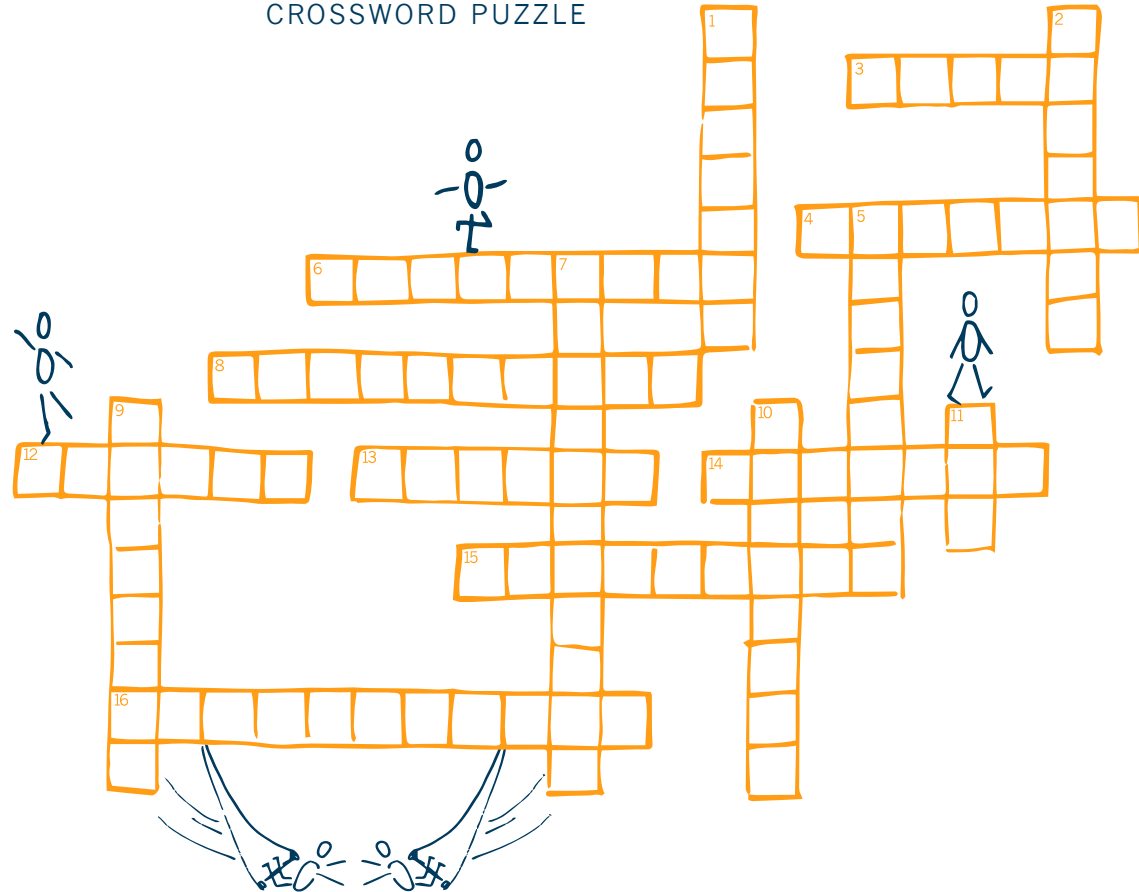


LIFE IS CHOICES

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

3. Rejecting the world's vision for your life
4. The opportunity or power to choose between two or more possibilities
6. The way you think, feel, act
8. The inner voice that encourages you to do good and avoid evil.
12. The capacity for logical, rational, and analytic thought
13. A good and moral behavior or character
14. The power of acting without the constraint of necessity or fate
15. Being content
16. Restraint exercised over one's own impulses, emotions, or desires

DOWN

1. A way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization
2. Opposite to self control
5. Having a divine quality, being perfectly good.
7. What's driving the culture of the world
9. Not liking to work hard or to be active
10. The ability to make our own choices; one of God's greatest gifts to humanity
11. The ultimate Father



SESSION TWO

What's _____ **HOLDING** *you back?*

O Lord my God, teach my heart this day where and how to see you, where and how to find you. You have made me and remade me, and you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess, and still I do not know you. I have not yet done that for which I was made. Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me. Let me seek you in my desire, let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you, let me love you when I find you. Amen.

• ————— *St. Anselm* ————— •

HOW LONG DO YOU WANT TO BE happy FOR?



