body only wanted one and done – I say stupid things and regularly ruin the mood.

By writing that bit, I’m clearly trying to be funny – I have that problem. If you enjoyed the silliness, thank you for being a genius. If you didn’t appreciate it, my condolences... you’re not a genius. On the plus side, I just gave you an opportunity to try to see the good in something you didn’t appreciate like you can be glad it was short or a reason to be grateful I’m not your husband. (My wife doesn’t have that option; she sometimes gets jealous of people like you.)

That being said, mentioning my daughters taking one shot each has two main benefits (besides giving me a chance to think I’m funny). First, my daughters are likely going to read this one day and knowing I just grossed them out makes me smile – you’re welcome future daughters. The second benefit is it demonstrates seeing the lighter side. Some people are gold medal winners at feeling sorry for themselves, but *being able to see the good makes the difference between a bad life and a good one*. Seeing the good reduces anxiety and anger, the risk of depression, and helps in emotional healing – it’s a lot easier forgiving someone when you can see good in what happened. For instance, after performing on stage the other day, a guy said to me: (guy) “When you were on stage, you looked young, but now that I’m closer, I can see that you’ve gotten on in years.” How do you respond to that? I went with, “Thank you?” He then added, “I’m just saying.” I think the rest of that sentence was supposed to be, “I’m just saying... I don’t have social skills.” But how great is this awkward conversation? I get to prove to my wife there are guys out there with worse social filters than me (they’re hard to find) and I get something to laugh at later with my friends – he said what? *It’s amazing how the weirdest and worst situations tend to be our*

***best stories later.*** Life is never easy, but it can look easier for some. We can be jealous of those people or we can be grateful we're not them because an easy life is boring and leaves us without any good stories to share. Meanwhile, those who face the greatest struggles are the most interesting. I know someone who is allergic to water – yeah, water. She breaks out into a rash when she showers – that'd be unpleasant. When she was a kid, she had some equally crazy things happen, but the worst was she fell into a septic tank – that's pretty crappy (yeah, I went there). How disgusting would that be, swimming in a septic tank? What's funny is she didn't break out into a rash until later when she had her shower in clean water. The water was essentially more dangerous to her skin while the septic was more dangerous for the smell. But how interesting does she sound? She's allergic to water, fell in a septic tank, and when she was young her house burnt down... yeah, that happened, too. ***We can have an easy life or an interesting one.*** I'm still not sure what I'd prefer (I definitely want to avoid falling into a septic tank or my house burning down), but what I do know is ***I want an interesting life that isn't bogged down by petty squabbles and unnecessary issues caused by bad choices in order to handle the natural craziness of life as best I can.*** After all, it's a lot easier facing trials when I live a life founded on good choices instead of trying to stand in a storm while on a broken foundation. The lessons in this book are part of that journey – learning how to be wise and to make my life as healthy and enjoyable as possible. Hopefully they can help you on yours.

Discovering what it means to be emotionally healthy has been my focus since my second year as a youth pastor. My group was on a weekend camping trip, and I had three young people give their testimony to say why they're a Christian. I gave an impromptu couple thoughts after to conclude the night where I said something about how I needed God's love, but added, "You probably see me as this happy, friendly person, but when I'm alone to my thoughts, the truth is I hate myself." As soon as I admitted that out loud something in my brain clicked: "That's not right." Since then I've been on a journey to figure out what it means to be emotionally healthy and like myself. (I assume those are supposed to go together.) As I learned in teachers' college (one of the only things I learned there), we learn

best by teaching. That means for eight years while I was a youth pastor giving weekly lessons I was getting more out of it than anyone else. (I definitely learned more than the people listening with their eyes closed and drooling on their neighbor's shoulder.) Even now, as I write my lessons for my blog or book, I'm getting more out of it than anyone reading it (sorry about that) because it forces me to reflect, summarize, and make conclusions on issues I come across as a psychotherapist and simply being alive. ***Ultimately, if teaching is better than listening or reading, the best thing you can do after reading each lesson is to teach what you learned to someone else.***

The great thing about this book is even if you don't agree with something I teach, it will help you sharpen your own beliefs. You don't have to think everything I claim is right (although you will if you're smart... just kidding... not really; it sounds better when I add that). What's important is challenging ourselves to consider what we believe. After all, in 10 years I might look back at something I wrote and be like "What was I thinking?" because that's how growing works. I often look back at things I did in my twenties and thirties and wonder, "What was I thinking?" Thus, it makes sense that when I'm in my fifties there's a good chance I'll find something in my forties that leaves my future self wondering, "What was I thinking?" There's a reason old people look at younger people and think, "Ah, you're so young and dumb. One day you'll see... or maybe you'll stay an idiot forever; it could go either way." Regardless, every lesson in this book will give you an opportunity to learn what I've learned and apply it to your own life in a way that makes you wiser and better prepared for what comes your way.

May this book give you food for thought and lessons for growing more into the person you want to become.

## Notes to Your Future Self

Take a moment to write where you are at and what you hope to gain from this book. For instance, what are your top three strengths and top three areas that can use some work? How would you rate your emotional health on a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 being the best

possible? (Hint: no one is a 10.) How would you rate your own communication skills? Your level of wisdom? Your ability to love yourself? (Tip: loving yourself is about being patient and kind to yourself; being self entitled is more about being selfish.) Your ability to love others? Who's the most emotionally healthy person you know? Why?

*To acquire wisdom is to love yourself;  
people who cherish understanding will prosper.*

Pro 19:8



**"Surely you can go bowling with Harvey  
another night?"**





## Lesson 1

# A Good Place to Start

I'm a psychotherapist. That's one word. If that was two words, "psycho therapist," that'd be a very different title: (concerned client) "How psycho are you?" I'm glad I'm not psycho... although I may have made a few people wonder that over the years. In "psycho therapist" the gap makes a big difference. The word "gap" is itself interesting. It suggests something small unlike a valley or crater, but gaps can be incredibly dangerous. In London, taking the subway (or "tube"), you regularly hear, "Mind the gap." Gaps can cause us to trip and fall, especially because they're so small we can ignore them: "It's a small gap. It'll be fine until tomorrow. It's just a nuclear reactor."

But no matter how small, over time gaps take their toll on us because a gap means something we need is missing. Sometimes we convince ourselves it's a small gap and it's fine when it's actually pretty huge. In my therapy intakes I used to have to ask, "What is your debt situation?" I had a surprisingly large number of people say, "The usual. Just mortgage, car loan, credit cards, and line of credit." Um, what else are you thinking could be on that list? That's not a small gap in your financial situation. That's a pretty huge hole. You're spending a lot of money on interest and making everything you've purchased cost a lot more than it's worth. Unless it's a tax right-off, interest is like donating money to rich people and makes you the opposite of Robin Hood.

One of the greatest problems people who are struggling have is they aren't paying attention to the gaps in how they live. I like to encourage people to work on being emotionally healthy, and one of the best ways of doing that is to make sure we are taking care of our whole self. Reading "our whole self," you might be thinking, "Oh, he's one of those weird self help people who memorized *The Secret*

and likes to put things out in the universe as he pursues his authentic self that manifests forced positivity.” Nope, that’s definitely not me. I’m all about being pragmatic. ***Life is not as complicated as a lot of therapists want to think it is: Live like garbage and you will feel like garbage; live with healthy habits and you will feel better than if you didn’t.***

When I use the term “whole self,” I’m referring to how people have the four parts: body, mind, heart, and soul. This can also be referred to as the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual sides, but that’s too many letters and syllables for me (I never claimed I didn’t have a lazy side). To be healthy, we need to be addressing all four areas or these gaps will have serious consequences to our lives, especially since each category is dependent on the others. For instance, if we ignore our body’s needs, how can we expect our mind to be at its best? Our body will be in too much discomfort for our mind to be able to concentrate very well. You also can’t load up one area and expect it to compensate for the lack of attention to others. For instance, I can’t carb-load my soul (or whatever that’s called) or be like “I have Jesus, so I don’t ever have to eat a vegetable again.” ***Our bodies need balance.*** There is no one thing that fixes everything. Although I’m sure the pharmaceutical companies are working on a pill for that.

When people tell me they often get in fights because they get hangry (i.e. angry because they’re hungry), I like to tell them, “That’s interesting because I get angry at people who are incompetent and don’t do simple things like feed themselves.” At least that’s what I say in my head. (I have a part functioning social filter.) The truth is if you get angry because you’re hungry that means you don’t know how to plan well. Eating is such a simple thing to do. It’s even enjoyable. Why are you not doing one of the basic staples of life? You being cantankerous with others because you’re peckish is completely avoidable – that’s the opposite of genius. If you’re wondering, one of the people who say they get hangry is my wife, so people who can’t plan well make me angry, but if they’re hot enough, I’ll still marry them. I’m not sure what that says about me (besides when I was young I liked hot women), but I think it suggests where hunger

makes my wife crazy, hormones make me dumb... or I guess hormones accentuate what's already there.

When people are struggling, looking at the four parts of the person can be a good place to start. For our body, how are we eating, sleeping, and exercising? For our minds, are we learning anything new or challenging ourselves to stimulate our brain? For our hearts, are we connecting with strangers, acquaintances, and loved ones? I mention all three because they all have their benefits, especially because a stranger we meet today might become our best friend in the future or simply teach us a new perspective. I used to claim I was shy, but it was really me choosing to hide behind my anxiety. Now I like to meet new people because, if nothing else, everyone has a story or idea I can learn and use for my own growth.

People in Western culture seem to struggle the most with the fourth category, the soul (although walking around Disney World and seeing the overweight people you might think taking care of our body is the biggest issue – pun intended). In general, Modern Westerners don't give a lot of attention to their souls. Some people will argue they do yoga, meditate, or some new age trend, but I'd argue those do more for our hearts than our souls. We need actual spiritual things like connecting to God and/or nature. In a culture where we're so city based, it's easy to miss the power of being in nature and surrounded by trees. In a culture that's very comfort based with grocery stores full of food we get to buy without touching dirt or blood, it's easy to ignore God who used to be the one people looked to for provision of rain and a plentiful harvest. As wonderful as grocery stores are, it's easy to lose our gratitude for the food we eat and the work that went into preparing it. Soul wise, there's something about being reminded of how small and insignificant we are that can help keep us stay grounded. For instance, it's harder to feel sorry for ourselves when we're on a hill and looking down at a city full of people as it reminds us that there are so many others out there. Life isn't all about us. We are just one story among so many others. Because of the importance of the soul, I've included a few lessons in this book with connections to God. You may not believe in Him, but it's good to see the other side even it's to sharpen your own beliefs.

**Side Note:** As a Christian, I was taught to treat my body as a temple (my temple enjoys carbs). Our body is a gift from God we're meant to respect, which makes sense because if I don't respect my body, how can I expect others to respect me? If I don't have proper hygiene or stay in decent shape, how can I be seen as emotionally healthy? If I won't wear second-hand underwear, why would I want to have sex with random women who have had many other man-bits inside of them? (I was trying to reduce the grossness there – not sure I achieved that.) Or can you have a fling using someone as a sex toy and not reduce yours or the other person's humanity? From my experience, I don't know how you can expect people to respect you and your body if you don't first respect yourself. Be the precious jewel you were created to be and not something hawked at a pawn shop.

This week, may you consider how you're addressing the needs of the four parts of your whole self.

## Lesson 2

# 12 Tips to be Emotionally Healthier

I recently had a friend say to me, "I told my doctor that I was exercising, eating better, and trying to keep a regular sleep schedule. Then I asked if he had any other suggestions for how I can try to feel better, and he stared at me confused. Do you have a better answer?"

My response? “I hope you brought a change of clothes because I’m about to dump some genius on you.” Arguably, a very ungenius thing to say (like using “ungenius”). I started by pointing out that our culture sucks at being emotionally healthy, and the people we most expect to be the best at it tend to be terrible including doctors, teachers, pastors, and even therapists (i.e. professions where people can focus on helping others as a way to ignore their own problems). I then added I have three Masters Degrees, and in all that education, I never had anyone teach me what it means to be emotionally healthy. If I wasn’t taught it with my background, how can I expect different for anyone else? If you asked most so-called experts how to be emotionally healthy they’d say the typical things like try to exercise, eat well, and get regular sleep (like my friend had been doing), or they might go with meditate, do breathing exercises, and/or yoga. Other experts might ramble for awhile and never really say anything: “Wow, you just talked for half an hour and I got nothing out of what you just said.” I’m not saying that’s what most Sunday sermons were like for me growing up, but I’m also not denying it. How can pastors talk so much and say nothing? It’s like a gift... worth returning. That being said, I know I can be guilty of rambling when I’ve been asked a tough question as I try to figure out my final answer (i.e. processing), but that’s different than giving a sermon that’s planned. For instance, my friend heard a lot more rambling from me than this lesson, which is thought out and edited ten or more times. On the plus side, there were some good points in what I shared that I can now use as the catalyst for this lesson. Thank you to him for his patience.

**Side Note:** My conclusion for why most experts can’t give a good answer for how to be emotionally healthy is they don’t live very healthy lives themselves. They might be very smart and/or maybe they’re really good affirming listeners, but it’s hard to find anyone who role models a healthy lifestyle in our Western culture.

The following is a summary of the points I shared with my friend with a few extra thrown in I thought about after. This is not an exhaustive list or the rest of my book would be a lot of me repeating myself. This is, however, a list based on my 17 year journey to know what being emotionally healthy means.

1. ***Recognize Facts:*** Feelings can be liars (e.g. you can feel guilt when you shouldn't), but facts are facts. Don't let feelings twist the facts. If you don't like certain facts about you or your situation, don't be offended. Accept the truth and work on changing what should be changed. For instance, if you're embarrassed you have a beard (beards are weirds), shave it or accept that you look closer to an orangutan. When it comes to others, the reality is ***if someone sucks, they suck. That's it. Stop thinking about it.*** Unfortunately, good people have a tendency to over think like they're trying to find reasons to beat themselves up – stop! Stop over thinking things because that'll likely lead to thoughts of payback. And then we're the person who sucks – retaliating makes you a bad person. Instead, learn, adjust, and move on. That's it.
2. ***Find the Balance of Caring for Your Needs and Others':*** When I meet people with depression, they either spend too much energy helping others or they only care about themselves. I would argue the balance should be slanted to focusing more on others because I'm a big believer if you want to feel like your life has value, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." Focusing too much on ourselves makes us self absorbed, whiny, and terrible to be around, which adds to our problems while focusing too much on others burns us out and implies we see their lives as more valuable than our own.
3. ***Find the Balance of Being Alone and Socializing:*** Being alone is important whether it's the drive home from work where we decompress or at the end of the day before bed when we take five plus minutes to reflect on the day and preferably do a short inspiring reading to put positive thoughts in our head. Too much alone time makes us get stuck in our head and be self absorbed, which is why socializing is so important. Being around people changes our energy and reminds us life isn't all about us. For some people, socializing can be a challenge, but just because it's a challenge doesn't mean we should avoid it. ***The best thing for us is often the hardest thing to do.***

4. ***Find the Balance of Comfort and Struggle:*** Our culture makes comfort look like the dream. On one hand, we need to rest and recover, but on the other, we need a reason to rest and recover. Our body needs struggle. We are designed to need it to grow and be stronger physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Having a healthy challenge can inspire us and give us purpose. Being the best at something isn't very inspiring, but learning something new and trying to get good at it can renew our sense of drive. Because our culture is so docile (e.g. we don't have to chop firewood), we need to be setting aside time to exercise. As we get older we get drawn to the familiar and being complacent, but like any muscle, our brain needs to find new ways to be challenged. ***We need to keep learning new things or we get bored and become boring.*** Learning something new also helps us feel more confident talking to others as we have something new to share. We shouldn't be scared of struggle; we need to embrace it and make it part of our daily routine.
5. ***Find the Balance of Doing Things that are Pleasant and Unpleasant:*** We need engaging activities, which are things that help us get lost in the moment like writing, playing music, reading, learning, fixing something, and being with loved ones. We also need to do unpleasant things because those are the times that give us our best stories and help us better appreciate the good times. I personally hate conflict, but without it, life is bland. Having something we hate or struggle with gives us something to bond over with others and gives us opportunities to grow.
6. ***Find the Balance of Being Busy Enough:*** Being too busy and not being busy enough are very dangerous for our health as we can burn out or have idle hands that get us in trouble. The latter is one of the reasons having a job is important – it gives us something productive to do and a reason to get moving. People with too much free time tend to get tempted to do things they shouldn't and/or think too much about things that don't matter.



7. ***Have Responsibility and Accomplishments:*** We need purpose. We need purpose in the bigger sense (e.g. I work to support my family) and in the smaller (e.g. to-do lists are great for getting stuff done and knowing what to do). Having purpose includes having a reason to get up in the morning. I hate waking up, but as hard as it is, having a reason to get moving makes a big difference. It helps us wake up while lazing around keeps us blah. Plus, when we do things we end up with accomplishments that we can be proud of and give others a reason to see us as contributing members of society, which helps us feel respected. ***It's easier to see ourselves as good people when we do good things.***
8. ***Find Something that Gets Your Blood Flowing:*** There's something about competition or being on stage that helps us come alive – there's a rush. We might get nervous, but pushing past our anxiety makes the activity all the more exciting and rewarding. There's a reason why action movies are so appealing; we get a small rush as we live through other people's experiences.
9. ***Experience All the Emotions:*** Our emotions are a gift. We need to experience, and let others experience, all of the primary emotions: anger, sadness, fear, and happiness. Being numb makes life terrible, which is why a movie without conflict and void of emotion is terrible to watch. Of course, too much of any one emotion is also bad. We need to learn how to experience a healthy balance of all four emotions. If you're wondering what too much happiness looks like, watch the *The Wiggles* – it's a form of torture.
10. ***Find the Balance of Having Someone Who Inspires You and Someone to Inspire:*** I have a small list of people who inspire me like Buddy the Elf. Sure, as a Christian I should want to be like Jesus, but that's setting the bar way too high. At the same time, there are great benefits to having others we inspire because it gives us confidence and a sense of accountability. When I was an

insecure teenager I was pushed to volunteer in a grade six class and it was incredibly empowering. Because I was older, they thought I was cool (suckers), and as they saw me as cool, I started believing it, which helped me be more confident in general.

11. ***Have a Routine:*** Routine gives us a foundation for how to live and reduces unnecessary decision making thereby freeing our brain. That being said, the best part of a routine is breaking it – it's awesome. It's like rules; we need them to know how to live, and breaking them once in awhile is a lot of fun.
12. ***Find Hope:*** Hope can be knowing we have loved ones cheering for us. It can also be having positivity in our lives, which might be as simple as having something to look forward to doing. Knowing there's something coming up can give us the strength to keep going when we're down. I've had clients have to wait two weeks in order to see me, and knowing they have a session booked helped. When they finally saw me, they were often in a better spot because they kept moving forward.

***Please Note:*** I didn't include faith in this list, but it can make a huge difference. ***Believing the Creator of the universe is cheering for you because He believes in the abilities He's given you can be very encouraging in difficult times.*** Like any good parent, God is looking for reasons to be proud of you, so give him something. Of course, an improper view of God like He demands we earn His love by being perfect or that He wants us to be crippled by guilt and fear are very damaging – obviously.

This week may you consider how you can be healthier.

### Lesson 3

## The Key to Emotional Health & Being Happy

Out of everything I've read, heard, and experienced, there is one key element to being emotionally healthy and happy. It doesn't matter how many drugs you take, how many self help books you read, or even how many therapy sessions you have, if you don't learn to do this, you'll forever be limited in how emotionally healthy you can be. If you're wondering if I'm trying to delay sharing this point, I am. Is it to build intrigue or am I just a jerk? I know my wife's answer and it's pretty accurate. The key to being emotionally healthy and happy is... ahem, sorry, I had to clear my throat, which has no relevance when I'm writing. Sorry... the key to being emotionally healthy and happy is... shoot, what is it again? With all this rambling, I forgot what it is, which is pretty funny... oh yeah, the key is being able to laugh. ***If we can't laugh at our mistakes or see the good when things go wrong, we'll forever be limited in how good life will feel.*** The following is a story that helps demonstrate this idea.

The other day I was cleaning out the cat litter box – jealous? Cleaning up after animals is sooo fun; it's like the best reason to have a pet (if you're being sarcastic). For the record, I was cleaning the litter without being asked; I'm that impressive a husband... or I just couldn't handle the smell and my wife wasn't home. We keep the litter box in the basement near the backdoor that leads to five outdoor steps that take you up into the backyard. On the one outdoor step we keep a trash container for dumping the dirty litter. These details are important for understanding why what happened took place. I'm not sharing random details that don't mean anything, which makes the story unnecessarily longer; you know, like a wife... I mean like "certain beautiful people." I had just taken a full scoop out of the litter that was a blend of all the goodness a cat litter can hold, and when I opened the door to get to the bucket, two steps from the top of the stairs, a young mouse started running back and forth on the step. I, being very manly, screamed. Fortunately, I screamed like a girl so my neighbors will think it was my wife. The mouse, not being able to climb up the concrete stairs, jumped down a step heading towards the house. Panicking at the thought of having a mouse run into the house and becoming an unwelcomed roommate, my body decided to fling all the cat litter I had in the scoop (genius), which hit the ceiling above me and exploded everywhere (definitely

genius). It was as gross (and streaky) as it sounds. Meanwhile, my supposed to be indoor cat had come downstairs and was trying to get outside, so while blocking the dirty cat litter ricocheting off the ceiling from my face and trying to stop the mouse from getting in, I was now also trying to keep the cat from getting out. Growing up watching Disney movies, I also don't do well seeing Discovery Channel like carnage, so I was trying to distract my cat from seeing his new potential toy. Knowing mice are really unhealthy for cats to eat, it was a lose-lose for the cat and mouse if they met (although more of a lose for the mouse). Fortunately, on the mouse's way down to the bottom step I was able to snag him with the litter scoop and get him out of the stairwell to the backyard and then close the backdoor before the cat could get around my foot and discover his new play toy/germ infested snack. After giving the mouse a chance to get away, I had the pleasure of cleaning up the dirty cat litter that was now everywhere in the stairwell and sprinkled in my hair. It was a special kind of gross.

This experience was not pleasant, but after it was done I was able to laugh to myself and I was looking forward to being able to tell friends about it. It's moments like these that make life more interesting and give us something unique to share with others. I could've just been angry and blocked it out of my mind, but I was able to see the good in it. I'm not perfect at seeing the good, but I'm actively working at getting better. And with it, I'm rewarded by life feeling better – sometimes. It's often said that laughter is the best medicine. When it comes to actual sicknesses, take the antibiotics or whatever is suggested by a doctor, but laughter, which is a sign you're seeing the good in things, is the best way to reduce anxiety, depression, and anger while making us friendlier to others and ourselves. I've heard stand-up comedians say they didn't need therapy because they had the stage to get their junk off their chest while making people laugh, which makes a lot of sense. It's easier to heal when we can find the good in the worst of experiences, especially when we can share laughter about them with others. This can help the worst moments almost feel beneficial as they connect us to others and help us sound more interesting.

Hopefully this week you'll be able to see the humor in something that could be seen as bad.

## Lesson 4

# **A Letter for my First Daughter when She Turns 16 (15 years from now)**

***Please Note:*** Writing letters to ourselves and loved ones are great ways to build deeper connection. (Nice letters anyway; mean ones, not so much.) Journals can be helpful when we're upset, but

they're more of an emotional dump. They are meant to help process what's in our head and are typically about negative feelings that should be left alone and never read in the future. Writing a letter, however, can help give a better idea of who we really are and what's going on in our lives. The following is a letter I wrote for my first daughter when she was one, which I highly recommend to parents to do for their kids as keepsakes when we're no longer around. This can also be something we do to encourage others because taking the time to write a letter we print and give to someone shows we care, and it means more than a text or email. It can also be something you do now for yourself. This can be a letter you write in order to read when you're done going through this book or at a designated time like the end of the year. This can be a way to see how you've grown or simply to see how reading letters from ourselves can be encouraging and fun. Not only is the following letter role modeling what I recommend you do, it's a way for you to learn a little bit more about me on a personal level in order to give this book experience more of an intimate feel.

Dear Gracie,

If you're reading this, you're 16. That's a terrifying thought for me as a dad of a one year old. I much prefer going into a store and having old people say, "Ah, she's so cute," rather than teenage boys hopped up on hormones say, "Oh man, she's so hot!" and then me getting arrested for my response. You are now at an important age, and even though you may have heard all of this before, I wanted to write it down to give you as a record from the younger less uptight me. Besides, you likely inherited a pretty terrible memory (you're welcome), so even if you have heard any of this before, it could still feel like the first time – there's good in all things even a bad memory.

My life before you rarely made sense, especially when it came to finding a career. Your Nana (my mom) used to joke how she was wearing out her knees from all the praying she was doing for me because for awhile there my life was constantly hit by one hurdle after another. After my first couple degrees and still not having my life in order, I started to fear that I had peaked in high school and was now

like the former high school football star who never went anywhere after. My last year of high school was amazing. I started an OFFSA winning Ultimate Frisbee team, I was working at a movie theater surrounded by girls who somehow thought I was cool (it pays to be the older guy), I ran a comedy team that had performed a couple great shows, I went to Europe for the first time, and I graduated winning a few meaningful awards on top of giving a valedictorian speech that was one of the best moments I've ever had. Back then my life looked so promising. I was sure I was going to be a millionaire performer by thirty with a wife and kids I could spoil... and I couldn't have been more wrong. Instead, I was 30 and living at your Nana's house rent free because she felt bad that I was making below poverty level income as a youth pastor. I had gone from being a straight A student to the bottom few percent for worldly success with little hope of improvement. I was embarrassed at my inability to live a grownup life, but at the same time, I somehow felt like I was where God wanted me to be. It was really strange. After my time working for the church was done, I had many moments of reflection in my mid 30s where I felt like a total failure and questioned if I had been following God's lead or not. It wasn't as if I was lazy or wasted time. In fact, it was the total opposite. I had been a workaholic, people pleaser most of my life. I never played video games, and at 15 I gave up watching and playing hockey, something I loved, in order to focus on school and making money. From then on, I spent weekends doing homework, working, writing comedy, and volunteering instead of being with friends and playing the sports I loved in order to be "responsible." That work ethic had its benefits, but how could someone who wanted to do great things in God's name keep falling flat, especially when others who didn't care about God looked like they were doing so much better?

When I was thirty-four, my eight years as a youth pastor came to an end because the church couldn't afford me anymore. The funny thing was they had just installed a hundred thousand dollar lighting system (I made about \$30k a year), and not knowing the church's financial situation I was one of the people who voted for it – that bit me in the butt... kind of. I was mentally done with being a youth pastor, so it worked out that I could leave and blame them – bonus. What's crazy

is that was the second time my youth program was cancelled because of shrinking church numbers while my program was thriving and by far the most successful part of the church. How could God allow that? I tried to follow His leading, yet I kept finding myself rejected and unemployed. Fun fact, the next church your mom and I joined shut down a year after us being there. Was I a curse for churches? Add to this the problem that I was told I wasn't "grownup" enough to be hired as a real pastor for other churches (a real pastor position would have given me a real wage). This followed the theme of my youth pastoring days: (church) "You're great with young people, but adults... don't really like you." Both churches I worked for had several people hate my speaking style so much the pastors banned me from preaching – that's impressive. This was devastating when public speaking was something I had always enjoyed and thought was a strength – guess I was wrong. Why would God allow that? Add to this the fact that at this same time when I was desperate for work, I was interviewed for a position at Dofasco, the local steel factory. They were interviewing six people for four positions in a labor role and one person didn't show. Guess who was the one person not hired. They said I was "too employable" to hire. At the same time, a therapy office I applied to said I was by far the best candidate interviewed, but someone else had more years of experience, so they went with him (a logically terrible choice because I was stronger than him with less experience, which means I would be that much better than him when my experience increased). Around the same time, another therapy office that interviewed me said I was overqualified as I had more education and experience than the two women doing the interview. Why wasn't I ever right? How could God not care enough to help me get a job? How could I spend thirteen years heavily involved in ministry for three churches (I volunteered for five years before becoming a youth pastor), which led me to being more backstabbed, judged, ripped apart, and betrayed than anyone I knew? Outside of the church wasn't much better; actually they were worse. ***I wasn't Christiany enough for Christians and I was too Christiany for the world.*** I didn't fit in anywhere. What didn't make any sense was I thought I had followed God's guidance, so why was I such an abomination? No matter what I did I kept being attacked when all I



wanted was to help the world be better, be seen as good enough for people to love, and earn a grownup's wage in order to be a proper provider for my family.

Did you catch the one particularly terrible statement I just shared, “good enough for people to love”? A major part of why I was such a workaholic, people pleaser was to impress people. Not only that, but I wanted to impress God. There's an impossible task: “You created the world, but look at what I can do.” Part of me figured if I could impress others, they would like me, which meant there was a chance I could like myself – another very sad statement. Fueled by my competitive nature, I wanted to stand out as one of the greats... and God protected me from that. All of the betrayal, attacks, and resentment I've experienced from other people and every hurt I've caused, God used to protect me – how strange does that sound? But He protected me from becoming just another fallen Christian leader like Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker, or Ted Haggard (there's an unfortunate name, Haggard). God had other plans than for me to be “great” in human eyes. ***He wanted me to discover what it means to love and accept myself the way He loved and accepted me.*** I didn't need to do “great” things for thousands of people. I didn't need to earn the world's love and admiration. Instead, God had a better plan for me than to be rich and famous. He wanted me to develop connection with people on a personal level and help them learn to love and accept themselves as He had taught me. As it says in Proverbs: “Better to have little, with fear of the LORD, / than to have great treasure and inner turmoil.” (Pro 15:16) Even better, after all my years of hard work, God has blessed me with a wonderful family and a great paying career, which means I'm even further ahead.

One of the best parts of having you come into my life is I've had more moments of peace this past year than I've ever experienced before. I can still question God, but those thoughts have mostly been replaced by moments where it feels like everything is what it's supposed to be in my life. It's like you were God's way of saying, “I said I was guiding you and here is your proof.” All the twists and jerks in my journey, and even in my family's journey like your Aunt and Uncle taking five years to have your oldest cousin, so she's only

two years older than you; it has all come together beautifully when you came into our lives. Your birth was the start of things making sense. Having you in my life has helped me better accept the journey I've had because you have helped make it feel worth it.

I know when I was in elementary school I was disappointed that my dad was older than all of my friend's dads (he had even been a couple of the other dads' elementary school teacher) and I vowed I wouldn't do that, yet here I am even older than he was when he had me. Fortunately, I praise God for this because if I had you ten years ago, I would've been a fraction of the dad I am now. I would've been so busy trying to establish my career that I would've missed out on being with you as much as I get to be now. ***I also would've been anxious about looking like being a good parent instead of actually being a good parent.*** When I was younger I still had so much I had to learn about being a good person in order to be at my best for you. You may have an older dad, but I'm the best version of me that I can be. I may never see my grandkids, but all I needed was to see you (and hopefully a sibling).

When you read this you'll be at an age when you'll be trying to figure out your own path and the best advice I can give you is ***do your part and God will do His.*** It took me until I was thirty eight to better understand how God had been working with me. Every time I was hurt by someone and was filled with guilt for the pain I knew it caused my family seeing me suffer (that thinking is a good way to make a bad situation worse), all of that emotional trauma God has used to make me the best version of me that I can be now. Every time I questioned God and wondered if He cared, He was in heaven whispering, ***"You'll understand one day. Keep doing your part, and I'll do mine."***

Our lives don't always make sense, but what does: Love God, love others, and love yourself. ***If you can learn to be patient, kind, and self controlled, it doesn't matter what job you have or how much money you make, you'll be doing what you were called to do: Making the world a little better than it would be without you.*** Do your part and God will do His.

Someone you've helped feel whole.

Love

Dad

PS Since you'll be reading this as a teenager, a time when you'll likely see me as a prude trying to reduce your fun, here's a lesson from someone before they're an overprotective parent of a beautiful teenager: There is a difference between sexy and trashy. Sexy is subtle and will help people respect you while being trashy will leave you being treated like trash. If you want a guy to return, leave him wanting more. As your mom teased when we first started dating, "You're not getting this milk for free," to which I jokingly replied, "That's fine. I'm still trying to figure out if that milk is worth it." Yeah, it's amazing she didn't dump me.

## Lesson 5

# My Challenge to You this Year

**Please Note:** This challenge is similar to the challenge I gave couples in my *52 Lessons for a Better Relationship*, but it's such an important idea, it needed to be included in this book from a different vantage point.

I have a friend who hates New Year's resolutions because he says we should be constantly trying to grow. I say he's fifty percent right: We should be constantly trying to grow and New Year's resolutions are a great way to do that. They are a natural starting point for making the year and our lives better. For instance, resolutions can include taking a vacation (my favourite resolution), reading a book (an easy resolution), and a promise to buy Christmas presents before December (a great resolution for husbands). What people tend to

screw up is they make terrible resolutions that are doomed to fail. For instance, resolving to be happier or to be nicer are foolish goals because what does that mean? Resolutions (a fancy word for goals) need to be measureable. For instance, after Hurricane Katrina, Brad Pitt supposedly formed a charity to help a specific area build 150 well-designed, green, affordable homes. Other groups said, “We’re going to help,” but if it’s not measureable like 150 homes, how do you know when you’ve done enough? Keeping it measureable is important in order to track your progress and to know when you’ve achieved your goal and then you can reassess the situation.

Reassessing a goal when it’s been achieved is important because saying, “I’m going to lose forty pounds,” is measureable, but it can be dangerous since many people achieve the goal and then get lazy causing them to gain it all back again. People also have a tendency to go too big: “I never work out, but this year I’m going to work out three days a week!” A smarter resolution is “I’m going to work out once a week – every Saturday morning for two months and then add in Tuesday night for the next two months. After that, I’ll see if my schedule can allow me to do three times or not.” See how measureable that is with specific days chosen and how it’s gradual? This resolution is much more likely to be kept because it’s realistic. Most times it’s better to keep changes to the routine simple and then slowly increase it to prevent giving up on them. Change is hard; we need to be wise with how we try to do it.

Following this advice, here’s my challenge: Get a large paper calendar that you enjoy looking at (easy enough) and use it to make and track your monthly goals (that’s a little harder).

Writing out your monthly goals can take three forms. The first is simple since it’s looking over the year and dividing it up. For instance, this can be when you’ll schedule regular family dinners, friend nights, date nights, sex nights, girls’/guys’ nights, vacations, when to put up Christmas decorations, when to do certain jobs you want done around the house, etc. If you divide the jobs up over the year, it can free your brain to focus on what needs to be done now and prevent feeling overwhelmed by everything that needs to eventually get done.

This is big picture thinking and a great way to make sure you make time to do the things that are important to you. This is essentially having a budget for your time.

The second form is writing monthly goals at the beginning of each month as they come up. I did this last year and it was amazing how much it helped me feel a sense of accomplishment and reduce feeling overwhelmed with everything I needed to do. For instance, for August my goals were to enjoy my week vacation, pack, unpack, write five weddings, perform three weddings, and clean the gutters. Because it was spread over the month, I didn't get discouraged if one day suddenly got busy and prevented me from doing something since I had the rest of the month. This is particularly helpful for wives who want to get their husbands to do certain jobs around the house because if guys are given a month to do the agreed upon chores (emphasis on "agreed upon"), they can have some control for when they do it and it helps the wives not have to nag. Even better, if the guy doesn't finish the tasks by the end of the month, his wife now has proof that he doesn't follow through with his agreed upon responsibilities. It also affirms why she's nagged in the past – he needed it. Hopefully this will be a wakeup call and help motivate the guy to be more on the ball.

Finally, the calendar can be used to track certain behaviors as they happen like who cooked dinner, sex nights, family time, etc. This can be particularly helpful to keep track of bad behaviors that need to be reduced like how often there's a yelling fit, drinking, and how many times the partner looks at their phone when they shouldn't. When both people know the action is being tracked, it can encourage better behavior. Even better, if there's improvement, it is great for celebrating, which is always a smart way to encourage continued better behavior, which is why groups like AA do it.

**Bonus:** I use a calendar for my prayer time since it's more practical than trying to pray, but after two minutes falling asleep. The first thing I do is write ten things I'm thankful happened that day. (I started with doing five and as I got better I increased it). My list includes very specific things like getting to sleep in (amazing),

watching my favourite show at the time (delightful), finding cheap gas for my car (always exciting), and biting my tongue instead of fighting with my wife (not that I'd ever do that). The second thing I do is I give myself one compliment, which is harder to do than the ten thankful things (maybe that's because I'm not a millennial who was overly praised growing up). The third thing I do is I write down the name of someone I saw, talked to, or thought about in the day and ask for a blessing for them. Finally, I make 3-5 requests to God because it's good to define what I actually want and it's exciting to see how God answers them even if it's to redirect me to something else. I'll still talk to God at random in the day, but I find this keeps my nightly prayer time more organized and easy enough that I don't have an excuse to skip it since it only takes about five minutes.

This year may a calendar bless you as much as it has blessed me.

## Lesson 6

# Self Esteem Made Simple

My three year old, Gracie, has a superior grasp on emotional health than most grownups – she's very advanced... until she gets older and then she'll be like everyone else. It's amazing how self esteem tends to disappear as we become more aware of the world around us. The reason Gracie is so advanced is she's got my genes... kidding. It's actually because she lets herself feel her emotions and knows how to comfort herself. She's so good she proves we don't need things like booze, pot, or sugar to feel better. She just needs a blankie and a hug. Even if I'm the one who upset her (usually because she didn't get what she wanted), she'll start crying, get her blankie, and then want me to pick her up to hold her – when's the last time you wanted your spouse to give you a hug when they upset you? After a few minutes of being held, my daughter will be good to go about her day. Her ability to have an emotion and recover is incredible. There's no over thinking or beating herself up; there's no over complicating it. She

just gets over it – when’s the last time your spouse got over you upsetting them that quickly? We adults – the so-called more mature people – suck at this. We second guess ourselves, stress about things we don’t need to stress about, hold onto hurt for unnecessarily long periods of time (sometimes for life), and/or we bury feelings with things like booze, pot, or sugar that come back to haunt us later – sound familiar? The next time someone tells you to act like a grownup, tell them you want to act like a three year old because they’re emotionally healthier and then start to suck your thumb and ask them for a hug. I can’t promise it’ll reduce the fight, but it’ll be hilarious... at least to me.

The best lesson Gracie has taught me is how simple it is to have self esteem. I mean it’s insane how easy it is considering so few people have any. Some people confuse self esteem with being an entitled jerk – they suck. Self esteem is different than being self absorbed. ***Self esteem is the ability to love and accept it in return.*** My three year old is a genius at this. If we could all be like her, the world would be a better place.

The other day I was carrying Gracie down the stairs for breakfast, and this was the moment I finally got what self esteem looks like:

Gracie: I love you, Daddy.

Me: And I love you, Gracie.

Gracie: You love me, and Mommy loves me.

Me: That’s right.

Gracie: And Blankie loves me; and Lucy (her sister) loves me; and Nanny Meow-Meow loves me; and Auntie Lori loves me; and Nanny Woof-Woof loves me; and Tucker (the dog) loves me; and (continues for a bit) and Nanny Mike loves me (I taught her to call her uncle “nanny” because I think I’m hilarious); and (continues her list).

Isn’t that incredible? There’s no questioning of any kind. The people she’s listed are supposed to love her, so why would she second guess that? This past month these conversations have become an almost daily occurrence where she’ll share a list of who loves her. Even if Gracie’s had a bad day with getting in trouble, she’ll have a moment

where she talks about how much she loves people and how much we all love her. That's impressive self esteem: she loves others and accepts that they love her. ***Self esteem is so simple a three year old has mastered it, so why do adults suck at it so much?***

There seems to be a moment in childhood where something flips because the majority of teenagers I talk to have moments like "I don't like myself," or "There's something wrong with me," or "I feel like I don't belong." I once talked to a teenager who said his parents must be crazy for loving him because he was such a screw up. That's a far cry from being like my three year old: "You love me, and Mommy loves me..." This inability to be self accepting doesn't get any better for most adults who say things like "I'm not happy," "I don't know if I'm good enough," or "How can people like me if I'm not perfect and everything in my life isn't in order?" We start off so well and then it goes downhill from there.

