

SERIES: Win the Day! Wk. 5

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It's not at all uncommon, that I get in conversations with people who express a pretty deep level of disappointment in life. Life has become dissatisfying; they're disappointed—oftentimes they're just miserable. They want to blame other people; they want to blame all kinds of circumstances, but there often seems to be this disconnect, between their choices and their misery. Well, that's what we want to talk about, and remind ourselves that **our choices do matter**. If you have a Bible, turn with us to Proverbs, Chapter 14.

Look then at Verse 6:

**A scoffer seeks wisdom and *finds* none,
But knowledge is easy to one who has understanding.** (NASB, Proverbs 14:6)

In other words, when I fear God, I do believe that His path is the right path. Therefore my life is dedicated to understanding, to believing and obeying what God says. But the fool who rejects that, **a scoffer, seeks wisdom, but finds none**. The scoffer: *there is a way that seems right to a man*, "I think this is the right path," and so the fool begins to travel down that path, begins to mock at sin, is actually kind of offended, and reacts to anybody that suggests that my path is not the right path. But there's a problem, and the problem is, my life doesn't seem to be working out. It does seem like things are falling apart. It does seem like I'm unhappy; I'm disappointed; I'm disillusioned. It does seem like there's a high level of misery, and I really would like to find something better, so I'm looking for the answer. I'm looking for a way out of the jungle. I'm looking for some sort of skilled living—a different path - that will improve the experience of my life. The problem is, once I have rejected God's path, there is no other path out of the jungle. So the **scoffer**, the **fool**, is seeking wisdom, but finds none because once you've rejected the fear of the Lord, once you've rejected God's path, there is no other path. I'm just now stuck in this spiral, and I have no understanding how to get out.

Turn over to Verse 15; this leads to believing everything:

The naïve believes everything. (Vs. 15a)

The naïve—which is another one of the fools identified in the Book of Proverbs—isn't someone who's dumb or stupid. It's someone who is untaught. It's someone who simply doesn't know the truth. So now imagine this scenario: *there is a way that seems right* - I'm going to go my way - it seems like that's the most likely way to make me happy, to give me what I'm looking for in life. So I scoff at the idea of sin. But the problem is, when I'm alone at night, I realize I'm really unhappy; I'm kind of miserable. My life isn't working. It feels like it's falling apart. I'm trying to find the path out of the jungle, but I can't, which means that now I'll believe anything. That's

what the proverb just said. I am so desperate, now I'll believe anything, to find some way out of the misery of the jungle in which I find myself.

It's a bit like a leaf being dropped in a river. The leaf drops in the river and just flows with the current. There's no shortage of teenagers, college students, 20-somethings, middle-aged adults, who, in our culture all think they're cutting-edge, sophisticated thinkers. They're on the edge of new thought that defines the 21st century, but it is so new and sophisticated, that actually it's the same thing everyone is believing. It's the current of the culture. They're nothing more than a leaf falling into the river, and the current's carrying them down, and they're all thinking the same thing - *There is a way that seems right* - "Well everybody's doing it." That must be the right way, and so they'll believe anything, and they find themselves travelling with the current of the culture, but not finding what they're looking for.

The second part of Verse 15:

But the sensible man considers his steps. (Vs. 15b)

As I said before, there are hundreds of ways I can mess up my life today. The culture is filled with land mines that can dramatically change my life. Therefore, I'm very thoughtful about the steps I take.

Years ago when I was in grad school, Patty and I lived in Southern California, kind of in the L.A. area, and my job to get me through seminary was as a tow-truck driver. Well, I was born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska, clear back in the '70s. It was fairly easy to navigate. The streets kind of went north, south, east, west. So I grew up at 24th and B, right down by Lincoln High. So A, B, C, D, E, those streets all went east and west; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, north and south, so it made a nice little grid—fairly simple. Nothing in Southern California is like that. The streets are curvy, windy; there's no intuitive way to figure out an address. In our station, we had a very lucrative AAA license. According to the rules of AAA, when you got the call as a driver, you had 20 minutes to be at the call, which wasn't real pressing. But if you got four calls in a row, you did not get 20, 20, 20, 20; you had to be at the fourth call in 20 minutes. So, it was a high level of stress. I'm pretty sure I was the only driver in our station that wasn't on something to deal with the pressure. (*Laughter*) I was from Lincoln, transplanted into Southern California, so all of these roads and addresses were new to me. In Southern California, the roads wind around, then all of a sudden they dead end; they stop; they hit the expressway. It could take you 30 minutes to figure out how to back up, get over or under the expressway, and get back to where you're supposed to be. What it boiled down to, is you simply couldn't make that mistake. So they gave you a book - we called it the "T-guide", the travel guide—and basically it had every road, every alley; it had everything you needed. It was the most amazing resource! Every time I got a call, I went immediately to the travel guide. I couldn't afford to make a catastrophic mistake. I would map my route and I would go there. Eventually, I kind of learned the routes and what's what, but there was no way for me to keep my job without the travel guide.