PAUL THE APOSTLE (AD 5-67) was originally named Saul of Tarsus. He was a persecutor of Christians until he experienced a vision of the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and had a radical conversion (Acts 9:4). Paul became one of the most influential Christians of all time. Fourteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are attributed to him. He knew well that what we spend our time thinking about tends to multiply in our lives. So, what did Paul encourage us to think about? "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are gracious: if there be any excellence, if there be any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

2. WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

In Session 1 we talked about God's dream for you to become the best-version-of-yourself. Nobody wants to be a second-rate-version-of-themselves . . . so why do we find ourselves doing things that don't align with our best selves?

Have you ever noticed that sometimes you know something is wrong and bad for you . . . but you *still* desire it? *Not everything you desire is good.*

Or have you noticed that sometimes you know something is *not* good for you and you *don't* want to do it, but you find yourself doing it anyway?

The problem is, we enjoy things that don't help us become the best-version-of-ourselves. This is a part of our **fallen nature**, the disordered desire that exists within every man and woman.

Paul wrote, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." (Romans 7:19)

What was he saying? I want to be the best-version-of-myself, but sometimes I find myself doing things that don't help me become the best-version-of-myself—even though I don't want to do these things.

We don't always choose the best-version-of-ourselves. We don't always choose virtue. We don't always choose self-control.

Let's take a look at what gets in the way, how we get deceived so easily, and what's holding us back.

2.1 THE Quest FOR HAPPINESS

We are all on a **quest for happiness**.

You have an enormous *desire for happiness*. This desire is an incredible gift, and God has placed this desire within you for a reason.

We all do certain things because we believe they will bring us happiness. Sometimes the things we choose bring us happiness, and sometimes they don't. We have all done things that we thought would make us happy, but that in fact left us feeling empty, unhappy, miserable, used, deceived, or worse.

We want to help you avoid this in the future by teaching you how to *choose wisely* the things that will truly bring you happiness.

We all want to be happy. The question is, how long do you want to be happy for?

If you just want to be happy for an hour, take a nap.

If you want to be happy for two hours, have a great meal.

If you want to be happy for a whole day, go shopping.

If you want to be happy for a week, go fishing.

If you want to be happy for a month, take a long vacation—go down to Australia.

If you want to be happy for a year, inherit a fortune.

But the truth is, you want to be happy **forever**.

The good news is, God wants you to be happy forever too.

God has created us for happiness.

And not only does God want *you* to be happy; he wants to play an *active role* in your happiness. He doesn't just *hope* for your happiness from afar. He wants to *help* you find that happiness.

When it comes to happiness, the culture wants to sell you a poor substitute: **pleasure**. God wants you to be happy. The culture wants you to be a slave to pleasure. This is another reason to rebel against the culture.

The world tries to distract and confuse us with pleasure. Our culture says that pleasure and happiness are the same thing. It's *another lie*.

Pleasure is good and beautiful, and in the right context God wants us to experience much pleasure in this life. But pleasure is not happiness.

What is the difference between pleasure and happiness? Pleasure cannot be sustained beyond the activity producing it.

Let me give you an example. When we eat we feel pleasure. Stop eating and the pleasure stops. That's why we don't stop eating. Seventy-five percent of the time when we are eating we are not actually hungry. But we like the pleasure of eating, so we keep eating—that is the only way to maintain the pleasure. Pleasure cannot be sustained beyond the activity producing it.

Pleasure CANNOT BE SUSTAINED BEYOND THE Activity PRODUCING IT.



How happy do you think Mary was when she held the child Jesus in her arms?





WHO WAS

Mother Teresa?

Mother Teresa (1910–1997) founded the Missionaries of Charity, a religious congregation made up of more than forty-five hundred religious sisters who are active in 133 countries. Their work consists of running homes and hospice facilities for those with HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis; soup kitchens; orphanages; family counseling programs; and schools. Members of the order take four vows: the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and a fourth vow, “To give wholehearted and free service to the poorest of the poor.” Mother Teresa had an immense love for the unloved: “We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked, and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.”

Happiness is different. Happiness is sustainable.

Here’s another example. I come home from work one day next week, and it is my day to work out, but I don’t really feel like working out. So I have to make a decision: Work out or plant myself in a recliner in front of my 127-inch idiot box with a six-pack of beer and a three-hundred-ounce bag of potato chips?

The choice is mine.

Now, suppose I force myself to work out even though I don’t feel like it. The thing is, whenever I get done working out I am always glad—even if I had to force myself to do it. Happiness can be sustained beyond the activity producing it.

Happiness is more than pleasure. *Don’t settle for an empty life of pleasure.* Choose more. Rebel against the culture of pleasure and start actively seeking the happiness God created you for.

So, what will really make you happy?