On the opposite side of things is a moment that still baffles me. I always loved my Nana who had a reputation for driving like a Nascar driver and eating butter like it was its own food group. She was incredibly generous and ready to help those in need. She was so feisty, when my sister was two years old and a little girl bit her, my Nana bit the girl, made her cry, and then scolded her saying, "You're not going to do that again now are you?" That's feisty (and a call to the cops now). She was so feisty, as a parent she'd pretend to call CAS on herself to scare her kids into thinking they would be taken and put into foster care if they weren't better – that's very different than today where kids threaten parents who cower. This is why a situation when my Nana was 85 was so surprising. I was in my late 20s and for her birthday I gave her a movie called *Penelope* with the idea that my girlfriend and I would have a movie night with her. This was back when you could buy used movies for \$6.99 at Blockbuster (I miss those days). It was the cleanest movie for sale when I was looking and my girlfriend was in love with James McAvoy, so it was an obvious choice... or so I thought. My Nana had a slight cleft pallet. I didn't even know what that was until this situation happened. When we put the movie on I thought I was doing something special (a grownup grandson choosing to spend a Saturday night with his Nana;



I was awesome), but she eventually ran out of the room weeping because the movie was so triggering for her. I always saw her as a confident and strong woman who couldn't be held down... but I was wrong. It turned out she had a crushing insecurity about her lip that I never gave a second thought about before this. I loved her and any lip issue was just part of who she was, but for some reason, she saw it as a reason to be ashamed and feel terrible about herself. She was the total opposite of my three year old who just loved and accepted love.

That was a very sad day for me because it made me realize that ***my Nana didn't love herself as much as I loved her.*** What's crazy is we all have our own "cleft pallet" issue that makes us feel terrible while others who love us don't give it a second thought. Sure, there's a risk some jerk will make fun of it or use it in anger to attack, but why do we give power to such mean people? ***Why can't we see ourselves the way those who love us do?*** Why can't we see ourselves the way my three year old does?

On the flipside, when I was younger trying to be good enough for people to love me, I was struggling to accept what my Nana already accepted about me – I was worth loving just for being me. I was worried about things that no one else cared about, which actually made me a harder person to love because ***who's easier to love, someone who's always down on themselves or the three year old who simply loves you and accepts that you love them?***

In cartoons, they'll use the idea of an angel on one shoulder a devil on the other. Maybe as we get older the devil gets louder (or the angel gets lazy) because we let his voice be the one to control us. If I had told my Nana about my insecurities, she would've said I was crazy because I was perfect the way I was to her just like I thought she was crazy for not thinking she was perfect the way she was to me. What she would've wanted was for me to love myself as much as she loved me just like all my parents really wanted was for me to love myself as much as they loved me. Similarly, all my sister, brother, and close friends would want is for me to love myself as much as they loved me because otherwise I'm essentially saying they're dumb for loving me. Sure, we all have things we can improve on and it's important to work

on them, but we still need to love ourselves for where we are at because *proper change never comes through self hate*. I'm fortunately much nicer to myself now than I used to be, but what I need to be doing as a therapist is help people be more like my three year old: You love me, and Mommy loves me, and Lucy loves me; and...

This week may you try to start loving yourself as much as those around you do. And if you don't have people who love you, you either need to make some changes in how you treat others or you really need to find some better people to be in your life.

## Lesson 7

# At What Capacity Do You Run?

(Dilbert) "I think my coworkers are getting dumber." (Dogbert) "They're not getting dumber; you're just getting to know them better." This Dilbert comic made me laugh because of how true it is (said with love). I know some have thought this of me (my wife is one of those people), but I'm actually at a higher risk of doing this because I have a bad habit of meeting people and seeing them as better than me (I'm working on that). Because I see people higher than I should, I naturally end up being disappointed, which is more about me doing something wrong than them. In a strange way, this reality check can be a relief: "Oh good, you're not too good to hang out with me." My imposter syndrome's also a blessing at preventing me from being arrogant (I have no chance of that), and when I was young, it helped drive my competitiveness and pushed me to do some cool things. As I've gotten older, however, imposter thinking has paired with my new bad habit of being conflict averse and together they give me a very strong temptation to hide from people and situations because it feels safer in the moment. Unfortunately, this typically makes situations worse, which might include me imploding (i.e. shutting down or immune system issues). Of course, the only real way to fight these thoughts is to acknowledge that the imposter idea is a lie and focus on the truth – in our humanity we're all equal. I

also need to remind myself I'm stronger than my brain wants to accept (my brain is a jerk).

Imposter syndrome is a major reason I hate when my office has work meetings (I hate work meetings!) I know I'm not alone in this, but I have a particularly strong dislike for them. The main reason I hate work meetings actually has nothing to do with how I see people. (Mentioning imposter syndrome was really just a bonus thought for today's lesson – you're welcome.) I ended up discovering the main reason I hate work meetings after my big meeting last week – self reflection has its benefits. The main reason I hate work meetings is they almost always announce something new we need to start doing. I hate new stuff; I haaaaattttttte it. Yes, I'm old and I hate change, but I realized today it's more than just a fear of change. It's because I'm so busy I can't handle anything else being added to my list – don't throw off my rhythm.

I was once told that a car engine runs at its best around 70-80% capacity. Below that it's sluggish and above that it starts burning fuel faster. If you consider a person to be like an engine, above the 80% is when we start being more at risk of irritability and eventually burning out. I'm really good at running at 80%... when I'm on vacation at my wife's family cottage (that's not bragging... obviously). In this setting I should be closer to 70% if not lower because I'm at a cottage for "relaxing." Nope, even in this setting my brain can find ways to be running hard because it's so used to it. I'm that messed up – yea, me! In my late teens through my early 30s when I was in post secondary (I was in school a long time), I was regularly running at 95% or more to fit everything in. Guess what that caused. Yup, I was regularly at the cusp of burning out or burnt out. I faced my first burn out experience in early university and after that moment the pattern was burn out, recover, and then repeat and repeat and repeat, etc. After that first experience, my body was quicker to burn out: "I guess it's time to burn out again. Man this guy never learns." At the level I was running, if I sat down or had a moment of peace, I was asleep within two minutes. I was a ton of fun at parties: (partier) "Did Chad pass out drunk?" (friend) "No, he passed out tired." When you're at 95% or higher, you're cutting out things you need to

function properly like sleep, seeing loved ones enough, and doing things that help you enjoy life. It's great... yes, that's what it is. Running at that level is obviously dangerous for a person's health and needs to be avoided. As a parent, there can be seasons where this is impossible to avoid, and they just have to be endured like the first four months a baby is born, which are brutal. Or you can be like my friend's parents who had four kids under the age of four – crazy. After having two kids in two years, the parents had an oops, which were twins. Apparently my friend's mom doesn't remember the first seven years of her twin sons' lives. That sounds about right; four boys under four? No thank you.

I would say that I now typically run at 85-90%, which means I'm busier than I should be, but it's still manageable. Because I ran at such a high level before, I find I'm uncomfortable if I'm in the healthy range outside of being at the cottage – that's brilliant I know. Fortunately, at 85-90% I'm still doing everything I should be doing to be healthy and can still watch the odd 20 minute TV show to decompress most days. The problem is if anyone tries to change something in my schedule or someone gets in my way, I have a hard time not freaking out: "I don't have time for this!" Even if what's changed will reduce my workload, because it changes my routine, I am at risk of feeling overwhelmed: "I can't handle change!" I would call myself a recovering workaholic now (I'm much better than before), but I'm still so busy (especially having a two and four year old) I don't have a lot of wiggle room before I have to give up sleep or other healthy habits to fit something new in. This means every work meeting impinges on my time and when they ask for the workers to do something like learn a new program I really have to bite my tongue because I want to scream. Arguably I should try to run at a lower capacity to have space for these random things that come up, but that's not really an option for my brain that's used to running at a higher level. Even if I could cut something, my brain would just replace it with something else because I get bored not being busy. This, of course, means beach vacations are my enemy, "I'm supposed to 'relax' for a week? Just shoot me." I relax through accomplishments: "That's one thing off my back."

Understanding our capacity is really good for helping make decisions. For instance, my wife is obsessed with having a dog, but we agreed that we can't as a couple handle any more than what we currently have. We are at our max. Unlike many couples and young people who get a dog because they want what they want, we're waiting until our two girls are more independent before we revisit this. Knowing our capacity is also helpful for deciding what kind of house we should own. I love my mom's house with her almost acre property, but my dad was a teacher, which gave him the time to do all the work around the house it needed. Summers off really makes a big difference. My lifestyle doesn't afford me the room for that kind of responsibility unless I want to give up something I really love – no thanks. Knowing I'd rather not be spending most of my free time doing lawn and garden maintenance means I need a simpler property like my current one.

Understanding our capacity ultimately helps us make wiser choices, which allow us to function in a healthier and productive way. Running at 95-100% may work for a short period and help get a lot done in the moment, but it'll have long lasting effects like burn out. We are better at running life like a marathon and not a sprint, burn out, sprint, burn out, etc.

### ***Questions:***

1. At what capacity do you run? Your partner and/or parents?
2. Why do you run at your current level? For instance, if you run high is it because you want to prove yourself, enjoy life to its fullest, or hide from something by being too busy to think? If you run too low, do you enjoy being lazy, don't trust your abilities, or given up?
3. What does your healthy 70-80% capacity zone look like?
4. Is your healthy zone able to grow to handle more or is it maxed? For example, you don't start by running a marathon (hopefully). You have to work up to it.

5. What activity or habit needs to be added to your current schedule to help you run better? Anything that can be cut out?
6. What are the warning signs you've moved past the healthy zone?
7. Is your current lifestyle causing someone else to run too much or too little?

This week may you consider what capacity you want to run at and how to get there.

## Lesson 8

# Should Anyone be Proud of You?

When I was really young, I thought the pinnacle of being a good son was buying your mom a house like Elvis did. What I didn't know was that idea was dumb (no offence to me). Maybe if I was from an immigrant family who moved to a new country with nothing then that would be a nice idea because it would be a practical way to say thank you for the sacrifices my parents made to give me a better life. But that's not my story – mine's boring. I grew up in a beautiful home full of wonderful memories, so why would my mom want a new house? Even poor parents might not want to move to a new house given to them by their kids because their home is *their* home. It could even be a little insulting to them since it's essentially saying what they've achieved isn't good enough. More importantly, as I've learned, good parents want to be able to do good things for their kids and their nightmare is being a burden. They want their kids to be proud to be theirs just like kids want their parents to be proud of them (at least good people do).

Looking back, I think my goal of being able to do something like buying a house for my mom was my way of showing how much I loved her. Knowing that, my idea wasn't so dumb (yea, younger me), it was misguided (so still dumb, just not that dumb). If I want my mom to know how much she means to me, I simply need to tell her

even if it's in a Mother's Day card (that's a lot cheaper than a house). Even better, I should have a relationship with her where we regularly talk, so she can feel part of my life. ***Creating new memories with your parents is the best way to show you appreciate all they did... that and being a good person who enjoys life.*** Being a jerk everyone hates, on the other hand, leaves parents wondering what they did wrong and why they sacrificed so much just to produce a disappointment.

What's interesting is at some point I stopped feeling the need to show how much I appreciated and loved my mom and my focus became wanting to make my dad proud of me. Oddly enough, even though he was a very hard worker and sacrificed a lot for his kids, I never worried about making him feel appreciated (oops). What I wanted was to impress him. I wanted him to say, "Yes, you are a man now." I knew my mom loved me and part of me assumed my dad did as well, but there was something in me that needed to make him proud. ***That's the power of a dad; they can help us feel like we're good enough; they can help us feel like we've made it.***

Dads have more power than we often realize. For instance, a lot of women develop their sense of beauty and worth from their dads. If the dad doesn't help the girl feel this, they're more likely to look for it from boys – often very dumb boys. There are clearly a lot of dads who haven't done this well. In fact, my wife was never told she was beautiful by her dad (ouch); although that might be why she ended up with me, so maybe I should thank him for not boosting her self-worth. For guys, on the other hand, a dad can help a son feel like he's a man. Again, a lot of guys end up never feeling like they've made it because they never had their dad's approval, which is largely because their dads didn't have their own dad's approval. This is an unfortunate cycle and not a sign these dad's don't love their son. In a world when a lot of dads have sucked, it's easy not to think about how valuable a dad can be because it feels normal. Meanwhile, when a mom is neglectful it's glaringly obvious because we expect them to be involved and loving. A neglectful mom is very damaging in its own way, but it can be less personal to the child because a mom who's not loving is more likely to be seen as a terrible person – it's not me;

there's something incredibly wrong with her. ***Either way, both moms and dads are equally important; it's just different and should be involved. If they're not, it's them, and not you.***

In my mid 30s, I was watching a movie called *Woodlawn*, which is basically a Christian *Remember the Titans*. Not only did it surprise me by being good (a Christian movie that's good? That's crazy!), there was a scene before the championship where a loving dad says to his anxious star player son, "Blah, blah, blah, I'm proud of you." The "blah, blah,blah," wasn't a direct quote (I'm sure you guessed that), but when he said the second part, "I'm proud of you," I became a blubbering mess. I was watching the movie with my in-laws, so when the tears started I did my best to act normal, but I was horrible at it. I pretended to sneeze as a way to wipe my nose and cheeks (my sneezes apparently go all over my face). Later on my own, I re-watched that scene over and over and the tears kept coming. That's what I wanted. I wanted to make my dad proud... which was kind of difficult when he was dead – that's a definite challenge. He died when I was 24, so he's not speaking to me anytime soon (is that joke too dark?). When I was in my late teens/early 20s and he was still alive, there was a phase when I was listening to Simple Plan's song to a dad where the chorus goes, "I'm sorry, I can't be perfect." It became my anthem. The crazy thing is my dad never told me he was disappointed and honestly, there really wasn't a reason for him to be – it was a lie I told myself. Sure, there were a few times (and only a few times) he was angry at me post adolescence, but I was a solid geek and never did anything bad (dumb, yes, but not bad). The one time he was really angry at my brother and I, I now realize was more an expression of him feeling forgotten and the explosion was more about him being tired and unloading bottled up hurt. The next day he even apologized for it, which was a great act of humility. ***The truth is this idea that I needed to make my dad proud was all in my head – feelings can be liars.***

Of course, when I was young I never went small. I always went big (ah, the days when I wasn't as complacent). I might have wanted to make my dad proud, but what I really wanted was to make God proud. Yeah, how do you make the creator of the universe proud?



“You made everything? Well, I did a pretty drawing. That’s about equal, right?” The problem was I had the phrase, “The more God gives you, the more He expects,” bouncing in my head growing up. Since I had been given such a great life with an incredible family and lots of friends, I figured God must have expected huge things from me (and by default, I assumed my dad did as well). What’s interesting is I’m just now realizing I never associated this idea of needing to earn the blessings to my sister or brother even though they had the same blessings – just me. *It’s amazing how we can put ridiculous standards on ourselves while we give others a free pass.*

What’s impressive is I carried this weight of wanting to make my dad and God proud for decades until I finally realized the truth (I’m a slow learner): *A good parent is always looking for reasons to be proud of their child.* I discovered this lesson when I was 35 (I’m a very slow learner). My older brother had the first grandchild in our family. (Yes, we all started late.) My niece was very “special.” No, the quotations weren’t a mistake. The family doctor said in his 25 years of practice he had never heard of a baby who cried that much (there’s something to brag about). He categorized her as “super-colic.” That’s a gold medal performance... of terribleness. She cried so much; like soooooo much. I can’t fully describe how much she cried that first ten months, yet somehow my brother would still hold her and talk to her with so much pride in his voice. As someone who hadn’t had kids yet, I thought that was the result of sleep deprivation – it wasn’t... maybe a little. Seeing his love for this ear destroyer I realized a child doesn’t need to earn a parent’s love – it’s naturally there. The same goes with God. We don’t have to earn His love; it’s naturally there. In both cases, we need to do our best to be a good person and offer love in return.

What’s important to note is my desire to make God and my dad proud may have had its downfalls, but at the same time, it gave me an incredible drive that I needed to get to where I am today. Sometimes the best thing for us is believing a parent doesn’t think we’ll be able to achieve something – I’m going to prove that wrong. Even if that’s not the case, when we’re young and establishing our adult lives, we need a balance of wanting to prove ourselves and recognizing that

we're loved with a little more emphasis on the former. As we get older, however, the latter becomes more important. Regardless of our age, *it would behoove us to see ourselves as our parents see us.* There'd be a whole lot less insecurity and defensiveness (and bad partners chosen) if we realized our worth from the people who love us and see us without the negative voice that tells us we're not good enough.

All that being said, I should point out that I have met people who should be answering the question, "Should my parents be proud of me?" with a solid no because they suck – too blunt? Be honest; you probably know someone in this category, too. If not, get a job in retail or as a ref and you'll regularly have to deal with this type of person. These are the people who need to be more concerned about making their parents proud, or if their parents suck, they should aim to be the opposite of their parents – decent people. They should live in such a way that they can be proud of themselves (and maybe even have friends).

If you're reading this book you're a great person (I don't mind pandering to my audience). All sucking up aside, your parents are proud of you; whether they've acknowledged it or not; they are proud of you... or they suck. *If they're a normal parent, and you're a normal (to great) person, they are proud of you and who you've become, and ultimately what they want more than anything else is for you to see yourself as they see you – wonderful with a few rough edges to work on.*

This week may you live so it's easier for your parents to be proud of you.

## Lesson 9

# Don't be the Weak Gazelle

When I was in my late twenties and working as a youth pastor, I fortunately bumped into a woman I had worked with when I was a teenager at the local mall movie theater. Oh, the good old days when the malls had theaters (and herds of cockroaches because of the nearby food court). Side story, on my one shift, a customer found a cockroach in their nachos – nasty – and they politely returned what was left and asked for their money back without any anger or attack. I'm not sure if that meant people twenty years ago were nicer or we just lucked out on a customer who was nicer than a lot of people today who seem to be one assumed mistreatment away from exploding. This side story leads to an important point. When I write, “Don't be the weak Gazelle,” I don't mean be a jerk. Jerks are... jerks. The world would be much better off if it was filled with nice people. Jerks ruin things and make good people want to hide, which is a double hit for the world because jerks get more attention while the good people limit how much good they do because they're too scared of the jerks.

This former co-worker mentioned she had her black belt (very impressive) and she was kind enough to offer a self defence course for my youth group (she's one of the few good people who's not afraid of jerks; I think the black belt helps). Her class was a night I won't forget... well, I forget pretty much everything that happened (I have a terrible memory), but her opening was fantastic. She had everyone line up and walk up to her one at a time. After shaking the

person's hand, she directed them to go to her left or right. I figured she was dividing us up into teams, but the numbers were far from equal. When everyone was put into their groups, she announced that the people to her left were at high risk of being mugged while the group on the right were fine. I was on the right, and at first I was nervous because I was thinking we were the group who were too ugly or poor to bother mugging. (Could I have had self esteem issues back then?) When we asked why, she calmly explained that when she was shaking peoples' hands, she was looking to see who looked her in the eyes and gave a firm handshake. If you did both of those things, you were put into the group on the right. I definitely felt better about that and gave a sigh of relief. If I was in the other group, that would've looked terrible as the leader... and I felt better that it wasn't because we were too ugly or poor to bother attacking. That being said, if she was dividing us based on looks that would've been pretty terrible... and hilarious (I have a dark sense of humor). She then explained that if you look confident, muggers aren't going to risk attacking you. They want to find the person who is the least likely to fight back. The rest of the night was spent with her teaching how to protect ourselves from basic attacks in order to feel empowered. I don't remember the moves, but I do remember her saying, "When in doubt, go for the eyes, ears, nose, throat, or crotch. There's no such thing as fighting dirty when you're trying to protect yourself, so have fun." She also mentioned the importance of not setting yourself up to be at risk of an attack. Her basic advice could be summarized as "Don't be stupid." ***We are responsible for ourselves and to limit the risks we face, so don't be stupid.*** This is especially important for young people to consider because trying to have fun can get them in a lot of trouble, especially with drinking where the kind of trouble tends to look different for the two genders – guys are more likely to do things that get them a visit to the hospital or police station while girls are more likely to end up in tears and feeling used. Either way, the advice is sound – don't be stupid. Whatever you do, be smart in how you do it.

Another way of putting this (arguably a nicer way) is "Don't be the weak gazelle." This follows the idea of not being stupid. It also takes this lesson beyond mugging, which is something that doesn't happen

as much anymore since people don't usually carry cash on them. Nowadays we're more at risk of identity theft or more technology based scams. It's nice to know criminals are growing with the times better than I am.

"Don't be the weak gazelle" is important advice to consider because the weak and sickly gazelles are the ones who get picked off by predators. Lions aren't going to waste their energy chasing the young and healthy gazelles that are more likely to get away. Lions want to go for the more guaranteed kill. Bullies do the same thing. If you need to pick on someone to feel better about yourself, you're not going to risk going for someone who can fight back and potentially make you look bad. You go for the weakest link. Thus, "Don't be the weak gazelle." I should point out this doesn't mean surround yourself with weaker gazelles, so they're more likely to be the target. Instead, surround yourselves with the strong gazelles and be strong with them in order to make the lions move on to find a weaker herd to attack.

Not being the weak gazelle is about *looking* confident. It doesn't mean you have to *feel* confident. You can feel socially anxious, but don't *look* it. How can you not look scared or weak? Follow the adage of "Fake it until you make it," or as the Bible says, "clothe yourself" (Col 3:12). When it comes to being happy, there is proof that by making yourself smile, you can feel happier whereas if you act sad, you'll feel more defeated. In a similar way, if you act confident, you'll start to feel confident. Walk taller, keep your shoulders back, and keep your head up. It's actually been proven that good posture helps us feel more confident while slouching, looking mopey, or walking like you could fall down crying at any time will make you feel weaker.

Not being the weak gazelle is also important to consider in marriage. If you act weak in your marriage, your partner will get resentful from carrying more of the weight and/or they'll burn out. ***In marriage, you're meant to be a partnership and not a "reliant-ship"*** where you rely on your partner to carry you. As the Bible teaches, be "equally yoked."

One of the biggest issues in our Western culture is adults (e.g. parents and people in the education system) acting like the weak gazelle by

bowing down to kids' needs: "We don't want kids to struggle or they might learn how to deal with it. If we can't coddle them, how can we feel important? If they don't rely on us, what's our purpose?" This can also be over accommodating: "A kid is upset? We must change everything to fit their needs! They should never be told no or they might learn that life isn't all about them," "No child should ever be sad because they're too weak and pathetic to handle disappointment unlike me who is so mature." Sorry, my sarcasm came out pretty strong there. I get angry at adults who cower to kids' needs. Kids need to get upset. Kids are supposed to get sad. Kids are supposed to feel like they can't have everything they want because ***it's a parent's job to prepare their children for life and not spoil them.*** Kids need to suffer while having the safety of their parents nearby because one day they're going to grow up and need to be able to suffer and handle it on their own. We need to help our kids not be the weak gazelle or life will swallow them up. And this makes me angry because I have to remind myself of this lesson every time my daughters cry. I don't want to see them upset, but on some level I need to let them figure out how to deal with the pain because that's part of them growing up into emotionally healthy people. We need to learn how to properly cope and it's easier when you're young and people are still watching over you even if it's at a distance.

This week may you consider what it means to *not* be the weak gazelle and instead *look* confident.

## Lesson 10

# Help for Over Thinkers

Over thinking is great... at making life harder. The truth is life isn't meant to be complicated (e.g. there are seven basic music notes, seven basic facial expressions, and three primary colors), but we're really good at making it seem that way. Sometimes we make it more complicated than it needs to be because we make bad choices. One of the worst choices we can make is to ignore facts for feelings: (wife) "It feels like you were trying to hurt me." (husband) "But that's not what I was doing." (wife) "But it *feels* like it." (husband) "So either I'm a liar or you're making a bigger deal out of this." (Insensitive yet logical husband now stuck in a fight he wanted to originally avoid.)

***When it comes to processing, we really need to stick to the facts and not twist things.*** Over thinking often leads to finding a way to blame ourselves (i.e. nice people) or others (i.e. mean people).

As a therapist, I love working with people who over think to blame themselves because helping them tune it down is a lot easier than getting people who don't care to start caring. The main problem with these people is they get stuck and have a tendency to punish themselves. They rarely over think in a way that makes them like themselves more... although that'd be amazing: "I don't feel good about what I did. I better start thinking about it, so in an hour I'll feel fantastic." Over thinking is more of a spiral downwards with the more we think, the worse we feel, and the worse we feel, the more we want to think about it. Meanwhile, some people over think as a way to find a way to blame others or it leads to resentment. Those people tend to be pooppy pants. They might be nice in person to random people, but their families will have a good idea of how much of a pooppy pants they can be. At the same time, I find everyone is at risk of over thinking as a way to justify doing something we know we shouldn't. That doesn't make us pooppy pants, just foolish.

When it comes to being emotionally healthy, knowing how to process properly to prevent over thinking is incredibly helpful. ***We often over think because we're looking for a sense of resolution.*** It's like a TV show that leaves you with a cliff hanger – we want to know what happens next. Our brain wants to feel like things are resolved, which is why binge watching has become an addiction for a lot of people. Just like with over thinking, we keep replaying and thinking about the same thing as our brain looks for a sense of peace it can't find... because there isn't a resolution to be found. If there was a resolution, we wouldn't need to over think – we'd have our answer. On the plus side, this means ***the key to reduce over thinking isn't that complicated – find a sense of resolution.*** By knowing how to properly process, the risk of over thinking can be greatly reduced.

A) ***How to Process the Future:*** One of the most tempting times to over think is trying to figure out what we should do in the future. I find there are two basic ways to help with this. The first is particularly helpful when it comes to making decisions: ***Make a list of all the potential options no matter how dumb or terrible they are.*** For instance, for any hurtful situation we experience the basic options are we can work on healing, stew for awhile and then work on healing later, bury our head pretending it never happened until it bites us in the butt, bottle up our feelings and see if we explode or implode, or stay hurt/resentful forever. That's it. From your list of options you can cross what you don't want, and then pick between the couple options that are left. It's a lot easier when you see the options in a list, especially when the answer isn't obvious. In a bigger situation like when a relationship is struggling, your basic options are:

B)

- 1) Keep things as they are and continue suffering until something really terrible forces you to do something (e.g. the cops get called).
- 2) Have a timeline in place to see if it naturally improves.
- 3) End it.
- 4) Do a trial separation where both people take turns not living in the house or having the kids to see what it's like.



- 5) Try therapy (make sure the therapist is a good fit because the wrong therapist can make it worse).
- 6) Try a therapy book like my *52 Lessons for a Better Relationship*. (Yes, that's a shameless plug).
- 7) One person tries to be as nice as possible for a month to see if that causes a change in the other person. Ideally both people will try to be nice for a month, but there's normally one person who wants to make things work more than the other.
- 8) Start trying to connect more like with weekly date nights/double date nights, regularly engage in an activity/sport together, and/or start to have a half hour designated connection time a day for conversation. Sometimes conversation starter questions can help like in lesson 52 in my book *52 Lessons for a Better Relationship*. (Yes, that's another shameless plug).

With your list, eliminate the worst options, then consider the remaining and choose the one(s) that's the most tolerable. It's like voting for government – you vote for the person/party you think will do the least damage (or you vote for the least annoying person to listen to). We may not like our options, but we still need to choose. Not choosing is its own choice.

The second way to process the future is to ask yourself: What's the best case, the worst case, and the likely case scenario? The important thing is to not go too extreme like "I win the lottery" or "The person is late because they're dead in a ditch." By giving healthy parameters, we have a better idea of what to expect, which can help us consider how to be best prepared. And that's it. We don't need to think anymore about it. Parameters can prevent unnecessary thinking and worry. Keep to the facts.

- B) ***How to Process the Present:*** I was recently talking to someone who was scared of failing a test – pretty normal. Here's what I pointed out: "Let's say you fail the test. That means one of four things happened: You didn't study hard enough, you didn't study the right material, the teacher gave an unfair test, or you're stupid." The fear

for most people is the test will prove we're stupid, but that's not necessarily true. Failing a test doesn't mean we're stupid. Not studying and doing our work means we are being stupid because we set ourselves up to fail. Whatever the reason for failing, learn from it and move on – that's it. ***Beating yourself up is its own failure.***

This connects to an important way to process the present: ***Define what you feel.*** Our feelings can be liars, but it's good to break down what it is that's bothering us into one sentence like a thesis in an essay to verify if it's true or not. In the previous situation it was simply, "I'm afraid failing will mean I'm stupid." If someone is cheated on, what is it about being cheated on that is the problem? Do you feel betrayed, disillusioned it could happen to you, foolish that it happened? Defining what you're experiencing in one sentence makes the feeling more tangible. It can take journaling or talking to a trusted friend to find the one sentence, but with it you can now address whether you should feel this or not. For instance, failing doesn't mean you're stupid while being cheated on should leave you feeling betrayed, disillusioned, and/or foolish. This way we can eliminate unnecessary fears and give us a starting point for healing. Life isn't that complicated – ***healing means feeling what we should feel and saying no to lies our brains tell us.***

- C) ***How to Process the Past or What You're Going Through:*** When processing a difficult situation or hurt, we need to consider what we can learn from it and what we can be thankful for in that situation. This gives it purpose and a sense of benefit (e.g. "That made me who I am today"). This is important after losing a loved one because if we can find value in it, at least it doesn't feel like they died in vain. For instance, my dad passing when I was 24 was the greatest life lesson I could've been given because it made me a lot wiser. I'd rather my dad be alive than have had that lesson, but at least I can honor him this way. Seeing the good doesn't erase the pain, but it does help in the healing. Sometimes there will always be pain there like when a loved one dies, but after a year of natural grieving time, try to focus on the good when you can and then distract yourself in order to give your brain a break from all of the emotion. ***You'll never heal constantly thinking about something.*** That's like picking

the scab over and over. Our bodies need a chance to heal, and so do our brains.

This week may you consider how to reduce your over thinking.

## Food for Thought

*A gentle answer deflects anger,  
but harsh words make tempers flare.*

*Pro 15:1*

*Some people make cutting remarks,  
but the words of the wise bring healing.*

*Pro 12:18*

*Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor;  
only fools insist on quarreling.*

*Pro 20:3*

Being wise looks a lot like self control and not seeking retaliation... uh oh.

*If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If  
they are thirsty, give them water to drink. You will heap  
burning coals of shame on their heads, and  
the LORD will reward you.*

*Pro 25:21-22*

Or maybe self control does involve “retaliation.” It just looks very different than we think it should when we’re angry because yelling, jab comments, and nasty looks are a lot easier than showing kindness.

## Lesson 11

# How to Reduce Depression on a National Level

“You should do it because you want to do it for yourself,” or “Do what makes you happy.” Here are two of the biggest lies our world teaches right now, and it’s adding to the growing depression rates in our culture. This is especially true for guys. We’re fine not doing anything. Do it for myself? No thank you. We need a better reason. Do it to get a girlfriend? That’s good. Work hard to beat the competition? Sure. Eat healthier and stop drinking, so you can live longer for your family? Ummmmmm.... depends on the day (dads know what I mean).

These two lies have infected our world and using my simple solution can fix our nation’s increasing mental health problems and revolutionize our current world – it’s so simple! For just four installments of \$99.99... sorry, I felt like I was in an infomercial for a moment there.

Our culture is on a path of selfishness and laziness. Considering every store manager I’ve talked to over the last five years says that hiring young people is a waste of time, we definitely need to do something different. I was recently talking to a friend who is a manager and she told me that teenagers are quick to call in sick, especially if there’s a party they’d rather go to or it’s a nice day out – that’s quality. What happened to the days people bragged about never calling in sick like it was a badge of honor? When these young people do show up for work, she struggles to get them to do any work. What kind of terrible things does she ask her workers to do? Dust – the easiest of all chores. The biggest negative response she gets is when she asks the teenagers to welcome people to the store. They

use excuses like “I’m shy” or “I don’t want to,” which I didn’t know was an excuse. Saying, “I don’t want to,” was the first step to getting whacked when I was a kid. And what terrible, awful store does this manager work at that makes life so difficult for these teenagers? The Christmas Store, a place that should be filled with Christmas cheer. Perhaps you’re thinking the bad behavior is the result of listening to Christmas music in the summer. Perhaps. My other friend, however, who had been the manager at the Disney Store for over twenty-five years found the same thing. The quality of young people and workers, in general, has significantly dropped. This does not make our future look very promising. Our work ethic as a culture is dying and along with it our mental health and it’s a largely because we promote, “Do what makes *you* happy.” What makes a lot of people happy? They think it’s not working a job, but that’s a lie. We need to be fruitful to be happy.

Working with young people, I’ve seen some incredibly unhealthy choices. These teenagers making these stupid choices (because they are stupid choices) demand that everyone accepts them, and damaging therapists say they have a right to demand their parents support them. Even if the parents disagree with it, they are expected to change their beliefs and boundaries for their children. It’s like parents have to bow down to their children’s demands. What happened to the fifth command in the Ten Commandments: Respect your parents for it will go well with you? What happened to the Jewish rule that parents are to stone children who are very disrespectful? I’m not advocating the death penalty for bad children (I’m not that crazy), but we’ve swung hard to the other extreme where parents are told to cater to their kids, the ones with less life experience and less brain development – brilliant.

On the plus side, my therapy practice is benefiting – yea, for a growing business. But as a culture, we’re in serious trouble if we don’t start to do something different. Fortunately, the answer is simple. I have two simple statements that can revolutionize our nation.

- 1) ***It's not about you.*** That's it. We've made our culture all about us: What will make *me* happy? Why should *I* do it if *I* don't want to do it? It's my right to be a drain on society because I'm just being me – All garbage. Here are important reasons for doing things:
- a) It'll make my parents proud.
  - b) My teachers/boss will be happy.
  - c) It'll make life better for others.
  - d) I'll be able to provide a better future for my family.
  - e) It'll make me a good employee.
  - f) That's what God wants me to do
  - g) Because it's the right thing to do: Why should I be a contributing member of society and pull my own weight? Because it's the right thing to do and ***doing the right thing leads to good things.*** Skipping work or avoiding a problem might feel good in the moment, but it'll mess over your future self.
- 2) ***You are not your own.*** This is a Christian teaching, but it has universal merit because we need to realize that ***we are connected to those around us.*** I have a responsibility to my family. I have a responsibility to my work. I have a responsibility to my town and country. I'm not my own, and my choices affect everyone around me. I need to be careful how I act because otherwise I'm a selfish turd. Why should I be quiet in the movie theater? Because being noisy is rude and disruptive to others. Why should a woman cover up when she nurses a baby in public? Because it can make other people feel awkward and she should be considerate. Why shouldn't I illegally download stuff for free? Because it's stealing. Why shouldn't I litter? Because people who litter are the worst! Why shouldn't I expect special treatment when I have something different about me like how I'm a picky eater? Because it's my

problem. ***If I don't care that I'm a burden, I'm a selfish turd.*** It's not complicated. I need to live life like it's not about me because it's not.

It's amazing how much mental health could be improved if people did their jobs and were friendly to those around them. Half the people I see wouldn't need therapy because they wouldn't be getting burnt out trying to compensate for lazy people or being brought down by the negativity around them. ***If we want to help mental health, everyone needs to start living life for the benefit of others and not just ourselves.*** What's interesting is this applies to people with depression and anxiety because you don't get over those things only worrying about yourself – that makes them worse.

This week may you consider how you can make the world a little better for those around you (FYI sometimes that means taking a nap, so you're not as grumpy).

## Lesson 12

# Know When to Let People Help

Here's a question: Do you make more friends doing a favor or asking a favor? I'll come back to this in a moment.

I remember years and years (and years and years) ago (I'm that old), I was at a little league baseball game watching a friend play; why? I have no idea. We had plans to have a sleepover that night; why? I have no idea. I guess when you're a kid you do weird things because other people do it, so it sounds fun. I was around the grade two age, which was in the heart of my being in the unquestionably obedient with any grownup besides my parents phase (you're never as good at home). If a grownup told me to jump, I would start jumping and thank them for telling me what to do – I had a problem, but adults loved me, so there was a plus side. My friend's dad was naturally at the game, too. Everyone thought he was cool (at least until a few years later when he ran away with another woman devastating my friend's family). During the game, he asked me if I wanted a snack and I politely said, "No thank you." Shortly after I declined his offer, I went to the concession stand and bought a chocolate bar with the money my parents gave me. My parents were the kind of people who were the first to offer to help others, but never let anyone help them, which also meant they didn't want their kids to be a burden on anyone. When I got back to my seat and started eating my Kit Kat (I was a fat kid, so I was in my happy place), my friend's dad saw me from where he was watching the game, he came over, threw a dollar at me, and under his breath said "Fool," as he walked away. I didn't know what I did wrong, but I figured it must've been something terrible to upset him so much. Good thing I had my Kit Kat to sooth my sadness. All



I knew was I did what my parents told me to do. Now that I'm older, I can see that by not letting him help me he was insulted, and saying "Fool" was him expressing his hurt. He didn't have the best response – it was pretty terrible – but I get it now (I also get that he was a giant turd bucket).

Does this story give you a better idea of the answer to the initial question: Do you make more friends doing a favor or asking a favor?

Most people I ask answer, "Doing a favor" – eh, wrong, suckers (that's my attempt at being a turd bucket – nailed it). The problem is favors can be brushed off or cause guilt. Ever be given a Christmas present when you don't have anything to give back? There's a moment of panic: "Oh... uh... thanks?" and then we lie, "Uh... shoot, I forgot your gift at home." Sometimes when we do a favor, the other person feels indebted to us and that leaves them feeling guilt or anxiety for when and what they'll be asked to do in return. By needing help, the person can also feel a sense of shame, which means doing a favor for someone is limited in its potential for making friends because it's often associated to the person needing the favor feeling like a burden. Meanwhile, if you ask someone to do a simple favor they'll feel trusted and empowered. It's why many people volunteer at charity events – it feels good to help. By getting someone to help you, good feelings will now be associated to you. It also helps the other person see you don't think you're better than them, which makes you very safe to them. Thus, ***we make more friends asking a favor rather than doing a favor.***

The idea of asking for help to make friends is all the more important because people can be insulted when we don't let them help like in my earlier example. My friend's dad wanted to do something nice for me and by not accepting it, he was hurt. This follows the idea that when good intentioned people don't ask for help because they don't want to be a burden, it actually makes those around them feel rejected. People don't want to watch anyone suffer, especially when they can help, but that's what happens when good intentioned people don't let others be involved. Thus, instead of creating a stronger friendship,

the good intentioned person gets associated to negative feelings and disconnection is forged that harms both sides.

This phenomenon of making more friends by asking favors is called the Benjamin Franklin Effect. Early in my youth pastoring days, I remember wondering why I liked people so much more than they liked me. Why was this happening? I was sacrificing and doing so much for everyone else while refusing to let anyone do anything for me. Fortunately, I was soon forced to ask for help because I was burning out and how much I liked people and how much they liked me started to balance out. Back then I didn't know why, but now I do – the Benjamin Franklin Effect. The reason this exists makes sense because the more a parent does for their child, the more attached they become. ***Love grows through serving.*** The same thing happens to our home – the more we do around the house, the more attached we become to it. Thus, if parents want their kids to love them and their house, they need to make their kids do chores – you're welcome for that idea.

