

GOD? Truth?

Guardrails

IF YOU HAVEN'T NOTICED, many challenging issues arise during the young adult years. If you've ever needed solid answers, it's now.

Before we move on, let's establish one fact: you were created for a purpose; your life has meaning. Regardless of how others have made you feel, God created you; you are not an accident. No matter what you've gone through, or are going through, **your past does not have to define your future.**

God's Word provides encouragement and direction as you face tough decisions; therefore, a large portion of this book draws from the Scriptures. Don't simply glance over Scripture references, even if you've read them before. Read them again to see how each relates to you today. Don't let the surplus of information and the biblical principles make you



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feel that you cannot measure up. We all fall short, and we all have issues that we struggle with. Spiritual maturity takes time. One step in the right direction leads to another, and then another, and so on.

Finally, don't tackle these issues on your own; seek God's help and pray for guidance. *It's difficult to stumble when you're on your knees.*

Unfortunately, we often view the Bible only as a book of "DOs & DON'Ts," instead of a book that contains absolute truth. It guides, defends, and protects. God's principles are guardrails through the canyons of life. They don't prevent us from enjoying life; they protect us from falling. With that said, let's begin with the first topic—*absolute truth*.

Going in the wrong direction

I learned a lesson as a very young boy that still applies today. One summer, I was on an early morning bike ride to school. As I turned the corner and headed west, a heavy gust of wind slowed my pace. It was clear that I would be late for school, so I turned around and headed home for a ride. To my surprise, when I changed directions, my bike felt as if it were gliding on air. I turned and headed back to school, but once again, I was bombarded with gusts of wind that nearly blew me over.

KNOWING GOD

Religion vs. Relationship

Follow Me

WHEN I WAS A YOUNG MAN, I believed that I was strong because I could bench press over 400 pounds, drink a 12-pack of beer, and win most of the fights that I was in. What I failed to realize was that I was weak; I was dying spiritually. **I didn't have control of my life—my life had control of me.** Years later, I read again about the life of Jesus Christ, this time with open eyes. I found that I had been completely wrong about Him. Who, but Jesus, would say, *no man takes my life, I lay it down willingly?* Who, but Jesus, would say to the judge who ordered His execution, *you would have no power over me unless it was given to you from above?* Who, but Jesus, when hanging on a cross, severely beaten and dying for our sins, would say of his accusers, *Father, forgive them, for they*



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know not what they do? (See John 10:18; John 19:11; and Luke 23:34.) Following Christ does not represent weakness; it represents meekness. Weakness is the absence of strength; meekness is strength under control. It takes far more strength to follow Christ than to go with the flow of society.

Two words from Jesus: “Follow Me”—have changed more lives than all the words of famous men combined. As the great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, once said: **“The grace that is not strong enough to change me will not be able to save me.”** We don’t need to be ashamed of Christ and what He did for us. The apostle Paul said: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Why then are so many disturbed when the name of Jesus is mentioned? Why is His name, above all others, often taken in vain? The answer is simple: there is power in His name—power that shakes the spiritual realm. Philippians 2:9-11 says that *God has highly exalted Him and has given Him a name that is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.* No wonder the enemy seeks to destroy our relationship with Jesus; it’s the only name that can defeat him. Martin Luther said, “When Jesus Christ utters a word,

WHAT IS God's Will for My Life?

Your greatest investment

“IT’S *ALMOST TOO LATE*” jumped from the pages as I read an article by noted author and speaker, Josh McDowell. He stated that the reason so many young people are losing ground in the area of spiritual truth is because their parents are not involved in teaching them in word or action. He continued, “One of the most common questions I get is, ‘How could we live for Christ, when we don’t want the Christ that our parents have?’”¹⁴ Wow, that should force us all to ask, “Who am I influencing, and who’s influencing me?” Now, more than ever, it’s time to make solid choices in unstable times. *When the deterioration of the family is coming from within the same walls that were designed to protect it, it’s time for change.*

“What does this have to do with God’s will?” you may ask. A great deal. If you are a parent, or plan to be one, your greatest investment will be in your children—period! Your goal may be to own a business, climb the corporate ladder, or pursue a profession; whatever you choose, there is no greater opportunity than to promote the spiritual success of another, especially your child’s. Proverbs 22:6 (NIV) reminds us, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” **Character is not only taught; it’s caught.** It’s demonstrated through the lives of parents.

We live in a society that emphasizes wealth and possessions, but these things have no eternal value. I hardly remember my parents’ income or many of the material things they gave me. I do, however, remember the values they taught, those things that money cannot buy. It’s been well stated that the best things in life aren’t things. Although I took a temporary detour in my younger years, my parents’ example left a lasting impression. Never underestimate the power of parenting!