Happiness is the result of **right living**. Honesty leads to happiness; dishonesty leads to misery. Caring for others leads to happiness; selfishness leads to unhappiness. Patience leads to happiness; impatience will make you miserable.

There are right and wrong ways to live your life. The culture tells us that there is no right and wrong. The culture says that what’s wrong for you might be right for me. This is nonsense. Hitler’s way was wrong. Mother Teresa’s way was right.

But how do you know what is the *right* thing to do?

At a basic level, you just know. One of God’s great gifts to you is **conscience**. Your conscience guides you in the way of right living so that you can celebrate the-best-version-of-yourself, and live your best life.

Very often we say we don’t know what we should do, but we are lying to ourselves (and to others), because our conscience is telling us the right course of action but we are trying to ignore it.

Our regrets are born when we ignore our conscience.

But there may be a handful of times in your life when you legitimately don’t know what the right thing to do is. It is for these times more than any other that God has given you another of his great gifts: **reason**.

I had dinner last week with some friends, Mike and Samantha. They have been married for two years and have been trying to have a baby,

but have not become pregnant. Their friends have been telling them about different types of fertility treatments, but they don’t know if these treatments are part of God’s dream for them. Mike and Jessica want to do the right thing, but they are not sure what the right thing to do is. This is a highly specialized and complex area of science and morality. To get to the truth they are going to need to study this issue.

This is a perfect example of why God gave you a *beautiful mind*. You have the ability to study an issue, search for the truth, think things through, seek out God’s way, and act on the truth you discover.

If you want to make great decisions, *just do the next right thing*. Don’t worry about what you have to do next week or next year; just do the next right thing right now.

Five, ten, fifty, one hundred times a day. Do the next right thing often enough and you will live a life uncommon, a life that is rich with inner peace and happiness.



WHO WAS

Hitler?

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) was the leader of the Nazi Party and Chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945. Hitler’s was the diabolical mind behind the Holocaust; his regime was responsible for the deaths of six million Jews, as well as millions of others he and his followers considered racially or genetically inferior.

“THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE”
JOHN 8:32

JOHN 8:32
KNOW IT: God created you for freedom and wants you to be free. Jesus is telling us that truth is essential for freedom and happiness.
THINK ABOUT IT: What lies are enslaving you?
LIVE IT: Make a conscious effort to align your actions with the truth this week.

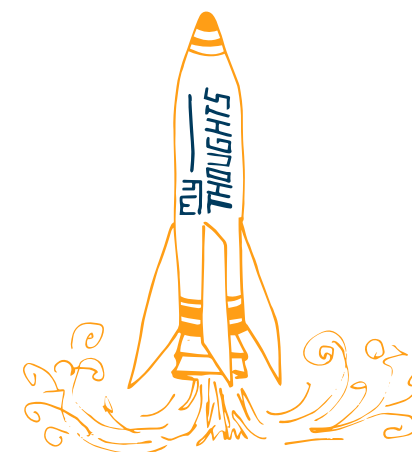


 **discussion
questions** 

1. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS YOU DESIRE THAT ARE GOOD FOR YOU?

2. WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU THOUGHT WOULD MAKE YOU HAPPY, BUT IN FACT LEFT YOU FEELING EMPTY, UNHAPPY, MISERABLE, USED, DECEIVED, OR WORSE?

3. DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU HAD THE WISDOM AND COURAGE TO FOLLOW YOUR CONSCIENCE, AND YOU WERE GLAD YOU DID.



DISORDERED DESIRES:
NOT ALL YOUR
DESIRES ARE GOOD.
IF THEY WERE, THEY
WOULD DIRECT YOU
TOWARD WHAT IS
GOOD, RIGHT, JUST,
AND NOBLE.
BUT SOME OF YOUR
DESIRES DIRECT
YOU AWAY FROM
WHAT IS GOOD.
THESE DISORDERED
DESIRES ARE PART
OF OUR FALLEN
NATURE AND THE
RESULT OF ORIGINAL
SIN. WHAT ARE
YOUR DISORDERED
DESIRES?

JUST DO
THE NEXT
RIGHT
THING.

2.2 STINKING THINKING

Even though God has given us incredible minds to reason with, we still do a lot of **stinking thinking**. Let's take a quick look at some of the paths that the world proposes for happiness.

Individualism. The creed of the individualist is: What's in it for me? Individualism is the philosophy of selfishness. The fruits of individualism are greed, selfishness, isolation, and exploitation.

Individualism is stinking thinking.

Hedonism. The creed of the hedonist is: Pleasure is the ultimate goal in life; if it feels good, do it! The fruits of hedonism are laziness, gluttony, procrastination, and lust.