***Side Note:*** Jesus told people to serve one another. It's like He already knew this idea or something – crazy.

Since learning this concept, I've tried to ask for help...but it's so not my nature. I also try to take people up on their offers... but it feels weird. Sometimes if the offer doesn't really work well, I'll ask for another way the person can help. For instance, when people offer advice it's normally a way to offer help, especially when it's from parents, but unsolicited advice is annoying. If this is the case, it can be beneficial to say something like "I'm guessing your advice is your way of helping. What would be more helpful is (blank)." And preferably that "blank" is something nice and not "Jump in a lake." Either way, it's good to remember people want to be helpful, but sometimes forget that sympathy is often more helpful than solutions.

I should point out that even though I know I make more friends asking for favors, I still make sure to do favors for others because I don't want to be a user and it's good for me to be attaching myself to good people. Of course, I'm aware there's a risk when I do something nice that can cause the other person to feel guilt, but

they're allowed to feel that and I'm allowed to point out that this is my way of showing them I care.

This week may you discover the power of asking for favors.

## Lesson 13

# What's the Underlying Fear that Fuels You?

When I was in my teens, I didn't dream of being someone who made a lot of money through business or someone who was a doctor helping people in a practical way... which kind of makes me sound uncaring (that's only half true). Instead, I dreamed of being someone on stage performing some type of comedy routine that had the audience full on lol-ing and maybe even lmao-ing. As the latter acronym suggests, lmao (laugh my "butt" off), I'd be in the show that fat people would want to see as a way to shrink their large buttocks (said with a Forrest Gump voice). I'd be like Richard Simmons (every guy's dream): "Say good-bye bulging bottom; we're laugh you off!" At that time in my life I was this goody-goody, shy kid who shocked people when I came alive on stage. I spent hours writing, practicing, and performing on any stage I could find. Looking back I don't know how I did it; there was schoolwork, a part time job, flirting with girls (floundering might be a better word), volunteering, and doing the performing thing. How did I have such a crazy drive? How can you or your child accomplish as much as I did? Have a near crippling fear. Sounds fun doesn't it?

My fear wasn't constantly in the forefront of my mind, but it was always there under the surface. And what was that fear? I was afraid of not being liked by everyone (a fear of spiders would've been easier). The sad truth is I didn't realize I should have started with liking myself in order to be open to sharing the same kind of love to others. Jesus said love others as yourself, but what did he know, right? I needed everyone to love me first and without criticism; that way I'd be good enough to potentially like myself. Talk about a terrible plan.

I was relying on people to always like me? Yea, that doesn't happen. As you can probably guess, that mindset had a few serious drawbacks. For instance, it fueled other fears like a fear of criticism, fear of weakness, fear of failure, and fear of not winning every game I tried, which inadvertently made me harder to like. It's a little bit ironic; don't ya think? It's like raaaaaiinnnnn... sorry, old person lyric flashback.

From my observations, we are all fueled by some underlying fear. This fear isn't like a fear of snakes or heights. Those are fears of things that can actually kill you – yeah, they should be scary. The fear I'm talking about is something more meaningful to who we are as a person. You could say it's an underlying need, but I like to consider the fear because knowing the fear means you can start to reduce it and/or protect yourself from it being triggered. For instance, now that I'm older, my underlying fear is the fear of wasting time. Guess how well I handle being stuck in traffic. Knowing this is my fear, however, I can fortunately do what I can to prevent it from getting out of hand like I listen to books in the car, and I always have a writing project with me wherever I go in case I have to wait a few minutes. Even better, I can look at this fear and dig a little deeper to what it's connected to in order to reduce its power. A fun activity (if you like to be annoying) is to ask why at least five times. For instance, I would ask, "Why do I have fear of wasting time? And then ask "Why?" at least four more times. By asking "Why?" a bunch of times, it can lead to a different underlying fear, or like for me, it brings me back to where I started thereby confirming that it's an underlying fear.

Knowing your underlying fear is very helpful, especially when it comes to fighting as a couple. When it comes to being with my wife, my main fear is more connected to my original teenager issue: A fear of not being good enough, which is triggered by criticism and being talked down to. Knowing this is particularly helpful for reducing unnecessary fights as I can do things to safeguard myself from being as sensitive. I've also told my wife this is my fear, which means now she can be more sensitive to it and be more understanding when I get upset. For instance, if I gave a bad reaction, she can simply ask, "Are

you upset because you just felt criticized or are you just tired?”

Similarly, I know her main fear is not feeling cared about, which gives me a starting point for helping her.

To help you figure out your underlying fear, here are potential options:

Fear of... fear, panic attacks, pain, being uncomfortable, looking stupid, debt, conflict, change, failure, chaos, feeling helpless and having no control, challenge, losing, dying, everything falling apart, getting worse, instability, rejection, waste, violence, letting people down, hurting others, others being left out, and people needing help.

Fear of... being dependent, being invisible, being useless, being incompetent, being alone, being mocked, being bullied, being weak, being powerless, being left out, being vulnerable, being noticed, being less intelligent, and being stagnant.

Fear of not making everyone happy, not everyone liking you, not being seen as adult, not respected, not admired, not significant, not accomplishing anything big, not being good enough, not funny, not likeable, not acceptable, not successful, not being the best or having the best, not being safe, not having a voice, not being heard, and not making someone proud.

Ultimately, we need to know having a fear isn't weakness – it's normal. We need to learn how to control it and use it to our advantage. For instance, my need to be liked as a teen helped me achieve a lot and got me to where I am today; thus, I'm grateful I went through it... and even more grateful I moved past it. The benefit of my current fear of wasting time means I'll push myself to do more cool things. Ultimately, ***fear is a gift that can help us be better people...*** as long as we learn what it is, how to tame it, and how to use it for good.

This week may you discover your underlying fear in order to better protect yourself.

# Handling Conflict 101

As someone who hates conflict (like really, really, really hates conflict), I was less than thrilled when I had to face it over something that should've been benign – social media is the best. The situation started when I made a Facebook post on my personal account. I like posting funny/dumb moments I have like when I was holding my two year old daughter and while talking to a phone salesperson, she put her finger in my mouth. Besides the typical, “When did she last have her hands washed and what has she touched since?” thought, I quickly realized her finger had something on it, and what was that special treat? A giant booger – delightful. I have since taught my daughter my mouth is not a Kleenex... although she has coughed in it a few times – extra delightful. You know those great family moments? I enjoy posting silly stuff like that because I like to think it makes someone laugh. This particular post that led to the aforementioned conflict received a couple likes and a couple fun comments like it normally does, but then there was this one strange response that included the words: “...that’s a d\*ck move, right?” Credit to him for his proper use of a comma, but I was really thrown off because it appeared that he was suggesting this post or what I did was a “boy-part” move. It wasn’t obvious, but this definitely seemed to be a “read between the lines” moment. In my mind, he was a great example of a male body part hidden by underwear that will go unnamed (you have two options; both work). So what do I do?

- 1) ***Give yourself time to cool down in order to find the best response:***  
Sending the first thing that comes to mind is never smart (like he did). Even if your goal is to be mean (his was), don’t send it right away because anger makes us dumb and we think of better answers when we’re calm. This is especially important with online interactions where it’s easy to be extra negative because we don’t see the person’s face.

- 2) ***Don't be a jerk:*** Here's an important point: We can't control other people's actions, but we can influence how they react to us. People are mirrors. If you're a jerk, you should assume the other person will be a jerk back. If he was being a jerk to me, he should expect me to be a jerk back... which could actually be his goal. There is a chance he was picking a fight because he was in a bad spot: "I need to do something with my anger! Here's something stupid I can do." If he had messaged the old me, that's exactly what he would've been given. I would've thrown off the gloves and went to town. He didn't realize picking on me was like the dumb bully picking on a small kid who secretly has a black belt. I'm a writer who spent his formative years practicing passive aggressive soul crushing attacks on himself. Yea, I could've ripped him apart, but as good as that might have felt for a moment, it would make me a giant jerk (like him). Being a jerk is a lose-lose... at least if you have a soul and feel guilt after hurting people (I'm not sure he did). If someone is a jerk and the other person bites their tongue that makes the jerk look like more of a jerk and makes them angrier while the other person can feel like they were the better person – because they are. It pays to be the bigger person.
- 3) ***Define why it bothered you:*** Whether you decide to say anything or not, it's good to define why something bothered you. I spent close to half an hour journaling about this situation before I came to my conclusion: I'm upset because I felt attacked (by someone who thinks they're superior). It was that simple, but it took me a half hour of venting to reach that conclusion as I filtered through feelings and questions. Journaling and talking are both excellent ways to process what's going on in our heads because they help us stay focused and not repeating ourselves whereas thinking tends to be messy. As tempting as it can be to stay in our heads, especially for men who tend to be internal processors, we're better off writing or talking our thoughts out to reduce the risk of downward spiraling.

4) ***Be careful with your approach:*** Therapists love to teach the “I feel (emotion) because (reason).” This is supposed to make the situation about you and not the other person, but fun fact, it still makes the other person angry – therapists aren’t always the smartest people. The idea is that by saying, “I feel...” we’re making it about us, but the other person still takes it as criticism. It’s like giving a compliment followed by a criticism or an apology with a “but...” after; people ignore the positive opening. The only time this “I feel...” sentence should be used is when two people are actively trying to find what upset them in order to both apologize after: (Person1) “I feel hurt because the way you spoke to me was very condescending.” (Person2 likely with clenched teeth) “I’m sorry you felt hurt because the way I spoke to you seemed very condescending. And I was hurt because...” (Person1 likely with clenched teeth) “And I’m sorry you felt hurt because...” Notice how this is an equal exchange? Both people are apologizing for something they likely don’t think they did, but there’s no defending themselves. It’s about making the other person feel cared about and respected as an equal, and not stupid for feeling that way. In these situations you simply accept what upset the other person, apologize, and move on – they’re allowed their feeling even if you don’t agree. After the apologies there’s room to consider how to prevent that situation from happening again, but either way, it’s equal and the exchange doesn’t have to be long. Women have a tendency to want to “talk” about something because they’re typically more external processors, but they need to get their talking out with their trusted friend or journal and keep this conversation short. Things are too sensitive and at a high risk of blowing up again if there’s too much of a conversation.

5) ***Keep it between you and the other person:*** Normally with social media there’s no point in responding to someone’s comment – they’re mean and not worth it. This person, however, is loosely connected through family, so I wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt and address it in case I have to see him again. Unlike him, I made a private message because there’s no reason for



anyone else to know what's going on – that's what a decent person does. When I teach to keep it between you and the other person, this means not fighting publicly online. It's very healthy to vent and joke about it with the right people.

- 6) ***Don't assume the worst:*** Whenever we have a situation with someone, it's best not to assume the worst or sound critical – criticism leads to defensiveness. Instead of a statement, it's always best to start with a question. The best questions I find have two options; one is how it feels and the other is a positive out. Thus, I messaged him: “Out of curiosity, was your comment on my post a joke I didn't get (the positive out) or more of an attack (how it felt)?” Notice how I took my earlier sentence to define what I felt and made it a question? That's one of the benefits of defining the problem in one sentence; we have a better idea of what to ask the other person.
  
- 7) ***Find a way to end the fight:*** The next day when I sent this guy my question, he quickly answered it: “I'm attacking you.” I know people question my method because they don't think others will be honest, but from my experience, they will be. Passive people will likely point out it was a misinterpretation because they wouldn't want to upset the other person. There's a good possibility they'll apologize or they'll be hurt you could think so negatively of them. Aggressive people can go either way, but they'll be honest about it like this guy: “I'm attacking you.” Meanwhile, passive aggressive people will likely be angry they're getting called out on their behavior and will attack harsher. A common attack for passive aggressive people is to call others passive aggressive – ***they accuse others of doing what they do themselves.*** If the person attacks you for your fair two-optioned question, get away from them and try again later when they're calm with something like “Earlier I asked you a question and you got upset. Was that because I caught you at a bad time or did you feel criticized?” If they attack again or avoid directly answering, you'll have your answer and you'll want to

leave before they attack you further. Passive aggressive people aren't worth your time.

In my situation, this guy gave an honest answer and then attacked me more. Because it was online, my best option was to delete him – and I did. There was no reason for me to engage in that conversation any further or to have to worry about him criticizing any of my other posts. From what I later gathered, this guy was in a bad spot with his wife and he needed to go after someone to release his anger because his wife dominated him. Whatever the reason, it was inappropriate to do what he did, but at least his bad choice led to this lesson and a chance for me to see how I could be the better person.

This week may you see how to reduce conflict and give yourself something to be proud of as well.

## Lesson 15

# The 2 Kinds of Depression & 2 Ways to Handle It

From my experience as a therapist, there are two kinds of depression:

1. I'm overly nice to others to the point I get taken advantage of while being really hard on myself, which means I'm high risk of burning out.
2. I'm a helpless victim who blames others for everything wrong in my life and want sympathy instead of solutions. This includes saying things like "This is all my parents' fault," and "I'm too in need to help others." People in this position can also be hard on themselves like the first person, but this is more about feeling sorry for themselves.

These two mentalities follow the two main kinds of people I see in couple's therapy with the third being added to the show the goal to work towards:

1. We had a fight and it's all *my* fault.
2. We had a fight and this is all *your* fault.
3. Preferred: We had a fight, and this is what I did wrong, what they did wrong (i.e. "It takes two to tango"), and this is how we can avoid it next time.

As you can probably guess, both number ones and number twos from the two lists correspond with each other. For instance, the nice to others, but hard on themselves person will likely blame themselves for the fight while the helpless victim will fully blame the other person. Whether you're more likely to blame yourself or the other person doesn't mean you'll get depression, but the more we do either put us at higher risk.

Interesting note, the most successful people tend to be very hard on themselves, which gives them their drive as they constantly look to prove themselves. The benefit of this mindset is you can do big things, but it is something you'll want to eventually address once you get past the main developmental part of your life (i.e. you have your career in place) because it limits how much you will enjoy things. Meanwhile, if you're the person who has a fight and blames everyone else, you're less likely to be successful as there is always an excuse for not trying. The victim mentality leads to feeling helpless and hopeless – two very common ingredients for depression.

Out of these two types of people, it's hard not to feel sorry for the one kind. Is it the helpless victim who blames everyone else? You betcha... it's not. These people are likely to take advantage of well intentioned people, which makes the first category of people a major target. To make things worse, no matter what is done, the so-called helpless victim will never be happy and nothing will seem good enough (aka they're glass half empty people; aka party poopers), which will hurt the person trying to be helpful. It makes sense that these two types of people bond as the one person wants help and the other likes to help. Unfortunately, it causes a very unhealthy and unbalanced relationship that eventually falls apart as the caregiver wears out. It's a really sad situation because the caregiver tries so hard to be good, but between the other person never being happy and their own problem of being hard on themselves, they will eventually crash and burn, which adds to their guilt and shame. Add in the Benjamin Franklin Effect and ***the person wearing themselves out is attaching themselves to the manipulator making it harder to leave the relationship.***

When someone is grieving, going through a down period (we all have down periods from time to time) or actually dealing with depression, there are two main ways we can handle it:

1. We can fight it
2. We can wallow in it

Just reading those two options you probably have a good idea of what they look like. You can also probably guess who's likely a strong candidate for each category. My most successful clients are people who are kind to others, but hard on themselves because they have the work ethic to do what's needed to fight depression and get better. These people are eager to learn and open to growing. They appreciate lessons like "***Treat yourself the way you treat others,***" (a flip of the original golden rule) and communication tools that help them feel empowered. These are the type of people who want to be at their best and would already be there if they had been given the tools sooner. This is what I was in my late 20s. I had depression mostly because I didn't know how to be emotionally healthy. Now that I'm learning, I'm in a much better spot. Ironically, my hard on myself side (the side that puts me at risk of depression) helps me do the work I need to do to be healthy. Just like being physically healthy, being emotionally healthy isn't easy, but it becomes easier as behaviors become routine and the results are encouraging.

People who fight their depression try to create healthy habits like exercising and sleeping regularly, they seek guidance from wise people (e.g. therapy or books like this), they try new things to see if it helps, they work on standing up for themselves in a loving way, they try to communicate clearly, they use good questions instead of assuming the worst, they try to see the good in all things as they fight their negative thoughts and feelings that want to hold them down, and they try to forgive and follow the advice of "You got to put your behind in the past." (Thank you Pumba for that lesson).

Meanwhile, people in the helpless victim category are very frustrating. They don't do the work to be better because they just want sympathy. I will typically only see these people two or three times before they give up because in their mind nothing will help or they don't like that I encourage them to grow. Being a so-called victim, they are helpless to their problems... or so they think. The truth is no one is helpless, but feeling that way is how you end up wallowing. People who wallow don't really try anything new. They assume the worst of others, they act miserable and never appreciate what people do for them, and they continue doing what put them in their negative spot in

the first place. These are the people who develop and continue bad coping strategies (aka addictions) like bad eating habits, playing video games, smoking pot, scowling at the world to keep others away, gossiping, being a drama king or queen, or attacking others online. These people are what many would call a drain on society because they bring others down emotionally and possibly even financially. They are (or soon become) a dark cloud making everywhere they go feel a bit worse. What's frustrating is there is no convincing them they can change their experience because on some level they want to feel like a victim, which is a truly sad way to live. ***A garden of negative thoughts never leads to very good fruit.***

This week may you consider the difference between fighting your down periods versus wallowing in them.

## Lesson 16

# Is It Really Depression?

As a psychotherapist, my work week is pretty much a qualitative study of humanity. One of my favourite parts of the job is learning about people and the patterns that can be found. For instance, I've noticed sometimes people will say they're depressed, but they're using the wrong word because what they mean is they're grieving (i.e. there's been a loss), they're discouraged because life keeps kicking them in the pants, it's a temporary low because of something like the weather or time of year, or they're just feeling low for no particular reason. If I can have a grumpy day without having anything that should make me grumpy, it makes sense that people can also have a sad day once in awhile without any real reason besides waking up on the wrong side of the bed (there's a reason that expression was made). There's another time when people misuse the term depression – a more dangerous time: ***A lot of people who claim to have “depression” or “anxiety” feel exactly the way they should be feeling because their body is trying to tell them to change something.*** Last fall I realized a number of people said they had depression, but when they told me their lifestyle I was like “What do you expect to feel when you live like that? If I did that, I'd be miserable, too.” If you live an unhealthy lifestyle, your body will get angry at you and try to tell you to smarten up – ***our body wants to protect itself physically and emotionally, and it will hurt you in a small way to get your attention in order to prevent being hurt in a bigger way.*** In these cases, it's not depression; it's the natural repercussion of doing something wrong. What's worse is well-intentioned people (e.g. parents and educators) placate to the cries of young people with unhealthy habits and enable their bad behavior. This only perpetuates the problem when a lot of people really just need to live better – ***if you live terrible, you'll feel terrible.*** Sometimes what that person really need is a kick in the pants to get moving – yes, I just wrote that. It can be hard to get moving, and sometimes we need a push. Other times ***we need to fall on our face to recognize we need to smarten up.***

**Please note:** I'm not saying depression and anxiety aren't a real thing; they definitely are, but if we throw these labels around all willy-nilly (I love that term) we discredit those who are actually suffering from them. If anything, I'm showing people who genuinely have depression and anxiety the respect they deserve by telling others not to tarnish the struggle by saying they have depression or anxiety when they feel exactly the way they should based on how bad they live.

Here's a simple way to look at this: ***There are good choices and there are bad choices. If you make bad choices, bad things will happen because they should.*** These things are called repercussions, and ***repercussions are supposed to make us feel bad, so we will be afraid of doing that bad thing again.*** That's the essence of discipline: If you do that bad thing, I will punish you, so you won't want to do it again. For instance, if my two year old daughter drinks from the toilet – she doesn't dunk her head in there or use a straw; she uses a teacup to dip in it like a lady – I need to punish her in order to discourage her from doing that again (and then laugh in private because that's hilariously gross).

Repercussions are the natural result of disrespect. For instance, fire is hot enough to cook, and that means if I don't respect it and I put my hand to close, I'll get burned. In that case, I shouldn't feel sorry for myself for the pain I feel. I need to learn and carry on. What's unfair is when people who make good choices have to support people who knowingly make bad choices and never change. ***There should always be room for grace, but there's a point where we need to let people face the repercussions of their decisions, so they'll hopefully one day learn – helping is different than enabling.***

I'm assuming the idea that putting your hand in fire is a bad idea makes sense (it's kind of a no-brainer), but at the same time, people screw this idea up all the time. For instance, if you eat fast food every day, you should feel like garbage because you're eating garbage. Your body is supposed to be angry at you because it needs nutrients. If you lay around all day, or watch TV for more than two hours in a row, you should feel gross because that's very unhealthy. If you overspend



and carry a lot of debt, you should be stressed because you overspent and your body is trying to tell you to smarten up with your spending. If you cheat on your partner or do something illegal, you should feel anxious about getting caught because your body is telling you to stop and make things right. If you claim you're an introvert and never push yourself to talk to people, you'll only make it harder in the future if you don't try. At a certain point, not talking to people isn't being introverted; that's you being very unhealthy and making things worse for your future self. It's like people who over drink or smoke too much pot to avoid facing reality; the more you hide, the harder it will be for you to face the real world, and the harder it is to face the real world, the more tempted you'll be to do the activity you need to hide. Addiction isn't that complicated – you're trying to bury pain instead of facing it, and until you confront it and try to heal, you're going to be stuck. ***You can't properly heal if you never pull out the knife stuck in your back physically or emotionally.***

A common thing I hear is people will say they have depression because they don't want to get up in the morning. Um, it's normal to hate getting up (I'm clearly not a morning person). As physics teaches: ***An object at rest, wants to stay at rest while an object in motion, wants to stay in motion.*** There's a reason we have the saying, "If you want something done, give it to a busy person." ***People in motion are more likely to stay in motion.*** That's why it can be hard to go to bed at night – that's normal. But either way, having a hard time getting up or going to bed isn't an excuse *not* to do them. Our body might want to protect itself, but sometimes it needs the brain (or a parent) to push it to do the thing it needs – that's life.

Life is not that complicated, but our culture seems to be so overly mental health driven that we're actually damaging people: (enabler) "You have anxiety? Then don't worry about doing this thing that will actually help your anxiety in the long run because I don't want you to have to push yourself." ***We need to start listening to our body and not runaway at the slightest sign of struggle.*** Instead of, "I need to get rid of this feeling," we need to be trying to figure out what it is our body needs. Instead of just claiming depression, we need to consider, "Do I feel this way because I should feel this way?"

***Sometimes we feel like our life is a waste because it is – so do something to change that!*** Other times, our body is trying to tell us something and we misconstrue the message like “I don’t feel happy, so I should get divorced.” Ehn! Wrong interpretation (sometimes)! Work on the marriage (most times)! Divorce doesn’t make you happier; it shrinks your bank account and adds a load of stress, and means you’re breaking a vow you made in front of family and friend: “I promise to love you for better or worse... but not that worse.” Our body will get our attention, but we need to be careful how we hear isn’t blinded by bias.

As a culture, ***we need to stop feeling sorry for ourselves and start doing things to get better.*** We also ***need to listen to our body instead of being angry at it for making us uncomfortable – there’s a reason.*** If you deal with the reason, you won’t be uncomfortable. It’s that simple. Sometimes we need help to know how to feel better, so do some research and/or see a therapist. We have more control of our lives than we often realize.

This week may you do the little things that make your life better.

## Lesson 17

# Is Karma Real?

One of the most frustrating things in life is when bad people seem to get away with being bad. We're told in Eastern religions that Karma follows the cause and effect rule where an individual's intentions and actions contribute to their future in this life and in their rebirths. Boy George said "Karma is a chameleon." I'm not sure that's what the original religious people were going for, but any chance I have to reference Boy George I take it. In Christianity, we're told that you reap what you sow (Gal 6:7b, para), which parallels this basic idea. Of course, Christianity also teaches the importance of grace, but from a logical standpoint, we still need justice – on some level, you should reap what you sow. Unfortunately that doesn't always seem to be the case. Sometimes good people just get messed over. The worst story I heard was from someone I did a wedding for who said his mom wouldn't be at the wedding because years ago she had an affair and left the family. Affairs happen, but what made his story crazy was in the divorce his mom got half the house and then half the business. Since the dad was a farmer, she ended up with three-quarters of the farm (it was the home and business) leaving the dad with a quarter of his original property. Maybe that was a case of the dad hiring a terrible lawyer, but sometimes awful people seem to win. You could argue the mom got what she deserved because her own son disowned her, but if she could do what she did, would she even care? As a psychotherapist, I hear lots of stories, and sometimes I meet some really good people who get seriously messed over, especially in divorce or through some tragedy, so do we really reap what we sow?

Years ago, I had been involved in my former high school for five years between volunteering, coaching, student placement for teachers' college, and regularly supply teaching. On top of this, my sister had taught there for many years and connected me to her friends and I had kids in my youth group in the school. Even though I wasn't a regular teacher, I was so appreciated I was included in the yearbook. I felt very accepted and at home there... Did you just hear "Duhn,duhn, duhn, something bad is about to happen"? Because that's what's coming. One sunny May morning, after supply teaching an art class that I thought went quite well, I was called down to the principal's office. As a teacher, you expect it's for paperwork or a

change of schedule, but when I got to the office, I was brought into a room where my union rep was waiting with the principal and vice principal – that's not good. I was told there was a complaint against me and I was going to be escorted off school property by security – what? I would then have to wait to be contacted by the board of education and meet with the disciplinary board. They couldn't tell me what I did or who made the complaint – what? It was the most horrifying moment of my life. Finding my dad dead on the floor from a heart attack was horrible, but this was a new level of pain because it was like my own life was exploding before my eyes and I didn't know why or how to limit the damage. What's really crazy is despite needing security to escort me out of the school, I was still welcome to supply teach at other schools. Does that make sense? I was too dangerous to be in this school, but I was completely safe anywhere else – what?

It took four very long weeks of trying not to over think before I could be seen at the board and be told what happened, which was its own traumatic experience as I'm a processor and terrible on the spot. The accusations were ridiculous but overwhelming. After that blur of an hour, I had to wait another three weeks to be told what my punishment was going to be without any hint of whether anyone else thought the accusations were ridiculous or not (they did). I was still not allowed on my former high school's property, but I was still welcome to supply teach anywhere else – so strange. The end result was I received the lowest form of discipline, which I was told was being given to me because they had to give me something – that didn't make sense. My punishment meant I had to complete two classes on proper behavior of a teacher where I learned that all the things I was taught two years before in teacher's college were wrong – that was fun. Were you aware students shouldn't know anything about their teacher like whether they're married, have kids, been anywhere interesting, or have any life lessons or personal examples to help a lesson? Did you know if two kids are making out in your classroom you shouldn't correct them because that would be embarrassing for them? That's what these classes taught me – genius. The end result was I learned that as long as no one complains about

you, you can do pretty much anything you want as a teacher. If there is a complaint, however, there is a list of rules not taught to teachers that are designed to protect the board, which means if anything goes wrong, the board can throw the teacher under the bus – it was very inspiring. I can't imagine why I changed career paths.

And why did this insanely traumatic and unnecessary experience happen? An EA who had been in the class, an EA I had been careful to be nice to because she was prickly, had made a complaint to the office about me without any hint that she was upset. She was an EA who had spent the class I covered coloring a picture instead of helping the student beside her like she was paid to do. Did I say anything about her? Nope, it wasn't my place. Should she have said anything about me to the office? Nope, it wasn't her place, especially when she didn't talk to me first and I hadn't done anything anyone else would've cared about. If she had talked to me like a proper person should, I would've happily apologized and explained the misunderstanding, but instead of being a decent person, she went passive aggressive and went for my throat from behind my back.

What was the result for me after all of the trauma she caused? She set my career path back two years and shattered my trust in people and organizations... again. I've been backstabbed hard a number of times, but this was by far the most emotionally damaging experience I have ever had. This EA won the gold medal in being damaging, and there's a good chance she never gave it a thought besides thinking I deserved whatever came to me – the passive aggressive way.

And what happened to this EA? Nothing... at first, but stories spread fast. Soon, all the staff heard an EA made a complaint about a teacher and she was done. What teacher wants to risk having someone like that in their classroom? The last I heard, she ended up leaving the school and started fresh somewhere else, but even then rumors travel. By being vicious to me and proving she has very low social skills and compassion for others, she ended up messing herself over hard – karma.

**Side Note:** The principal this woman complained to about me could've prevented all of this if he had been a real leader and shut it down. Instead, he was more worried about advancing his own career by doing the paperwork game rather than doing the smart thing and telling her to talk me while also warning me about her.

That being said, did hearing about her pain make me feel better? No.

***Her pain didn't take mine away;*** I still had the same hurt, and had to work through forgiveness. ***That's why revenge doesn't work.***

***Someone else's punishment doesn't reduce our pain.*** We may want to hurt others in hopes they'll understand what we're feeling, but that doesn't bring us healing.

Here's the reality:

1. ***Miserable people live miserable lives,*** and others are collateral damage. This EA was a miserable person who had a miserable life and I was simply collateral damage.
2. ***Good people live good lives... sometimes.*** People who have thankful hearts will enjoy life more than if they were miserable, but you can still have a difficult life depending on your family connections, choices you make, and general luck of the draw. Plus, there's a risk of being collateral damage no matter how good you are. Fortunately, good people will be quicker to forgive and move on rather than building up resentment and stunting their happiness.
3. ***Some people are too good and that really messes them over.*** There is a difference between being nice to a point and being a doormat who gets taken advantage of. Unfortunately, people in this category end up the most hurt out of everyone because they're too worried about making others happy even at their own expense, which is a difficult habit to break.

In my situation, I was living the best I could at the time, but that didn't matter; I still got messed over. Fortunately for me, this woman was obviously miserable and had a miserable life. Knowing this made it easier to forgive her, but other times, the miserable person who hurts us is a wolf in sheep's clothing and can fool a lot of people into thinking they're good when they're the most evil person in the world

(i.e. they're masters of being passive aggressive). I have definitely seen people like this and it's infuriating because these bad people seem to get whatever they want while the actual good people suffer. The only consolation in situations like this is these people may get what they want, but they're still not happy because "stuff" doesn't make us happy – the right heart does. These people clearly don't have that, so they're screwed.

So what do I do about this?

1. I need to work on having a thankful heart and being as good as I can be without being a pushover for my own benefit and to limit the hurt I cause others.
2. I need to work on forgiving, which means letting go of the pain by looking for what's good even in the worst situations. For instance, the dad of the son getting married may have lost three-quarters of the farm, but he still had his integrity and all of his son's love.
3. I need to surround myself with good people and make good choices. It's amazing how this reduces stress.
4. I need to recognize how strong I am and trust my own abilities to survive miserable people, especially when I've survived what I have.
5. I can ***pray a David prayer***. In the Psalms, David (from the story of David and Goliath) would ask God to punish his enemies in order to open their eyes to the hurt they cause. It can feel really good to say words like this out loud by yourself. It can free you from worrying about what happens to the other person since it's being given to God to handle.
6. ***I need to limit how nice I am because the people who are too nice are the ones who end up the most hurt.*** Bad people are miserable, but overly nice people often get the most hurt because they get dumped on. Thus, they need to be careful to develop healthy boundaries to protect themselves; they need to be good

to a point, which includes being patient and generous to a point.

***We need to love others as ourselves and not at our expense.***

This week may you see ways to protect yourself from miserable people.

## Lesson 18

### **Worse than a Pandemic** **(Written during the first lockdown)**

One of the best things we can do is create a spirit of thankfulness. It's important to have hope, to dream, and to have things to look forward to, but we need to balance that with feeling thankful for what



we currently have and where we're at in order to be happy. Finding a way to be thankful even in difficult times is the root of happiness and healing from the past. ***One of the best tools for being thankful is to remember how it could be worse.*** For instance, years ago when my eye was scratched and I had to wear an eye patch for a day (the peg leg and parrot I wore along with it were for fun), I could be thankful it wasn't both eyes that were hurt, it was temporary, I could see with the other eye, and there was hope for the injury to completely heal without any surgery or cost (thank you Canada). I could also be thankful I have an eye to be scratched in the first place. There are so many things that could've been worse than my current state.

My sister was really good at finding things to be grateful for when she went through her cancer bout three years ago, which made a big difference for her getting through it for herself and her family. Even though she was hit extra hard by the chemo (she could only do seven of the eight originally planned treatments), my sister was able to be grateful she didn't have something like MS or Parkinson's that are permanent. She was also thankful she had a job that offered financial help while she was off recovering unlike someone like me who is self-employed and would've been screwed if I didn't work. Even now when she's still struggling with heart issues caused by the chemo treatments that she'll likely battle the rest of her life, she's handling it remarkably well as she remembers how it could be worse rather than how other people have it better. After all, a partially working heart is better than a heart that's not working at all.

A lot of people say we shouldn't compare ourselves to others, but that's actually terrible advice. We *should* be comparing ourselves, but ***we need to have a balance of looking at people who have it better as a way to inspire us to grow while we remember those who have it worse as a way to remember how lucky we are for what we do have.***

This idea jumped out at me while I was reading the book, *Strange History*. Like all geniuses, I have a book in the bathroom to read when you know... I'm avoiding a crying baby or toddler. This book offers one page of information on a historical event, and the one was a great reminder of how it could be worse than this seemingly never

ending pandemic. The movie, *Outbreak*, is proof that we could definitely have a worse virus since the one in the movie was highly contagious and a death sentence for everyone who got it. The event in my book, however, reminded me how the world has faced worse things. Besides global wars and large scale famine, there was one event that greatly affected the entire world. In April, 1815, Mount Tambora, a volcano in Indonesia, erupted and lasted for ten days ravaging the Indonesian island of Sumbawa. Sure a ten day explosion is bad and it's tragic how the island was so devastated, but the real problem was the ash and dust from that explosion because it was so thick it blocked out the sun... all around the world... for a year. That's right. One event on an island caused what was called across the entire world, "The year without a summer." A year without seeing the sun? Brutal! Seasonal depression affects a lot of people during January to March in Ontario and that's just three months while knowing spring will soon arrive versus a year where you'd have no idea when or if the sun would be out again. Plus, unlike our three months of winter where we still get moments of sun, they'd have nothing – Insane! Keep in mind this was also at a time when there wasn't the instant global news we have today, so there would have been people throughout the world who'd have no idea what was going on and probably had a lot of crazy guesses: "Apocalypse!" "Aliens!" "A dance party with fog machines gone wrong!" Whether you thought it was God's wrath or the end of the world, there'd be people wondering if they'd ever see the sun again, and if that was the case, humanity would eventually face extinction.

So what was it like at that time? The temperatures that year were the coldest on record with snow or frost happening in North America and Europe in the summer. Where fruit and vegetables survived, there was a huge problem with it being moldy and not even good enough to give animals. There ended up being an increase in prices for food and some parts like Quebec ran out of bread and milk. In Europe, "the dust in the atmosphere turned the white snowflakes red. The ensuing famine was the worst the continent would experience in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the time that 'summer' was over nearly 200,000 Europeans had perished." (216, *Strange History*) A virus is bad, but I

can't imagine watching animals and people starve and the guilt that would be attached to surviving.

Of course, our situation with COVID also has its tragedies and we should acknowledge the suffering that is going on, but by remembering what others have been through or those who currently have it worse can help us find a spirit of thankfulness and contentment even in difficult times.

This week may you consider what could be worse in order to be thankful for what you have... because we have a lot.

## Lesson 19

### **Is Shame Bad?**

Here's a true moment I had with my three-year-old at Peoples Jewellers waiting for my wife to finish shopping in a different store (something that can take impressively long – she has a gift):

Worker: Can I help you?

Me: I need to find a push-present for my wife. (If you're like me who didn't know what a push present was, it's a sparkly gift a guy is supposed to give his wife when she gives birth because

apparently a new baby isn't special enough. It's a good thing babies are so cheap.)

Worker: When is she due?

Me: Last year... I'm a little late on this.

Worker: It's been a weird year (referring to COVID).

Me: Thanks for understanding.

Worker: If you need anything, please let me know; otherwise the clearance section is over there.

Me: Perfect, thanks.

Isn't that hilarious? That moment made my day. Her response basically meant she looked at me and thought, "Yeah, this guy's cheap" – a true thought. Maybe it was because of the outfit I was wearing – very comfort focused. Maybe it was because I had a three-year-old with me and, therefore, have more important expenses in my life than shiny rocks. Maybe when I said I had a wife, the worker realized I'm not a boyfriend compensating for anything or trying to buy forgiveness: "That guy's not buying an 'I'm sorry I cheated' necklace because who'd go for him?" Maybe it was more positive and she could tell I wasn't a sucker who would buy overpriced jewelry from a mall when I can get it much cheaper somewhere that has less overhead. Whatever the real reason, this worker should be allowed to categorize me as cheap without it being offensive. Categorizing people is part of healthy social interaction because it helps us know how to best interact with the person in front of us. For instance, how someone talks on stage at a church should be different than talking on stage at a rock concert: (rock band) "Jesus f'ing loves you!" (crowd) "What? That was wrong on multiple levels."

The unfortunate reality is if I wanted to play a victim (i.e. be passive aggressive), I could easily spin this situation and be insulted claiming, "You're shaming me!" Here's a phrase I don't remember hearing when I was younger: "You're shaming me!" Ugh, I hate that statement. When did this passive aggressive retort become allowed? What happened to the days when the response to do this would simply be "Get over yourself." People who claimed this used to be seen as manipulative... because they are, which means they should be shut down and not given a voice. Now, it seems whenever someone

claims shaming or bullying, the one being accused is the biggest villain in the world without trial or even question: “A person claims someone is bullying? It must be true! No one ever misinterprets, exaggerates, or claims this because they’re manipulating the situation to get sympathy.” To assume the accuser is right and the other person is evil, to put it gently is stupid. (Is that too subtle?) The idea of shaming and bullying has gone over the top. I’ve heard kids accuse teachers for being a bully because they told the kid to stop doing something bad – that’s not a bully. Authority is supposed to be authoritative. Just like a parent is meant to be an authority who makes the rules and doesn’t cater to their kids needs (a strange concept to many nowadays). Also, if a peer asks you not to do something, that’s not bullying either; that’s someone giving you clear expectations, which is healthy. Just because someone asks you to do something you don’t like doesn’t make them a bully. If they do it nicely they’re a good communicator. If they’re rude, they’re rude, but they’re not a bully.

What’s scary to me is people who are straightforward (a good quality) are frequently accused of being a bully (a bad quality) when they’re just being honest and the receiver can’t handle it (like a wuss). A bully is mean to make themselves feel better and/or to make others feel worse. Nowadays, bullying is more likely to be done on social media. For the record, if you try to “cancel” someone or damage their reputation you are a bully. If you say words to someone online you wouldn’t say in person, you are a bully. Attacking people online or behind peoples’ back is cowardly and cruel, yet we allow it. Revenge, in general, is villainous. Meanwhile, if someone raises their voice or gets visibly upset well below a rage category (a very normal human response to feeling threatened), they’re labeled as having anger problems because they’re “scary.” What happened to letting people have emotions and not having to suppress disagreement? ***What happened to encouraging people to develop a thick skin?***

Maybe I’m blind, but ***it regularly appears that whiners are given megaphones while good people are told to just take it and do more work to compensate for the whiners too busy whining and feeling sorry for themselves to actually work themselves.*** I miss the days

when you could say, “It’s time to put on your big boy panties and suck it up.” I miss the days when it was a badge of honor to say you never missed a day of work. I miss the days when people cared more about others and how what they did affected the community rather than it being all about the individual’s needs. The world I remember looks like a world with some integrity and respect for others. Without these things we end up creating self entitled, hypocritical jerks who claim how hard their first-world life is as they demand special treatment despite the wake of pain they leave behind them. It’s almost as if our world has forgotten what shame is as individuals feel they “deserve” everything they want. I think the biggest pointer to entitlement is the success of Uber Eats and Skip the Dishes. As a cheapskate, those businesses make me nauseous. A driver told me someone bought a bag of Skittles for \$25 through Uber Eats because they didn’t want to stop playing their video game to walk to the store – ouch.