Over the years, I've often thought of the Bible as being my travel guide. This is my "T- guide". I haven't been thrown in the jungle with no resources to just figure my way out of the jungle. There is no need to grope in the darkness. *God has given me a travel guide.* It starts with, I fear God; I respect, I worship God; I do believe His path is the right path. I've dedicated my life to understanding it, to believing it, to obeying it, to travelling His path. So *the one who finds life is the one who carefully considers his or her steps*, in order to travel down the path of life.

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That's what it says in Verse 27:

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, (That's what my soul is looking for.)
That one may avoid the snares of death. (or the snares of misery)

It goes on in Verse 29:

He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.
A tranquil heart is life to the body,
But passion is rottenness to the bones. (Vs. 29-30)

Passion there is not like we think of, passion in a positive sense. It's a word that means to be hot, to be agitated, to be upset, to be reactive. So the proverb just said two things. One is, the fool that travels his own path, is going to be characterized by being a hot-head, by being quick-tempered, by being angry and reactive all the time. Here's how it works: *there is a way that seems right*; I've determined that for me to be my own god, for me to determine my own reality, I'm going to decide for myself what's right and wrong. I'm going to make my own decisions. That seems like the right way, ultimately, to be happy. So I scoff at the concept of sin. When someone suggests that perhaps my behavior is offensive to God, I'm incredulous; I react to that. "How dare you say such a thing?! Who put you in charge?" But I start to realize my life is not working. I'm really not happy. I'm kind of miserable. Everything seems to be falling apart. I feel like I'm stuck in the jungle. I need a path out, but I can't find the path out. So that's now starting to upset me. It's starting to make me angry. I'm getting a little bit desperate, so I'll believe anything, which is starting to make my problems worse. It's getting me deeper and deeper into the jungle, with no path out, and now I'm really getting angry, because my life isn't working. And I'm tired of people judging me, and now I'm hot-tempered, quickly reacting, and that starts to be what defines me, which just drives me deeper and deeper and deeper into despair.

I think we would all agree, that the thing that characterizes our 21st century American culture, is that we have, by and large, said, "No," to God; God is irrelevant. We've become our own gods. We've defined our own reality. We scoff at the concept of sin, where people are incredulous when somebody suggests that somehow our behavior might actually be offensive to God. We're now willing to believe anything, but our lives aren't working. The culture is falling apart. People's lives are falling apart. People feel that deeply, and so they're getting more and more frustrated, and one of the things that defines our culture is, we are very angry people. We're angry at the politicians. We're angry at the media. We're angry at the government. We're angry at the schools, our work associates, our children. We're angry at everybody. It's just like we have this anger inside of us, and when anything pops us with a pin, out comes anger. Why are we such an angry culture? The proverb puts it all together. *There is a way that seems right*, but it's not working [Vs. 12, paraphrase]. It's all falling apart, and then people have the nerve to judge me, but I'm just getting deeper into the jungle. Nothing's working. It's making me more and more angry. It's making me more desperate. All of it fits together and defines our culture perfectly.

What the text also says is, this creates **rottenness in our bones**. It's actually talking about the physical effects of anger. Google it up for yourself. There are countless studies, which will tell you that that level of anger is destructive to the body, to your physical health. Now I'm even more upset with life, more disappointed, more disillusioned. Not only is my life not working, now physically my body's falling apart and I have headaches and anxiety. On and on it goes, and it just creates this miserable cycle, and yet so many people are unable to connect the dots. Your life is miserable, because of the life choices you have made.

Look at what it says then in Verse 11:

**The house of the wicked will be destroyed,
But the tent of the upright will flourish.**

The contrast is between a **house** and a **tent**. The foolish have a house, because they're living for the things of this world. They're permanent residents and that's what they live for. But the wise, who have lived skillfully, live in a tent, which is symbolic of the fact, that this world is not my home. I'm not settling for this. I'm actually a pilgrim just passing through, and I understand that the best is yet to come. The best is in the future, and those are the values I live for. So it's the **house** versus the **tent**, and yet it's the tent that endures forever.