Hedonism is stinking thinking.

Minimalism. The creed of the minimalist is: What's the least I can do? A minimalist is always seeking to exert the minimum effort and receive the maximum reward. Minimalism is the enemy of excellence and the father of mediocrity.

Minimalism is stinking thinking.

Relativism. The creed of the Relativist is: There is no absolute truth; what's true for you may not be true for me! Relativism contradicts itself because it claims, "It is absolutely true for everybody that nothing is absolutely true for everybody." The fruits of relativism are disorientation, intellectual and spiritual confusion, and hopelessness caused by the loss of any meaning in life.

Relativism is stinking thinking.



Great thoughts are beautiful. Great actions are inspiring. Are any of these philosophies beautiful? I think not. When someone embraces these broken ways of thinking and living, do they inspire anything good? Absolutely not.

They may be convenient to your disordered desires and selfishness at a particular moment, but do they really suffice as a philosophy to live your life by?

Reject the world's vision for your life. *It will leave you empty and dissatisfied.* Rebel against the culture.

Reject these broken philosophies and watch out for people who live by them, because they will only use you for their own benefit and selfish gratification.

Beyond yourself, these philosophies also mean doom for communities of any size.

What would happen to a community—a family, a parish, or a nation—if everyone lived by these self-centered philosophies? Those communities would grow apart, fall apart, and self-destruct.

In many ways this is what we are witnessing in world affairs today. As modern cultures and nations become increasingly secular, rejecting God and his ways, they begin to implode. *Anything that stands against God and his truth cannot last.*

Truth, beauty, and goodness: These are what your soul is thirsty for. The philosophies the world wants to pass off to you are deficient in all three.



VIRTUE IN
FOCUS

Cour·age

[kur-ij]

Mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.

What has been the most courageous moment of your life?

Who is the most courageous person you know?

In what situations would you like to have more courage?

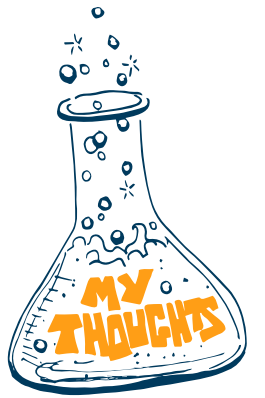


DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS

1. HOW IS “STINKING THINKING” HOLDING YOU BACK FROM BECOMING THE PERSON GOD CREATED YOU TO BE?

2. INDIVIDUALISM, HEDONISM, MINIMALISM, RELATIVISM: WHICH OF THESE ARE THE BIGGEST TEMPTATIONS FOR YOU AT THIS TIME IN YOUR LIFE?

3. DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU EMBRACED ONE OF THESE BROKEN PHILOSOPHIES. WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME? HOW DID YOU FEEL AFTERWARD? DID YOU BECOME A-BETTER-VERSION-OF-YOURSELF?



WHAT IS WISDOM?

Wisdom is not the amassing of knowledge. The sheer volume of information available on the Internet is enough to boggle the mind, and experts say the amount of data will soon double every day. But information is not wisdom. In fact, even if you could commit all this information to memory and claim it as knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom. So, what is wisdom? Wisdom is truth lived.



2.3 HUNGRY FOR THE TRUTH

One of the beautiful things about young people is *you are hungry for the truth*. And because of this hunger for the truth, you *hate being lied to*.

The broken philosophies we just explored and the stinking thinking that comes with them lead to the lie that there is no truth—and if there is no truth, there is no right and wrong. This is among the most absurd claims modern culture makes.

This kind of stinking thinking makes happiness impossible.

The good news is *there is truth*. Some things are true for everybody. There is such a thing as right and wrong.

You know this already from your own experience. Tell a lie and you will feel uncomfortable with yourself. You will also notice that lying makes you more anxious and less joyful. Anxiety represents the world. Joy represents God. Every lie takes you further away from God and his joy, and deeper into the anxiousness of the world.

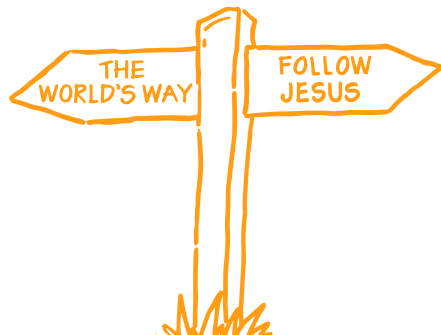
If someone else lies to you, you feel that they have wronged you in some way. How can they wrong you if there is no right and wrong?

You're smarter than the culture. Rebel against it.