It used to be if it walked like a duck and talked like a duck, it was a duck. Now, if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, be careful not to label it a duck because they could be offended... unless the label somehow gives them special treatment then they’ll use it to their advantage. Here’s a fact: I’m 20-30 pounds overweight. I’m technically fat. If someone told me that fact, that’s not “fat shaming”; it’s rude and a sign that person doesn’t have proper social skills: (me) “I’m fat and you’re rude; we each have our faults.” The reality is *it only hurts if you believe it*; you can’t insult someone who brushes it off. If a NBA player called me pathetically short, I’m not hurt because I know I’m not; I’m just short compared to his giant-ness. To someone who was insecure about their height, however, that could be crushing. If someone called me a whore, I’d just laugh because I know I’m not. Some guys would even wear that as a badge of honor: “That’s right! I’m a lady killer.” If most women were called this, however, they’d lose their mind. Why? Because on some level they’re afraid there’s truth to it. Maybe they don’t like the word, but even then, why does it bother them so much if it’s not true? ***What people say only has power if we give it power.*** At the same time, like me being fat, sometimes someone really is a whore based on their lifestyle choices. In that case, *it’s not an insult; it’s a fact. If you don’t like the fact, change the way you live and have a better fact*

*about you.* Facts are just facts; there's no insult or offence to them. They're only dangerous when *we* associate judgement to them.

*Instead of claiming someone is shaming us, we need to reconsider why it bothers us so much. We can't control the world around us (as much as passive aggressive people try), but we can control how we respond. I'm responsible for me.* If being called fat bothered me, I should change my lifestyle and lose the weight. At the same time, I should own the truth: "Yes, I am fat. You just stated a fact, so I'm not offended, but it does remind me to go jogging later. Maybe you should join me. If we're being honest, you've got a little extra, too."

As far as shame goes, I used to think it was bad. I also used to think guilt was bad until I realized, like all emotions, it is a gift as it helps protect us and those around us. Without it, we're psychopathic. Guilt specifically teaches a lesson and motivates us to do something to make it better. Shame, on the other hand, is guilt taken too far; it's what keeps people down: "I don't deserve any better, so I'll suffer." As far as this definition goes, shame is a pretty terrible thing to have, but recently I realized that shame is still a gift. I'm guessing that sounds strange, but *shame is a gift insofar that the fear of it can keep people from doing stupid things.* The fear of shame can keep people from posting overly honest information online. The fear of shame can encourage self control and people acting with respect to others. The fear of shame prevents "The people of Walmart," (if you don't know this reference, Google it) and encourages healthy social norms. The fear of shame used to keep people from being so self-entitled. Now, however, it appears that *shame has been bundled up and given to a select few people who are already overworking and slowly killing themselves with how hard they are on themselves while others who should feel more shame than they do roam free and hurting those around them without a care.*

To be honest, I look at what's in the news and *I can't help but miss when shame helped people be nicer.* I miss when shame prevented people from being so quick to throw stones a pre-emptive strike from others saying anything about them. Maybe one day we as a society will learn that boundaries and norms are important and that

not everything should be allowed. Considering it can be fun to break the rules once in awhile, we even lose out on potential fun if there aren't boundaries and norms to follow.

Ultimately, *as a culture we need to learn to start laughing at ourselves more and assuming the best of those around us.* Worrying about being shamed makes us nasty people who judge and shame others (a terrible way to live). Meanwhile, *laughter can unite people together.*

This week may you consider how shame has actually helped you as a way to prevent the power it can potentially have over you.

## More Food for Thought

*Fools have no interest in understanding;  
they only want to air their own opinions.*

*Pro 18:2*

*Don't waste your breath on fools,  
for they will despise the wisest advice.*

*Pro 23:9*

*Fools think their own way is right,  
but the wise listen to others.*

*Pro 12:15*



You could also add “Fools don’t read books like this and consider how they can grow.” Well done for trying not to be a fool.

## Lesson 20

### Humble or Self Deprecating?

I recently sent this message to someone I’ve really admired for a long time:

*Hey [person], I was talking to someone who struggled to accept that certain people can look up to him, and I thought I would send a note to say how much I look up to you and how it’s been that way since the first time I heard you speak in 1999... a few years ago.*

His response was:

*Wow, thanks Chad. I feel very unworthy. But thanks. I appreciate it. You are an amazing person and I’m glad we get to see each other more often.*

I was surprised by his response – unworthy? – and to be honest, disappointed. I mentioned this to my mom who is an incredible

person and she said he had the right response, but was it? I shouldn't have been surprised; my mom's a very passive person whose main weakness is not realizing how great she is. She doesn't like to think she's great, however, because "It's not being humble." ***Humility, however, isn't about downplaying our strengths or being self deprecating; it's not rubbing our strengths in peoples' faces.*** As a Christian, she believes God is her Heavenly Father and if He created her, as a Father, shouldn't He think she's pretty great? I think my daughter is pretty great and she regularly screams in my face when I make her do something she doesn't want to do – it's fun. Right now she believes me when I say she's great, but one day that'll change. It'll be a sad day for me when my daughter hits the age where she only sees her flaws because I want her to see herself the way I see her, and I'm pretty sure that's how God wants us to see ourselves. In fact, we're told: "we are God's masterpiece." (Eph 2:10a) It makes sense that He would want us to see both our strengths and weaknesses with sober judgment in order to know how best to grow while appreciating who we are in that moment.

What was really disappointing about these messages is I'm trying to teach the importance of being self aware, yet in my response to my friend's reply, I completely missed his compliment to me because I was so worried about him accepting my compliment to him – hello hypocrite. He wrote that I was "amazing," and my response proved why he didn't say I was perfect. It also proved that I need to be careful to see others complimenting me and not just worry about pushing my thoughts onto them.

From my experience, a lot of really good people are really good at putting themselves down, which means they'll be really good at NOT receiving compliments. But if someone says I'm a great therapist (it's happened) should I be like "Of course you'd say that; you're crazy"? Of course not. I should thank them and validate their kind words. Sometimes we need to just accept the compliment, and other times like if I get complimented as a therapist, I should reciprocate with some type of balancing comment like "I appreciate that. The truth is I'm only as good as my client. You've done a lot of great work,

which makes me look good.” The reality is I’ve had some people love me, some people be indifferent about me, and some people hate me hard. Fortunately, the latter is rare or I’d be doing something very wrong. What’s interesting is if someone hates me, it’s not normally about me. It’s because they twist what I say or I’m not doing something they want (e.g. saying they’re right and their partner is wrong). Ultimately, ***emotionally healthy people are fair to themselves and self accepting of both their strengths and weaknesses as well as being accepting of other people’s strengths and weaknesses.***

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses; humble people aren’t afraid to acknowledge these truths. They just don’t use them as reasons to look down on others or themselves (i.e. they’re not judgemental)

Being humble is NOT about being mean to ourselves. In fact, ***being mean limits how good we can be to others as it reduces drive, desire, and confidence.*** Even worse, if we don’t accept that we’re good at something, we may not share it with others, which means the world misses out on what could’ve potentially been beneficial.

**Tip:** To be better at receiving compliments, it’s really helpful to write yourself a compliment every day. If this is a struggle – and it likely will at first – try thinking about what someone who loves you would say. It also helps to keep it simple. You don’t have to be the best or stand out in some way. You just need to do something well.

To take this further, being humble is not only being aware of our strengths and weaknesses, ***it’s ultimately understanding that our strengths are also our weaknesses and our weaknesses are also our strengths.*** For instance, I’m very creative, but that was encouraged because I have a terrible memory. Meanwhile my friend who has a great memory never needed to work on being creative; he’s also haunted by a lot more memories than the average person. Thus, being creative and having a good memory both have their advantages and disadvantages. Neither makes one of us better than the other – just different. ***Humble people accept this and don’t need to show off or earn approval because they already accept themselves.*** If everyone was humble, there wouldn’t be show offs or envy, or judging

– how nice would that be? If we were humble, we could appreciate other people’s talents and not worry about feeling inadequate compared to them because we would know we had our own strengths, too.

Being humble isn’t about self deprecation; it’s about being content with who we are and enjoying what we and others have to offer the world to make it a better place.

This week may you consider how you can be more humble.

## Lesson 21

# 12 Things that can Make You a Jerk

Like a lot of people, I’m drawn to underdogs, but I take it a step further as I inherently assume people being accused of something are innocent – that’s not a good quality for being a juror: “I know he was covered in the victim’s blood and ten people saw him do it, but I’m sure there’s a good explanation.” I want to assume these people have good hearts and they acted in a way that was misinterpreted or they simply had a bad moment. I don’t like to assume people are bad... but some people are. Some people really suck. Ghandi had a similar way of thinking as he was quoted as saying, (*Strange History*), “I do not consider him to be as bad as he is depicted. He is showing an ability that is amazing, and he seems to be gaining his victories without much bloodshed.” Guess who Ghandi was referring to. Think late 1930s... think famous leader... think world event... Are you thinking the Wizard from *The Wizard of Oz*? That’d be incorrect. Ghandi was

referring to Hitler. I'm sure he regretted saying that, especially since it was recorded and Hitler was clearly as terrible as he was depicted.

At the same time that my heart goes to the accused, I find my heart is very slow to trust people in my own life because it's easy to believe they're good from a distance, but when it comes to a personal connection, nope, I don't trust it. On some level I realize the world is full of good people with bad moments and bad people with good moments, and sometimes these titles get confused, but I want to avoid anything bad (a common problem for writers who write as a way to avoid interacting with people). Ultimately, we can all have bad moments that make us look like a jerk... or it could be a sign that we are a jerk. Sometimes what helps is having a clear list of actions/attributes that make someone a jerk to help reduce the risk, which is why I present the following list of "12 Things that can Make You a Jerk":

1. ***Guarded:*** People who are guarded are often protecting themselves, but in their self protection, they end up pushing others away and/or become very hurtful. They can be distant without explanation or they're quick to snap as they assume the worst of people and take everything personally, which causes very unnecessary conflict. There is typically a lack of vulnerability, which would help others be more patient with their snappiness as they'd know the snappiness is like a dog nursing a wounded paw. Instead, they lack gentleness or any sense of warmth thereby making it all the harder to put up with them.
2. ***Negative:*** Jerks tend to only see the worst whether in you, others, or the world in general. Nothing seems good enough as they just want to complain and in some way feel sorry for themselves. People who are good at criticizing others are typically really good at it because of how good they are at criticizing themselves and/or have learned it from someone like a parent or friend. Either way, being constantly subjected to negativity sucks the life out of those around them. The only thing that makes the negativity worse is if

the negative person is arrogant and overly positive about themselves.

3. ***Socially Blind:*** Being socially blind leaves others wondering if this person is delusional or too into themselves. I've met a number of married people where, when the one complained about how poorly the partner treated them, the partner brushed it off: "I treat you better than I treat myself, so deal with it." This unfair comparison to brush off bad behavior leaves others very hurt. It'd be like a murderer saying, "I shouldn't go to jail because I only killed one person. That guy killed five people, so I'm fine."

Being blind can be the result of projection as ***almost everyone who accuses someone else of doing something is doing it themselves.***

For instance, whenever a person says someone else is passive aggressive, 95% of the time the accuser is the culprit. Meanwhile, if the accused accepts it as a possibility, it actually proves they're more passive. Passive aggressive people are always quick to accuse others of doing what they do themselves while choosing to see themselves as the innocent victim.

Being blind can also be from a lack of thoughtfulness like smokers who don't realize their smoke is going into other peoples' faces. Men are most likely to have this issue as the number one complaint about husbands is we're not thoughtful, which is often a result of us being easygoing. Being easygoing can be great for reducing criticism of others, but it can lead to not thinking about how we can do something kind to others. If we're fine, why wouldn't others be?

4. ***Self-Serving:*** Jerks are really good at making it all about them. Whatever they do or think about, it always goes back to them. This selfishness means they're happy to use others because it's all

about pushing their own agenda and they'll never help others unless it ultimately benefits them.

An often missed form of being self-serving is micromanaging. Micromanagers will often justify it as trying to “help” when it really reduces the opportunity for others to grow and/or shine while preserving what the micromanager wants – control. This usually stems from anxiety that might include perfectionism, but either way, they're difficult to work with.

5. ***Closed-Minded:*** Jerks tend to be close-minded; this doesn't help... obviously. Even if they're wrong, you're not going to be able to change a jerk's mind as they won't consider your opinions, ideas, or thoughts. Instead, they'll shut you down. Even worse, don't expect them to ever let things go. They've made up their mind and forgiving isn't on the agenda. You'll be forever paying for your perceived mistakes.
  
6. ***Don't Read Their Audience:*** Some people are jerks without really meaning to be; it's the result of not reading their audience. For instance, they can take jokes too far, or miss when someone really needs a kind word or could use some encouragement. Actor Michael Caine had a neighbor ask him to sign a petition to keep out foreigners from their apartment building and then Caine introduced this person to his Guyanese wife the person assumed was his cleaner – oops.

Not reading your audience can also be similar to being negative and seeing things that are aren't there and/or making false accusations. For instance, ***being accused of being mean when you're just trying to be funny causes a huge sense of rejection and hurt.*** Accusers rarely realize how damaging a false accusation can be because it's all about how they feel and not the other person, which also connects them to being self-serving.

7. **Know-It-All:** Some jerks are very brash and in-your-face about their opinions, which they hold as truth. They often like to show off how “smart” they are or overcompensate for something. They can lack proper self-reflection, which makes them blind and not read their audience. The worst kind of Know-It-All is one who acts as judge. They always get the final say and their opinion is all that matters, which also makes them self-serving.
8. **Sense of Cruelty:** Jerks don’t care. They lack compassion and are the first to justify their backstabbing, yelling and insults. They attack without regard and will never apologize unless it’s blatantly clear they made a mistake... maybe. This sense of cruelty can also be as subtle as not saying a kind word when it’s needed and not caring about it. It’s being critical without being constructive. It’s brushing people off by saying things like “You shouldn’t feel that way.” *A sense of cruelty is not just lacking thoughtfulness; it’s not caring that they lack thoughtfulness.* It can also be as simple as “I told you so,” and rubbing something in someone’s face: “I knew I was better than you.”
9. **Entitled:** Who doesn’t love someone who acts as if they’re superior in some way? Oh wait; no one. Jerks have a way of talking down to you or making you feel small. Sometimes they’re kicking you down off the perch they’ve put their throne on while other times they’re dragging you down to their level, but either way, the goal is to knock you down. Their tone often feels cold with some rudeness and potential for being dismissive like you’re not worth their time. Being entitled leads to a lack of gratefulness because they’re somehow owed this, which is usually associated to laziness and an unwillingness to work for it themselves. Being entitled can also allow them to use people without a second thought.
10. **Refuse Responsibility:** No matter how obvious it is the jerk screwed up, they refuse to accept any blame or fault. They’re the



kind of driver who will cut you off and give you the finger. Jerks also avoid helping others or donating to charities (even for a tax receipt) because it's not "their" problem. Refusing to accept responsibility can be as simple as blaming your partner for everything in a fight while assuming you're innocent. It often sounds like "I had to yell at them because they yelled at me" (a very common excuse I hear as a therapist).

11. **Misuse Power:** Jerks take advantage of others and manipulate to get their way. It's like when an off-duty cop speeds knowing he can flash his badge and he won't get a ticket. It's also when a therapist/teacher/boss dates a client/student/secretary or when a woman uses her sexual power over a guy to manipulate him. The one that makes me the angriest is when someone says, "God told me to (insert bad behavior)." God corrects people and guides, but He doesn't force things, especially if it causes unnecessary hurt.
12. **Two-Face:** Jerks will be nice to your face and then cheat, lie, and gossip about you. You simply can't trust them. Well, that's not true. You can trust they'll at some point screw you over.

**Bonus:** One of my favourite writers wrote: "...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience." (Col 3:12b) This means we don't have to *be* these things, but we need to try to be. If we don't at least try, then we become a jerk.

This week may you avoid being a jerk and recognise those who are in order to protect yourself.

## Lesson 22

# Dealing with Those Nagging Thoughts

As I've gotten older, I've found I have these old memories suddenly return and haunt me. I teach the importance of looking for the good in the memory and then distracting yourself, which is a very healthy way of dealing with negative memories, but I recently had a memory where I decided I needed to go a step further. The result? A pretty funny story... for my wife. Here's the back story:

When I was twenty years old, I was yet to have a girlfriend (not for a lack of trying). I had been working at a small movie theatre and eventually a girl from my church was hired. We knew of each other, but had never talked before this (like good Christians). She also had never dated, but she hadn't really tried (unlike me). The little theatre we worked at was soon shut down and we started finding other reasons to hang out. After two months, I asked her to be my girlfriend and she said... no. So what did I do? Kept hanging out with her (like a winner). After four months of hanging out, I again asked her to be my girlfriend and she said... no. So what did I do? Kept hanging out with her (I wasn't good at playing hard to get; I was more about playing desperate... like a guy destined to be single). Not long after that, I bumped into a girl I knew from my former high school. She was two years younger than me, but I had always thought she was hot (because she was). She was the kind of hot where she wasn't "popular" because she wasn't a flirt and obsessed with boys (the opposite of my wife in high school... a comment I make because it shows I married the popular girl; not bad for the guy who couldn't get a girlfriend). During my last year or so of high school, she was dating a guy, but now she was single (score). We ended up going on a date (serious score). A few days later I was supposed to go to Europe on a trip with students and graduates from my former high school, so the two of us arranged to go to breakfast the day of my flight. She was smart, easy to talk to, liked to laugh, and she even insisted on paying for the breakfast because I was going away. She was incredible. So what did I do after I said goodbye to her? I called church girl and invited her to hang out while I packed for the hour

before I had to leave for the airport. Yes, I'm aware that there are two terrible things in that sentence: I still had to pack an hour before leaving (but I'm a guy so that's normal) AND I had my first real D-bag moment. I was always a goody-goody and here I was being a serious turd going between two girls... and it felt kind of good. That's a serious change for the guy who struggled to get a date.

On the Europe trip, I ended up hanging out a lot with another girl who was also awesome. That's three girls! I was a serious player... in training. This girl had a boyfriend, but at this point I was twenty-one and never kissed a girl, so I was pretty much as big a threat as a gay best friend. This girl and I hung out more than usual (naughty, I know). It was always in small groups (very not naughty). The one time we walked around the Vatican where I "dazzled" her with my art history knowledge (I wish I was joking, but I was an art major, which also added to me being like a gay best friend... minus the fact I had zero fashion sense). After the trip this girl broke up with her boyfriend. I like to think it was because of me... even though she never contacted me and I found out through rumors. Still counts in my book.

Another person I hung out with more than usual on this trip was church girl's best friend. That sounds very scandalous, but there wasn't a hint of flirting from either of us. She was essentially like most girls I knew. I mention her, however, because when our Europe group arrived home, church girl was there with her friend's mom. When I saw her, I was thrilled... until she avoided me. Talk about a slap in the face. My art history knowledge was no longer helpful (not that it ever was) and the girl I had spent six months hanging out with didn't even say hi to me at the airport after not seeing me for two weeks. I don't remember how we ended up talking after that, but it turned out she was surprised how much she had missed me, and when she saw me, she got scared and hid (not a great flirting move). Shortly after that, I once again asked her to be my girlfriend and she said... yes.

So what happened to breakfast girl you might be wondering? That really incredible girl who was easy to talk to and paid for my

breakfast? Two weeks or so after I had returned home from Europe, she called me and asked, “What happened? I thought you said you’d call me when you got home.” Boom! I had gone from someone who had a D-bag moment to being a serious D-bag. I sheepishly told her I was seeing another girl and she very politely said okay and said good-bye. She handled it really well. It was like she was fine, but I knew she just hid her disappointment really well.

Overall, dating church girl was truly a gift from God. It was a wonderful five years... until she dumped me for a woman (an overweight, sporty woman who was eight years older than her and always wore plaid). To be honest, being dumped for a woman was a bonus. I just wish my replacement was hot, and not a woman who was essentially manlier than me (she was only into sports and not art history) and her fashion sense was just as bad as mine).

One of the reasons I chose church girl was I had already invested a lot into that relationship and I felt a sense of loyalty to her, but more importantly, she was just as naïve to dating as I was whereas breakfast girl had previously dated someone for almost two years and I was incredibly intimidated by that. I hadn’t had my first kiss yet and I’m guessing she had (among other things). Whether it was fear or instinct, it paid off. Church girl became a fundamental part of my development as a man as she supported and encouraged me through some of the toughest things I have ever gone through including several career attempt flops, my dad’s death, and even our break up (nothing like your ex having to help you through the break up because you don’t know who else to turn to).

So why does this back story matter? Fast forward shortly after breaking up with church girl and breakfast girl is playing in the same ultimate Frisbee league as me and she’s one of the best females in the league (crap). Over the next 14 years, I kept randomly bumping into her and when I saw her all I could think is how much of a D-bag I had been. So what did I do? Avoid it (like a dude). At least I did until a few weeks ago. I mentioned the story to my wife and I suddenly realized this choice had a huge impact on my life. If it wasn’t for church girl I wouldn’t have been a youth pastor, which

meant I wouldn't have met my wife, and there's a good chance I wouldn't have become a marriage therapist. That one decision changed my life, yet I still felt all this guilt. I even started having nightmares about it. It didn't make any sense, but my brain was beating me up for how I acted. So what did I do? I confronted it (like a weirdo).

***Sometimes, we can't just accept a situation; we need to confront it and apologize.*** It's now been nineteen years and from Facebook I see breakfast girl has a different last name so I assume she's married (or she lost her mind after losing me). She clearly moved on and why wouldn't she? It was two dates. Now, I was well aware that messaging her made me look like a nut job, but what did I have to lose? Someone I was a D-bag to now thinks I'm weird? I can deal with that if it'll clear my head and I can stop having nightmares about it. I could finally go back to having nightmares of school like I did before – awesome.

After rewriting a Facebook message several times to make sure I didn't say too much off the bat, but give enough to suggest that I'm not some creepy guy trying to hook up with an old interest (not that anyone has ever done that on Facebook), I hit send and let it go. For all I knew, she didn't check her messages... but she did. Several days later she responded, "All I remember is we went out, but we weren't feeling it." What? (Written with exaggerated frustration.) "*We* weren't feeling it?" *We* were feeling it. *We* were definitely feeling it. *You* were definitely feeling it! It was the one time I turned down a girl... emphasis on the *one* time, and she remembers it as "we" weren't feeling it? I had one moment and now it was gone... kind of; I'm really good at lying to myself. The truth is she totally loved me and her anger fueled her being such a great Frisbee player... yes, that's the truth.

After reading the message, I told my wife about the response and she thought it that was amazing. This person that caused me to feel part guilty and part darkishly proud ended up shooting down my memory. I had been very interested in her back then and loved the idea that someone had liked me, too (especially as someone who had no game).

That being said, this response makes for a great story: (friend) “You thought a girl liked you years ago and when you brought it up, you found out you were wrong? That’s hilarious!” Yes, I have a dark sense of humor. It’s just easier to enjoy when it happens to someone else... I mean when it doesn’t happen to me... I mean...

***Besides a fun story and a chance to remember why I’m grateful to be married (dating is the worst), messaging breakfast girl was amazing because my brain is now completely free.*** Sometimes it really is worth sending a note to apologize to someone even if it could make you look dumb or ruin a memory.

This week may you consider if you need to do something to help reduce haunting thoughts.

## Lesson 23

# A Dangerous Christian Lie & a Fun Story

A friend recently sent me a meme that upset her, and she wanted to know what I thought about it. It was a paragraph written on top of a

“spiritual” picture of Jesus. There was a lot of fluff in it, but the one part made me really angry: “Don’t ever stop trusting. And don’t ever stop hoping. God is so ready to give you everything you’ve ever dreamed of – but you have to understand it’s on His timing, not yours.” After reading this meme, I congratulated my friend for realizing that although there was some truth in this, it was teaching a serious lie. God doesn’t actually care about our dreams – does that sound harsh? Probably, but it’s better to be realistic than to teach this lie to someone like my wife who prayed for fifteen years that her dad would be healed from his illness only for him to die in his mid-fifties from a different problem, the flesh eating disease. I claim it’s a lie because where in the Bible does it say anything about God wanting to give us everything we’ve ever dreamed of? I know Jesus said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” Luke (9:23b NIV). Maybe I’m misinterpreting this passage (I’m not sure how), but it seems pretty clear that following Jesus isn’t easy. We need to “deny” ourselves (there’s a strange concept for a lot of people today) and carry a burden (we have to struggle? No wonder Christianity is losing popularity). When I read the Bible, it’s very clear that ***God isn’t our heavenly Santa who gives us what we ask for if we’re nice while punishing those who are naughty.*** The Bible teaches that God is our heavenly Father, which means He is there to encourage us, offer some guidance, and discipline us. (Discipline? There’s another strange concept for some people today, but ***self discipline is best forged out of healthy discipline from parents***) Like any father, God wants to see us to be happy and will do things to help that end, but it’s not His priority (especially when happiness is the result of a heart rooted in gratitude and not what we’re given). God’s priority is to reach the lost (which should also be ours). As Jesus taught, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine safe sheep in order to find the one that’s lost. My personal happiness or accumulation of material stuff is not as important as someone’s eternal salvation... which sounds pretty obvious when they’re put beside each other. That being said, God does want us to pray and ask for things because like any father, He wants to do good things for us when it’s possible.

My favourite answer to prayer came about ten years ago. It was back before I was married and I was a youth pastor. The night before our annual summer camping trip everything was all set to go except I needed one last story to finish up my weekend talks. On camping trips, I'd do campfire talks where I'd share some great stories for teaching important lessons, but I couldn't find anything to use on the last day's talk – the most important talk. I had been praying about it and looking for something by reading and talking to people, but found nothing until... duhn, duhn, duhn. On the way home from my girlfriend's house, around midnight (I was wild and crazy being out so late), I was praying about it as I stopped at the Terryberry Library (the happiest sounding name for a library). Dropping material off on my way home was something I regularly did, but this one particular time... I had a very unique situation happen. After dropping my books in the drop box, I got back in my car, put my seatbelt on (like a responsible driver), and I was ready to start driving away when I had a knock on my window – that was strange. It was a woman – even stranger. The library is a few blocks from Mohawk College, so I assumed she was a student, especially since she looked to be in her early twenties, dressed normal, and she had a backpack. The reason I mention she was dressed normal will make sense in moment; I'm not obsessed with fashion, which is clear by my own fashion choices. This young woman asked where a certain place was, and I told her it was on the other end of the city – that was a normal moment. She asked me if I could take her – that was not a normal moment. I said yes thinking it was late, it's in my direction, and I figured that was the gentleman thing to do, especially when this was before Uber. Without any hesitation, this young woman hopped in the passenger seat, and we were off. Not sure what to say and feeling awkward, I told her she was very brave to get in a stranger's car – probably not the best opener; I might as well of asked, "Have you ever been mugged?" But she smiled and responded, "Why, are you going to rape me?" Now, I have a terrible memory, but I remembered this exact line because it was so jarring – did you just say rape? Shocked, I laughed and said, "No, but I'm a pastor, so I'm going to preach to you." By her response this was an equally shocking thing for her to hear, but her response topped her first one: "Really? I was praying I'd



be able to talk to a pastor.” And the weird thing was she wasn’t being sarcastic – crazy, right? What were the odds? I normally joke that if you ever want to be left alone at a party, tell people you’re a pastor because it’s like you have a disease the way it scares people off – not her. She had asked God for me... like my wife... but in a very different way.

If there was a young lady walking around late at night and had zero fear for getting into a stranger’s car and casually joked about being raped, what do you think her career was? If you said healthcare provider you’d be right... if you consider a prostitute a healthcare provider – some do. This young woman told me she got into this job when she was fourteen and ran away from her abusive stepdad; a logically terrible choice – why just have one abusive man in your life? It was the kind of sad story you expect to hear from someone in her line of work.

What was surprising was after I stopped to let her buy something at a convenience store she got back in the car and said, “I thought you would’ve left.” She clearly wasn’t used to dealing with decent people... or pushovers in my case. Actually, I think I was just excited to have someone want to hear about God. That doesn’t happen very often – shocking, I know.

I think the strangest moment in our conversation was when this young lady paused and then exclaimed, “You know, I’ve never F\*\*\*ed a pastor before.” To which I said, “So I guess we have that in common.” I thought I was funny – she didn’t. I then added a true fact, “To be honest, I’ve actually never had sex.” This time she laughed because she thought I was trying to be funny, but here’s the thing... I wasn’t. I’m not sure what would be stranger to her, the fact I said I was a virgin with the confidence of someone who said they went to Harvard: “Yeah, I’m that awesome,” or that I was physically in my prime without the “I’ve played too many video games” hump and basement troll “I only come out at night” vibe. I may have been living with my mom, but I wasn’t in the basement (I was only half a loser). What’s crazy is I was 32 at the time, so I was more than double the age she was when she became a prostitute. We clearly had

two very different backgrounds. If she was a lot older, I'm pretty sure my comment would've given her a heart attack because her eyes exploded out of her head: (me) "Are you related to a cartoon character? I didn't know eyes could pop out like that in real people." After a few minutes, she exclaimed, "I've never met a grownup who was a virgin. My friends are going to think this is crazy!" to which I responded, "And I've never met someone in your profession before. My friends are going to think this is crazy. We have very different friends."

We only talked for about thirty minutes total before I dropped her off in a parking lot where another car was waiting for her – that was weird. I gave her my number and told her to call me – that sounds weirder than it was. I wanted to share more about God. Unfortunately, I never heard from her again. I have since learned to always ask for a number if I want to talk to someone again because other people never follow through.

What's great about this story is it was an answer to both our prayers. I prayed for a story I could use on the camping trip and she got to meet a pastor and see that God cared about her. I hope that she started making better life choices after we met that would lead her to a better life, but I'd be surprised if I gave her anything but a fun story for her friends: "You met a 32 year old who hadn't had sex? How ugly was he?"

Writing this story I said a prayer for this young woman because sometimes there's nothing we can do but pray. It may not feel like a lot, but at least it gives me something tangible to do. Besides, God likes to answer prayers because He likes to make us smile, so it never hurts to ask for something good. And who knows; maybe she was an angel sent to give me a story because it surprised my group: "Want to hear how God answered my prayer with a prostitute?"

This week may you consider the difference between God spoiling us versus showing He cares.

## Lesson 24

# How People Screw Up Conversations

Ever wonder why they call it the “terrible twos?” It’s because the child typically discovers the word no, and they use it over and over, or they scream in your face as you try to put on their shoes and coat, which is an even worse form of saying no. It can be so infuriating (parent to toddler): “Stop saying no! Listen to me! Respect me! Just be a decent human being instead of a piece of garbage!!!! I mean... I love you, and being a parent is the greatest gift.” Ever wonder why a lot of

parents of teenagers have heart problems? It's because the child rediscovers the word no, but now it's accompanied with an attitude of superiority making it even worse (parent to teen): "Stop saying no! Listen to me! Respect me! Just be a decent human being instead of a piece of garbage!!!! I mean... yeah, no, I mean what I said. Your rudeness is terrible." Did I just imply that teenagers are like two year olds? Absolutely. Teenagers are often just big toddlers with a few more skills. They're similar because both two year olds and teenagers are trying to create a sense of independence. The big difference is small children think their parents have all the answers, which is why they ask them so many questions: (child) "Why? Why? Why?" (parent) "Stop asking questions I have to fake answers to because I don't want you to realize how little I know!" Teenagers, on the other hand, are fully aware their parents don't know everything while at the same time being arrogant/delusional enough to think they themselves do: "I'm so smart I know I'm smarter than someone who has thirty years plus life experience than me." Teenagers are hilarious because they learn a few interesting things at school and have a few good ideas, and somehow that makes them think they know how the world works (fun fact: a wise person is aware of how little they know, which makes most teens the opposite of wise). Add in a teen's typical feeling of invincibility and wanting to make a mark on the world and you have the recipe for a lot of unnecessary fights at home. This feeling of invincibility is why 18-22 year olds are the perfect choice for sending to war and their rude teenage behavior makes it easier for the parents to let them go... wait, is that too honest?

Whenever there is a communication problem, at the heart of it is someone saying or implying no. Implying no can look like someone being distant and appearing uncaring (i.e. a typical guy moves) or through criticism, correction, or degrading looks (i.e. typical girl moves). ***Saying no or implying it destroys safety in communication.*** It causes the other person to get their back up and be ready to fight or shut down because "no" is a form of rejection. It leaves the other person thinking, "If you understood me, you wouldn't say/imply no, so I will get louder and/or meaner to make you understand me... or I'll shut down because it feels pointless." Either way, it'll be terrible, but that's how people naturally respond – go big or shutdown.

In my book *52 Lessons for a Better Relationship* I mention one of my favourite rules for being a good communicator: Yes and. This is the number one rule in improv because in order to move a scene forward you need to say/imply “yes.” When you don’t have a script and the actors are just going off the cuff, it’s important to help each other feel safe. You need to know that even if you say something dumb, the other person will take that and turn it into something great – they have your back. That’s what we need in relationships. ***We need to feel safe enough to say something dumb and have it be turned into something great.*** How often does that happen with a struggling couple? This is what we need in brainstorming; we need to feel safe enough to share our thoughts no matter how crazy because who knows where one idea can lead. Good conversations require understanding and affirmations. The worst thing we can do is shut someone down, which is saying/implying “No and,” the opposite of good communication. Good people say “Yes and,” or if you don’t care about being good, we should “Yes and,” so we’re at least not like teens and two year olds.

I was recently jogging with a friend, and I mentioned if I could change one thing about my wife, it would be to make her more of a “Yes and” person with me – she’s great with other people. This conversation is itself a great example of two people “Yes and-ing” each other:

**Me:** I know it’s a pretty common issue for wives to be “No and” to their husbands, but it’s so frustrating.

**Friend:** Women have a gift.

**Me:** Every time I present an idea, she says no. I mentioned I had this idea of getting a skinny shed to put beside the addition we’re building, and right away she said no. When I asked her if she knew what a skinny shed was or where I wanted to put it, she admitted she didn’t. That means she said no without knowing what I was talking about. There’s no room to even brainstorm.

**Friend:** I’ve been there.

**Me:** I'm guessing it's connected to women feeling overworked and overwhelmed, so a husband having an idea is adding unwanted stress, but it sucks!

**Friend:** It really does... Actually, to be honest, I think I've done that to my wife. I've shut down her ideas before she had a chance to explain herself, but her ideas are sooooo illogical.

**Me:** That's a good point. I guess I've done that too like when my wife and I started dating and she said we should move to Europe to live for a few years, and I was quick to say no; it didn't make any sense... because it didn't make any sense.

**Friend:** Women have a gift.

You'll notice, there weren't any literal "Yes and's" said, but everything was affirming and moving the conversation forward. Even when my friend switched it to being how he does the "No and" thing to his wife, he affirmed me first to help me feel heard before changing it up a bit. That's how it works. You help the person feel understood and affirmed and then add to what they said. ***"Yes and" is such a simple rule, but it can be very challenging to actually do, especially if you're in the habit of being guarded or not being able to tolerate what the other person has to say.*** Negative people are typically the worst for this. They shut things down. Meanwhile, the friendliest people are the ones who are good at affirming and moving the conversation forward even if they disagree with you. This is why conversations about politics and religion tend to get so nasty – we say "No and." Some people are great at "Yes and-ing" with friends, but then terrible with their families because there isn't a lot of patience left, but ***we can't be angry at our family for not affirming us if we don't affirm them – we're equally bad.***

Because it's so important, here's another example of a "Yes and" conversation my friend and I had shortly after the previous one. It's very good at showing how even ridiculous joking ideas can lead to something worthwhile.

**Friend:** I asked at a restaurant why they don't use the cardboard containers for doggy bags instead of Styrofoam or black plastic that's not recyclable and the waiter said it's because it costs 10

cents more a container. I would pay that difference to reduce the waste.

**Me:** Big spender.

**Friend:** I've even been thinking about sponsoring a restaurant to switch over and I'd pay the 10 cents difference for each container for a month.

**Me:** You can have them put up a poster saying you're sponsoring them.

**Friend:** Restaurants would have their sign for meeting health standards and then a picture of my face giving a thumbs up saying I approve their doggy bags.

**Me:** Your face would be what sells the idea.

**Friend:** I also thought I could sponsor a different restaurant every month to get the different places in the habit of using cardboard boxes.

**Me:** You can have a parade from the one restaurant to the next celebrating your sponsorship with elephants and marching bands.

**Friend:** I would be okay with that.

**Me:** Who knows; it could spark a movement as other people would see it and want the credit for being a sponsor. People on social media could use it as a reason to brag and pretend they're better people than they really are.

**Friend:** You know; there might be something there.

**Me:** Maybe you could get GT French (a local paper company) to make a deal, and then you're involving a local business.

**Friend:** I never thought of that. Getting a company like them involved could make it less than 10 cents and actually doable.

**Me:** And that's why "yes and-ing" is so important. We just had a nothing conversation that was fun and then ended up with some interesting ideas. Yes-anding makes conversations so much better.

**Friend:** "No and-ing" really does bother you, doesn't it?

**Me:** You have no idea.

In the last part of that conversation I used a callback, which is a good way to show you heard and remembered the earlier conversation, or

in this case, it let me vent a little more. The point is, however, when we “Yes and,” we never know where conversations will end up. Sometimes it’ll lead to some interesting ideas and other times it won’t, but either way, it will leave both parties feeling understood and safe. ***The best communicators don’t use big words; they help people feel safe to share.***

This week may you learn to be more of a “Yes and,” person.

## Lesson 25

# Are You or Someone You Know Psycho?

In the show, *Brain Games*, the writers provide a simple six question test that has been scientifically proven to help point out if someone has psychopathic tendencies or not. Talk about a fun party game. Here’s the test:

Do you believe the following statements are true?

1. Success is based on survival of the fittest.
2. When I get frustrated, I release my anger by blowing up (at someone).
3. Love is overrated.



4. For me, what's right is whatever I can get away with.
5. I really admire a clever scam.
6. I tell people what they want to hear so that they'll do what I want them to.

Here is how it's graded:

- A) 1-2 you show high levels of compassion
- B) 3-4 borderline of showing psychopathic tendencies
- C) 5-6 you're more inclined to harbor psychopathic tendencies

In the demonstration, they asked these questions to a small group of people and two scored five or more, one male and one female. The writers of the episode pointed out that this didn't mean these two people are dangerous maniacs, but it did mean they had decreased activity in the part of the brain responsible for compassion. They also said that people in the psychopath category have superficial charm, impulsiveness, a need for stimulation, a lack of guilt or remorse, and a lack of empathy. The implied message to this, however, is if you have these tendencies, you can be difficult to deal with on a personal level: (spouse) "Don't you feel bad for what you did?" (other spouse) "Why? It felt good at the time." Fortunately, this person who is impulsive and doesn't feel remorse can also see certain behaviors like having an affair as counterproductive to them having a charmed life. They may not feel remorse, but they can still logically decide what's best for them.

I once had someone in my youth group say they never felt bad for anything they did, which was my first taste of someone who had psychopathic tendencies. I'd known them for awhile and they were a decent person. I asked why they didn't do more terrible things and they simply said, "Because it's not right." They still understood right from wrong and if they agreed to the rules, they were happy to follow them. ***What's interesting about this is we should all be doing things because it's the right thing to do and not just for fear of guilt.*** It also proves we can be a decent person without ever feeling bad. Can

you imagine how freeing that would be, to never feel bad? Considering my wife says, “I feel bad for (fill in the blank),” almost every day for something, if I had a choice between being her and always feeling bad for someone or something I did or being my friend with psychopathic tendencies, I think I’d rather be the latter. Of course, I write this not to claim I want to have psychopathic tendencies, but to point out it’s not necessarily that bad a mindset to have – everything has a good and bad side.