It’s possible to succeed in business, but fail at home. Look around, it’s happening everywhere, from the pulpit to the boardroom. Unfortunately, the price of success is often paid at the family’s expense. A friend of mine once shared a tragic story. He told of a trip to the hospital to visit a man who was dying. The man could no longer speak; he could, however, write. What followed was more devastating. The man cried as he wrote. At the top of his list he wrote that he regretted not spending more time with his family. He was in anguish over the fact that he had not been a better father and husband, but, instead, had built his life around other things. When all is said and done, it’s devastating to find that

ENTERTAINMENT

Where Do I Draw the Line?

Family friend

WHEN MATT WAS VERY YOUNG, his parents introduced him to a family friend. Matt was excited because he had someone to play with; his parents were pleased because he could entertain Matt when they were busy.

As the years went by, Matt and his friend spent countless hours together playing video games, watching sports, music videos, and reality shows. In time, things changed—his friend began to use profanity and was disrespectful toward his family. Although his mother and father disapproved, what could they do? His friend was like a family member now. He taught Matt how to dress, how to act, and even how to treat others. Although his parents wouldn't admit it, he taught them a thing or two as well.

Once Matt reached his teen years, his friend's influence was obvious. Matt spent more time with him than with his family. Matt's dad and mom were always gone, so his friend taught him about life. He introduced Matt to alcohol, drugs, and pornography. He explained how sex before marriage wasn't a bad thing; everybody was doing it, even with same-sex partners. Surprisingly, Matt's parents allowed his friend to continue to live in their home. After all, they enjoyed his company; he was a great entertainer.

When Matt grew older, he realized that the friendship should never have continued. He believed that his friend's influence encouraged his dad's affair, his mom's problem with alcohol, and eventually, their divorce; the impact of Matt's friend on him was just as devastating.

Today, with full knowledge of the damage done, Matt still allows his friend to live with him, and, amazingly, he still listens to his advice. Matt's friend has a name; it's television.

Although fictitious, Matt's story is more fact than fiction; it's characteristic of so many homes today—**what goes in ultimately comes out.**

What amazed them amuses us

Just a few decades ago, most of today's television programs and movies would have shocked the public. Programs that never would have aired then, receive the highest ratings now.



You may say, "Times change."
And you are correct, but God's
standards do not.

FINDING Mr. or Miss Right

Set the brake!

YOU MAY HAVE READ THE TITLE OF THIS CHAPTER in the front of the book and skipped ahead to this topic, but I strongly encourage you to resist the tendency to skip ahead. Each preceding chapter is important and relevant; they lay the groundwork necessary for this chapter. With that said, let's begin.

Although it was years ago, I remember it as if it was yesterday—largely because it was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. When I was seventeen, I drove my old Chevy Blazer to my father's construction yard. I parked and walked toward his office. I looked back only to find my truck following me as it gained speed. Before I could stop it, the truck slammed into a block wall. Although little damage was done to the truck, I was humiliated. My dad and several of his friends were there. The first words out

of my father's mouth were, "Did you set the parking brake?" Hesitantly, I replied, "No."

Days earlier, my dad reminded me to always set the parking brake until he could find out why the transmission wasn't holding. I remembered a very important lesson that day: **knowledge is knowing what to do; wisdom is doing it; both are important.** I knew what to do; I just didn't do it. I once heard that knowledge knows that a snowball is flying at your face—wisdom ducks. Hopefully, this chapter will encourage you to make wise decisions when it comes to dating, and ultimately marriage. "Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times" (Isaiah 33:6).

Michelle ... and so many more

There was a young woman; let's call her Michelle. Michelle began dating Mark when she was 16. He told her that he was also a Christian and that he respected her standards. He mentioned that he had been sexually active in the past, but that he felt differently about her. He reassured her that it wouldn't happen in their relationship. The fact that he had been involved intimately with other girls bothered Michelle, but she wanted to believe him, and he was very attractive.

As they continued to date, Mark's influence was strong. Michelle stopped attending church and youth group. She also lost interest in reading her Bible and praying. As a result, her relationship with Christ was no longer a priority.



If the person you're dating seems like "a nice person," give it time, a lot of time, before truly coming to that conclusion.

BROKEN Yet Unbreakable

The one who will never leave

LIFE IS A LONG JOURNEY FULL OF WONDERFUL opportunities and experiences, but there are also roadblocks, delays, pitfalls, and hurdles. We overcome by persevering; by getting up when we fall. Successful people build success from failure. They don't look back—it's not the direction they want to go. Everyone falls, but not everyone gets up. Few things hinder us more than failing to forgive others or ourselves for past mistakes. Many times, they haunt and discourage us from moving forward. As a result, people may rate themselves according to who they were, or what they did; not realizing that who they are now, and who they will become is far more important.