There is such a thing as truth—not this rubbish of *your truth* and *my truth*, but **universal truth**. Truth is bigger than you and me; truth is bigger than everyone. There is such a thing as right and wrong. And you will only ever be happy to the extent that you align your life with truth, and make choices based upon what is right.

Truth and happiness are connected.

Ever since Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, God has been trying to lead us in this truth, and we have been rebelling. When we walk with God in his truth we find happiness and fulfillment. When we rebel against God and turn our backs on his truth, we find misery and discontent.



In the book of Exodus we read the story of Moses leading the people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Every person and every culture has questions about what is right and wrong. This is how God answered the Israelites' questions:

1. You shall love the Lord your God and serve him only.
2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
3. Keep holy the Sabbath.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

I know, it may seem a little old-fashioned, but *wisdom is never old-fashioned*. Let me suggest an exercise. Watch the news tomorrow night with this list in front of you. As each story is presented you will notice that most of the news is bad news. (The culture focuses on what is bad. God invites you to focus on what is good.) After each story is presented in the news program, ask yourself, which of the Ten Commandments was broken?

The truth is, the list is brilliant. It is pure genius. Wherever you find injustice and misery in this world, you will discover that at least one of the Ten Commandments has been broken.

Now ask yourself: How would the world be different if we just lived by the Ten Commandments?

Imagine all the misery and heartache that could be avoided if we all just lived by these ten nuggets of life-giving wisdom.

The Book of EXODUS

The Book of Exodus is the second book in the Old Testament. It tells the story of how the people of Israel, led by Moses, left slavery in Egypt. They journeyed through the wilderness to Mount Sinai, where God promised them the land of Canaan (“the Promised Land”) in return for their faithfulness. Israel entered into a covenant with God, who gave them laws to live by and instructions for the Tabernacle. It was in the Tabernacle that God promised to live among them, lead them to the Promised Land, and give them peace.

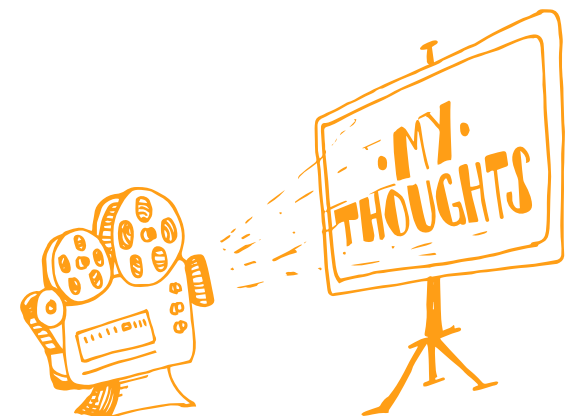


Discussion QUESTIONS

1. DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU WERE NOT “HUNGRY FOR TRUTH,” WHEN YOU DIDN’T WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH. WHY WERE YOU AVOIDING IT?

2. THINK ABOUT A DISTURBING STORY YOU HAVE SEEN IN THE NEWS RECENTLY. WHAT HAPPENED? WHICH OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE BROKEN?

3. WHEN WE EXAMINE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, THE OBVIOUS WAYS OF VIOLATING THEM ARE APPARENT, BUT WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MORE SUBTLE WAYS WE CAN BREAK THEM? For example, most people will never be in a situation in which they are tempted to break the Fifth Commandment (You shall not kill). But most of us have killed someone’s reputation with gossip. Go through the commandments one by one and discuss the not-so-obvious ways each can be broken.



2.4 THIS IS PERSONAL



"HOPE IS THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE BY WHICH WE DESIRE THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN AND ETERNAL LIFE AS OUR HAPPINESS, PLACING OUR TRUST IN CHRIST'S PROMISES AND RELYING NOT ON OUR OWN STRENGTH, BUT ON THE HELP OF THE GRACE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT."

(CCC 1817)

This discussion may seem very theoretical—but it isn't. This is deeply personal. What's holding you back? What's getting in the way of you becoming the best version of yourself? Disordered desires? Stinking thinking? Wrong friends? Bad habits? Drugs? Alcohol? Sex? An eating disorder?

Let me tell you a story to put all this in context.

Once upon a time there was a Native American Indian boy. It was the custom of his tribe to send the boys out into the wilderness around the time they were becoming young men. For thirty days they had to take care of themselves. They had to find their own food, defend themselves against wild animals, and find somewhere safe and sheltered each night to sleep. After the thirty days had past, all the men in the tribe would come searching for the boy and when they found him, he would be initiated into the tribe as an adult.