This idea of not acting out of fear of punishment follows Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development, which I summarize as:

- 1) You do things out of fear and/or to gain something
- 2) You do things because it’s the right the to do
- 3) You see beyond the rule and see its purpose. This essentially means you can see the difference between the spirit of the law (i.e. the intention) and the letter of the law.

This third stage where we consider the spirit of the law is why Martin Luther King Jr. and his team fought against the established norms at the time in certain areas. They saw that the laws that separated people based on color were wrong and they worked to change them even though it meant breaking the law and being arrested. This third level is why I believe in the Ten Commandment to not murder (a natural idea to follow), but I’m also okay with euthanasia (to a point) since you’re ending someone’s life because it’s better for the person and family suffering. That being said, I hope I never have to face a loved one being put down. Taking my cat to the vet to be put down because of how sick he’d become was roouugghh. A person would be way worse. The letter of the law says don’t murder, but the spirit is about not hurting people. There’s a point when keeping someone alive is selfish because it’s only for the fear of loss for the people left behind, especially if it’s just delaying the inevitable. This third level has been very helpful for me to not feel the level of guilt I used to have, which means I may not have psychopathic tendencies, but like the person in my old youth group, I’m not as held back as someone stuck living in guilt or the fear of it.

The good news is psychopath or not we all need to continually work on being better at love and acting accordingly because it's the right thing to do.

This week may you take a lesson from psychopaths and learn to dial down how much guilt you feel... if you feel more than you should like a lot of good people do. And if you don't feel enough, maybe dial it up a bit.

## Lesson 26

### **A Great Story** **(Taken from a great person)**

For the last four months my family has been regularly going to church. (Yes, I'm bragging... and no, I've never been good at it.) I've been loosely connected to this church for over twenty years largely because of how much I admire the pastor. (A pastor who's a good person? Weird, I know.) He's the perfect mix of gentleness and warmth on top of having an incredibly developed public speaking ability. To be honest, he's such a good person and so talented, it kind of annoys me. Do you know someone like that? They're so good it can make you feel bad? I'll never be that good, which is disappointing (a statement that confirms I'm not that good a person). When I want to make people feel bad, I have to do it the old fashion way and make

fun of them. On the plus side, my way is a lot easier and more fun... I should probably keep those thoughts to myself.

One of the best stories he's told is one I will now try to duplicate. As butchered as it might be, it still gives the basic idea.

Years ago, this pastor was visiting a mens' meeting at a church in the States. Not long after he walked in, a very large and brash man (aka a very American American) greeted/accosted him. My friend is a very gentle person, which means this encounter was the emotional equivalent of being punched in the gut. This brash man, however, either had no ability to read social cues or simply didn't care that my friend was cowering in front of him as he very boldly announced, "You're new here! You have to hear my story." I don't have the best social skills (hence I'm a writer), but even I know telling someone they have to hear your story isn't the best way to build interest: (if this were me) "Do I give you my wallet before or after you tell the story? How does this social mugging work?"

Without allowing my friend a chance to protest (not that he would've dared to object), the American began: "Years ago I started a business, and it really took off. It was so successful I opened another one. That success continued and I opened another and then another and then another and then another. Soon I was making over \$100 million a year (i.e. he was the human equivalent of Scrooge McDuck from *Duck Tales* swimming in money). Eventually, we went international, so I started making even more money. It was crazy!"

If you're like me, you're thinking this guy sounds like he's showing off. Actually, if you're like me, you're wondering if this guy who has no social graces needs to hire someone to be his friend and how much does that position pay? I'm always looking for ways to help people... who are willing to pay (I may not be a great person, but I can fake it for the right price – a truly admirable quality).

At this point in the story, the American's mood suddenly took a turn: "I had everything I could ever dream including houses around the world and the fanciest cars; that's when, in one week, my life completely fell apart. I found out my wife was leaving me for

someone else, my daughter was heavily addicted to hard drugs with little hope for recovery, and my son had tried killing himself for the second time. ***I had all the money I could dream of having, yet I had nothing!*** I was completely alone and the three people I loved the most couldn't care less about me. If I was given the choice, I would've cut off my own arm if that would save my family. ***I had spent so much of my life climbing the ladder of success, but when I reached the top, I discovered I had climbed the wrong ladder.*** What good is being at the top of a ladder when you're at the wrong building? It didn't matter how much money I had, I missed out on what really mattered and where I should have been! I missed out on providing what my family really needed – love! Don't fall for the same trap I did. Don't forget what really matters!"

When I heard this last part, I was floored. That was brilliant! No wonder this guy was so quick to share his story – people need to hear it. How many of us dream of being rich and/or successful in the worldly sense? How many of us sacrifice family time for making a little more money? How many of us get distracted by materialism or get caught chasing a feeling only to realize this pursuit blinded us from what we had in front of us? How many of us get annoyed with too many questions? Sorry, I was on a roll.

The important truth is we need to stop envying people who are above us in their climb to wealth because materialism doesn't mean they're actually climbing up the right ladder. Instead, we need to focus on making sure our own ladder is on the right building and that it's secure and won't slip away leading to our fall. We also don't want to get complacent and not realize the ladder pulled a Harry Potter stairwell move and shifted us to a whole other building without us noticing. And that reference proves I'm not as good as my fiancé, I'm also a nerd.

This week may you consider whether the ladder you're climbing is on the right building.

## Lesson 27

# Everyone Needs an Anti-Role Model

It's well known that role models are important for inspiring and giving direction. I've also found that knowing who someone's role model is helps me have a better idea of who that person really is beyond their social face; you can fake being nice, but if your role model is Donald Trump, I'm going to question how nice you really are – you don't get rich being nice. A few years ago I talked with a guy interested in dating my sister, and to know if he was worth her time, I simply asked: "Who are your role models?" He could've said his dad because his dad was a great provider. He could've said his coach growing up because his coach was really caring. He could've said Tom Hanks because who doesn't love Tom Hanks? Instead, he went with: "I'm my own role model." Wow. How do you respond to that? He somehow thought he was special for not having a role model when, in reality, it made him an idiot. Does he think he's superior to everyone else? Unless you're Jesus, there's always someone better. Does he

think he's Jesus? If he does, at least he'd be delusional and his answer would be more understandable: (delusional person) "Orange is the answer." (person nearby) "Um, no one asked you a question." (delusional person) "You're right. The answer is bubbles."

Now that I've vented about this guy (it's good to get out your frustrations), I've found the one thing more powerful than a role model is an *anti*-role model. By "anti," I mean someone who is the opposite of who you want to be. (I'm aware that "anti" can sound like I'm against role models like the guy I made fun of, but it can also mean the opposite). My grandpa is an example of an anti-role model. Since he was an alcoholic, my dad never touched alcohol. Since I'm a lot like my dad, I have also never touched alcohol, which means my grandpa was an anti-role model for my dad who, in turn, became my role model. This is the ideal set up for a family because we're supposed to get better with each generation.

The best anti-role model I've ever had was the youth pastor I volunteered under – a statement I'm sure he wouldn't find a compliment... and shouldn't. I started volunteering in the group with my girlfriend at the time when I was 21. After a few months where I ran events and led talks, the youth pastor was hired and I switched to working under him for close to five years until one day when he essentially fired me from my volunteer position. You're probably thinking I must have been pretty darn terrible to be so bad that my *free* help was worse than no help at all. That would make sense accept later that year in the church's annual report he specifically bragged about me as a leader in his group. He claimed he had developed my abilities so well that I was running events and leading talks for him. I was his proof for his own abilities to equip young leaders – fun right? And if you're wondering, "But Chad didn't you claim to have run events and do talks before he was hired?" You'd be correct. But who'd remember that? The amazing thing is after the youth pastor kicked me out, he told me I couldn't say anything about it... and I obeyed. The youth pastor had to keep my leaving a secret in order to protect himself because this was the church I grew up in and I was a golden child, which was the payoff for being a stage performer and a serious goody-goody my whole life, which included as a child winning

most of the Bible verse memory contests; yeah, I was as cool a kid as that sounds. If you're thinking, "But if the youth pastor was bragging about the work you did, he must have taught you things, right?" You'd again be correct if by "teach" you mean he taught me what *not* to do. He never helped me prepare or give feedback after the events and talks I did – he didn't even thank me. He almost seemed to avoid me. He taught me nothing directly, but by watching him, he showed me so many things I shouldn't do (like be a youth pastor in your mid-forties making about thirty thousand a year – ouch).

My two main guesses the youth pastor kicked me are he was either envious that I was really popular with the kids in the group or for five years he quietly developed and harboured resentment toward me until one day he snapped. Either way, it suggests he was an incredibly broken man, and the best evidence for this is when he told me I wasn't allowed in his youth group, he added that I needed to get a mentor because I was so screwed up. Um, you're a youth pastor? That's your job, and you had five years to help me, so if you think I'm so terrible that's kind of on you. The worst part for me was I didn't even get to say goodbye to anyone. I was so ashamed to be kicked out I just quietly left the church. You'd think I'd be angry, but I was so passive back then, I was more worried about causing conflict. It was pretty scarring. Add in the fact that the so-called friends I had there never reached out to see what happened to me and you can probably guess I never wanted to go back.

Arguably the worst thing about my situation was after I left I found out he had done the same thing to four other original leaders and I had never noticed. He just told the group they had moved on, which I foolishly believed. Not one of his original five leaders including me received any real appreciation for our years of service. If you want to scare people away from church and volunteering that's a good way to do it – he was a treasure.

Actually, the worst thing he did was later that year. After four months of not being in his group, I was hired as a youth pastor at another church across the city and after finding out, he called my new boss/pastor and told him not to hire me. He not only kicked me out of his



group without real cause, he tried to prevent me from being a youth pastor at another church. I later found out it was partly for fear I'd try to steal kids from his group. He was something special. Again he was in his forties while I was in my mid twenties. He's a major reason I've done my best to never step foot in my childhood church ever again, you know, the thing every church should have of its past members. Interestingly enough, over the next year other people he had quietly kicked out after me ended up in my group and became core members, and they were instrumental in helping me develop a thriving group. His rejects were my heroes.

Besides this experience inspiring me to develop my therapy material on forgiveness (in the end it was a very beneficial experience), I'm very grateful for what he taught me *not* to do. The best example of this was when I started as a youth pastor; I had a great little youth group with some excellent leaders, but one guy was almost too excellent. I remember driving home one night upset – I was supposed to be the cool guy when this one leader, Joe, was waaayyyy cooler than I'd ever been. He was the best at everything and he had a high paying job that let him buy cool toys. He was so cool he didn't need to wear deodorant because he didn't have BO – how? For a brief moment (like 3 seconds brief) I wanted to hate him until my former youth pastor flashed in my mind. It was like being punched in the gut. I was becoming the very person from whom I was still recovering. I needed to value Joe and not let envy grow in my heart. I was now the youth pastor. I had to focus on being the organizer, encourager, and disciplinarian. I wasn't able to be carefree like a volunteer. I needed someone else to be that fun person and Joe was perfect. From that moment on I tried to use and appreciate him as best I could, and he was amazing. In the end, he was only able to help for a couple years before he moved too far away to continue in the group, but he was one of the greatest blessings I experienced in my eight years as a youth pastor. The group wouldn't have grown the way it had without him. He was the perfect person at the perfect time; he was a true blessing from God, and if it wasn't for my anti-role model, I may have let my envy get in the way.

**Fun fact:** Four years later I saw my anti-role model at a wedding. I had long since done my healing and purposely went up to him with my beautiful then girlfriend at my side. I greeted him as friendly as I could while still being authentic and he just shrunk. I have to admit, that felt pretty validating. That made all the work I had done to heal well worth it.

**Bonus Tip:** Seeing someone as an anti-role model can help make stupid people more acceptable and not as damaging because they can now be seen as a great teaching tool for what not to be and not just someone who hurt us.

This week may you recognise your anti-role models and may they inspire you to be better.

## Lesson 28

# The Benefits of Religion

I was recently asked a natural question from a non Christian: “What if you die and find out that you were wrong? Like, what if the Buddhists were right?” The great thing is if I follow the teachings of Christianity to love and be good, I’m doing well if Buddhists are right. I’m actually doing well if any other religion is right including Islam. Even if atheists are right, I’m doing great because by following Christianity, I strive to live a life with morals, integrity, hope, and love – how can that be bad? Christianity (when done right) makes life better. Personally, I don’t get why anyone would want to be atheist: (atheist) “I celebrate nothingness and believe that life has no real value or purpose.” (potential new member) “Sounds delightful. I’m tired of things like peace, hope, and love – they’re the worst!”

I recently had a new experience connected to this question... and it was a strange feeling. Someone told me they don’t believe in God and it broke my heart. I’d never experienced that before. Later it did the same thing when someone told me they were agnostic (i.e. they believe in a God, but don’t care enough to pursue understanding or a relationship with Him). I’m not sure who troubles me more because how can you be so sure there isn’t a God and how can you believe

there's a God, but not care to investigate what that should mean for your life? Neither response makes any sense to me, especially because this world is full of injustice and suffering. How can we not hope there's something more after all of this? How can we not want this up and down experience to have meaning? When a loved one dies, how can we not want to have the comfort of thinking we'll see them again one day? How can you live your life so stuck in the moment and not care about the bigger picture? If you invest in RRSPs for retirement, what about post retirement? As a middle age man, it feels like that post retirement time is coming pretty fast.

I am the first to complain about mean and hypocritical religious people (even though I can be one myself), but overall, having faith demonstrated through action has a lot of very strong benefits. Like most people, even non believers, I hold those who call themselves Christians to a higher standard. That alone is proof that Christianity is supposed to help people be better. Unfortunately, people are always just people, so even the most devoted Christian can be stupid (except me... if you believe in lies).

***In some ways, being involved in the Church is like being part of any organization – the more involved you get (i.e. the more family-like you become), the more there is to be gained and, at the same time, the more pain to potentially be felt.*** When the church experience is good, it is one of the greatest experiences you can have. When church is at its worst... watch out. It is soul crushing. As someone who has gone to church all their life and worked and volunteered in a church for over fifteen years, I have experienced both in very powerful ways. What's interesting is the pain I experienced in church felt all the worse because I once thought it was supposed to be a safe place, which led to a sense of disillusionment when things got nasty. But it's just like a family; the more invested I am, the more risk there is to being hurt. To be honest, despite any pain I've experienced, I keep going back because it's worth it. I've changed churches a few times because I have boundaries, but I keep going because being part of a religious group is good for me.

Here are 12 reasons how following Christianity (or any religion) can make your life better:

1. ***Family Unity:*** I have never found a better way to create family unity than to have everyone getting together in the family car and driving to church where we get to meet the same people, create our own ideas we can compare, and be annoyed by the same people we can complain about later.
2. ***Push to be a Good Person:*** Here's something we need more of. (Does that sound too negative toward people?) In Christianity, we are supposed to love and show it by our actions. We're also supposed to follow a pretty clear moral foundation with the 10 Commandments (summarized by love God, yourself and others), which leaves room for debate on topics that aren't so cut and dry such as gay marriage, euthanasia, and abortion (even though some think it is). It's funny how people who are so obsessed with answers to these three topics are at the same time likely breaking a few of the 10 Commandments like number four, keeping the Sabbath – the most common Christian sin in Western culture.
3. ***Constant Reminders:*** We all need reminders of what we believe. Reading my Bible every day, listening to worship music, and regularly going to church helps with that. These things keep me accountable and remind me that I'm loved.
4. ***Friends/Sense of Belonging:*** Going to church every week leads to friendships that are easier to maintain because you naturally see each other every week unlike old friends you might see a couple times a year.
5. ***Community of Support:*** There is something wonderful about having a community support you when you go through things like a wedding, child birth, sickness, and funerals.
6. ***Business/Job Connections:*** Being connected to a church has benefited many small businesses and led to job connections. In fact, that's how I got my first two part time jobs.

7. ***Questions & Things to Think About:*** Religion gives something positive to think and talk about besides our own drama and selfish ambitions.
8. ***Existential Understanding:*** Our brains want to understand the bigger picture of life, and religion gives direction for answers.
9. ***Purpose & Value:*** Being part of something bigger than ourselves is very important for enjoying life and not being so selfish. Why are young people struggling with greater levels of depression and suicide than before? Maybe a lack of religion and all that brings is part of that. Christians can definitely struggle with depression and suicidal issues, but there is a difference when you believe there is a God who cares about you and you're part of a community that can offer support.
10. ***Identity:*** So many people look for identity in foolish things like what their sexuality is, what they own, or what they're good at, but these all lead to conflict and being self absorbed. Being Christian gives a natural identity on a personal level (I have a God who cares about me) and on a larger level (I'm part of a body of believers).
11. ***Better Understanding and Connections to History, Art, and Culture:*** The Judeo-Christian belief has had huge impacts on the world and its development including the history of Rome. Knowing Bible stories and Christian history helps the world make more sense, especially in Europe where museums and tourist spots are flush with Christian history.
12. ***Routine:*** Having a nightly and/or morning devotion time, praying during the day, and going to church once a week, help give structure to our lives and can have very strong emotional health benefits. And now that I've found my church home, it is the highlight of my week.

May you consider the benefits of religion and if that's something you can improve on.

## Lesson 29

# 10 Things Babies Teach to be Happier

I was once told my dad didn't really like kids, but he loved his own. When I was younger I didn't get that – now I do. Maybe it's because I was the youngest in the family, but kids scare me. At my daughter's fifth birthday party, she had four friends over and I hid in the pantry most of the party. But in large groups kids are terrifying. They're like those tiny dinosaurs that can take down a giant. And babies? They seem so breakable... because they are, and I don't want to be that guy: "Were you wanting them to have both arms work properly? Sorry." I've always preferred working with teenagers because they're like mini adults who get sarcasm and enjoy teasing. They're also easy to embarrass, which can be a lot of fun. Dad's know what I mean. My favourite thing about young people is they still have hope for the future. Dreaming of the future often affords more hope than living it (not to sound too depressing). For instance, dreaming of having a

baby is often more fun than not sleeping for four to six months (or six years and counting as my one friend has found).

Even though I didn't like kids, I knew I wanted a family, so I was banking on being like my dad and I am (most days anyway; some days I don't like any kids). My wife is the opposite. She used to think kids were fine, but she didn't want any. Fortunately, her body had other ideas, and now after having two kids, she's obsessed with babies while I'm like "Yeah, two is enough."

One of the many lessons my babies taught me is that *life isn't complicated*. In school, I remember many times thinking, "This seems more complicated than it needs to be," and my daughters confirmed that. Intellectuals and people who want to sound smart have this tendency to make things seem so big that only they're able to understand them or they've uncovered some great secret, but spending time with a baby has confirmed my belief that most times the answer is simple. Following this idea, here is a list of lessons my babies taught me:

- 1) *Everyone can get cranky:* Everyone benefits from healthy routines, especially when it comes to eating and sleep. We can't expect people to be at their best when their hungry or tired. Sometimes sanity is just a snack, nap, or distraction away.
- 2) *Healthy makes happiness easier:* A good parent is careful to make sure the baby gets enough sleep, healthy food, and exercise, yet many grownups don't follow this idea for themselves and then wonder why they struggle. Life's not complicated. Our bodies can't be happy if they're not getting enough of what they need.
- 3) *Soothe & offer hugs:* When a grownup is upset, it's amazing how often that person will get scolded or criticized. That never helps – shocking, I know. For some reason yelling at people crying, grownup or baby, doesn't help them. Trust me; I've tried. Most times soothing words and/or a comforting touch can help.

Unfortunately, I find with grownups we typically don't have the same patience to use these tools because we're too worn out or expect them to be fine because they're grownups. The truth remains, however, hurt people are hurt people no matter their age.

- 4) ***Feeling better is often a good distraction away:*** Many times all a baby needs not to cry is a distraction like a silly face or toy. Adults are no different... although our toys tend to cost more. Fortunately, a silly face is free and cookies are cheap.
- 5) ***Replace:*** To remove a want we shouldn't have, we need to replace it with something else. For instance, when a baby wants to play with something breakable, it's best to give them something else in order to take the first item away with less of a fight. Similarly, when it comes to things like adults with addiction, the simple truth is we need to replace the addiction with something else. For instance, I knew someone struggling with a porn addiction who started playing guitar in order to replace it.
- 6) ***A protector:*** We benefit from having someone watching out for us. Babies can't survive on their own and need everything done for them. As a parent, our job is to help them be able to help our kids grow up and live without us, but no matter how old we are or smart we become, everyone benefits from knowing they're not alone, especially when times are tough. This is a reason why believing in God can be beneficial – we don't feel as alone.
- 7) ***Times of restriction:*** Playpens are a Godsend. Many parents don't use these anymore, but following the advice of a fantastic mom (mine) I have incorporated playpen use. It's not all day, but for short periods it gives the parent freedom to do things that help give sanity. At the same time, it's good to change up a kid's play



area throughout the day. It also gives the baby a place of safety and prevents unhealthy wants like wanting to chew on electrical plugs – my first daughter was not the brightest... but was trying to be... shockingly. As a guy, a playpen is kind of like a man cave or a dog kennel for a dog; these are spaces that help the world not seem so big and overwhelming.

- 8) ***Variety:*** No matter how much we love something, we need variety. A baby's favourite toy brings a smile to her if she has had a time without it. No matter how much we love something whether it's an object, person, or an activity we need to have time without it in order to better appreciate it. This is why making what you love to do your career a bad choice for most people. What we love to do is easier to love when it's a break from doing our responsibilities and there's no pressure to make money with it. Sometimes we need to keep what we love as a hobby.
- 9) ***We need struggle:*** Teething, crawling, growing muscle... yeah that explains that one. It helps to remember that a hard moment can make a better tomorrow. For instance, a baby is rarely happy about getting medicine, but it makes later better. As adults, we need to embrace this same concept in order to make our tomorrow better. ***Live so your future self will thank you.***
- 10) ***We need some silliness:*** There is nothing better than a baby for getting people to use silly voices, make funny faces, and sometimes even dance. We do this to make the baby smile, but for some reason we don't do this for friends and family. Unfortunately, it's easy to be afraid to do this for adults because we don't want to look stupid and being silly and getting shot down never feels good. At the same time, ***it's important not to let the curmudgeons of the world take away the joy from good people.*** What's interesting is I find I like to be funny in social settings (being around new people

or new situations gives me energy), but at home I tend to be boring and focused on getting stuff done. Whether we're funny or not, we can at least push ourselves to offer a smile. Ultimately, ***we need to help the world be a place that offers love and safety instead of judgment.***

The world can use a little more love; are you willing to help?

## Even More Food for Thought

*A wise person is hungry for knowledge,  
while the fool feeds on trash.*

*Pro 15:14*

*How much better to get wisdom than gold  
and good judgment than silver!*

*Pro 16:16*

*A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body;*

*jealousy is like cancer in the bones.*

*Pro 14:30*

## Lesson 30

# 7 Tips to Help in Tough Times

Life is... something. One minute you think you have everything under control and you feel confident, and the next minute, there's an accident that knocks you on your keister. As a therapist, I'm regularly meeting people who are on their butts because they've been knocked down (nothing like having a job where you need people to suffer in order to have work). I joke with clients that my goal is to help them just enough that they want to come back, but not so much that they don't need me. It's funny because it's true... or it would be if I was a terrible person. The truth is there is so much trouble in the world

that I want to help as many people as quickly and effectively as possible in order to make room for whoever else is in need next. The fun fact is people would get a lot more out of therapy if they were in a good spot and not nursing wounds when they come in to see me. For instance, I once saw a couple who told me they were doing fine, but they wanted to come in a few times because they had the insurance to cover it and they wanted to see if I could help them at all. After a couple really great sessions, they were both excited with what they had learned and the one joked, “I’m glad we didn’t have any actual problems, so we could learn these lessons.” I pointed out that this was the best time for them to come in because ***you build a bomb shelter before the bomb hits and not after.*** This couple is essentially preparing for when life knocks them down, so they don’t fall as hard and they can get up easier when it does.

Here are some tips for reducing the risk of something bad happening and/or the damage when it does.

- 1) ***Safe person(s):*** I was blessed with being born into a home where I grew up best friends with my brother and later became just as close with my sister. I even have a mom who’s a better listener than most therapists (including me). Most people aren’t this lucky (not to rub it in), but ***it’s up to each one of us to forge intimate connections*** even if it’s with a therapist. Developing connections is particularly helpful to do when things are good because when things fall apart (and they will) it’s really helpful to have someone we can share our heart with and be vulnerable. It’s certainly healthier than a bottle, pot, video games, or eating too much, which are common ways of bottling up feelings.
- 2) ***Have sources of encouragement:*** When a dog has a hurt paw, he licks it to feel better. When we’re in pain, just like a dog, we need soothing. My daughters have a favourite blankie to soothe them, which is a much healthier choice than drinking or pot. (It’s funny how toddlers can be smarter than grownups). It’s also beneficial to have someone who is our cheerleader (e.g. parent, spouse, child,

best friend...) and an activity that gives us confidence and a distraction.

- 3) **A safe place:** The couples I see who struggle the most have a very limited world. They basically have work and home. This is fine if only one is struggling, but there are many times when the one spills into the other. Years ago I was incredibly lucky because as tough as my youth pastoring days were I had a bunch of different worlds happening from a dodgeball group, two Frisbee teams, church friends, work out partners, family, and my Saturday night friends. Even if several of those groups were struggling, I had others to balance me and give me a place to feel safe. ***The more diverse our connection portfolio, the less alone we will feel in difficult times.***
- 4) ***Freedom from someone digging at you:*** When we're struggling, the worst thing we can have is someone digging at us. The worst culprits of this, unfortunately, tend to be spouses and parents (those who should be our safe people). If you have this happening, there isn't a guaranteed solution, but a good place to start is to ***make request for what you need instead of complaint*** – complaining about others can be bonding while complaining to the person at fault leads to fights. ***A request offers a solution*** while complaints feel personal and are more likely to cause defensive behavior, which will make your situation worse. Changing a behavior is like changing an addiction; we need to replace it with something else, and it's up to us to tell people what will be better for us through a request.
- 5) ***Define the problem:*** When we go to the doctor, we define what hurts us: "My leg is in a lot of pain after falling out of a tree. Can the bone be put back together preferably under the skin?" For some reason we don't do this with our emotions: "Why am I hurt? I'll tell you why I'm hurt (10min rant that doesn't make any sense)." When we feel angry or sad, we need to be able to say

something like “I feel (thing I feel) because (one clear sentence).” When my dad died my sentence was, “I feel devastated because the life I knew has been shattered.” This later became, “I feel helpless because I know my mom is weeping in her room and there’s nothing I can do to take away her pain.” Defining the problem in one sentence helps the feeling make more sense and keep it tangible. Mystery can make things scarier, which means one clear sentence can reduce some of the fear attached to the pain. Not only does it help us, it can help the listener have a better understanding. This further helps us feel better because *feeling understood helps us feel a better connection to the listener and feel like they care.*

- 6) *Feeling that we’re not the only one in a spot like this and/or realizing it could be worse:* Going through pain is made all the worse when we feel alone or that no one understands us. That’s one of the great things about music as some lyrics speak to us and help us feel normal – you understand me! Ultimately, “There’s nothing new under the sun,” (Ecc 1:9b) and it’s good to remind ourselves of that. It can also be helpful to see how others have it worse. For instance, when my back is in a lot of pain, after seeing someone in a wheelchair, I’m grateful I can still walk. I might be in pain, but it could be worse.
- 7) *We need to see an end to the pain (a timeline):* When I first hurt my back last summer, the biggest problem was wondering if it would ever go away. It helped being told that I needed two good sessions with the chiropractor before I would see any real improvement. Seeing him once a week, I knew I was in for a tough couple weeks, but I had hope knowing there should be an end to it. Not seeing an end makes things all the worse because it’s harder to have hope. That’s why when I ask clients to do difficult changes or to be nice to a jerk spouse, I suggest doing it for one month. It’ll be hard, but it’s only a month. Do it for a month and see how it is after. People often think divorce will be relief, but it typically sets them up for years of garbage. When there’s been an

affair and the cheater is apologetic (sometimes they're not), I say expect the first month to be brutal, then it slowly gets better and by six months, you'll be in a decent spot with fewer bad days. Then, by a year in if you're dealing with things properly you'll be doing much better because this gives hope for relief. When it comes to a diet, I suggest do it for a month without looking at a scale and see where you're at then because if you're checking every day it can be really discouraging, especially since sometimes it takes three weeks or so for our bodies to be ready to shed weight.

This week may you find ways to limit the times when life knocks you on your keister, but when it does, may you find tools like these seven things helpful.

## Lesson 31

# **60 Reasons Someone May Not like You**

A friend once told me, "If everyone likes you, you're boring and irrelevant." He proudly has a few people not like him. It's an

interesting idea: If everyone likes me, there's nothing that interesting about me. I'm essentially living a life of beige. (No offence if you love beige.) As someone who hates conflict, I'm drawn to being beige. I need to remind myself of my friend's idea because I have a knack for people not liking me. Even years ago when I was more of a people pleasing workaholic, someone would always end up not liking me no matter what I did, and it used to drive me crazy. Now it just drives me a little crazy (yea for growth). I'm not as obsessed with everyone liking me, but there is still a line where I should want good people to like me and enjoy me being around. Bad people, who cares? They're bad. Even my friend who's okay with people not liking him has a list of people who adore him, which balances those who don't. There should always be people who like us. If not, either we're in the wrong crowd or we're not a good person; neither option is great.

What's important to note is sometimes we might think someone doesn't like us, but we're misreading the situation. I once had someone who'd been one of my best friends for about seven years pretty much disappear for the next five years. I assumed they stopped liking me, especially because they rarely responded to messages I'd send, but then he asked me to be his best man – what? For me, I feel close when I'm regularly around people, but that clearly wasn't his way to feel connection; his was having a history together (but how do you make history if you're not around each other? There's a reason I didn't date guys... maybe a few reasons). Sometimes we miss the fact that people like us because our brains are being mean to us: (sad person) "It feels like you don't like me." (confused person) "I'm currently hugging you." (sad person) "But it feels like it's forced." Sometimes if we really want to know if someone doesn't like us we can simply ask: "Can I ask a question?" (If the response is yes.) "I was just wondering if the way you treat me is a sign that I should give you space or if you're okay." In college I had a guy bluntly ask: "Chad, why don't you like me?" As soon as he said that, I realized I hadn't been as nice to him for awhile and I suddenly returned to my friendlier self. I was actually glad he called me out on my behavior because I don't want to be a jerk even though sometimes we end up being one. Of course, I prefer my question because his was a little



too blunt for most people, but it still worked; he had the right audience.

Sometimes we think someone doesn't like us because they don't. Accepting this can be easier if we consider the many reasons why someone might choose not to like us. The following is a list of potential reasons.

- 1) They need someone not to like.
- 2) They think they're superior in some way (e.g. morally, financially, socially, etc).
- 3) My need to be liked and/or impress everyone is annoying.
- 4) I'm too much of a suck up and/or smother them.
- 5) They heard something about me they don't like.
- 6) There is a misunderstanding between us that hasn't been cleared up.
- 7) I did something hurtful to them or someone else they haven't gotten past.
- 8) I appear to be at risk of hurting them or someone else.
- 9) They think I'm too flirty or blind to it.
- 10) They think I'm too popular or rich.
- 11) I make them feel inadequate in some way.
- 12) They think I act like I'm better than them.
- 13) There is an age, cultural, or religious reason.
- 14) They don't like the position of authority I have.
- 15) There is a general disconnect between us.
- 16) They can't find a common ground between us.

- 17) They're having a bad day/phase.
- 18) They think I'm too emotional or dramatic.
- 19) They think I make everything about me.
- 20) They think I'm too logical or emotionally shut off.
- 21) They think I'm a risk for creating conflict.
- 22) They think I don't engage enough in conflict.
- 23) They think I'm terrible at listening and/or don't ask good questions to add to the conversation.
- 24) They think I ask too many questions.
- 25) They don't like anyone and/or keep everyone at a distance.
- 26) They think I always have an opposite opinion.
- 27) They think I correct everything others do (aka I'm nitpicky).
- 28) They think I'm too easygoing.
- 29) They think I'm too uptight.
- 30) They think I don't like them and they're acting accordingly.
- 31) I do something they hate about themselves (i.e. projection)
- 32) I remind them of someone they can't stand (i.e. transference)
- 33) They lack a sense of humor or think I do.
- 34) They're snobby and think everyone is below them.
- 35) They're insecure and think I'm too good for them in some way.
- 36) They lack empathy and/or social skills.
- 37) They think I lack enough empathy and/or social skills.
- 38) They're jealous and/or intimidated by me.

- 39) They think I'm jealous and/or intimidated by them.
- 40) They're struggling with anxiety particularly for social situations.
- 41) They're judgemental and/or guarded.
- 42) They think I'm judgemental and/or guarded.
- 43) I look like a know-it-all.
- 44) I do things that are inappropriate or insulting in their eyes.
- 45) I have a weird tick or annoying habit.
- 46) I speak in a way they don't like (e.g. they use unnecessarily big words to sound smarter)
- 47) They think I'm too much of a goody-goody.
- 48) They think I'm too much of a user and lack appreciation for what they do.
- 49) They lump me into a category of people they don't like (e.g. jock, nerd, airhead, etc).
- 50) They think I'm too whiney.
- 51) I never let them help me, and they find that frustrating.
- 52) I cause them guilt in some way.
- 53) They are an overall bad person.
- 54) They think I'm an overall bad person.
- 55) They think I'm sneaky or backstabbing in some way.
- 56) They think I'm too bossy, pushy, or domineering.
- 57) They're too stressed, tired, or in pain to like me.
- 58) They think I never give an opinion or help with deciding what to do.

59) They think I'm a mooch.

60) They think I'm too old, immature, ugly, pretty, dumb, smart, loud, quiet, stagnant, wild, smelly, perfect, etc.

As this list demonstrates, there are many reasons why someone may not like us and it's usually more about them than us. Unfortunately, most people see it as black and white: If I'm a good person, you'll like me, and if I'm a bad person you won't. As this list demonstrates, however, it is rarely that simple. Just because someone doesn't like us, doesn't mean we're not a good person. In fact, being a good person could be the very reason they don't like us. If you're thinking people are weird, you'd be correct. We are all weird in some way and that's what makes life more interesting.

This week may I better accept the idea of someone not liking me.

## Lesson 32

### **Why You Should Stop Apologizing**

Apologizing is good... sometimes. Other times it's annoying. Sorry, was that too blunt? Sorry if it was... sorry if it wasn't and I just delayed this post... sorry for being sorry or not sorry when I should be sorry or not sorry or more sorry... or sorrier if I'm to use proper grammar... sorry... I think you get it. Saying sorry is wonderful when it comes to bumping into someone or a wave when you accidentally cut someone off and then realize it after. It's acknowledging you

goofed. Ultimately, *saying sorry is a way to say we care and may not be an admittance of guilt.* It's like going to a funeral. We say we're sorry as a way to show love and not because we did it... hopefully. Saying the right sorry can also be a sign of strength as it takes a humble heart to be willing to say it. Saying sorry too often, however, can make us feel weak or be annoying to others, which means apologies should be used with caution.

**Tip:** A good apology defines in one sentence what you're sorry about (e.g. "I'm sorry I acted in a way that left you feeling uncared for.") and another sentence to say how you'll prevent it from happening again (e.g. Next time I will...).

There are times when we should be saying sorry... ladies. Sorry, that just slipped out. Fun fact, as a therapist there is one gender that is great at apologizing to everyone but their partner while the other gender has their partner tell them they apologize too much or their apology doesn't "feel" like a real apology. Any guesses which gender does which? (Pause to let you think.) Men have a tendency to say sorry as a kneejerk reaction to woman, which can be annoying. I've proven that true many times: (wife) "What are you sorry about?" (me) "Not knowing what to be sorry about." Guys will also say, "Sorry, but..." with the "but" erasing the apology. A "but" ruins everything: "You're beautiful, but..." "I like you, but..." "I was trying to put the lighter away while holding the firecracker in my mouth, but..." A lot of husbands tell me their wives are more likely to criticize, which rhymes with apologize, but it's not normally as well received. In defence of these wives, they typically say they don't want to criticize, but they don't know what else to do to get the husband to step things up, especially when it comes to cleaning and organization where the guy's standards are typically lower. Women want to be nice, but they tend to exhaust themselves trying to help everyone, which doesn't leave a lot left for the husband. And there's the "but" again. Most times a good "butt" is more appreciated than a good "but."

**Reminder:** Instead of complaining about something a person does, make a request for what they can do instead next time.

Complaints tend to cause defensive behavior like being snappy,

giving reasons why they did it that way (reasons you don't care about), or they might shut down. Requests, on the other hand, tend to land better since they're solution based. Sometimes the request should more "If you can... then I will..." in order to make it feel more equal and less "I'm better than you."

So now my point... and *thank you* for your patience. I've recently discovered we often need to switch from apologizing to thanking people (like I just did to start this paragraph). I've found that appreciating someone is often a much stronger connecting tool than apologizing. For instance, I'll occasionally be slow to respond to an email. I used to start, "I'm sorry for the delay," but now I write, "Thank you for your patience." See the difference? Apologizing in a way lowers you while appreciating the other person raises them up like a compliment. It's essentially saying: "You're so patient; you're awesome." As good as apologizing can be, it can feel like a downer and bring an air of negativity to the situation whereas appreciating the other person makes them feel better about themselves. I first came across this concept in the movie *You've Got Mail*. If you just asked, "What's that?" you're likely under the age of thirty. This is a classic romantic comedy starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan movie. If you just asked, "Who's Meg Ryan?" you missed out. She was pretty amazing. In the movie, Meg Ryan ends up in the wrong line at the grocery store and Tom Hanks swoops in and persuades the cashier to ring her through with charm and positivity. When he finishes talking, the cashier is smiling and happy. That's when Meg Ryan throws in an apology and the cashier goes back to looking annoyed. There's a distinct energy switch. The cashier went from feeling appreciated and valued to being annoyed. In many situations it's good to remember the adage, "Flattery will get you everywhere." Actually the real line is "Flattery won't get you anywhere," but thank you for understanding my point... see what I did there? I used a thank you. If you didn't get what I was doing, thank you for not thinking I'm an idiot... and did you see what I did there? If someone reading that thought I was an idiot, I might have made them feel guilty; that's just a bonus. Other examples of thanking instead of apologizing are:

Instead of “I’m sorry you had a hard day,” try “Thank you for persevering through such a difficult day. You are very strong.”

Instead of “I’m sorry I was grumpy today,” try “Thank you for being so patient with me when I was a grumpy pants.”

Instead of “I’m sorry for not calling like I said I would,” try frigg’n calling. Sorry, that was a moment. Thank you for your patience.

Instead of: “I’m sorry you’re so ugly,” try: “Thank you for helping me feel better about myself.” And thank you for knowing that was a joke... kind of. Sometimes thinking stuff like this can make you feel better. Thinking doesn’t make you a bad person; admitting it for others does... so thank you for understanding I can be a bad person sometimes.

At the gym this week, a lady asked my friend to help move a weight for her and she apologized after for bugging him. I then said “Thank you for giving my friend a chance to help you and think he’s strong for once.” She laughed and then said how that was a good reminder of how to see the positive spin of a situation, and she was left feeling better. ***Saying thank you is an incredible tool that we all need to be better at using because it’s through gratitude that we end up enjoying life more.***

This week may you share appreciation with others.