With life comes power. The God-given power to persevere is one of the strongest attributes that we possess. **The obstacles ahead are never greater than God's power**

to take you through. There is little that we can do about life's difficulties, except control the way that we respond to them. *It's been said that life is 10 percent what happens to us and 90 percent how we react to it.* We are clearly in charge of our attitudes and responses.

Granted, I don't have all of the answers, and there are questions and situations that are difficult to understand, but II Corinthians 4:8-9 has helped me greatly, and it can help you too. It states: "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." When I was hard-pressed, I was molded into the person that He intended me to be. When I was perplexed, I had only to ask for direction and move forward. When I was persecuted, I found hope through spiritual truths. When I was struck down, God restored me, and when I wanted to give up, I found the endless encouragement to continue. God will do the same for you as you commit your life to Him. **You will find encouragement, restoration, and wholeness in the One who will never leave nor forsake you.**

The last thing you ever want to do

With millions of families experiencing divorce, abuse, or broken relationships, the need to address this topic is unavoidable and necessary. In the book, *Sacred Thirst*, the author writes:

The bride and groom are standing in front of everyone, looking better than they are ever going to look again, getting so much attention and affirmation. Everybody even stands when they walk in, so it's easy to think this marriage, at least, is about them. It's not. Just look at the worn-out

What's INSIDE?

What's inside spills out

AS A CHILD, I was captured by the stories that my grandfather told about life on the farm in Oklahoma in the early 1900s. The images I've held are not those of pleasant surroundings and ideal conditions; they are impressions of twelve-hour days spent working the land, dust storms that could devastate a crop, blistered and sunburned skin, and poverty unlike most Americans know today. Life, in general, was harder then, but interestingly enough, character seemed much stronger—it was a time when commitment, integrity, and honesty stood in place of contracts, disclosures, and bylaws. A handshake and a man's word were generally good enough. I'm not suggesting that we return to that time in history, but that we learn from the past and strongly encourage those same character traits today.



... the depth of your relationship with God is in direct proportion to the depth of your commitment to Him; great commitment, great relationship; poor commitment, poor relationship. Discipline matters!

I remember watching a news story about an enormous oil tanker that sprung a leak off the coast of Spain. Because the tanker was full of oil, millions of gallons gushed into the sea; it was a horrific sight and an environmental disaster. In the same way, **when we're struck, what's inside spills out.** Is anger, pride, unforgiveness, or selfishness exposed, or does adversity reveal patience, humility, forgiveness, and self-control?

Much of what we've discussed, thus far, focuses largely on developing spiritual disciplines and godly character (what's on the inside). Discipline is the ability to put the right choice into action; it's essential for accomplishing anything in this life. If we exercise discipline in one area, it will help to strengthen other areas. Habits are hard to break, and it often takes discipline to overcome them. The principle of discipline cannot be overlooked when it comes to developing godly character.

Ironically, **people think that they lack discipline, but they don't—they lack motivation.** For instance, if it were possible to offer a large sum of money to those who would read their Bible an hour a day for six months, how many would qualify for the money? Probably a large

ONE NATION 'Above' God

A note regarding Chapter Eight

As I complete this final chapter, war rages in the Middle East, and the potential for nuclear war intensifies. America is divided on many fronts. Where are the answers? How will the future and security of America unfold in the days to come?

Although the previous chapters address personal issues, the following chapter recognizes the biblical foundation that once guided America; these principles are the foundation on which America's success rests. This transition in subject matter may seem like a quantum leap, but stay with me.

Please understand that it is not my intention to endorse a political policy, party, or candidate—but to point, once again, to the power of Scripture to shape an individual, as well as a nation. Who we are in our personal lives should reflect who we are as a nation.

With that said, let's begin.

Keep the roots alive

I NTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, one of the top concerns on the minds of young adults today is the stability of America. There was a time in recent history when America felt secure knowing that its most formidable enemies were abroad. Not so today. We seem to be losing ground in many areas. As a result, our legacy as a great nation has all but been forgotten.

“What does this have to do with young adults?” you might ask; it has everything to do with your future. Most schools are no longer teaching students about the spiritual foundation that has guided America throughout the years. Consequently, America’s moral and religious heritage is often deleted, grossly distorted, or revised altogether. *Students often miss the critical connection between America’s unparalleled greatness, her rise to world leadership, and the spiritual foundation that made it possible.* This should concern us. The ideas of the classroom in one generation will create the ideas of government within the next. **The spiritual state of a nation simply reflects the spiritual state of her people.** As things stand, the future of America will be an atmosphere of even greater intolerance of those committed to God’s ways. If we fail to return to our Judeo-Christian roots, we will lose a rich harvest of God’s blessings and experience the pain of regret.

In order to take the initial steps to regain lost ground, it’s important to understand why America was established, and it’s equally important to note just how far we have drifted from the original intent of the founding principles. Woodrow Wilson rightly said, “A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today, nor what it is trying to do.”³⁴