For several days everything was fine. The boy found plenty of food to eat and a place to sleep each night. But around the fifth and the sixth day food became scarce. On the seventh day the boy couldn't find any food at all, and this went on for almost a week. Finally, the boy woke up starving the morning of the thirteenth day. He hadn't eaten in almost a week.

That morning as he wandered in the wilderness, the boy noticed a mountain in the distance. He thought to himself, "Perhaps I will find food up on the mountain."

The boy walked in the direction of the mountain, and around the middle of the day he reached it and began to climb it. He soon discovered a path and followed it toward to the top, but still no food.

Late in the afternoon, just as the boy was stumbling upon the pinnacle of the mountain, starving and exhausted, a rattlesnake slithered across the path in front of him.

The boy froze.

The boy looked at the snake and the snake looked at the boy. Then the boy slowly began to back away from it. But just as he did, the snake said to the boy, "Boy, I am lost up here in the mountains and I cannot find my way down. But I know you know the way down. Please, will you lead me down the mountain?"

The boy replied, "No. I know what you are. You're a rattlesnake. At any moment you could strike out and hurt me, even kill me."

The rattlesnake said to the boy, "You look hungry, boy."

"Ahh," the boy groaned, "I'm starving. I haven't eaten in almost a week."

The snake said to the boy, "I know where we can find food. If you lead me down the mountain I will lead you to food."

The boy said, "No. You're a rattlesnake and you could hurt me."

The snake said to the boy, "If you lead me down the mountain, I promise I will lead you to food and I promise I will not hurt you."

The boy thought for a moment, and then he said to the snake, "Do you promise?"

"I do," replied the snake.

So the boy led the snake down the mountain, and when they got to the bottom the snake led the boy to food. The snake laid before the boy every type of food he could imagine, a banquet fit for a king. The boy ate and he drank, and he felt like a king.

Then the snake began to dance, and when the snake danced it was beautiful. So, the boy began to dance also. The boy danced and the snake danced, and they ate some more and drank some more, and then all of a sudden the snake struck out and bit the boy.

The boy fell to the ground screaming and crying. The snake slithered over to the boy. The boy looked at the snake, and the snake looked at the boy, and the boy screamed, "You promised! You promised you wouldn't hurt me."

The snake looked deep into the boy's eyes, smiled and laughed, and said, "You knew what I was when you picked me up."

What is it that sooner or later is going to turn on you and bite you?

And what are you going to do about it?

The rattlesnakes we encounter in life are always making promises they cannot keep. It is the very nature of these things to turn on us and strike us down.

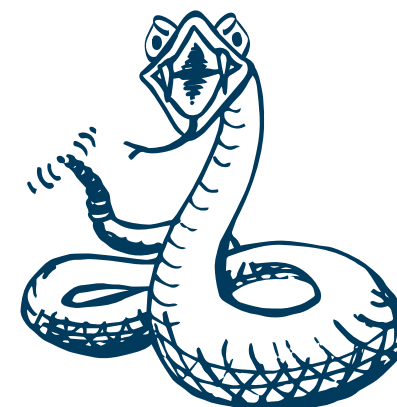
In a world filled with so much cynicism, the **SUPERNATURAL VIRTUES**

-Faith, Hope, and Love-

are often laughed at and dismissed as foolish and naive. Some people say that hope only sets you up for disappointment, and because of that hope is a bad thing.

Hope is a good thing,

maybe the best of things. Hope is one of those things that you can't buy, but that will be freely given to you if you ask. Hope is the one thing people cannot live without. Hope is a thing of beauty.



Life is a journey. Where is your journey taking you at the moment? Is it time to make a change? If it is, I hope you will have the **courage** to make the change.

Courage is a prerequisite for the life God has envisioned for you.

Everything in life requires courage. Whether it is playing football or coaching football; crossing the room to ask a woman on date, or rekindling a love that has grown old; whether it's your first day at college or your first day back at college after twenty years, life requires courage. It takes courage to say yes at the right times and it takes courage to say no at the right times. Your first day at work or starting a business, battling a potentially fatal disease, getting married, struggling to overcome an addiction, apologizing for something you have done, or coming humbly before God in prayer and asking: God, what do you think I should do? All require courage.

Life requires courage. Courage animates us and is therefore essential to the human experience.

The most dominant emotion in our society today is **fear**. We are afraid. Afraid of rejection and failure, afraid of certain parts of town, afraid of certain types of people, afraid of criticism, afraid of suffering, afraid of change, afraid to tell people how we really feel, afraid of losing the things we have worked hard to buy, afraid of what our friends will think . . . We are afraid of so many things. Often, we are afraid to be the best-version-of-ourselves.