## Lesson 33

# Are You Messed Up Like Me?

I’m a good person (occasionally), yet every now and then I get excited at the idea of ruining someone’s day (that’s fun). Ever have that? I don’t mean when you’re driving and slow down because you don’t like how close the person following is - that’s a regular day. I also don’t mean purposely making a spellingg mistaken to annoy peoples – that’s just fun. My one rule is I won’t try to ruin someone’s day in a mean way – I’m not dingle berry. I’m a good person, so I need to ruin it in a “nice” way. For instance, this can be holding a door for

someone who's just a little too far from the door, so it's this awkward moment where they feel obligated to do a little jog to get to the door quicker and not look rude themselves. See how this makes me mean in a nice way? I cause unnecessary anxiety and sweating to someone by being "nice." It's a win-win because I look good while being jerk. I think part of me enjoys this because I used to be so obsessed with rules and being perfect (aka annoying), so now my rebellious nature is kicking in, and it helps me feel "wild and crazy." Yes, I know this is far from a normal person's wild and crazy, but as I claimed earlier, I'm a good person (aka someone who hides their jerk side well).

I have recently come up with the ultimate way to be a good/jerkish person, and I'm really excited about it. It's so simple, yet mind blowingly awesommme (there are three m's because it's mmm good). Here's my idea: On garbage day, I'll put my neighbor's recycling bins back. Sounds nice, doesn't it? But not when it's before the garbage truck gets there. I'm not putting back an empty recycling container like a normal good person. I'm going to put back the very same container full of stuff my neighbor put out. Do you see the brilliance of this? It's going to blow my neighbor's mind, and not in a good way. Sometime after he goes to work and before the truck shows up, I'll go out and return his recycling bins to the exact spot he always leaves them. Later that day he'll get home and be like "Huhn, the recycling bins aren't at the end of the driveway. Some nice person must have put the bins back." Some nice person did put the bins back, but at the wrong time. For a brief moment my neighbor will feel good about life because someone did something nice for him... until he sees the bins in the normal spot still full. What? That won't make sense. At first he might wonder what day it is and then he'll question, "Did I not put the bins out today? I could've sworn I did, but then how could they still be full and put back?" He'll be very confused, so he'll check with his wife, but she'll think he forgot because he's a guy and, therefore, must be incompetent... you know, what most wives of many years think about their husband.

The next week my neighbor will be very careful to put the recycling out because he'll now have two week's worth. He'll go to work feeling good that the mess will be gone when he gets home... or so he



thinks. After he leaves for work and before the garbage truck comes, yeah, I'll go out and put his recycling bins back again. I'll even put some of my own recycling in his bins, so there'll be more than he left. My neighbor will come home and again he'll be like, "Some nice person must have put the bins back." Of course, after last week he won't be as confident about this idea, but before work he double checked he put the bins out, so it'll be fine... won't it? He'll convince himself he's fine just as he goes to the side of the house where he'll see the bins overflowing more than they were in the morning when he put them out: (neighbor) "No! What's going on? I know I put them out. I double checked!... Didn't I?" Again, he'll go in and ask his wife about it, and she'll be super annoyed because how incompetent is he? He now has two-plus week's worth of recycling and his wife is starting to get angry... and I'm laughing hysterically.

Third week, I need to change it up. He'll know he put the bins out and his wife will check on him because she doesn't trust him and three-plus week's worth of recycling is getting ridiculous. So this time I let the truck come and remove the recycling, which will be fun to watch because so much recycling at one stop will ruin the worker's day – that's the bonus moment of being good/jerk person. As soon as the work is done, I'll go out and bring the bins in... to my house. My neighbor will come home and have a little panic attack because the bins aren't out, but he'll know he couldn't have forgotten this time because his wife checked. Afraid to be happy that someone was nice, however, he'll quickly run to the house to see the recycling is, in fact, gone, which is good... but so are all the bins. "Where are the bins?" he'll exclaim out loud. My neighbor will go back to the curb to see if they're there – nope. He'll look up and down the street in case they were blown around – nope, nothing there. They're not at the curb, on the street, or at the house? Confused, he'll go in and ask his wife, "Where are the bins?" And as soon as he goes in the house, I'll put one bin out at the house and another at the curb. How could he miss both? Unless he's starting to actually lose his mind. Now he'll go outside with his wife to show her how the bins are gone and that's when they'll see there's a bin at the house and at the curb where he didn't think there was anything at all. He'll protest, "But they weren't there a minute ago!" His wife will now call the doctor because her

husband is clearly insane and I've ruined his life... but that's what you get when you flick your cigarette butts on my lawn and refuse to stop. Payback is mine, sucka!

So will I ever do this plan? Of course not, but it's fun to think about. Sometimes we need to let ourselves think crazy things in order to not feel so bottled up and helpless. Talking can also be a great way to bond with our partner as we share weird ideas. Sometimes we need to let go of our uptight side and just be silly (with a little imaginary vindictiveness). Thinking and talking like this can be a great way to bond with people and can actually help fight symptoms of depression. I once read that Stephen King claimed if he wasn't a writer, he'd be a criminal. I think he made the right choice (but I've been wrong before). Our creative minds are a wonderful thing, and we need to take the time to let that creativity out, especially if it gives us a laugh. Being creative and imagining things is part of being human; we just need to use it appropriately and know when to follow through with an idea and when to just think about it and smile.

This week may you get to think about doing something creative that's fulfilling and talk about it with someone you love.

## Lesson 34

# What's Good about Falling on my Face

Falling on my face metaphorically has been a regular occurrence throughout my life. Physically? Not so much. I do my best to avoid risky activities; you know, like a wuss. The other night, however, I got to do a full out old man fall. This is the kind of fall where observers wouldn't laugh because no one wants to be the person laughing at the old guy in need of an ambulance. Little kids falling? That's hilarious because they tend to bounce back up like nothing happened. There, however, was no bouncing for me. It was more of a thud like a tree falling, but the tree was wrapped with a layer of muscle warmer (aka fat) that jiggled after.

Sunday nights I've started going for a jog to help free my mind and prepare me for the week. This past Sunday was my usual 9:30pm start when normal people are getting ready for bed (aka watching TV). I find something peaceful about this time of day and, I'll be honest, the darkness makes it easy to see into people's houses. I don't mean this in a creepy way (even though it is). I just like looking into people's houses... wait, that doesn't help. I'm not hiding in the bushes or using binoculars; I just slow down to peer into the house a few seconds longer because I like seeing the layouts of people's houses. If anything, seeing people inside makes me feel awkward – get out of my view. It makes me feel like I'm peering into their house when I shouldn't (because I am). If I had free time, I'd be doing all the open houses I could like the people real estate agents hate, which is like a bigger scale version of taste testing at Costco: "How much is this product I have no interest in buying, but feel obligated to ask about? Great; thanks."

So while jogging on a sidewalk about two kilometers away from my house, I turned a corner and I didn't notice the two sidewalk slabs were uneven and I bailed hard. It was the kind of fall you are completely unprepared for because you're way too relaxed and why wouldn't I be? Jogging is like the safest aerobic activity since there aren't any balls flying at my head or people trying to tackle me. If I was jogging on a trail I'd be more aware of the risk of falling because of roots and such, but this is a flat surface, so I was in my own little world. I was daydreaming about random crap guys think about when you ask them, "What are you thinking about?" and the guy says, "Nothing," because it really is so pointless it falls in the category of nothing.

Before I was even aware of what was happening, I was hitting the ground and seeing my hand slide on the rough concrete like I was trying to massage it. My first actual thought was, "This is not going to feel good later." And I was right. It didn't feel good later. Fortunately, my body was smarter than I expected and I naturally fell with a lean to the side where one hand and knee took most of the weight as I then rolled into the grass to take away some of the force of the land. This meant I wasn't at risk of breaking my wrists like a

lot of roller bladders who fall do while also being young enough I didn't break my hip – yea, I'm not that old. The funny thing was as I started to get up my first thought was that of a five year old, "I'm hurt and bleeding. Who's going to kiss my boo boos and carry me home?" That's a sad moment for a grownup. I then did a damage check. My one knee was scraped up and my one palm was stinging pretty bad, but I was fine overall. If I turned back, it was two kilometers home or I could continue on my normal route and do another four kilometers. That's when I had the thought, "I'm going to be sore whether I'm jogging or sitting at home, so I might as well finish my run. Besides, if I was playing a sport, I wouldn't miss a shift for this." My logic brain was back on track and I was thinking properly (aka like someone my age should). While I was jogging, the words of my friend I sometimes jog with came to mind, "Never run on the sidewalk." I had thought this was stupid advice, but not anymore – he was right.

The best part about this experience is when I got home; after a few minutes when my wife was not distracted, I said "Funny story..." and then showed her my hand and she got all mommy-sympathetic, and inside my head I was like "Yeah, I'm a man. I grossed her out and I'm getting sympathy. It was so worth falling." Men are sad, aren't we?

The title of this post claims that it was good that I fell, which means I better explain that because right now it doesn't make a lot of sense. As I often claim, there is good in all things, so what is good about this situation?

1. I was able to jog (i.e. I sometimes have back issues that prevent me from jogging).
2. I'm able to feel pain, which means my body is protecting itself from further hurt while it heals.
3. My body's natural response was very healthy when I rolled into the grass.
4. I had the determination to finish the jog.

5. My injuries didn't prevent me from being able to work or work out; my palms made it painful, but I could push through it.
6. I learned a valuable lesson about jogging at night on sidewalks – don't do it.
7. I'm grateful for lit streets and sidewalks, so I can jog at night unlike in a forest.
8. My wife had the best possible response that helped me feel loved.
9. It could've been worse (e.g I didn't break my wrist).
10. I have a story to share.

This week may you see the good in a situation that isn't the most pleasant in order to help it feel not so bad.

## Lesson 35

### **Sometimes the Worst is the Best** **(Written three years before this book)**

This past summer I had the privilege of going to Disney with my mom, sister, wife, and 17 month old daughter (four adults to one baby is the only way to do it). While at Disney World, my sister had booked us fast passes for the Snow White and the Seven Dwarves ride, which as you can probably guess is a kids' ride. Have you ever noticed that kids are typically better at handling spinning and bouncing? Guess where this is going. Because my daughter was too small for the ride, my mom and I watched her while my sister and

wife went on it. For the record, the secondary reason I didn't go on it right away was because I was still recovering from our previous ride, The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh – it was more intense than it sounds. If you're thinking, "Isn't the Winnie the Pooh ride for really little kids like my 17 month old?" Yes it is. My daughter rode it like a champ while I had turned the color of the Grinch. I can handle drops, but spinning or shaking ruin me and this ride was all shaking. Shaking makes me feel like I a pop can. Fortunately, the ride ended before I got to demonstrate what happens when you shake a pop can too much, but it was close. My daughter? She giggled the whole time... not at my struggle... unlike my wife; she thought my wussiness was hilarious.

When my sister and wife came back from the Snow White ride, they were excited for us because they said we would love it. I should point out that my mom is in her early seventies. She could handle the shaking with Winnie the Pooh better than I did (I'm that big a wuss), but she absolutely hates drops like my sister. I'm the opposite; I think the drop is the best part, but guess what this ride didn't have? It's a kids' ride, so there wasn't a drop (the one reason my sister loved it), but there was a lot of spinning. Did I say I can't do spinning? My mom hates roller coasters in general, but my sister and wife assured us this was different. As we got strapped into our seats, my mom said, "This feels like a roller coaster." As the ride started moving she said, "This really feels like a roller coaster." When we were taken around a corner and up a hill she exclaimed, "This is a roller coaster!" because it was. The rest of the ride included both of us cursing my sister and wife. I'm pretty sure the parents in front of us (or anyone who could hear us screaming words you don't expect to hear at Disney World) were probably very confused how tiny kids were screaming with joy while the full grown man sitting beside his mother on a kid's ride (not an impressive scenario to begin with) were screaming like it was a new form of torture with words of hate for two people they should love.

After the ride, my mom and I went to my sister and wife and bellowed, "What were you thinking? That was awful!" They were both surprised by this reaction. To them it was a kids' ride and they

had no problem riding it because, as they said, they're not giant wussbags (that was a fair argument). I pointed out that they should've known I was a giant wussbag because the Winnie the Pooh ride was too advanced for me while my seventeen month old daughter loved it, and they said, "Yeah, that makes sense... but you can suck it up." Okay, that's not a direct quote, but it would've been fitting.

We ended up taking a photo of my mom and I in front of the Snow White ride, and that is now my favourite photo from the whole vacation. Being on the ride was essentially the worst moment of the trip (how great a trip is it when that's the worst part?), but after our stomachs settled, it became one of our favourite moments to joke about. This is how life tends to be. ***Our best stories tend to come out of struggle.*** This experience is now my reminder that I shouldn't be so scared of bad things happening because they can be the most interesting and funny things that we remember. I won't purposely try to make things fall apart, but I will try harder to be open to whatever happens because the worst thing can become the best.

May you see how some of the worst things you've experienced can become the best.



“People ruin their lives by their own foolishness  
and then are angry at the LORD [or someone else].”  
Pro 19:3

I added that last part because when I was young I would blame God when things didn’t work out as I wanted, but now I find most people use other targets (e.g. partner, parents, job, their childhood, trauma, etc). We’ll enjoy life more if we accept responsibility for our choices and learn to laugh when things end up being a roller coaster.



## 5 Tips to be More Creative (& raise creative children)

I keep hearing parents talk about not wanting to stunt their children's creativity, and of course, they're the same parents who give their kids tablets and cell phones to entertain them – helpful. As someone whose top three strengths include creativity, in this lesson I will be giving the five things that have helped me. (Hint: cell phone use isn't one of them.) All of these tips are at risk of making social workers upset (which makes me smile). I love how social workers think they know everything about how to raise kids when they've helped raise the entitled generations of the last thirty years. (Tip: if you want to know how to be a good parent, talk to older people who raised adults you respect). I recently came across an article by a social worker who taught that parents shouldn't say no because it's damaging for a child's development. That's one step stupider than at teachers' college where I was taught you should use green pen for marking and not red because red is too scary for students: (kid) "Get me away from Santa. I was too traumatized by red pen being used at school to look at him! If only they used green pen.!" If a teen is afraid of a color, there's a whole other list of problems going on. Besides, if green is the sign of mistakes, aren't you just making green the scary color? And what's wrong with having a scary color? We need things in our life to scare us. Fear is a healthy emotion, and kids need to learn how to deal with it in order to become a healthy functioning adult. Without a healthy fear of someone, it's hard to have respect, and without having to face your fears, how will you know you can handle them? Without facing our fears, we'll end up claiming we have bad anxiety when the problem is we haven't learned how strong and capable we are. There's a bonus thought; you're welcome.

Here are the top five reasons creativity is one of my strengths.

1. ***I'm Dumb:*** Yup, I'm a dumb'n and I say that with pride. Being dumb is a great way to help you be creative. Despite having three

Masters Degrees, in grade five I realized I couldn't do things the way really smart kids could. I had to be different because my memory was garbage. My memory is so bad I'll be editing this book, which I've written and read through nine times already and be like "I wrote this? Wow, good for me. I have no memory of that." Impressive, I know.

Fortunately, by being different, teachers thought I was really smart when, in fact, I did it my unique way because I couldn't do it the "right" way. After years of being a weak to average student, in grade five I suddenly got straight A's. During my undergrad, however, my method tanked hard because creativity was more annoying to the markers than helpful – academia wasn't a fan of my creativity. Fortunately, the Masters level was more open minded.

**Side Note:** Sometimes straight A students struggle after school is done because school makes sense – follow the rules and be rewarded. Life, however, doesn't work that way – there aren't clear rules or rewards. This can cause some people to stay in school longer than they should and/or flounder when school is done. Sometimes the most successful people weren't the best in the class, which means parents should encourage good marks because it shows work ethic, but they're not the be all and end all... unless you want to be a doctor, but who wants that pressure?

2. **Be Informed:** Being a dumb'n I couldn't get away with half-hearted effort. I had to be all-in and get an A or if I was relaxed, I'd struggle to pass. This meant I had to work harder than others, which ended up helping me realize the value of researching ideas. Seeing other great ideas gave me inspiration for my own. This was particularly helpful in my art classes where my creativity stood out the most, but again, it's largely because I had researched other ideas and used them as my foundation for brainstorming my own.

3. **Rules:** Here's something that will really upset social workers (yes, I'm smiling at this thought). Rules are amazing for helping me be more creative. By knowing the rules, I can work within parameters and twist what's expected. Telling someone to draw a picture of anything can be overwhelming and limit ideas. When I was in art college, my most creative work came out of projects with the most rules because I was able to find ways to stand out against the others. If there are no rules or norms, you can't stand out. Everything's just different like the fashion at a hipster concert. Everyone is wearing stupid stuff, so stupid stuff becomes normal. When I wrote sketches, writing for "fun" was hard because I didn't have a starting point whereas being given a topic to address or a lesson to give made it easier. Rules give a starting point.
4. **Embrace Emotions like Anger, Sadness, & Fear:** A lot of parents want to shelter their kids from negative emotions, but they're fuel for creativity. I regularly tell clients to try ranting alone in the car when they're upset. Not only does it help you vent out your feelings, but it can lead to some fun ideas. A lot of comedians discover material this way because emotions energize us and get our brain working better. Ranting about our fears and sadness can have a similar effect. All of our emotions can help us connect with others and should be respected rather than avoided.
5. **Suffering:** Yes, suffering. The thing many people avoid like the plague (which is a form of suffering we should all avoid because death makes it difficult to be creative). Many parents try to shelter their kids from suffering, but it is incredible for inspiring creativity. What comedian doesn't love having a weird quirk, or having worked a terrible job, or been with a crazy partner to joke about? ***Suffering can lead to incredible creativity while comfort is its enemy.*** Coddled children are at risk of not being creative (unless the creativity comes out of complaining how over protective their parents were).

This week may you start to see the good in all things including someone being a dumb'n.

## Lesson 37

# Pain is a Gift

**Tip:** This post is not suggesting you should tell people with a broken leg something like “You're so lucky. I just have a sliver. You got the better gift.” Although that'd be hilarious... to me... and other messed up people.

I make fun of therapists who tell clients to read certain books... not to their faces; I'm a decent person (smirking because I think my sarcasm is hilarious). In my mind, people are busy enough. If there's something in a book a therapist wants you to see, they should summarize it and help you apply it to your life. Let's be honest; who has time to read a book? Okay, that's clearly a dumb question to someone reading a book, but how often do you actually read a non-fiction book from beginning to end (besides this one)? Outside of listening to biographies, I've maybe read one book from start to finish since high school, but it was mind blowing. When I was 24, I read *The Gift of Pain*, and it gave me a new perspective on life – that's an impressive book. I used to be plagued by the question: How can a loving God allow pain in the world? And now I had my answer – who said pain was bad? I'll get back to this point, but first, let me point out that this is the most entertaining and brilliant book I've ever come across. It was so good I didn't skim or skip large sections just to say, “I finished it”: (high school student) “I read the first and last page... done. Time to write my book report.” Looking at the title, you know exactly what the book is about – pain is a gift. It was co-authored by one of the original leading doctors of leprosy, which is a disease that causes damage to the peripheral nervous system. Simply put: You don't feel physical pain. It's as crazy as it sounds. There's the phrase “No pain, no gain,” but leprosy proves “No pain ever... you're screwed.” It's not as poetic, but it's true. One of the greatest challenges of painlessness is little things become risky. For instance, the doctor had to teach his patients to chew gum as a reminder to

blink because people with leprosy don't have the pain sensors in their eyes telling them their eyes are dry and the person needs to blink. This was the lesson taught after teaching his patients not to just scratch their eyeball with their fingernail like they'd scratch their skin. And of course, they'd only know something was in their eye if their vision was blurred because they wouldn't feel it. You could essentially lick their eyeball and they wouldn't know you did it by touch – arguably a disturbing example for me to think of using. For the record, I've never wanted to lick an eyeball... but I'm hoping you assumed that: (reader) "I don't know. He seems pretty weird." As the doctor helped prove, leprosy doesn't make people go blind. Blindness is the result of the body not protecting the eyes because there isn't pain to act as a warning system.

The doctor even had to teach a group of boys to have pet cats to protect them while they slept because rats were eating their fingers in the night. If you're thinking this doctor wasn't practicing in Canada, you'd be correct. The rat dinner problem was discovered after a group of boys kept waking up in the morning with one of them missing a finger. It was once believed leprosy caused body parts to fall off, but the fingers didn't fall off – they vanished like a magic trick gone wrong. To figure out what was going on, one of the boys stayed up to watch over everyone. It turned out there wasn't a monster in the closet or a bad magician; there was a rat. While the boys slept, the rat would bite one of their fingers, and when the pain didn't wake them up, the rat was able to have a very fresh meal. As the doctor eventually proved, leprosy doesn't cause body parts to fall off (or magically disappear); something would happen like there was a barber who wore off three fingers using his scissors too much or there'd be infection problems. This meant patients had to be hyper vigilant about checking every day for any new cuts and scratches because infections were a high risk without pain warning the person. Even dry hands proved to be an issue because if the skin cracked there was a risk of infection.

One of the doctor's constant struggles was getting leprosy sufferers to respect their bodies and not do dangerous things. For instance, he saw one man was trying to roast a marshmallow that fell in the fire.

Upset, he reached into the fire, pulled out the marshmallow engulfed in flames, and put it in his mouth. Why not? Minus the burns caused to his hands and his mouth he couldn't feel, he "felt" fine. His skin was damaged, but he "felt" fine.

The author noted the worst part of leprosy isn't the potential blindness or loss of body parts; it's the fact that you don't feel anything including the warmth of touch. Even if people aren't afraid to hug someone with leprosy, the leprosy sufferer doesn't "feel" anything because the same nerve endings that relate pain also relate pleasure. ***Whether something is considered pain or pleasure is all in the mind; it's based on perspective.*** Leprosy sufferers may never feel the itchiness of a mosquito bite, but that also means they can't feel the warmth of a fire or the refreshing coolness of water on a hot day. Even worse, without being able to feel anything through touch, leprosy sufferers often struggle with intense feelings of isolation and loneliness; it's like there's a chasm separating them from the rest of the world.

Can you see why I found the book so life changing? I read it almost 20 years ago, and I still remember more from this book than others I've read since (or more like skimmed). This is all the more amazing because I have a terrible memory... what was I writing about? Oh right... I have since learned that pain is a gift in other ways as well. Here are 14 reasons why pain is not the enemy, but more of a friend:

- 1) ***Comedy:*** Where would comedy be without the hilariousness of a guy being hit in the groin? Physical comedy exists because we know it hurts, but are able to laugh when it happens to someone else, especially the bad guy. There's a reason *Home Alone* one and two are classics.
- 2) ***Protection:*** Pain warns us when we've been working too hard and need a break. If we didn't feel pain, how many more heart attacks and pulled muscles would people have from overworking?
- 3) ***It can make us wiser:*** Pain can help us prevent and handle similar situations better in the future.

- 4) ***It can strengthen us:*** How we handle pain can make us stronger and more resilient as we learn what we can handle.
- 5) ***It can bond us:*** Going through pain together has a way of connecting people. Even sharing stories of pain with others can build stronger friendships as they give us heart to heart moments.
- 6) ***Fear of it can make us move:*** Fear can get us doing things to protect ourselves. For instance, when we see a car driving at us, the fear of possible death will make us get out of the way... hopefully.
- 7) ***It motivates us to address it:*** People in pain are usually more willing to seek help.
- 8) ***It creates empathy and connection:*** Seeing someone in need like starving children often causes us to want to help because we can understand the pain they're in.
- 9) ***It forces us to pay attention:*** Pain tells us to stop what we're doing and fix the problem. It then reminds us to protect the spot to allow it time to heal, which is the point of a bruise – don't touch it... even though sometimes the pain can feel oddly good.
- 10) ***It fights arrogance:*** Pain reminds us we're all human.
- 11) ***It helps death be more appealing:*** Death is supposed to be something we don't want, but pain can help make it easier to accept for both the sufferer and the loved ones being left behind.
- 12) ***It helps us enjoy relaxing:*** There is nothing better than sitting down after a long day and/or chugging a glass of water when we're really thirsty, which is all thanks to pain and its relief.
- 13) ***It helps us feel accomplished:*** I get disappointed if I work out and the next day I don't have some soreness. The pain helps me feel like I've done something.
- 14) ***People overcoming pain give the most inspiring stories:*** Ever see *John Wick*? That was a bad day... and awesome! Ever see the movie *127 Hours*? Not the best movie, but it's based on a true story,

which is pretty crazy. After being trapped in a crevasse and nearing death, a hiker cut off his own arm with a pocket knife to survive – it’s nuts.

This week may you discover the gift of pain... without a lot of pain.

## Lesson 38

# Having Mental Illness is Not an Excuse to be a Bad Person

Sixteen years ago I became friends with a guy for whom I have the utmost respect. When I first saw him, he was leading the worship team at the front of the church I was visiting because I was thinking of applying to work there as their youth pastor (and yes, I did end up working there). When I first saw him, I was pretty annoyed because I could barely see him. There was a beam that went across the performing area, yet he chose to sit down. I remember thinking, “Get off your butt and stand you lazy singer,” you know, like a good Christian should be thinking when worshipping God. After he was done playing, he moved out of the singing area... actually, the proper description is he *rolled* out of the singing area in his *wheelchair*. That’s right. I was just judgemental of a person with a disability... while at church... during worship... at a place I was planning on applying to work as a role model of God’s love. That sounds about right, doesn’t it? Sounds like solid youth pastor material. Good thing I learned a long time ago if you’re going to be judgemental, keep it in your head. Yes, that’s the right moral to take from that story. To add to this, my friend is in a wheelchair because he saved a dozen orphans from a burning building... just kidding. I was just trying to make myself look worse (not that I needed to). My friend has cerebral palsy, which can cause a varying degree of limitations. His CP confines him to a wheelchair and leaves him with twisted hands. Despite these setbacks, he has an incredible voice and he’s great with a guitar as he’s taught himself how to play using different fingering because his hands won’t allow him to play like people with normal hands. On top of this, he managed to become a high school music teacher, get married, and



have three well behaved kids. My friend is a testament of what you can achieve when you push yourself (and marry the right woman). His life has been far from easy or even comfortable, but he has managed to create a life that is far beyond what many non-CP people achieve because he didn't just give up and expect others to serve him.

While I was a youth pastor at his church, he joined me on a mission trip and several weekend retreats. He always carried his own weight and never expected others to cater to him. He was incredibly independent and he would only ask for a hand when absolutely necessary. He is a man worthy of admiration like Zach Anner (also has CP), Kyle Maynard (born without arms and legs), and Aaron Wollin (the daredevil with half a body).

I think one of the best things about my friend is he has a tremendous sense of humor that he's worked very hard to develop. This helps him joke about his disability in a fun way and not the I-just-made-everyone-awkward way. The best thing about joking is it can take away the power from judgement and/or insecurity. Too many people obsess over what's wrong with them and use it to feel like a failure or outcast. Others use it as a weapon to manipulate people and/or gain sympathy power. From my experience, the people who are the quickest to point out their disabilities are the last to push themselves to be better. Meanwhile, the people who don't draw attention to their limitations, unless it's to joke, end up being so much more than their label. They lead successful lives and inadvertently become inspirational like my friend.

I know on social media people post all these claims of hardship for having mental illness and it can be very difficult going through life with any type of physical, intellectual, or emotional handicap, but those are never an excuse for not trying. Handicaps aren't a free pass for being lazy, rude, or unapologetic, and unfortunately, that's often what labels tend to lead to – excuses for being a jerk. I don't care what you've had to go through, being a bad person is never the way we should live life; it hurts you and everyone around you.

I know saying this will make some people angry at me, but I'm angry. I'm angry at people for not pushing themselves to be better and

settling for a life that's less than it can be, especially when it hurts others. I'm tired of people being a drain on their family and anyone around them they can sucker into helping them be lazy, especially when they aren't appreciative of the help they're given. From my experience, this makes God angry, too. He made us to be so much more resilient than that. When my wife was pregnant (being pregnant has its temporary handicaps) I had more patience for her when she was in a bad mood because of her state, but there's a point when you say, "Nope, that's too far. I'm not your emotional punching bag." No matter how bad you have it, you never have a right to be mean to those around you. The old saying, "Hurt people, hurt people," may be true, but it doesn't have to be. What we should strive to live is "Hurt people are kind to those around them because they don't want others to hurt like they do." Depression isn't an excuse to lay in bed every day. Anxiety isn't an excuse not to push to try new things and do what's good for us. Feeling bad isn't a reason to drink, smoke up, play hours of video games or binge watch TV. Those are all things that make it worse. We all need distractions to give our brains a break from over thinking, but we need to continually push ourselves to process and address issues in order to move forward and be healthier.

A few weeks ago, my pastor quoted Galatians 6:5: "For each one should carry their own load." (NIV) Yes, we are meant to help each other, but ultimately, we need to be carrying our own load. ***We need to realize how strong and capable we really are and not just feel sorry for ourselves.*** The more we push ourselves to be better, the better we can become.

This week I pray that people will start to be more like my friend who carries his own load and by doing so gave himself many reasons to be proud and to be thankful for the life he has earned.

## Why I Admire my Sister

My sister has cancer... that's not why I admire her; that'd be a very strange reason. I admire her because she has always been a thoughtful and generous person *and* getting cancer hasn't changed that. I think the best word that sums up all of her good qualities is kind. She's not, however, the type of kind person who ends up being a pushover because she is also strong. She is actually a very healthy blend of kindness and strength, which helps her role model what it means to be a very emotionally healthy and motivated person. She is what you wish people could be like... minus the cancer. I think that's fair to say. It's also fair to say that I'm good at ruining compliments.

**Side Note:** This lesson was written six years ago, and she's doing very well today.

Having cancer (or any sickness) is very taxing on one's emotions. Throw in the fear of dying or the trial of going through the rigors of chemo and there is a definite risk of a person's personality changing. Until I saw my sister go through chemo, I never realized how terrible it is. The only warning she really had of how bad it was going to be was being in the bathroom at the chemo center and seeing a sign that said "Men have to sit to pee," (this is a sign all bathrooms should have because most men have terrible aim). This was followed by a warning that a chemo patient's urine was radioactive. That's not a good sign. My sister was also told that she needed to cover the floors and furniture where she was staying because her vomit would be radioactive and could destroy them – like an alien. And it wasn't "if" she vomited; it was "when"; also, not a good sign. Going through a typical chemo treatment is kind of like someone having a really bad hangover while also having the flu after four days of not sleeping and having been used as a piñata, so they're physically sore everywhere; inside and out. To make it worse, the symptoms last for most of a week and just as you feel better, you get sent in for another round for the hangover-flu-no sleep-beaten up feeling. Treatment plans can vary, but it's normal for this weeklong terribleness to happen eight

times, once every two weeks. The added bonus is the chemo often temporarily changes your taste buds, so things like chocolate taste like sand. Plus, you typically lose all of your hair including eyebrows and eyelashes, so when you look in the mirror you look freakish. My sister said not having eyebrows was a constant reminder of how sick she was, but losing her hair was like losing part of who she was.

The cherry on top is a lot of people gain weight because you're too weak to do anything and your muscles turn to mush. With all of this, it's understandable why people with cancer struggle emotionally.

***When you're a wreck physically, we tend to be a wreck emotionally.***

My sister has always been very good at putting on a strong face for others and it continued through this experience. At home we get a glimpse of the cracks in the strong exterior, but she's still good at keeping her pain dampened. What's incredibly impressive is no matter how terrible she's felt, no matter how scared she's been, she has always remained kind. She has never been mean even to the dumb people who have given her judgemental looks, which she's recently started receiving as her hair has begun to grow back and she looks like a feminist rebelling against the social norms of longer hair. Even if she was, why would they give her a dirty look? If I were her, I'd want to say something like, "Thank you for giving me a dirty look. After almost dying from cancer, it really warms my heart." That's my passive aggressive side coming out. Unlike me, my sister is too kind to think of doing that.

Meanwhile, I know someone who has a disease, but he's not like my sister at all. His disease has led him to be stuck in this world of self pity and selfishness. He doesn't show love or kindness to anyone around him, and he does his best to shut out the world with video games. A friend recently told me that I shouldn't be bothered by this because I don't know what it's like to be in his position. There's truth to that claim; I don't know what it's like. That being said, do I want to be like him or my sister? Even in my sister's sickness and limited energy, she has made time to do things to show she loves others like make over a hundred cupcakes for a baby dedication. There's a reason she has a list of really great friends and people who are

cheering her on and regularly connecting with her and he has no one – and I mean no one. His own parents struggle to like him. As the Bible says, “You reap what you sow,” (Gal 6:7b) and my sister has found the balance of reaping and sowing that makes her life that much better despite any struggle she may face.

Sickness is terrible; the fear of dying is terrible, but *nothing gives us the right to be mean*. No matter how terrible life seems or how sick we may be, we can choose to be kind; we can choose to be like my sister.

This week may you see that kindness is the best choice, and may the world start to be more like my sister... without the cancer. (And there I go again ruining a good compliment; my wife is a lucky lady.)



This is my sister with my daughters. I chose this picture because I'm a lame parent looking for any excuse to share a picture of my kids – I own the lameness, but seriously, how cute are they?

## Food for Thought for the Extra Hungry

*A lazy person is as bad as someone who destroys things.*

*Pro 18:9*

*Wise choices will watch over you.*

*Understanding will keep you safe.*

*Pro 2:11*

*The generous will prosper;*

*those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.*

*Pro 11:25*

## Lesson 40

**“Give Until It Hurts” is a Lie**

“Give until it hurts” is a well known concept, yet surprisingly dangerous for emotional health. Simply put, if everyone gave until it hurt, everyone would be hurt, and what good is that? Isn’t the point of giving to make someone feel cared about? And how can the recipient feel good knowing the giver is hurt? Good actions need to lead to more good or they’re not so good.

Like many people, I was taught “Give until it hurts,” especially in the church environment because we’d be encouraged to give more financially than we felt comfortable and then “trust” God to provide. It was a sweet guilt trip and a form of manipulation. Whether the money is used for good or not, this type of teaching is a misuse of power because it benefits the teacher. This is the same kind of mentality that made TV swindlers millions in the 80s: (swindler) “If you send us money, we will pray for you to be healed.” Maybe I missed the verses where Jesus said that kind of thing: (Jesus) “I am happy to heal you... for a small fee.” This kind of fraud is arguably the most disgusting thing anyone can do as it takes advantage of vulnerable people. To be clear, this is not a biblical concept. There is no verse in the Bible that tells believers to give money to be healed or even to give until it hurts. If anything, it teaches the opposite. ***The Bible promotes self control and being responsible.***

***Tip for Christians:*** Believers are supposed to be filled with love, peace, joy, and self control (Gal 4:22-23). It doesn’t say, “You should be weak, get taken advantage of, and go into debt to help others.”

I believe God can provide, but we’re told not to test Him (Luke 4:12, Matthew 4:7). Logically, what kind of loving parents tell their children to set themselves up for failure in order for the parents to rescue them? Loving parents want to help their children, but only if necessary. A parent wants their child to become a capable adult who can run their own life in a responsible way. Parents want their teenagers to be responsible. For instance, if a teenager has twenty dollars to buy something for school, but then spends it on something else even if it’s to donate to charity that’s pretty irresponsible. If they then go to their parents, “You’re going to fix this, right?” Talk about

putting the parent in a difficult position. Do they tell their kid sorry and let them face the consequences or bail them out, which is potentially enabling bad behavior? It's also a form of taking the parent for granted: "You'll fix my mistakes right? I want to give and feel good about myself even though I shouldn't." I once had a very giving young person in my youth group, but by being overly giving to some people, he constantly needed someone to rescue him, which made him a burden to them. That made his giving selfish because he wanted the benefits of giving when he wasn't able to. ***It's important to give (and to put ourselves in the financial position to be able to share), but we shouldn't be a parasite in order to do it.***

To better understand this idea, let's look at a scale:

No Giving (-10)-----Give to a point (0) -----Overly Giving (10)

This scale goes from -10 to 10, but the only healthy spot is in the middle at 0 – obviously. As this scale shows, we need to be careful not to give until it hurts because that means we are Overly Giving. At a certain point giving becomes selfish because it becomes about feeling control, earning something, avoiding unnecessary guilt, and/or to get a sense that people owe us. Like anything in excess, giving becomes an addiction as you overly give and become a "give-o-holic." What do these people often look like? Very friendly conflict avoiding, pushovers. And who are most likely the people on the No Giving side? Entitled, thoughtless jerks who expect others to do their work for them. These people likely come from Overly Giving parents who spoiled them and now have a knack for finding other Overly Giving people to continue taking care of them. Meanwhile, if Overly Giving people find each other it can work well or it becomes a battle of giving.

Ultimately, we need to be aiming for Giving to a Point, which is a wonderful way to encourage self worth.

***Signs you are Overly Giving (aka a Give-o-holic):***

1. You treat others way better than you treat yourself.
2. You can't say no.



3. You refuse to ask for help or let others help you when they offer.
4. You explode once in awhile whether in anger or weeping.
5. You can't accept compliments.
6. You feel guilt when people do something nice for you and need to do something in return.
7. People feel bad because of how much you do for them.
8. People get frustrated because you won't let them do anything for you.
9. Friends get frustrated with you because you're never available to hang out since you're busy helping people.
10. You always have to give when a store asks if you want to donate to a charity.
11. You want to hide from people for fear of being asked for more.
12. When groups ask for volunteers, you offer to help or feel incredibly guilty.
13. Even if you have a good reason you can't help someone, you feel really guilty for not helping them.
14. You feel burnt out from giving so much and are drawn to periods of hiding.
15. You attract people who want to use you.
16. You constantly feel like you're not giving enough even if people say you're giving a lot.
17. You give so much it hurts you and/or your loved ones emotionally, physically, or financially.
18. You often feel unappreciated or that you like others more than they like you.
19. You struggle with anxiety and depression from people pleasing.

20. People feel awkward around you because you're too giving of compliments or gifts.
21. You feel like you need to earn people's love
22. People say you try too hard to make others like you.
23. You can't go anywhere without bringing a gift and/or sending a thank you.
24. After seeing friends, you regularly feel the need to send an apology for something you said.
25. Your spouse feels like a low priority and/or forgotten.

You might be wondering: "Chad, did you research that list?" Nope. It's all stuff I've dealt with in my own life between my wife and I. Isn't it great being screwed up? You can learn so much.

**Tip:** This is the power of the Benjamin Franklin Effect we discussed earlier: you are more likely to make friends asking for a favor than doing a favor. Remember, helping other people is empowering, so letting people help you can be a gift.

This week may you consider what it means for you to give to a point.

## Lesson 41

# The Best People Think They're the Worst and Vice Versa

If you ask yourself, “Am I a good or bad person?” you’re likely a good person... emphasis on “likely.” It’s not guaranteed. Bad people have also asked this question, but it’s more likely in a way to manipulate a situation or garner sympathy... you know, because they’re bad. ***I define a good person as someone who is more likely to act in love than selfishness.*** Of course, when it comes to understanding good and bad people, there are more than just two basic categories. I like to use a scale (as always):

Bad Person (-10)-----Good Person (0)-----Overly Good Person (+10)

I like scales like this because they point out that we can be too much, too little, and just enough. Yes, I was influenced by *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. For this scale, the Overly Good side is for people who overemphasize the importance of others over themselves. They give too much, try too hard, and blame themselves for everything. They’re people pleasers who put so much pressure on themselves to be good, patient, and kind they end up hurting themselves. (Oddly enough, this reduces how many people they can actually help). People on the Overly Good side are at risk of feeling overwhelmed with wanting to help everyone and they can eventually get burnt out or become resentful from feeling taken advantage of. A long term effect is the Overly Good Person can become socially anxious since being around people leads to them feeling stress to help or they’ll over think things later and feel guilt. They can also get scared of being used again. This means sometimes the nicest people end up the most alone

because they become so afraid of being hurt again they shut everyone out. Personally, I think saying someone is the “nicest person” is an insult. I want to be considered really friendly and nice to a point.