Which gets us to Verse 13:

**Even in laughter the heart may be in pain,
And the end of joy may be grief.**

Basically, what that proverb is saying is, even on my best days, on my moments of greatest joy, there's something deep in my heart that still grieves me, because I know this is temporary. I know this won't last. I know the clock is ticking, and everything's going to change, and even in the best of moments, I'm going to grow old and diseased, and I'm eventually going to die. There is no way to avoid that. Therefore, even in the happiest moments of life, there is something inside of me that knows deeply this won't last.

Which gets us to the last part of Verse 32:

But the righteous has a refuge when he dies. (Vs. 32b)

The righteous understand, *I live in a tent*. I'm a pilgrim. I'm passing through. The best days are yet ahead of me. Everything that my soul longs for, will be perfectly fulfilled in the world to come. No matter what happens in this world, no matter what this world may do to me, I understand if I've lived for the things that matter, if I have travelled God's path, that the best is yet to come, and the most wonderful moments of this life are but a glimpse of what will define my life for eternity. Even when I die, I have this place of **refuge**, of knowing the best is yet to come.

And of course we are reminded that that's all been made possible, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. All the way back to Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve found a way that seemed right to them, and plunged the human race into sin, before the chapter was over, God had already made a promise: He would do something to bring life back out of death. Two thousand years ago, God became flesh and died upon a cross, in payment for your sin and mine. That if,

by faith, we choose to believe that Jesus died for my sins, God offers the forgiveness of sin, that we may enter into a relationship with God now and forever. But here's the problem: the message of the Gospel is counter-intuitive. *There is a way that seems right*, and the way that seems right is, I must get to God through religion. I must get to God through religious activity. I must get to God through self-performance. I must get to God by being good. As long as I'm better than the next guy, as long as God grades on a curve, that's the way everything in this world works. That's kind of intuitive. *There is a way that seems right*. At the end of the day, that must be the way, ultimately, to God.

But so much of our faith is counter-intuitive. Jesus said, *You have to die to live*. Jesus said, *The last shall be first*. Jesus said, *It's more blessed to give than to receive*. There's so much within our faith that is counter-intuitive, that we believe *by faith*. It is not intuitive that God would somehow pay the penalty for our sin, and offer salvation freely as a gift. Nothing in life works that way. But that is what God did—and **He freely offers you salvation as a gift**.

The first step to getting out of the misery, out of the jungle, is to **enter into a personal relationship with the living God, made possible through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus—step one!** And that is the beginning of your journey onto the path of life, where you might find that which deeply satisfies your soul. There is this sobering reality that you don't get to live life twice. The choices I made when I was seventeen are the choices I made. I don't get to go back and do them again. And those choices do affect my experience in life! If I don't get to go back and do them again, I'd better be very, very thoughtful about the choices I make every day, because those choices will affect the experience of my life.

Our Father, we are soberly reminded that choices matter. Lord, there are people who, if they were honest, they are miserable! They're disillusioned. They're disappointed. They're angry. They search for wisdom, but there seems to be no wisdom to be found. God, I pray specifically that You would open up their hearts and minds, that You have made a way out, freely offered as a gift, if we choose to receive it. It's in the name of Jesus we pray this. Amen.

So, just like the writer of Proverbs, Jesus talked a lot about choices. Most people are familiar with Jesus talking about the choice to build your house on the sand, or to build your house on the rock. What's interesting about that story is, you don't really see a difference between the two houses, until the storms come. The house on the sand collapses. The house on the rock remains. What's hard to understand is, how do you explain those whose house on the sand collapsed, who go right back and build the next house on the sand? Don't they understand another storm is coming?

Proverbs Chapter 14 is encouraging us to build on the rock, to build our lives around the wisdom of God, that to build our lives on the wisdom of God, that may not be fully evident until the next storm comes. I understand it's hard to swim against the current. I also realize we have one shot at this life. If you've listened to God, you will live it for the things that matter, and I'm absolutely sure at the end of the story, there will be no regrets. We need to listen and follow God's road map. The Proverbs is telling us, *choices matter*. So I just want to say, thank you to so many who walk uprightly every day, in a culture of confusion. I do believe your reward is the fountain of life. You can believe God's truth or not, His road map or your road map. It's a choice, by faith, to

either believe God tells the truth, or to travel your own path. But *if you choose to trust God and travel His path, it leads to the **tree of life***. I pray that's the path you choose.