But before too long we are going to meet someone who will *banish our fears* and fill us with courage to *live an incredible life*.



Discussion Questions

1. WHAT DID THE STORY ABOUT THE RATTLESNAKE MAKE YOU THINK?

2. WHAT DOES THE RATTLESNAKE REPRESENT FOR YOU? WHO OR WHAT IS HOLDING YOU BACK? WHAT IS IT THAT SOONER OR LATER IS GOING TO TURN ON YOU AND STRIKE YOU DOWN? HOW WOULD YOUR LIFE BE BETTER IF YOU COULD WALK AWAY FROM THAT RATTLESNAKE?

3. IF YOU HAD MORE COURAGE, WHAT GOOD THING WOULD YOU DO?



If you ask people **what the main message is in the Bible**, they might tell you

➡ IT'S *Love* ← OR {FORGIVENESS.}

BUT WHAT IS THE PHRASE THAT APPEARS MORE TIMES THAN ANY OTHER MESSAGE IN THE BIBLE?

DO NOT BE AFRAID. OVER AND OVER

throughout history, GOD'S MESSAGE TO HUMANITY HAS OVERWHELMINGLY BEEN *Do not be afraid.*

This phrase (or some variation of it) appears more than one thousand times in the Bible. → **WHY?** ←

BECAUSE GOD SENSES THAT WE ARE IN FACT AFRAID. AFRAID TO TRUST HIM. **Afraid to love others.**

Afraid to love ourselves. Afraid to embrace and celebrate **THE-BEST-VERSION-OF-OURSELVES.**

Afraid to ask the big questions and see where they might lead us. AFRAID.

GOD WANTS TO *liberate* YOU FROM THESE FEARS.



“HE WHO HAS
OVERCOME HIS
FEARS WILL
TRULY BE FREE.”

—ARISTOTLE

THE BOOK OF **JUDGES**

The Book of Judges is the seventh book of the Bible. It tells the stories of a series of divinely inspired leaders (judges). These judges were sent by God to help the Israelites live faithful lives. Gideon was one of these leaders. There is a pattern to the stories: The people are unfaithful to God and thus fall into the hands of their enemies. The people repent and call on God for mercy. God’s merciful response is to send them a new leader (a judge), who delivers the Israelites from oppression, and they prosper again. But before too long, they get carried away with their prosperity, forget their promises to God, become unfaithful, and repeat the cycle.

2.5 DECISION point

In the book of Judges we read about how the Israelites had turned away from God, choosing idolatry and immorality. As a result they fell into slavery again. Then God called on Gideon and he had to make a choice.

Gideon was a young man that God chose to free the people of Israel from their worship of idols.

Gideon was asked to tear down the altar of Baal and to build an altar to the Lord. Was he afraid? Yes. Did he have doubts? Yes. Was he concerned what his friends would think? Yes.

But . . . he listened to the voice of God—above his doubts, fears, and friends. He trusted in God’s word. And he chose good over evil, right over wrong, and bravery over cowardice.

So Gideon, under God’s instructions, destroyed the altar of Baal. This is where the Israelites were worshiping false Gods.

The Israelites had:

- Gone looking for happiness in the wrong places
- Fallen into stinking thinking
- Turned their back on the truth
- Been too proud to admit their wrongdoing

Life is choices. Today’s culture wants to build an altar of Baal in your heart. In fact, the construction of this altar probably started long ago. I know, because I tore down that altar many years ago, and yet it is amazing how often I notice that the world has started building a new altar to Baal in my heart, and I have to tear it down all over again.

Because like the Israelites, we have all:

- Gone looking for happiness in the wrong places
- Fallen into stinking thinking
- Turned our back on the truth
- Been too proud to admit our wrongdoing

Just like with Gideon, a **decision point** is before you today. God is asking you to tear down the altar of Baal that the culture has built in your heart. *Tear it down.*

And *now*, build in your heart an *altar to the Lord*.

Anyone or anything that doesn’t help you become the-best-version-of-yourself is just too small for you.

Decide *today* not to let anything get in the way of becoming the-best-version-of-yourself.

Don’t let anything hold you back from becoming the person God created you to be.



FEED YOUR
FAITH
AND YOUR
FEAR
WILL STARVE
TO DEATH

How much
courage did Mary
need to say yes
to God?