The downside of using scales is it requires self honesty, and a bad person won’t likely see themselves on the Bad Person side even though most people who know them would be like “You’re clearly a terrible person.” For instance, passive aggressive people will think they’re Overly Good because they can do good things, but there’s always a catch – their giving comes with a cost. If they do something for you, you owe them something in return even if it’s adoration – it’s very mobster. At the same time, the Overly Good people are at risk of assuming they’re the Bad Person because they tend to be so hard on themselves. This, of course, makes the question of are you Overly Good, Good, or Bad tricky to answer on your own. ***Our perception is likely skewed as good people tend to be too hard on themselves while bad people tend to be too easy.*** That being said, when we’re in the middle of a conflict, regardless of being good or bad, most people see themselves as Good and defending themselves against the Bad Person: (yeller) “You’re yelling because you’re a Bad Person while I’m yelling because I have to!”

Fortunately I have found a couple clues that will help point out where you land. For instance, Overly Good people will say something like “But this is what *I* did wrong,” while bad people will say something like “But this is what *they* did wrong.” See the difference? People who are ***Overly Good blame themselves while people who are Bad simply blame the other side.*** If you’re good at deduction, this means you’ll know that a Good Person will consider both: What did we do wrong? (Person who had been a yeller) “We both shouldn’t have yelled. Neither of us is better than the other because we both acted in the same way and we both think the other person started it –we’re equal.”

A trend I find in therapy is people who say, “But I’m a good person,” are the ones most likely to be involved in an affair and/or be the best at being judgemental. Meanwhile, people who say, “I’m not good enough,” “But I should be doing more,” or “I must have done

something wrong,” tend to be Overly Good. They also tend to be passive and incredibly hard on themselves. Oddly enough, I’m yet to meet anyone who is in the midst of an affair who says, “I feel so guilty, can you help me stop?” Instead, it’s always, “But I’m a good person.” If they get caught there’s a good chance they’ll feel guilt, but that’s not even guaranteed. Some people will always be able to justify their actions. This always makes me wonder, “So what does a bad person look like to you because people having an affair are normally seen as pretty low?” That’s the trouble with looking at what’s a good versus bad person; it tends to be relative. If you ask a thief, he’ll say “At least I’m not a murderer. They’re the worst.” If you ask a murderer, they’ll say, “At least I’m not a millennial. They’re the worst!” There’s always someone we can point to who is worse, which helps us justify our bad behaviour. ***The sad reality is, just as prison is full of “innocent” people, hell will be filled with “good” people.***

What I should note is our past doesn’t determine our future. For instance, ***it doesn’t matter what happens to a child, they can go either way.*** Tough childhoods can make people resentful or compassionate while a loving childhood can make people either entitled or carry on the loving spirit. There is no rule for how to make a good or bad person. Fortunately, how we respond to our childhoods is ultimately up to us. We can use it to make us good or bad with bad people using their childhood as an excuse for not being good. Your past, however, isn’t an excuse for being terrible in the present.

***The ultimate challenge for a Good Person is to love others and themselves in a healthy balance.*** We don’t want to leave others to suffer unnecessarily or give so much we suffer. We want to love properly and not love at the expense of others or ourselves.

Hopefully this week you’ll be able to see how you can be more in the middle.

## Jerk or Hero?

I recently watched *On Wings of Eagles*, a movie based on the true story of Eric Liddell. He's such an inspirational figure there are six different movies made about him beginning in 1981 with *Chariots of Fire*. Yes, that's the same movie that gave us the iconic slow motion heroic music "Chariots of Fire." In this most recent movie on Eric Liddell (2016) with actor Joseph Fiennes, the focus is his life during World War 2 while he was in China during the Japanese invasion. If I saw this movie twenty-five years ago, without any doubt I'd say he was a hero, but now I can't help but think he was actually selfish and, in a way, a jerk. I will now give a short breakdown of his life and let you decide if you are more like my old or new self. (Thank you Wikipedia for the information.)

1. Eric Liddell was an Olympic champion in 1924 (So far he looks pretty good).
2. Because of his conviction to keep the Sabbath holy, he turned down running an Olympic race he was expected to win gold. (Although I don't agree with his extreme stance of the Sabbath, it's impressive for someone to have such steadfast faith.) Crazy enough, after not running the Olympic race he was expected to win, he ended up winning gold and setting the world record for the 400m, which was a race he wasn't even a considered a contender to win. (So far he's still looking like a hero... and someone who had some help from God. Hopefully I don't get hit by lightning for this.)
3. Although he was British, because he was the son of missionaries, he was born and died in China, which leaves him considered to be China's first Olympic champion (Okay, in some ways he is definitely a hero)
4. Like his parents, he became a missionary and taught grades 1-12 students from wealthy families in the hope they would become

Christian. By connecting with them, these kids would grow up and have more influence on the rest of the country. This is the same basic idea St. Patrick used when he went to Ireland to share his faith, but he focused on meeting with kings and queens. Fun fact, the school Eric Liddell taught at is still in use.

5. In 1941, the British were advised to leave China, so Liddell sent his pregnant wife (also raised in a missionary family) and two daughters to her Canadian parents to be safe while he stayed to work at a mission serving the poor in China. He soon ended up being sent to the Weih sien Internment Camp, which is basically a slightly nicer version of a German concentration camp, so it was pretty awful. He spent his time helping and trying to cheer people up, especially the children who liked him so much they called him Uncle Eric. It was said, “[He] is the finest Christian gentleman it has been my pleasure to meet,” and “It is rare indeed that a person has the good fortune to meet a saint, but he came as close to it as anyone I have ever known.” It definitely looks good for him to be seen as a hero.
6. In this movie, he was offered a chance to leave in a prisoner exchange, but he gave up his spot for a pregnant woman in order for her to be given better care. The truth of this act is debated, but it is a good example of his conviction to put others first.
7. While in the internment camp, Liddell died from a brain tumor, which was considered sped up by him not taking better care of himself as he was more concerned with helping others.

So I’m sure you can clearly see why he is considered a hero and why he should be held as a great man – because he was – but here’s my problem with his story: He was a husband and father; those should have been his priority until his kids were older. Because he stayed in China when he was told to leave, he never even met his third daughter. He left his wife to raise three girls on her own and those girls grew up not having their dad. I know the World War was a different time and many people made sacrifices, but he could have easily found another way to help. The need back then was great. No matter where he went, he could have made a difference. One of the

problems I have with many of those in leadership (e.g. pastors and teachers) is they help others to the detriment of their own families. When you get married and/or become a parent, your family should be your number one priority. It becomes selfish to help others instead of fulfilling your family responsibilities. Even if staying was his choice, while in the internment camp, he should have been taking better care of himself in order to live longer in the hopes of seeing his family. His giving until it hurt caused him to die sooner, which ultimately hurt the people around him more than if he had spent a little more time taking care of his own needs and living longer.

***Sometimes the best way to help others is to take care of ourselves.***

I will admit that as I write this I feel conflicted because watching the movie I was angry at him for leaving his family, but now I wonder if being a missionary herself, perhaps his wife wanted him to stay because she would've stayed with him if she didn't have the kids. Either way, losing her husband in this way would've caused her some confusing emotions. There'd likely be anger he didn't leave the county with her, sadness not having him with her in Canada, guilt for not having stayed with him, and pride knowing her husband died a hero and she helped him achieve that.

Regardless of my opinion that he should've kept his family the priority, Eric Liddell earned the right to be called a hero. The world needs more people like him who want to bring hope and make the world a better place. His devotion to love and hope is inspiring.

This week may we all be a little more like Eric Liddell.



## **Let People Suffer** **(This isn't as mean as it sounds)**

When I was a youth pastor, I ran a bunch of mission trips through a wonderful group called Center for Student Missions (CSM). One of my favorite trips was to Los Angeles (I knew how to pick the right places to go). We spent a week serving in soup kitchens and food banks, and afterwards we celebrated by going to Disneyland (I definitely knew how to pick the right places to go). Los Angeles was actually a really great place to do a mission trip (not just because we went to Disneyland after... but that helped) because of the infamous Skidrow, which contains one of the largest consistent populations of homeless people in the United States with over 5000 people living there. In the heart of Skidrow is a shelter that was seriously impressive. It had multiple levels with each one representing a client being one step closer to being integrated into regular society on their own with a job and a place to live. At the end of our tour we were at the top of the building where I was able to look down over a large section of Skidrow. It was shocking to see the thousands of people on the street hanging around just outside the shelter doing nothing. I asked the tour guide why they weren't inside getting help, and he said it was because they didn't want it. On some level they were comfortable enough with their lifestyle that they didn't want to change it. The shelter was there and ready to help everyone who came in the front doors and protocols were in place to encourage the people outside to come in, but it was surprisingly rare for someone to actually want help to get off the streets. Being homeless was the life they knew, and familiarity often feels safer. When I thought about it after, who am I to tell them how they should live? It'd be arrogant for me to say, "You need to live like me. The stress of home ownership is a dream come true." I'm sure you can think of someone who feels it's their job to tell you how to live, but meddling in others' lives is rarely appreciated (if ever). Realistically, as long as the homeless people are not breaking the law or hurting others, I should let them be as role modeled by the shelter.

At night, the streets of Skidrow filled up with tents as the homeless people put up their tiny shelters. What was really interesting was the “residents” looked proud of their little piece of land. They kept it surprisingly organized and clean. In the morning, everyone packed up their tent, swept their spot, and carried on with their day. It was definitely a way of life for them. Meanwhile, just a short distance away was this shelter with a soft bed waiting for them. Despite this option, thousands of people didn’t want the help because they were content with the way things were. Ultimately, the workers at this shelter had to accept that they couldn’t force everyone to change, and they needed to focus on helping those who wanted help. As every caregiver must learn, you only have so much energy and resources to help, which means we need to be smart with how we use them.

As an outsider, choosing to live on the streets because it’s familiar can sound crazy, but if we look at our own lives, we likely have something we’re currently doing that’s limiting our own life, yet refuse to do anything about it. For some of us, it’s an obvious addiction like drinking and eating too much junk while for others it’s the addiction of pleasing others or trying to feel good enough. Perhaps it’s the opposite problem, and we don’t care enough about others. How many people yell and attack others when all they want is to feel loved? How many people live a life that’s constantly in a state of feeling overwhelmed or underwhelmed, but they don’t do anything to help themselves? As Leo Tolstoy said, ***“Everyone wants to change the world, but nobody wants to change themselves.”*** How true is that statement? It’s easy to see everyone else’s mistakes, but we ignore our own. Jesus said “Don’t worry about the speck in someone else’s eye when there’s a plank in your own.” (para) If I was God looking down on the world, I’d have a sore neck from constantly shaking my head at the decisions people make: (me as God) “Stop doing that! It’s only making your life worse!” The biggest thing for me is why do we keep spending billions on “curing” cancer when we should be spending more time and energy on preventing it?

As a therapist, I quickly learned I can try to encourage people to want to change and do what I can to teach tools that can help, but I can’t force people to grow; that’s up to them – I need to let people suffer.

Instead, I need to grow myself in order to be the best role model I can be while being ready to help when given the opportunity. I once worked with a couple for several months and every week they left saying what I taught made sense and was really helpful. The next week when they returned they didn't do anything I taught no matter how much they liked it. It was like they were comfortable in their fighting. Fortunately, I know it's not my job to force change or I'd get discouraged and want to give up. It's hard to get people to go to therapy. It's even harder to get them to continue going to therapy. And the hardest thing is to get them to use what they learn in therapy because that involves making changes. Change is hard, especially when we're already so busy we're just trying to survive. Thus, ***instead of focusing on who I'm not helping, I need to be grateful for those I can.*** Even further, ***instead of focusing on what's wrong with other people, I need to work on removing the plank in my own eye.*** We all have our areas where we need to grow, and ***we need to be given the opportunities to both fall flat on our faces and the encouragement to get back up.*** There is freedom when we stop trying to control other people even if it means letting them suffer in order for them to realize they need to make a change (aka don't enable). This lesson is incredibly important for parents to learn because the best teachers role model what they want their students to do and avoid the adage, "Don't do as I do; do as I say." ***If you want your kids to be happy, learn how to be happy yourself and lead the way.***

This week may you learn the freedom that letting others suffer can bring.

## Lesson 44

# Careers & Finding Fulfillment in Life

A few years ago I saw David Copperfield perform in Las Vegas. It was really exciting because I had watched many of his specials growing up and I was now going to see him perform live. It was like a dream... I never had. Of course, it would've been a dream if I realized people on TV were real people – who knew? When the show started, there he was in front of me in all his magicalness... and he couldn't have looked any more bored if he tried. Someone told me he was probably drunk because he was in a bad spot, but that's not much better. The whole show, it was like he was saying, "Here's trick... and here's a trick... are we done yet? Ugh, this feels like math class. It never ends!" Here's a guy who got into magic because he loved it and is one of the best in the world, yet he looked miserable. His career didn't bring him happiness. Does that mean he chose the wrong career or is it possible that a career doesn't necessarily bring happiness?

If a career doesn't bring happiness, why do so many people say we should choose a career based on what we love doing? Is that how we should choose a career? Why do most mechanics get into working with cars? Because they love cars. After a long day of work, however, what do mechanics want to do? Anything but work on cars. They likely got into the field because they loved working on their own car and it was a wonderful distraction from school, but once it became the job they did all day, it lost the element of pleasure. It used to be the escape from the daily grind, but now it's part of the daily grind. Choosing a career because you love it is risky because it'll likely soon become something you no longer love as it's something you have to do. To make matters worse, the thing that helped you cope with the day to day is now part of the struggle leaving you needing to find a new coping tool.

My advice to people is avoid this trap; don't make a career out of what you love doing. ***Make a career out of what you can tolerate doing for long periods of time.*** That's it. A job is a job. Yes, I'm aware there's a reason I'm not a motivational speaker. People put so much pressure on themselves to do what they love and/or find the perfect career, but that's unnecessary stress. It's ultimately a first world idea started by a few people who made a lot of money on it. I

hear young people say things like “I don’t know what career I should do because I don’t know what I want to do for the rest of my life.” A career, however, isn’t a rest of your life thing. It’s supposed to evolve and lead to new opportunities. ***A career is filled with stepping stones.*** Even in a factory, you can do different jobs and possibly move into management. There’s comfort in the familiar, but we don’t want to go stagnant. We need new challenges and ways to evolve as people. This means picking a career is more about picking a career “path.” Sometimes we take a wrong step or two, but there’s always ways to get on the right path. Hopefully this will take some pressure off the decision because ***what you choose today isn’t forever***; it isn’t a prison sentence. It is the first stepping stone to many others.

***I should point out that a job can make life easier to enjoy, but a job isn’t what makes people have good lives. It can influence, but it’s not the root of happiness.*** A job is always a job. It’s the thing we do in order to make money to do the things we want to do. Consider this: There’s good and bad in all things. Some jobs have more good than bad in our opinion, but it’s all perspective. ***Our happiness is more determined by how we see life, the relationships we create, and what we do with our time outside of work that helps us live fruitful lives.***

Fortunately, this is great news because this takes away the pressure of finding the “perfect” career. We just need something we can tolerate for now because there’s a good chance we’ll have new opportunities in the future for different positions. If we do our jobs well and remain friendly, doors tend to open.

So here’s the problem: ***If a job isn’t going to bring happiness and fulfillment, what will?*** While some people see their job being the reason they’re not happy, others try to fill the void in their life with travel, thrills, drinking, money, sex, marriage/divorce, kids, or religion, but none of this will fill that hole. There is no *one* thing that will answer this problem of feeling like something is missing. The answer is actually split into three categories: ***We need connection with God, people, and ourselves.*** All three of these need to be in place. Any one or two of these will still leave us wanting. Jesus said the two most

important commandments are to love God, others, and ourselves, which can be translated to mean ***we need connection to all three in order to have a chance to feel whole.*** Remembering we're created by a loving God can help us love ourselves more in our journey to learn how to be self aware and self accepting (if He loves me, I should love myself), which will in turn help us be more accepting of others. And as we do this, we will hopefully find more of a connection to God (good relationships help us feel God's love), which will free us of the strains of this world as we see the bigger picture – happiness starts and ends with God. The world we're in is temporary and in our spoiled culture it can be hard to remember that because it's easy to get caught up with money, social media, illnesses, and stresses, but we need to see beyond all that. As the saying goes: Don't miss the forest for the trees.

Please know this is not me trying to be preachy (I can be much preachier). I'm simply trying to help others see that ***any unhappiness in our lives won't be filled by one thing like a new job.*** If it was, then celebrities who achieved their dreams should be the happiest people followed by those who save lives like doctors and nurses, but instead I find these careers are filled with people who are disillusioned and lost: "Look what I do. Why aren't I happier?" Happiness coming from God, others, and ourselves isn't a new teaching; it's a forgotten one.

This week may you consider how you can find more fulfillment in life by balancing loving yourself, others, and God.

## Lesson 45

# Help to Appreciate Your Job (& Other Things)

When I was a teenager, I remember saying to my youth pastor, “When I’m older, I don’t need a big house; I just want one like my parents.” His response was to laugh and say, “What are you talking about? Your parents have a really big house.” Back then I didn’t get what he was talking about, but now that I’m older and a home owner myself, I get it. He was right; my parents have a big house, but as a kid, compared to the custom built, three story mini-mansions, how could our one storey house be big? Besides, I was a country kid and all my country friends had similar sized houses. My family wasn’t special. Sure, the house had five bedrooms and a big rec room for running around on top of a property that’s as wide as four house properties on my current street, but it was just a one storey, ranch style house. I had no idea how lucky I was because I didn’t know how different life was for others. ***How often do we miss how lucky we have it because what’s considered special to many is just “normal” to us?*** Realizing how lucky we are is incredibly important, especially when it comes to appreciating our jobs.

Here are a couple fun facts I found:

1. In 2020, the average wage earner made \$54 630. If 45-54 years old, the average was \$67 400.
2. In 2023, 11% of Canadians made \$100 000 a year or more.
3. In 2020, the median, after tax household income in Canada was \$66 800 (that’s about two thirds of what was made before tax).
4. In 2023, households that made less than \$53 413 are considered lower class, between \$53 413 to \$106 827 are labeled middle class, between \$106 827 to \$236 000 are upper middle class, and above that is upper class.

***Side note:*** If you make over \$100 000 a year and you’re struggling to pay your bills, this is a clear sign you need to re-evaluate how you’re spending because almost 90% of the people in the country are surviving with less.

To better appreciate our jobs, we need to look beyond our paystub:

- 1) Is there any satisfaction in your job? For instance, does it give you a sense of accomplishment or connect you to good people?
- 2) How long is your commute? (Driving an hour to work will cost you a lot of time and money.)
- 3) Is your job secure from layoffs or at risk of dry spells where you'll make less?
- 4) Is there a benefit package and/or a pension plan?
- 5) Is there room to substantially increase income in your career?
- 6) Are you home in time to have regular family dinners?
- 7) Do you get to work from home occasionally like on really bad snow days or if your kids are sick?
- 8) Do you get paid sick days and/or holiday pay? (e.g. business owners only get paid if we're at work)
- 9) Can you leave work early to take your kids to things like dance and hockey games?
- 10) What are your holidays like? Do you get to choose when you take them?
- 11) Do you get tax breaks for your expenses? (The one perk of being a business owner)
- 12) Do you have to pay someone to do your bookkeeping and/or taxes like a business owner?
- 13) How much does extra childcare cost (e.g. daycare, before and after school care, camps etc)?
- 14) Is there a deeper satisfaction in your job like helping people or do you need to find it after hours in a volunteer position?
- 15) Does your job stimulate your brain, overwork it, or are you doing a job like an assembly line worker where you have lots of brain space to enjoy activities after work?



- 16) Are you able to leave work at work or are you constantly on call or needing to think about it?
- 17) Is your workspace climate controlled or do you work in potentially harsh conditions?
- 18) How much does your work outfit or tools cost you?
- 19) Does your job mean you need specialist visits like to chiropractors or massage therapists because of wear and tear on your body?
- 20) Do you have physical, emotional, or mental energy left for your family after work?
- 21) Does your job allow you a routine to make life less chaotic?
- 22) Do you get any perks with your job like a car, phone, or laptop to save you from buying your own?
- 23) Do you enjoy your colleagues, clients, and/or work atmosphere?
- 24) Do you get regular sleep or do you have to work nights?
- 25) Do you get paid overtime or have a chance for a side job?
- 26) Do you get healthy social interactions at work or is it too much or too little?
- 27) How hard was it to get to this position? (e.g. the bar exam and MCATs are pretty brutal)
- 28) Do you have busy seasons or is it steady?
- 29) Do you have to bring work home with you to do after hours?
- 30) What extra fees do you have to pay like insurance or a governing body? (e.g. I pay over \$1000/year for insurance and for my overseeing college)
- 31) Do you have to do extra learning to continue your position? (e.g. certain designations require ongoing learning)

32) How bad is the worst part of your job and can you tolerate it?

Hopefully this list will help you better appreciate your job or confirm you need a change. If you're still struggling with your job, it can help to remember being unemployed and looking for work is one of the worst experiences you can ever have (next to online dating – brutal). It crushes your sense of self-worth and purpose while pushing you toward a pit of hopelessness. Even if we don't like our job and we're looking for a new one, we need to be grateful for what we have because at least we have a paycheck. Of course, being grateful doesn't mean we can't look for a better job. It just helps the present feel better.

This week may you take a moment to remember how lucky you are.

## Lesson 46

# A Fundamental Rule for Success in Life

This week I saw a man with a spider on his face. I wish it was an actual spider, so he could just brush it away, and writing this would just freak out people who are afraid of spiders (aka wussy people): (person scared of spiders) “Oh no, an insect like creature with 8 legs instead of 6! The two extra legs make this invertebrate, exoskeleton, non-bug terrifying.” (Fun fact, a spider is not an insect or bug... which I just learned). This guy I saw had a tattoo of a spider on his face, and it definitely wasn't subtle. It also wasn't cutesy like he wanted to commemorate his love for the book *Charlotte's Web* with a cute little spider writing something like “winner” on his face. No, this was a full sized, hair exploding tarantula covering a chunk of his face. This might make more sense if he was trying to hide a giant hairy mole. I'd actually give him credit if that was the case because he was trying to make something good out of something unfortunate: (person with mole turned spider) “I gave him googly eyes and used pipe cleaners for legs. It's no longer a mole; it's an art project turned fashion statement.”

Minus the tattoo, he wasn't even that bad looking. It's not like he was thinking "Maybe this will distract people from my elephant ears and pig nose." Maybe the distraction worked and I missed them. What's crazy is having a tattoo means he chose to put this giant thing on his face – for life. It wasn't a marker drawing from a prank; it was permanent and he chose it. It's not a birth mark that happened to look like a spider; that would be kind of cool: "I was born a bad boy, Spider Guy." No, this was an actual needle pricked, ink blot on his face, which means he picked the tattoo, saved his money (or went into debt), and chose to spend \$500 (or whatever it cost) for someone to permanently scar his face. Even if he had a really bad drunk night and got the tattoo by mistake, everyday he's waking up, looking in a mirror, and thinking, "I made a good choice," because he's not trying to have it removed. It's like he saw *Home Alone* as a child and when McCully Culkin's character put the tarantula on the robber's face, he was like "That's it! That's what I need on my face to reach my full potential." Even if he somehow had an unusual attraction to spiders, put the tattoo somewhere not visible or at least somewhere he can easily see it to enjoy. Instead, he was like "I'm going to commit to this. Put it on my face. Tattoos are pain free, right? Ehn, whatever, I need to do this to show my love for my childhood pet, Ugly Hair." My parents gave me a spider because they didn't love me enough to get a puppy." Putting the tattoo on his face is essentially saying, "I'm happy not working a job that's very respected; I want to be hidden in the back." He can't even be a hitman because the marking makes him way too obvious a suspect (policeman): "I don't know what the crime is, but I'm guessing he did it." Maybe I'm crazy, but I've never looked at someone and thought, "You know what would make you more attractive? The tattoo of a giant creepy crawly across your face; the bigger the better." I'm sure God's not in heaven thinking: "I can't believe I never thought to have images of arachnids on people's faces. Images of ugly, exoskeleton creatures people normally squish dead because they hate them in their houses would've made their faces that much more beautiful. Good thing this guy could help me see that." Seeing this guy (a guy I assume is a genius), reminded me of the lesson I learned a long time ago: ***We need to balance the past, present***

*and future.* If we get overly focused or neglect one of these, it can really screw us up as the following describes.

**Past:** When we get stuck in the past, we typically end up swimming in a pool of regret and shame. It can also leave us stuck in the glory days, and not pushing ourselves to new accomplishments like the old guy bragging about his high school football days. On the other hand, if we ignore the past, we'll likely repeat our mistakes. We need the past to help teach us important lessons to grow and be safe. We also need to know when to cover up mistakes (e.g. spider face).

**Present:** When we only focus on the present, we can make some terrible choices (e.g. spider face): "It seemed like a good idea at the time." I find the three most common mistakes for people stuck in the present are racking up debt, cheating, and yelling. All three of these leave the person in some type of financial, or emotional debt. Money wise, the Great Depression taught us to spend less than we make and if we are investing in something we need to be careful it won't cause us to lose everything (or this is what we should've learned). If we forgot about that major event, we had the crash in 2008, which re-taught us the same lessons. It's sad that people are still getting seriously in debt to credit card and loan companies because they got sucked into the lure of "I can pay for it later." Similarly, cheating, I find is largely the result of people getting stuck in the moment and not considering the big picture. Cheating feels good in the moment, but it has a heavy price to pay later. Similarly, the third problem, yelling, is a mistake that happens when we're stuck in a moment. Unfortunately, I'm yet to find screaming a useful tool for reducing conflict: (person being yelled at) "Our problem is solved! Thank you for yelling at me. I feel so loved and connected." Getting caught in the present can get us in trouble, but on the other hand, the present can help us get things done as we get lost in the moment and enjoy what we're doing. At its best, it can also help us find a sense of peace and contentment.

**Future:** Getting stuck in the future can prevent us from enjoying the moment and thinking about what we still have to do. It can cause a lot of anxiety about what will happen and cause us to freeze. Fortunately, the future can also inspire us and help us have a better idea of what we should be doing in the present. It's typically helpful to have something planned in the future that we can look forward to whether seeing a friend or going somewhere special because it gives us hope and strength to handle the present. As I often teach, live so your future self will thank you (e.g. I doubt there's many people with a hangover thanking their past self).

This week may you find the balance of remembering the past, dreaming of a better future, and getting lost in the present.

## Lesson 47

### Are you Shy or Rude?

Back in my 20s, when I was dating my ex-girlfriend of five years, a time I learned a lot because I made so many mistakes (whereas now when I'm perfect... if you have no idea what perfect is like this wordy and rambling introductory sentence), my ex girlfriend's divorced dad married a woman who had two kids of her own. Even though I had limited dating/life experience, I still knew this was a disaster situation. Her dad was a good man... dumb, but that's implied when I say "man": (her dad) "I can make anything work." Her dad and this woman dated for about half a year before he proposed and they were married shortly after that. A year dating to marriage can work; it did for my parents, but they didn't have kids... and they were both good people. This woman? Ummm. Prior to the wedding, my ex had seen this woman five times, and I write "seen" because these meetings never included my ex and this woman talking. Including when my ex picked up the family phone and it was her, they maybe talked for a total of six minutes before the wedding and most of that was: (ex) "Hello?" (woman) "Is your dad there?" Are you shocked this marriage was a disaster? Sounds like a terrific start. The wedding was so poorly planned, the couple booked an 11am ceremony on the day my ex and I already had tickets to Canada's Wonderland for the

Christian concert day. My ex was really hurt, so her dad ended up telling his three kids they could leave after the ceremony – so they did. I'm sure her dad was hurt they didn't stay while hers did (although they didn't already have plans that day). Meanwhile, his kids felt rejected because the couple rushed the wedding and picked a day without considering them. Instead of this being a day to create family unity, it added to the disconnection. If nothing else, he was consistent.

After the wedding, it was about a year before my ex refused to go to her dad's house because she felt so unwelcome. My ex's dad claimed his new wife was shy, but *many times when people say shy, what they're really doing is giving an excuse for being rude*. The truth is you're either friendly or rude. I grew up hearing, "Children are meant to be seen and not heard." It was a joke... kind of. Either way, I ended up taking this to heart and was very quiet, but I always said hi to people. As I was also taught, there's a point when "quiet" is rude.

My favourite example of this woman's behavior came one afternoon when I entered the house with my ex and her two siblings. As always, I entered the house and said a general hello like a normal person: "Hi, we're here; we're not burglars." That's not what I said... but you know what I mean. In this situation, the stepmom was there, and she said "Hi, Chad." That's it. She didn't greet the others even though they were clearly beside me. She could've said "Hey guys," or the more inclusive "Hey, folks," or "Hey, gang," (although only weird people say those), but she specifically said my name to spite the other three kids. That was the normal dynamic. The stepmom's argument was the kids didn't greet her, so why should she greet them? After all, she was "shy." Um, no, you're rude with a vindictive spirit. You're the grownup. It's your job to role model good behaviour. Plus, you say hi because it's the right thing to do. What she should've realized was these three young people felt screwed over by their dad who seemingly put his love life before them. In his defence, he's a super friendly person who gets along with everyone... kind of; he did end up with two ex-wives. Because of her attitude, he soon accepted the truth – she was rude (or a word that starts with a "b" – bad).

What we need to remember is having a shy moment is normal; it's fear. Walking into a room full of strangers, who feels ready to mingle minus con-men? We are meant to have some social anxiety in order to prevent us from doing dumb things like taking our pants off and belching the alphabet. (I can't belch the alphabet, but part of me always wished I could.) Despite shyness, you're supposed to push past it. ***The great thing is the more you push past your fear, the easier it is to push past it the next time.*** That's basic social skills. If you asked my ex if she thought this woman was being shy or rude, she'd say rude. If you asked my ex if she was being shy or rude to her stepmom, she'd say she was being rude and don't call her stepmom. She was angry. Your dad marries a woman you don't know and who plays a victim complaining the children aren't nicer when she's done nothing to connect with them? Yeah, my ex should've been angry. She loved her dad, and this was a slap in the face as it felt like she didn't matter to him. Daughters take their dad's behavior very personally. For instance, if a dad cheats, the daughter often takes it personally because if he loved her, he wouldn't need another woman in his life. The daughter wants to feel like she's enough, and that's the same thing that happened here; my ex didn't feel enough.

Blending families is tough, but this was a guaranteed disaster situation. Rudeness tears relationships apart, and that's exactly what happened – this marriage failed. The plus side is my ex's dad soon found an incredible woman with whom he's happily married and the kids like her a lot more.

Years later, I was running a youth retreat at a church I had been working at for a few months and I had two fifteen year old boys who grew up going to that church in my car. They both agreed the people at the church were rude because no one greeted them Sunday morning. Fun fact, this was the first time these boys had talked to each other – see where I'm going with this? They both said they don't say hi to others because other people don't say hi to them. Um, you're angry at people for doing what you're doing? There are a few words for that: rude, hypocrite, stupid. That's like a bank robber hating the thief who stole his getaway car – you both steal, so you

both suck. Of course, both boys claimed they were shy. I asked them if everyone in the church didn't say hi because they were shy would that be acceptable? They were confused. Why is it that when we don't say hi we're shy, but when others don't, they're rude? ***It can be hard to say hi, but the hard path is normally the healthier one.*** Just like how exercising is harder than watching TV... unless you're watching *The Wiggles*; that show is terrible – it's like Peppa Pig terrible.

This week, may you do for others what you expect others to do for you.

## Lesson 48

# How Superficial Are You?

After thirteen years of working on my emotional health I thought I had reached a pretty impressive level... and as you can probably guess, that's exactly when I realized I'm not as healthy as I thought. (This was written three years ago, so now I know I'm amazing... for brief moments.) Emotionally healthy people still have ups and downs; they just have more ups and not as deep downs that are shorter.) In one simple test I learned I still have a strong superficial side. Yea for a growth opportunity. (Yeah, I'm not sure if that's sarcasm or not either.) So here's what happened. I was holding my baby daughter and thought if I could ask a genie for three magic wishes for her what would they be? I didn't actually choose my set three, but I thought of a few options:

1. She's a joyful person who can always see the good.
2. She finds activities she enjoys and finds pride in doing.
3. Her career path brings both financial and emotional satisfaction.
4. She develops a meaningful relationship with God.
5. She is given opportunities to experience life in a full way and great people to share it with.
6. She learns what it means to be respectful and appreciate others.



7. Her parents and grandmas live long and happy lives (that'll make her life easier, especially if we can babysit her future kids).

See how boring that list is? It's so practical. What would my list look like if I was making three wishes to a genie for me?

1. A money tree that grows enough money that we can pay off the houses of people my wife and I love and to be able to afford biannual trips with family and/or friends we can cover.
2. My writing and performing to become world renown for helping people be happier.
3. To be able to fly like Superman.

And this is why I realized I'm not as emotionally developed as I thought. How is there such a divide? How can I be so practical for my daughter, yet so superficial for me? The funny thing is the first list is all things that are kind of in her control. She can work on being positive and developing skills and relationships. My list? Not so much. Flying isn't going to happen no matter how many jumping jacks I do or how positive I am. Why aren't I more worried about being a joyful person who can always see the good? I work on the things in this list, but I'm terrible at being full of joy and I struggle with a lot of that other stuff. Sure, I've been blessed with things like being close with the family I grew up with and the family I made, but I still have so many things I need to improve like balancing how much I work. Maybe I want these things for my daughter because I don't have control of it. Maybe I've given up hope for gaining the things I wish for my daughter. Maybe I'm that special – who knows? What's strange is I don't want my daughter to have a lot of money because money often ruins people's lives. Statistically, ***after our basic needs are met, the more money we make, the less happy we become.***

Money is dangerous, which is why so many people win the lottery only to go bankrupt and/or become miserable. Money is the number one topic Jesus talked about: "You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money." (Mat 6:24b) Maybe I'm not as superficial for my daughter because I want to be able to provide her things in the future, which I'll only be able to do if she's not super rich. Maybe I'm not worried

about her being able to fly because I'd end up wondering if Superman was her real father.

My one friend did this test and the two lists he made for his kids and himself were identical. Does that mean he's a better person or does it mean he's boring? Who wouldn't want to be able to fly?

Regardless, this test of three wishes you would ask for your child versus three wishes you'd ask for yourself is very telling of where your mind is at, and mine clearly needs a little work.

This week may you discover something interesting about yourself like I did.

## Lesson 49

# **When You're Sad Without a Good Reason**

Feeling sad sucks. As a guy feeling pretty much anything sucks (feelings... gross). In general, feeling sad tends to suck away our motivation and desire to do things. Fortunately, this can be a good thing. Like all of our emotions, sadness is meant to be a gift that can help protect us and possibly lead to growth. Unlike anger, which energizes us and can give us a surge of strength to do things beyond what we can normally do, sadness makes us slow down and reflect on what's going on. This can lead to reminiscing about good times and help in healing like in the loss of a loved one. Sadness can also help us re-evaluate the situation and consider how we can prevent being in that spot again. I was once told that tears are our body's way of bringing new life like spring rains. Being sad can be a blessing... it can also feel crippling.

What I find frustrating is sometimes I'll go through a sad period and there's no real reason for it. I feel depleted of motivation and interest, yet I have no logical reason for it. I know I'm affected by certain times of the year like when we change the clocks in the fall, but that still doesn't feel like a good enough reason to feel sad. This

kind of feeling can make me feel like a wuss and/or a failure. At least if there's been a death or major life change, the sadness would make sense. Last June I went through a low period when I should've been fine. I love the long days of spring, I had healthy habits in place (e.g. regular exercise and every night doing my thankful exercises), and nothing really terrible happened while a few really good things came together. There wasn't a good reason for it, but I was sad, and it didn't matter what positive thoughts I put in my brain, my body just wanted to be sad. Sometimes we fall into an emotion even if it doesn't make a lot of sense. ***Ultimately, to be emotionally healthy, I need to accept this is just the way it is without punishing myself; I also need to continue doing my healthy habits while reminding myself this will pass.*** One of the worst things we can do when we feel down is stop doing our healthy habits because... well, they're healthy, so they help us.

When people feel down, I find they often become like snipers in the army; they pull out their sniper rifle and they look down the scope for the single target of their sadness, but outside of going through grief for a loss, ***a period of sadness is usually a sign of a number of things going on.*** From my experience, the three most popular targets to blame are our partner, our job, or something that happened in our past. If someone gets divorced, however, they don't suddenly become happy. If someone changes jobs or has a vacation, it doesn't flip everything around to Happy Land because the problems are still there. At best, this change will be a short distraction. One of the most popular distractions is a new relationship because when someone falls in love (whether with a person or with a new pet) they might feel better, but they're not actually better. They simply have a temporary high from the new relationship. Those sad feelings are still there and ready to resurface when the honeymoon phase is gone. Of course, having relationship problems or issues at work can knock us down, but how low we get is also a sign of how other things in our life are going. Remember the first lesson on the four parts of the person? How are we helping our body, mind, heart, and soul? There was also the second lesson, "12 tips to be Emotionally Healthy." These are both excellent lessons to point out how one thing can trigger a sad period (the straw that broke the camel's back) but there

isn't a simple cure because there's always more going on under the surface. After considering the first two lessons, sometimes all we can do is embrace the sadness and use it to reflect and consider whether you need to change something(s) in your life or simply ride it out.

From my experience, here is a list of options that can contribute to why people can go through a sad period:

- 1) We are going through a loss (i.e. grief). This is like how our body tries to heal a cut or a broken bone. The sadness is a natural result from our body trying to heal itself.
- 2) It's a natural result after having a high whether chemical induced (e.g. cocaine), returning home after a vacation, or after a major accomplishment (e.g. the fall after the high of winning a championship or retiring).
- 3) Something is trying to come to the surface that we've been burying. If this is the case, we don't want to obsess about what it could be because if our brain wants us to know, it'll let us know.
- 4) It can be a sign that our body needs something like rest, exercise, or a better diet.
- 5) It can be a seasonal thing.
- 6) We're burning ourselves out doing too much and/or caring too much about helping others.
- 7) We can become sad when we expect to be happy like at Christmas or in the summer, but we're not. The lack of happiness can lead to sadness.
- 8) It's a sign we need to make some changes in our lives like what's described in the first two lessons in this book.

Whether we're sad for a good reason or not, the way we should handle it is the same: Be patient and kind to ourselves (beating ourselves up never helps) and continue doing healthy habits like doing thankful exercises, having healthy social and alone time (and NOT social media time; that's the worst), venting to process what's going

on and get out any bottled feelings (e.g. journal, talk, and/or do something physical), help others where we can while letting others help us, and fulfill our daily responsibilities like going to work and keeping a clean house. There is no magical cure to get rid of sadness, but a simple math formula for it is:

Overcoming Sadness = Healthy Habits + Time

This week may you consider if there are any other healthy habits you should put into your routine to prepare for down periods.

## Lesson 50

# Money CAN buy happiness

*“It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life,.. God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that **they take no time to brood over the past.**”*

Ecc 5:18b, 20

I remember reading an interview with one of the wealthiest men in the world who made his money off of owning properties. The interviewer asked him what was enough, and his response was very simple: “I don’t need all the land; I just want whatever land is touching mine.” As this suggests, the pursuit of wealth can become an insatiable hunger. Money has its risks, especially since the detective show *Castle* claims that the three main motives for murder are love, protecting a secret, and money, and this has to be true because TV never lies.

Money and its pursuit may have its potential risks, but money isn’t the disease; it’s more like a medicine with potentially dangerous side effects like depression meds potentially causing suicide or pain killers being highly addictive. I have personally discovered that money CAN buy happiness. Daniel Tosh, one of my favourite comedians, says, “People say money doesn’t buy happiness, but it can buy a Wave Runner. Have you ever seen someone sad on a Wave Runner? It’s impossible.” When I say money CAN buy happiness I don’t mean it can buy us stuff that gives us temporary excitement. I mean money

CAN buy happiness in the sense that we CAN feel completely at peace. ***Money CAN buy happiness when we find contentment with what we have and where we are in life*** (i.e. we accept “our lot in life”).