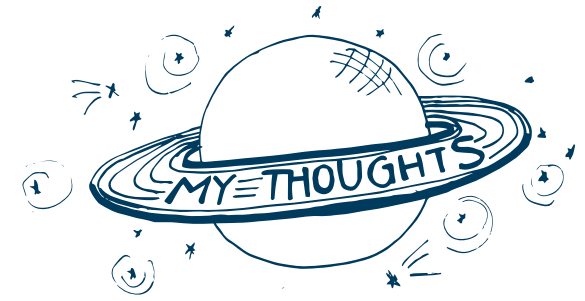


Journal Questions

1. IF GOD CALLED YOU TO A GREAT MISSION LIKE HE DID GIDEON, DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD SAY YES? WHY? WHY NOT?

2. LIKE THE ISRAELITES, WE HAVE ALL: GONE LOOKING FOR HAPPINESS IN THE WRONG PLACES, FALLEN INTO STINKING THINKING, TURNED OUR BACKS ON THE TRUTH, AND BEEN TOO PROUD TO ADMIT OUR WRONGDOING. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU ACTED LIKE THE ISRAELITES?

3. WHAT DOES OUR CULTURE WORSHIP?



WHAT'S HOLDING YOU BACK?

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

• PSALM 62 •

¹For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. ²He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly moved.

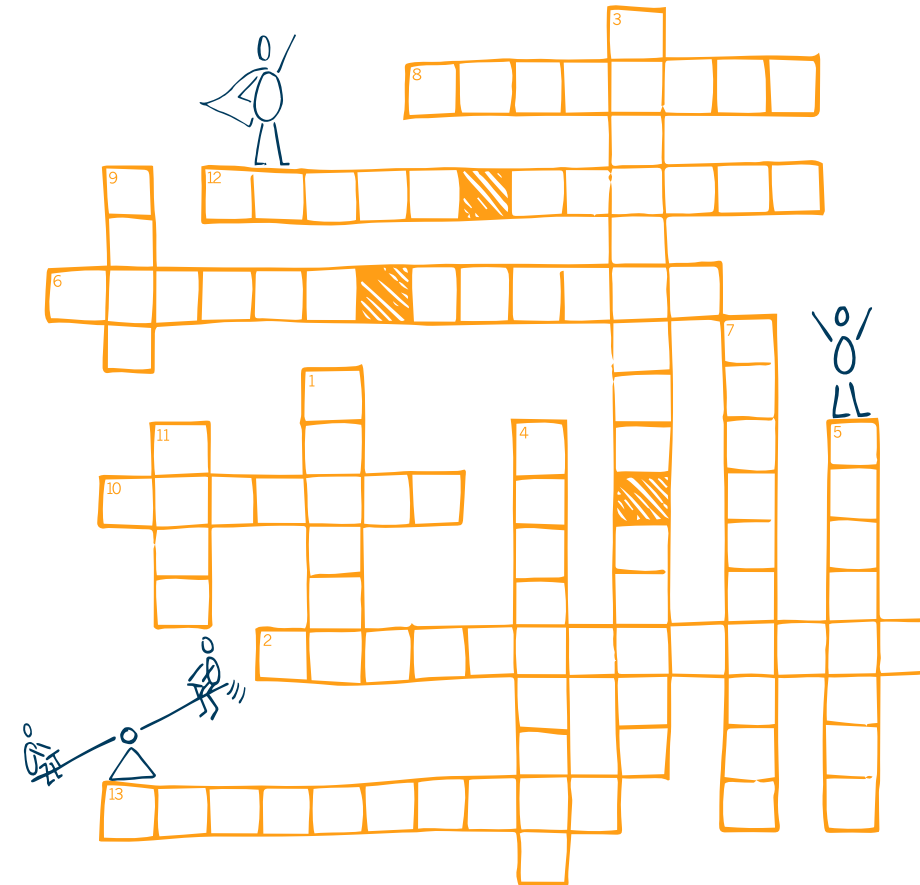
³How long will you set upon a man to shatter him, all of you, like a learning wall, a tottering fence? ⁴They only plan to thrust him down from his eminence. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse.

⁵For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. ⁶ He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. ⁷On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

⁸Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.

⁹Men of low estate are but a breath, men of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath. ¹⁰Put no confidence in extortion, set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, set not your heart on them.

¹¹Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God; ¹² and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For thou dost requite a man according to his work.



ACROSS

2. a philosophy centered on the question, "What's in it for me?"
6. disordered desire that exists in every person.
8. a philosophy that believes pleasure is the ultimate goal in life.
10. the moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty
12. happiness is the result of
13. the mistaken belief that what is true for one person might not be true for everyone.

DOWN

1. the power of the mind to think and understand in a logical way.
3. the idea that some things are true for everybody.
4. you have an enormous desire for
5. poor short-term substitute for happiness.
7. a philosophy focused on doing only the bare minimum.
9. the dominant emotion in our culture today
11. to desire something good and expect it with confidence.