When I originally wrote this lesson, if you combined both mine and my wife’s salary, we made about as much as a public school principal. Individually, we made significantly less than government workers like policemen, firemen, and teachers. As one teacher said to me, “I’m glad I got a raise because (naming the amount of money I make a year without realizing it) is total garbage!” That was a good moment for my manhood: (in my head) “Yup, my taxes have given you the opportunity to say that my wage is garbage. This feels really fair.” I bring up this point about how much I made because I want to be clear that when I originally wrote this I did not make very much money compared to a lot of people... and I like to make digs at government workers as much as I can because many of them are whiners: “I’m not happy because I don’t make enough.” Nope, that’s not it. That’s having a sniper moment as described in the previous lesson and missing the real reasons for not being happy. In this case, it’s something practical – not following a budget.

Despite how much I made when I wrote this, I felt happy, genuinely happy. ***Happiness is simply a sense of contentment.*** It’s being at peace, which is rooted in being thankful. Of course, being genuinely happy I could still get angry; I wasn’t delusional – I was happy. Happy people still feel all of the primary emotions, mad, sad, fear, and happy; they just experience the other emotions less often as they’re more secure and less defensive and judgemental. They are essentially happy people with times of feeling the other emotions and not be sad people, mad people, or anxious people with happy moments.

***Please Note:*** This lesson was written when my first daughter was 17 months and my wife was on maternity leave still. It was also two years before my second daughter was born, which was at the start of COVID. Back then my life was in a beautiful, peaceful spot... which was right before the storm. It’s amazing how a second child

and a pandemic tends to ruin the peace. Overall, I'm still happy, but the phase of my current life makes it more of a challenge to be as content as I was when I originally wrote this lesson. Fortunately, I know this chaos is just a phase and there'll be better ones in the future like when all the construction at my house is done. Renovations should be called fun-ovations or maybe more appropriately, what-was-I-thinking-ovations.

One of the most important factors in my ability to find peace is because of money: how I see it, treat it, and follow a budget. As King Solomon teaches: "To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life—this is indeed a gift from God." (Ecc 5:19b) There are many people who make more money than I do and have achieved much greater successes, but they don't accept their "lot in life." They can't find peace and happiness because there is always something more they think they need or this pursuit has left them with crushing debt. I may be content, but I still have dreams and aspirations, but I don't need them to work out in order to "one day" be happy like I used to think I did. I still care about people and want to make them happy, but I don't *need* to make them happy anymore. ***I'm content, which is at the root of happiness.*** Being content is like saying "I have things to hope for, but I have enough in this moment," which means you live very responsibly by delaying satisfaction until you can properly afford it. It means you have a cushion of savings and don't live paycheck to paycheck. I'd also argue it means you don't work a job with a commute that sucks your soul dry in order to have more stuff when you could make less and live closer to home. ***Time is often more valuable than money.***

As I once read in monk philosophy: Everything you own takes a part of you as it requires you to take care of it, maintain it, and protect it from others. The more you have, the more of a slave you become. Money can buy stuff or it can buy happiness. How are you going to use it?

Important tips to find happiness through money:

1. ***Donate:*** There is pleasure found in helping others. As a Christian, I was raised to donate 10% (or more), which is insane

to some, but as we give, it changes our hearts and helps the world around us. When it comes to donating I recommend picking a select few charities to support and not feel like you have to help every case you see or give when you're asked at stores. Besides, I'd rather give in a way that gives me back a tax receipt.

2. ***Spend Less than You Make:*** Living paycheck to paycheck adds a lot of stress. What's crazy to me is sometimes the people who make in the upper middle classes are the ones struggling the most with money because they don't budget. We need to know how much money we have to spend and not just buy because we think we should be able to afford it.
3. ***Learn how to live without:*** Because I was so poor and cheap in my twenties (being a student or youth pastor doesn't bring in the big bucks), I learned how to be content without things like going to restaurants and wearing expensive clothes. In the long run, this limited lifestyle was a great teaching ground for being content with less.
4. ***Find ways to reduce spending:*** I haven't paid for a haircut in over 16 years because my wife does it and no, she was never trained; it was full on experiment and guessing, but I'm a guy and it's hair, so who cares? If you like getting your haircut, great, find something else that can allow you to reduce spending like fasting once a week or have an older phone or cheaper plan.
5. ***Avoid Costly Habits:*** Don't develop unnecessary habits that cost money like buying coffee every day because that really adds up.
6. ***Enjoy Simplicity:*** Learn to appreciate the smaller things in life and avoid the trap of buying all the latest and greatest. Show offs are sad in two ways – they're lame and they end up emotionally sad because nothing they buy satisfies them for long.
7. ***Buy What You can Afford:*** This includes doing your best to pay cash for your car and/or avoid interest payments. Paying interest



is throwing money away and prevents you from having money to buy things in the future.

8. ***Credit Cards are a Gift (when used properly):*** Buy everything with your credit card and pay it off monthly. Using your credit card gives you a tally of all your expenses, it offers insurance on what you purchase, and even better, the right card will give points or cash back.
9. ***Be Open to Cheaper Ways of Doing Things:*** I love the library; everything is free and there's no long term clutter. I also like to travel with family or friends in order to share the costs. My wife and I have never actually travelled and had a room to the two of us besides our honeymoon, which was a trip we saved money on because it was through a timeshare sales pitch deal – yes, I'm that cheap.
10. ***Budget:*** Budgets help you know how much money you have to work with and can be great for seeing how you can spend less. It also helps point out where your money is going. For instance, if you spend \$10 on drinks a week, over the year you'll spend \$520. If you pay \$50 a month on your phone that's \$600 a year. Some people have \$100 plans, which means they're paying \$1200 a year on a phone. That's a lot of hours of work in order to pay for a phone. Is it really worth it? Your budget can help determine that.

***Tip:*** It's also helpful to learn how to budget time because that means we'll do the things we need to be doing. ***Time and money are two of the most valuable things in life, so we should be treating them with the respect they deserve.***

***The BEST Thing I've Done to Save Money:*** I have saved a lot of money by not drinking alcohol or coffee and choosing tap water over pop, juice, or bottled water. I mean I have saved A LOT of money (and calories). In my early twenties I went to Europe twice with the amount of money I saved. My choices not to drink my calories also

meant my Europe trips were a lot cheaper than they could've been. Being frugal has its benefits. It just takes a little work and sacrifice.

This week may you start your own path to happiness by figuring out how you want to spend and save.

## Lesson 51

# Christians (like me) Give Christianity a Bad Name

I was once told Christians are the number one reason why others remain non believers – we suck. That makes sense. For instance, when I was in my 20s and had serious workaholism problems, that's not exactly a great sales pitch for God: "Be a Christian and have underlying depression like me; it's great!" Fortunately, ***I have since learned the best thing I can do for God is to be the best version of me I can be, which includes enjoying life.*** Considering Jesus said, "My purpose is to give [people] a rich and satisfying life," (John 10:10b) that's more appealing than my workaholism/depression lifestyle: "My purpose is to crush you with guilt and a stressful life to scare others away." Unfortunately, it's been a long road to get here, and I've hurt people along the way, which leads to an even bigger reason people aren't Christians – ***Christians can be mean.*** What's crazy is you'll never hear someone say, "I won't be atheist because I've met some mean atheists," yet that's what happens to Christians. It's like the world wants us to be better and they hold us to a higher standard (which suggests the value of Christianity). Either way, it's like any negative behavior a Christian does gives people an excuse not

to care about God, which is tragic because Christians can suck like everyone else. I certainly have...

**Bonus:** The Book of Acts describes the formation of the early church after Jesus' death. In one story, a husband and wife lied about their generosity. They essentially stole from God and lied to look good, and how did God handle it? He killed them. They both dropped dead. That's pretty extreme. The early church was so protected by God to make sure it had a solid foundation for future generations that He killed those two manipulators and put it in the Bible for everyone to read as a strong warning to take your relationship with Him and the Church seriously. God hasn't killed people like that in a long time (that I know of), so the people that suck at being Christian today get away with it. This is good news for people like me who have had some terrible moments – I'm still alive! And being alive means I've had a chance to grow. It just sucks for the people I've hurt.

I have 10 things that are a goal for what I want said at my funeral (5-10 things you want said at your funeral is an excellent exercise for figuring out how to live your life), and one of those things is "Chad walked with God in an inspiring way." ***I want to be someone who helps others see that having a relationship with God can make life better and, more importantly, prepares them for what comes next.*** Unfortunately, I've screwed up hard with at least two people and a handful of others who I'm not sure hate God because of me or just hate me. When I was a teenager, I did the whole "argue people into heaven" idea – that was dumb – but that's not what I'm talking about here. That just made me a bit of a jerk. When my brain wants to beat me up for that time, I remind myself that I was a teenager and everyone at that age has really dumb moments. At least mine didn't involve getting arrested. I also reframe it to be proud of how fearless I was and that having passion is admirable – look at me trying to be healthy.

When I say I hurt two people, I mean they felt full-on betrayal. I have experienced this kind of hurt four times and it was by Christians (three were pastors), but I was lucky enough to see that it was them

and not God. These two people I hurt, however, didn't have the same Christian foundation and because of that there's a good chance I scared them away from God, which means I'd be a major reason they go to hell. (This post just took a dark turn.) The way I explain heaven and hell is ***God doesn't bring everyone to heaven because He gives people what they want.*** Why would He bring you to be with Him in heaven forever if you don't want to spend time with Him now on Earth? That'd be like a controlling parent forcing their kids who don't like them to visit... for eternity. That wouldn't be very loving. Some people make hell sound like God is spiteful, but that isn't the case. He is described as a God of love and justice; revenge and power tripping are the opposite of love. God's not passive aggressive. You might argue He can be aggressive like how He killed the two liars in the early Church, but He doesn't manipulate.

The first person I really damaged was my wife's cousin. When I first started as a youth pastor, she was 16 and quickly became a valued member of my little youth group. She regularly came out and the guys followed, which was a huge blessing as I was trying to grow the group. She ended up joining two of my Frisbee teams (outside of youth), and when she started dating a really athletic guy, she brought him out – score. This was great... for a year. Over the fall, things went the way of many high school relationships and she had a lot of anger at him even though the relationship ended because they both cheated on each other – oh, high school relationships. This guy had gone to a lot of youth events and became someone I really liked, but he chose not to continue after the break up because that was her thing first – very respectful. The following spring when Frisbee started, however, that was different – he was going to play. Want to know how I handled this? Did I talk to her about this before the season started? That'd be smart. Did I mention there was something she should know before the first game? That'd be helpful. Instead, I picked her up for our first game and on the way there I sheepishly mentioned that he was still on the team and he would be there that night. Yup, I was a full-blown idiot. Who waits that long to say something? A scared piece of garbage. I had been too scared to say anything sooner and I kept procrastinating until the last possible minute – so stupid! That made a bad situation waaayyyyyy worse. ***I***

*was garbage at conflict, which was a major reason why I was so scared of it.* The situation was on rocky ground and I threw in an earthquake. Part of me assumed she'd get over him being there and maybe reconnect – nope. She lost her mind and he had to leave because she was creating such a scene on the field.

The end result was I told her that if I had two teams, he should be allowed to play on one of them and she could chose to be on the other team or be on both knowing he'd be on the one – nope. She wanted both teams to herself because I was supposed to be on her side, and like her dad who had abandoned her when she was young, she had put her faith in me for two years only to be “betrayed.” What made it worse is I didn't know how to properly communicate with good questions back then and like a typical person, I used statements and logic to present my case – bad choice; that only makes it worse because it doesn't help the other person feel understood and cared about. *The right question is always more powerful than a statement in conflict.*

What really made things worse was my wife's cousin and her mom met with me and the pastor of the church I worked for, and he was also garbage at conflict. I was 28 at the time and only in church leadership for two years with lots to learn, so being garbage was a little more excusable. This pastor was in his mid 50s with 30 plus years experience and claimed he was a counselor – he had no excuse. No surprise, two years later he betrayed and stomped on me. Considering how bad he was in this situation, our falling out was a matter of time.

This experience was such a big deal, the cousin's family (my wife's deceased dad's side), including her grandma, aunt, and uncle, stopped inviting my wife, her sister, and her mom to holidays. That's right. I ruined Christmas (or made it better depending on your perspective because that was one seriously toxic family). Seven years later, this cousin was open to coming to my wedding, but her mom and grandma still weren't – their blood was part vinegar and I was Baking Soda.

Since learning how to properly handle conflict and the steps to reconciling, I have several times reached out to apologize to the cousin and take ownership for sucking at conflict and for appearing to betray her, but I never heard back. On the positive side, my friendship with the ex grew very strong and he became one of the most valuable players on all my Frisbee teams for the next ten years. More importantly, he gave his heart to God shortly after that family implosion and continues to be connected to God today, so at least my weakness didn't ruin everything. It's just unfortunate I was so damaging to someone I really cared about.

The other person I could be accused of betraying I can now see likely had undiagnosed borderline personality disorder (or he was demon possessed – I wish I was exaggerating). He was a ticking time bomb. Unfortunately, my lack of realizing what I was dealing with led to a bigger situation since he was able to connect with a few others who wanted to hate me – leadership can be fun. The problem of being in leadership is you get a giant target on your back. Meanwhile, ***the problem with following leaders is not many leaders are actually emotionally healthy and good with conflict.*** Some are too aggressive (bulldozers), others are manipulative (wolves in sheep's clothing), or they're like I was, weak and afraid of conflict (wussbag). Fortunately, by this time in my youth pastoring, I was stronger and handled myself much better than the first issue. Of course, it still wasn't as good as I would be now, but that's what happens as we grow in wisdom. I really could have used present me back when I was a youth pastor for guidance.

The good news is all of my screw ups have helped me have higher social understanding and I'm much better at handling conflict and difficult people now. God has raised me from my training ground (being a youth pastor was far better than any schooling I had) and now I'm able to help others heal relationships and know how to limit the chances of being hurt and hurting others (aka I can help them not be weak pieces of garbage like I was). What's sad (and scary) is people in leadership are the least likely to see me because they're too busy helping others to help themselves or they don't think they need help because they're the helper and, therefore, too good to need help.

Ultimately, all people in church leadership should be the first to try to grow because the best thing I can do is be the best version of me I can be and reduce some of the ammo for others hating Christianity.

This week may you consider how you can be strong in a healthy way in order to reduce conflict.

## Lesson 52

### **Agnostics are... (A post to help agnostics make a choice... or just be angry at me)**

In the last lesson, I wrote that I can do dumb things; this might be one of those times. This lesson is based on an idea that has been on my heart for awhile, and I was pushed to do it after a number of clients asked me questions that will be answered below. The main goal of this lesson is to encourage agnostics to make a choice and not be wishy-washy: There is a God and you will do something to grow closer (e.g. read the Bible and be involved in a church to help build a connection) or there isn't a God and you confirm you're an atheist (and hopefully have a good reason for it because it's a risky choice).

***As a Christian, I've been called emotionally weak, stupid, and a pushover who can't think for himself.*** Maybe these are true (I am married, so thinking for myself isn't always an option – joking), but either way, I want to address the problem of being agnostic because ***your faith choice is the most important decision you will ever make since there will be eternal repercussions.*** This means agnostics need to stop brushing this decision aside and make a real choice.

Considering faith in God can have strong emotional health benefits this push makes sense. Growing closer to God will make your life better. Besides faith leading to hope, a better understanding of life, and a sense you're not alone, it can lead to a fuller experience of life:

“The [devil’s] purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” (John 10:10) ***My hope is this lesson will kick start further investigation into the most important thing in life – a relationship with the Creator of the universe.***

Here is a quick breakdown of the options:

1. Atheists believe there isn’t a God (and typically have some resentment toward Him)
2. Theists believe there is a God (e.g. Jews, Christians, and Muslims)
3. Polytheists believe in many gods (e.g. Hindu)
4. Agnostics believe there could be a God (they might even call themselves Christian if asked), but they don’t do anything to pursue a relationship with Him. These people might even go to church, but they go because of routine or pressure. Agnostics can be wonderful people; I have a couple friends who are more loving than most Christians I know, but something is holding them back from committing.

I find there are four main reasons why someone is agnostic, but simply put ***agnostics haven’t done the work to come to a proper conclusion: There is either a God (and we should work on our relationship with Him) or there isn’t.*** If you decide there isn’t a God that’s your choice (that’s not the one I recommend), but if there is a God and you don’t take Him seriously – ouch. You are missing out on an important part of this life and the next because if you don’t want God in this life, He’s not going to make you be with Him in the next. As a Christian, it’s hard not to get scared for people, which is why I really hope you can see this lesson comes from a place of love and not judgement. I would hug you right now if I could... and if I was a hugger like my wife, but I’m not. I just want you to know this lesson comes from a place of love.

- 1) *Agnostics are Scared:*** Thinking of eternity and whether there is a God can be scary, especially for those who are bad at making decisions. Other times, people have been hurt by Christians and they’re afraid of being hurt again. It makes sense that people



would be afraid of committing to something that can lead to hurt, especially since some people are natural hidiers. Hopefully the points I share below will help reduce some of the confusion and fear, and will make it easier to further investigate a life of faith.

- 2) ***Agnostics are Terrible at Prioritizing:*** We live in a very busy and distracting culture. It's easy to brush God off as something that you figure is there, but isn't as important as the daily grind since many people struggle to survive (especially when they have kids). With all of the distractions in our culture, a lot of people don't make the time to assemble an informed decision, but this is foolish because faith in God can help this life be better and prepare our souls for the next.
- 3) ***Agnostics are Lazy (written with love):*** A major reason people can be agnostic is laziness – they either can't be bothered putting in the work to make an informed choice or they don't want to do the work it takes to be a person of faith. Having a relationship with God is a lot like a good marriage – it takes work. For instance, you have to spend time with Him, talk to Him, listen to Him (aka read the Bible and listen to wise teachers), work through conflicts with Him, and try to see the best in Him (aka not fun). If there's a God, it also means you're accountable because ***your faith should be demonstrated through your actions***. As Jesus said, "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." (John 13:25) Yes, Christians can screw this up, but if love is patient, kind, and self controlled, that's not easy for anyone. Being a Christian is hard, and definitely not for the lazy.
- 4) ***Agnostics Lack Information:*** One of the main problems for agnostics is they lack proper teaching. Let's consider some of the common issues.

The following is a list of problems I've heard people use against faith and the answers I'd want to offer:

1. ***"If God is real, why doesn't He give us a sign?"*** Have you seen the Bible? Have you seen a cross? What kind of a sign do you

want? Do you expect God to speak to you directly? Even if He did, would you believe it or would you question whether your mind was playing tricks on you after? Besides, if you told people you were a Christian because God spoke to you directly, does that make you sound sane? Faith is believing. It takes faith to believe or not believe.

2. ***“What if you’re wrong?”*** My faith has given me a better life, so I’m still good. The better question is what if Christianity is right? If you want further reading along this idea, check out Pascal’s Wager.
3. ***“How do I know Jesus was real?”*** Jesus was written about by people who weren’t Christian like Tacitus and Pliny the Younger. Even further, ***Jesus story is either true or it’s the greatest hoax of all time*** because He managed to create the largest religion in the world with two of the biggest holidays in the world, Christmas and Easter.
4. ***“Aren’t all religions the same?”*** Is a Chrysler the same as a Mercedes? Sure, there are similarities, but there are some drastic differences. With Christianity saying you need to have Jesus in order to go to heaven and not just good works, you’ll want to make sure the religion you choose is right because this is a very clear distinction from the other major religions. As a Christian, I’m actually in a good place for all of the other religions, but without Jesus, people in other faith groups are at risk. Logically, Christianity becomes the safest choice.
5. ***“Isn’t being a good person good enough?”*** Not in Christianity. Besides, what is a good person? If you don’t have the rules given by God, who decides what’s good or not? People? As someone who doesn’t really trust humanity, that sounds terrible.
6. ***“I’ve met very argumentative Christians.”*** Being argumentative is a sign of bad communication skills and insecurity. It’s also everywhere. This isn’t a God thing; it’s a human thing.
7. ***“Being Christian is just doing what culture tells you to do.”*** Actually, since there are more agnostics than Christians in

Western culture, you're conforming by being agnostic. Being Christian is being different; it's very counter cultural.

8. ***"There are bad Christians"*** Yes there are, and there are many good ones too like Shane Clabourne and Desmond Tutu. FYI, there are also bad agnostics. If you look in a prison, it's the ones who find Jesus who tend to have the best reforming behaviors; is that coincidence? Maybe, but it's worth investigating.
9. ***"Church is so boring!"*** If you think church is boring, you're either at the wrong one or you think you're bored when you're actually uncomfortable doing things that are unfamiliar. That being said, connecting to a church can be difficult like joining any new group. One year I visited 40 churches and there were three I'd consider joining.
10. ***"The Bible was written by people."*** Yes, it was. So is everything else you read. Anyone who says God wrote it is misinformed. Even Jesus made reference that Moses wrote the first five books. The only thing directly written by God in the Bible is the 10 Commandments.
11. ***"Isn't the Bible misogynistic, racist, homophobic, encourages slavery, etc."*** The Bible is written by people based on cultural context and needs. Without women, Christianity wouldn't be what it is today because rich women sponsored Jesus and His ministry. Then there's Saint Augustine, one of the most important theologians of the early church who was born in modern day Algeria – racism back then wasn't what it is today. In Roman times, it was more important whether you were a slave or free, rich or poor, and man or woman. The classic passage for this is "For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus... There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:26,28) The real problem is the Bible is read by people who can twist what they read to justify their own agenda. For instance, I have scriptural evidence supporting gay marriage. Is that me twisting things or reading it properly? I won't know for sure until the next life. To me, it makes sense, but to others, I'm wrong. Ultimately,

this proves why it's so important we read the Bible for ourselves and try to understand context, intended audience, and the spirit behind what was written with the foundation of knowing the two greatest commands in Christianity being to love.

12. ***"I do yoga and meditate."*** (Or "I pray to the universe.") Yes, yoga and meditation have very good physical and emotional health benefits, but you're still missing the important ingredient of who God is. If God's name is Father/I AM, Allah, or Krishna, those are three very different paths. I could be wrong, but I'm guessing even higher powers prefer to be called their actual name.
13. ***"Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?"***  
Yes, this can seem unfair, but there is no rule that if you're good you'll be safe from bad things. In fact, ***part of life is experiencing bad things, and it's how we deal with them that sets apart people with good character and perseverance from those who don't.*** Either way, we are all bad in some way. What's crazy is in Christianity, we believe that a perfect Being, Jesus, came to Earth to suffer and die to save people. If Jesus was willing to suffer and die (and the Father sat back and watched) when He was perfect, maybe we shouldn't be so quick to question why we suffer, especially when a lot of our suffering is from our own bad choices.
14. ***"Why is there cancer?"*** You could also ask: Why does humanity continue to damage the world and make things that are cancer causing? A lot of the problems we face in the world are from us abusing the earth. How can we blame God for things we do to ourselves? You could even argue how can we blame God for hurricanes that devastate cities when we build cities where they can be devastated by hurricanes? If you put your hand in a fire, it'll get burned because it's hot enough to cook meat. It's foolish to put your hand in the fire and then blame God for the burn. Ultimately, ***we need to respect the earth more and take responsibility for our own actions.***

15. ***“Why are there so many different groups of Christians?”*** At one point we were all Catholic (the universal church) and then through different challenges and needs, different groups grew. For instance, many groups like the Salvation Army weren’t originally intended to be a new denomination. It started in the 1800s when a married couple started helping alcoholics living in the streets and those most in need of physical help. It soon became a movement that continues today. Each denomination had a different goal when it started, but it’s the same God and the same book with slightly different interpretations and emphasis and worship styles. The good thing about this variety is we can find a style that is more suited to our own comforts.
16. ***“Is it okay to question Christianity?”*** Questions should be encouraged because they create conversation and help develop understanding. The only people who don’t like questions are insecure and afraid of looking dumb.
17. ***“What about Buddhism?”*** In university, I learned more about my faith as a Christian by learning about Buddhism and nonattachment than what I was learning in my own church. There are great teachings in all religions, especially Buddhism. Christianity just takes things further by focusing on Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.
18. ***“Christians used to believe the sun revolved around the world.”*** Yes, and it was a Christian who corrected that misunderstanding. Either way, I’m pretty sure Christians aren’t the only ones to be wrong about something.
19. ***“I believe in science and not Christianity.”*** Those are *not* two opposite things. Christianity is very pro science and discovering all the wonderful things God has given us the potential for learning and developing.
20. ***“Christianity has caused a lot of hurt.”*** Yes and what group hasn’t? People can suck, especially leaders. At the same time, ever wonder why so many schools and hospitals are named after Christians? Because health care and education as we know it are largely because of Christianity. Ever notice how most charities

have Christian connections? Christians are encouraged to be charitable, which leads to them being good at starting charities. For any damage Christianity has caused (aka dumb people being dumb), it has done so much more good.

21. ***“Why do bad people prosper?”*** What’s bad and good is all perspective. For instance, is it better to become rich and achieve everything your heart desires, but end up lonely and miserable or to struggle in life and develop strong character and wisdom (two things that only develop through struggle)? Besides this logic, we have to consider what Jesus said: “I’ll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!” (Mat 19:24) Being rich may be fun, but is this life more important than eternity?
22. ***“Why do bad people get away with being bad?”*** This can be frustrating, but in Christianity we can take comfort knowing “We reap what we sow,” (Gal 6:7b para) and that there is a Judgement Day. It’s also important to note that good and bad is either a self-made perspective thereby nullifying its universality or it’s been given to us by God. ***If the latter is true, you just proved there’s a God by believing in good and bad. If the former is true, than this question has no merit because there is no official good or bad.***
23. ***“Christianity is a crutch for the weak,”*** taunted a smug student in my first year university philosophy class (a breeding ground for pretentiousness). This is an interesting thought. Jesus said he came for the sick and not the healthy, so that makes sense, but what I don’t get is would he mock someone actually using crutches or a wheelchair? (guy): “Only weak people use a wheelchair even though it makes your life better. You should want to suffer unnecessarily.” Who’d have guessed, a smug university student could be stupid?
24. ***“Aren’t you a Christian because your parents are?”*** Our parents influence us, but Western culture has been very successful at stopping young people from following their parents’ faith backgrounds in order to live a life free from accountability to a

higher power. In this, isn't culture more of an influence than parents? Either way, we are not "free" to make our own decisions – we are influenced. Choosing to have faith is harder, however, because faith means we're responsible for what we do.

25. ***"The Trinity doesn't make any sense."*** Yes, it's confusing, but does that mean it's not real? I was once told the Trinity is like water where there are three forms, water, ice, and vapour, but they are all H<sub>2</sub>O. I shared this with some pastors who scolded me for liking it, but it makes sense to me, and who are they to say it's wrong? Either way, the Trinity is weird because Jesus was God, yet He prayed to the Father who is God in heaven and then after Jesus went to heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit, which is also God – and weird. As a believer, ***we will never have all the answers, so we need to find joy in the mystery.***
26. ***"Doesn't being Christian make you weird?"*** Yes, there are weird Christians, but we don't own the market on weird. Have you been to ComicCon? We're all weird in some way, and how weird we are is perspective. What's weird to one person is normal to another.
27. ***"I don't believe in being religious."*** Actually, we're all religious in some way, especially since being agnostic is a "religious" title. Do you mean you don't like rules? That can't be completely true because I'm sure you like rules such as don't murder. Do you mean you don't like being judged? Christianity teaches to not judge; thus, any judgement experienced in church is by people not acting out their faith, and therefore, not a reason to hate Christianity, but to hate human nature that Christianity tries to fight.
28. ***"Christians don't believe in evolution."*** Actually, many Christians believe in theistic-evolution where God used "evolution" and maintain that the Adam and Eve story is more of a teaching lesson. I, however, believe there's some evolving, but it started with Adam and Eve. Why? Because I choose to. Many Christians would disagree with me, but in my brain how can I pick and choose which stories I believe in the Bible? Why

would the authors use some real events and some made up stories? This is a particular problem when Genesis (the book the Adam and Eve story is in) is full of genealogies to give timelines and family history. In my brain, why do people believe in evolution? Because it's in books and it was taught to them? Why do I believe in Adam and Eve? Because it's in books and it was taught to me (plus it has 1000s of years of tradition behind it and connections to tribal stories around the world). For me, the main problem with evolution is it's a theory that's constantly "evolving." For instance, did you know they now believe the T-rex had feathers and dinosaurs sounded more like birds? (Or maybe the evolution book I read it in was wrong; who knows? There's isn't a "Bible" for evolutionists, so there is limited consistency among its followers. Evolutionists also keep changing their mind on the brontosaurus; they went from real to not real for awhile to now saying it's real again. At least my belief is consistent. ***Either way, what I believe about creation doesn't change whether there's a God or not, so it's okay to believe either side.***

29. ***"The Bible is confusing."*** Yes, it can be if you don't know the history and culture in which it was written, but it is incredible once you learn a few things. If you want to read the Bible as first timer, don't start from the beginning – it quickly gets overwhelming (and boring). Instead, try later in the Bible. For instance, the Book of James summaries Christianity in three pages while Luke and Acts give a summary of the start of Christianity or if you want more intimate writing, a lot of people like the Psalms, which are lyrics. These three options are much better spots to start.
30. ***"It's overwhelming with all the information I don't know."*** It's amazing how far we can walk when you take a step and another step and another. God doesn't expect us to have all the answers. He just wants us to care enough to get to know Him more and include Him in our daily lives like a normal parent.
31. ***"What about aliens or ghosts?"*** Why can't Christians believe in aliens or ghosts? There is a story in the Bible of a medium



bringing back a prophet from the dead to share a message, so Christians should believe in a spirit world. Aliens? That's kind of fun to think about.

32. ***“What about psychics?”*** There is a story of a psychic in the Book of Acts who lost her power when the demon was taken out of her. If she was psychic because of a demon, maybe I should avoid seeing psychics to be safe – they're likely either a fraud or have demon.
33. ***“Christians are told to give 10% to the church.”*** That's not actually true; that's a Jewish rule. What a Christian gives is between them and God, but 10% is encouraged as a guide. The spirit of the law in this case is to teach us not to be selfish or be obsessed with money, which makes it a valuable teaching for everyone even non Christians. By giving, we make the world a better place while helping our hearts. To take it a step further, we should put God first (greed is idolatry), and we need to remember if we are responsible and generous, God will provide. As the plaque I made says: “Do your part and God will do His.”
34. ***“Christianity is all about rules.”*** Rules are meant to help and protect us. Some people take them too far, but a world without rules would be terrifying.
35. ***“Christians are closed-minded.”*** Someone appearing to be close-minded is actually a sign they have poor communication skills. We're meant to help people feel heard and understood even if we don't agree with them. And again, Christians aren't the only close-minded/poor communicators; that's a human thing.
36. ***“What about the crusades?”*** You mean the event that was a political agenda hidden behind religion? The truth is no matter who is given power, bad choices will be made, but that doesn't mean the belief system or group is bad. It just means some people suck.
37. ***“How can I trust the Bible?”*** How can you trust any book? It's a choice. Unlike other books, this one has been cherished by

billions of people over thousands of years and millions have died for believing in what it teaches.

38. ***“If Christianity is real, why aren’t the numbers growing?”***

Christianity thrives in places of persecution like China. In North America where we’re spoiled and distracted, all religions struggle, but that doesn’t mean religions don’t have validity. It just means we’re too busy and have bad priorities.

**Bonus Thought:** The Bible is made of 66 books written by about 40 authors on three separate continents over an estimated span of 1500-1600 years, yet the congruency is incredible. The writers of the Marvel movies couldn’t even do that as professional storytellers with our modern day education system for the Thor storyline across twenty years. Those facts alone suggest the Bible is supernaturally inspired (aka God breathed).

**\*\*Question:** What started everything? As a Christian, I can say, “God,” which some will counter, “But how did God start?” Fair – I don’t know. At least I can say He’s outside of time as we know it and beyond our understanding. If you don’t believe in God, what started everything? Two evolutionist atheists wrote the odds of everything falling into place to create the world as we know it is 1 in  $10^{40,000}$ . Those aren’t good odds. Thus, they concluded the world had to be started by intelligent design, which they believe to be “intelligent life from outer space” (aka aliens), so I guess thank you Luke Skywalker for our world? The bottom line is whatever your belief, it’s founded on faith. To me, whoever started the world will be pretty angry if we don’t give them their due appreciation and respect.

Thank you for enduring this longer lesson, and I hope it can be a start for finding answers to whether you will believe in there being a God or not, which is the most important decision you can make because it affects how you live today and the next life.

\*A great book to learn about Christianity is “Letters from a Skeptic”

## Bonus Lesson

### **Taking a Life Inventory** **(A practical exercise from Martin Short's** **biography)**

I love the library and audio-books. That's a fantastic pairing. I get to listen to all the books I want for free and without the risk of downloading a virus? Yes, please. A couple months ago, I borrowed Martin Short's biography, *I Must Say: My Life as a Humble Comedy Legend*. If you're experienced like me (a nice way of saying old), you'll likely be familiar with Short's work, but not a huge fan. To be honest, I only grabbed the book because I know he's originally from my hometown, Hamilton, Ontario. I wasn't overly interested in listening to it, so the book sat on my backseat for two months until it was about due back before I finally gave it a chance. It was surprisingly fantastic. I had no idea how huge a Hollywood player he was or that he graduated from McMaster University before getting his big start in the play *Godspell* when they opened it in Toronto. His life was full of some amazing moments and his best friends include Steve Martin, Eugene Levy, Paul Shaffer (David Letterman's sidekick/musical director), and Tom Hanks. He has had some amazing good fortune that has helped him have a very impressive career, but he's also had a life plagued by extreme tragedy including when he was twelve his twenty-six year old brother was killed in a car accident, both his

parents were dead by his twentieth birthday, and he lost his mom, his first real girlfriend (Gilda Radner), and his wife of thirty-six years to breast cancer – that’s intense.

One of the most impressive moments he shared was from the night before his wife died. Short recounts being in a hot tub with his one son and telling him this was going to be the one event that would make his son a better and stronger person in the future. Short said that one day when his son had a job and his boss yelled at him, he’d be like “This isn’t good, but it doesn’t really bother me. If I can get through my mom’s death, I can handle anything.” When I heard this I was blown away. That’s such a powerful way of looking at trauma and only something that can be said by someone who has been through some intense trauma themselves.

Short is well respected in the acting world and known for his cheerfulness, but what surprised me was how hard he works at being a good person. One of the ways that help keep him on track is using what he calls “The Nine Categories.” Short essentially gives himself a grade like you would in school for each of these nine categories. He maintains that the goal isn’t to be perfect all the time, but to maintain a good average. You can choose whatever method for grading you prefer; Short uses the American GPA style while I prefer to use a scale of 0-10. (Americans complicate things like using Philips screws when Robertsons are clearly better and using the Imperial system, which is ironically started in Britain – the country they rebelled against.)

The following are his nine categories with my definitions:

1. **Self:** How well are you taking care of yourself? This includes how well you take care of your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs (aka body, mind, heart, and soul).
2. **Immediate Family:** How well are you connecting to your family and fulfilling your responsibilities to them?
3. **Original Family:** How well are you connecting with your parents and siblings and fulfilling your responsibilities to them?

4. **Friends:** Are you appropriately connecting with your friends?
5. **Money:** Are you meeting your financial needs and goals?
6. **Career:** Does your job meet your current needs? Sometimes satisfaction needs to be sacrificed for the amount of income and vice versa, but overall is it working?
7. **Creativity:** Do you have a healthy outlet for being creative? This can be anything from doing something artistic to playing sports to developing new ideas because they all requires creativity to some degree.
8. **Discipline:** Are you using the appropriate amount of self-control and drive to implement your goals?
9. **Lifestyle:** How much do you actually enjoy your life right now? If things are good, are you doing what you need to keep them that way? If it's bad, are you just going through a tough spot that will lead to relief later or are you stuck in a rut? Are you doing something today that will make the future better?

This exercise is obviously based on our perspective, but it's a great way to consider where we can improve and where we can be proud of ourselves for living properly as well as being grateful to God for His guidance and support.

May this tool spark some good ideas or be a helpful tool for you as well.

## Conclusion

“The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.” Ecc 1:18

Thank you for going through this book and congratulations. You should put on your favourite song and do a dance (preferably where a lot of people can see you). Hopefully as you’ve grown in wisdom, you haven’t also grown in grief, but if you have, you’re not alone. I sometimes get sad looking at how foolish people can be, and considering the above verse, this is a normal response. Sometimes the more we know, the harder it is because we are aware of the brokenness around us and the mistakes being made in the world. There’s a reason we have the saying, “Ignorance is bliss,” but hopefully the wisdom you’ve gained from this book will also help free you of the burdens of surface level issues that bog others down. May this book bring you peace and joy while helping you be easier to love and be loved in return.

Since you’ve already heard me ramble enough, let’s conclude this book by considering your response to the challenge at the beginning of the book:

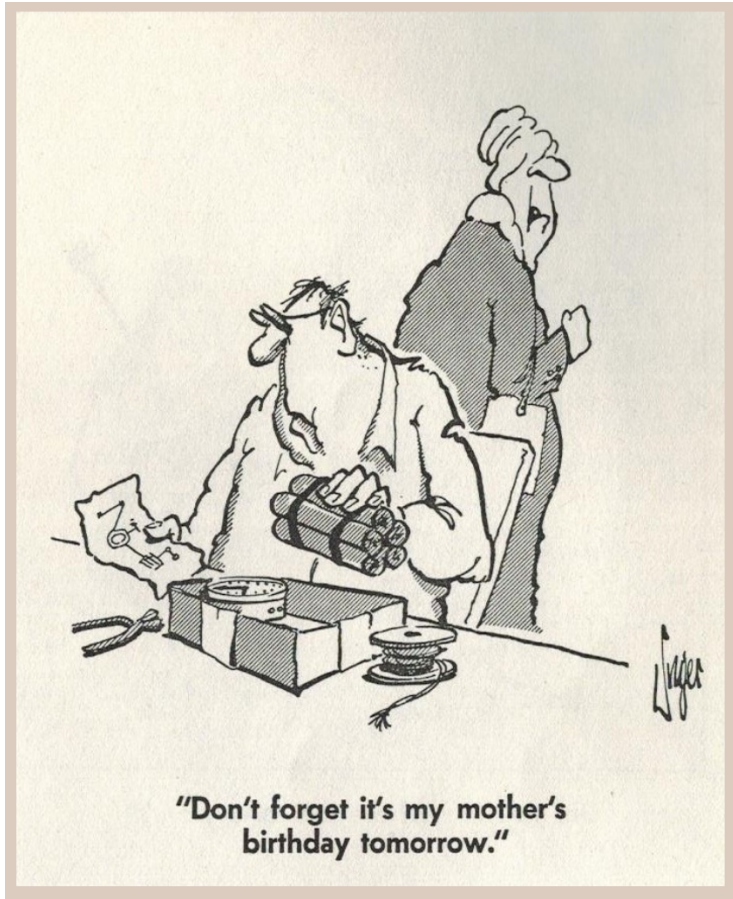
*Take a moment to write where you are at mentally and what you hope to gain from this book. What are you top three strengths and top three areas that can use some work? How would you rate your emotional health on a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 being the best possible? Hint: no one is a 10. How would you rate your communication skills? Your level of wisdom? Your ability to love yourself? Your ability to love others?*

1. Where are you now?
2. How were you right and how did you differ?
3. What is the one teaching you will most take away from this book?
4. What is the challenge you will give yourself now that you are done this book?

## **Blessing**

May this book be the start of a healthier and happier way of living, and may no one want to give you a gift like in the following cartoon.





# Congratulations!

You did it! You finished a book (or you skipped to the end). Thumbs up (if you read it).



I hope you can enjoy your sense of accomplishment as much as I enjoy this picture of my daughter.

I love that picture almost as much as this one:



Which was the moment before this one:





# Other Books by Chad

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