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The
Apple Concept
Devotional

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PREFACE

Seeking a deeper understanding of God can feel uneasy. After all, it will either be something we've heard a million times before -- and so are comfortable with, yet unchanged. Or it will be something that sounds different -- and so threatens us, yet holds the possibility of transformation. The most important aspect of this concept is to remember that questions are not bad. Questions are good; our inquisitive minds were fashioned by God and He is more glorified when we think than when we try to shut ourselves off. God's timeless message is not fragile; it will not brake when examined. You will not prove it false, except perhaps for the part of your interpretation that is holding you back.

While many popular devotionals ask for a verbal or written commitment, this one will not. We simply request that you decide to seek answers, meaning, and a spirituality that translates into your everyday life -- a real working faith in God. Of course, we hope to assist you to that end, but by all means, if this is not helpful -- move on. The commitment should be to yourself and to your spiritual life, not to a devotional.

Record thoughts, concerns, and questions as you go.

Let's get started!

PRAYER SUGGESTION:

Father, You are infinite and holy, your thoughts are above my thoughts and you are unsearchable. Please reveal Yourself to me in the ways You revealed Yourself to people in Your Word. Burn in front of me, pass by me, reach out to me, and sup with me. I want to know You. I want to be one with You. Help me understand what it really means to be a light and teach me how to apply Your precepts so that I will never thirst again. Reach me with Your unfailing love.

-Amen

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Day 1

He told them this parable: "No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, 'The old is better.'" – Luke 5:36-39

It seems that to most of us, the wine we prefer is the old stuff we're used to drinking, the mellow, aged wine that seems perfect to us. It offers aromas and tastes we know by heart and welcome the familiar weight of. But, in order to ferment new truths into our lives, we must not only adapt, but also become new ourselves.

The verse points out that an old piece of shirt does not match a new one. Does your life match the passages of scripture promising freedom, abundance, fulfillment, peace, love, joy...? Are those qualities eluding you? Do they tear at an already tattered life?

What if your life is like an old wineskin? What if the ways you have always thought and felt and reacted are ill equipped to contain a fresh understanding of God? If that doesn't make sense to you, think about how the burden of adding Biblical truth to your existing life sometimes threatens to break you. Do you feel pressured when you try to live into the expectations God is believed to have of you?

What if you simply needed a new wineskin for the new wine?

Are you ready to move on to the questioning, to grow into a deeper understanding of your relationship with God? Do you want to have the kind of spiritual experience that can accurately be described as born again, sight to the blind, new wineskin... Not words you say or feelings you manufacture, but a perspective shift that results in a better way of life.

You will have to revisit your absolutes. This will take courage, open-mindedness, and faith in a God who promised that when you actually came seeking with your whole heart, He would be found of you.

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Day 2

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." – Hebrews 10:15-17

God said He would put His law on your heart. He promised to put it in your mind. You have to begin to trust yourself. Not the deceived you that reaches for something to make life better in the moment, but the aware you, who understands that you were created, in love, with a purpose. That is the *you* who will be uncovered as you grow in understanding God's love.

If the law is put in your heart and mind, do you think it could be dangerous to silence your questions?

What if re-examining your beliefs was *the way* to freedom?

Imagine how it felt to the Pharisees, who were rigid teachers of God's law in Jesus' time, to question the laws they spent their lives memorizing and following and protecting. Imagine following a leader who asked you to reconsider everything you've ever believed. That would be Jesus.

Hebrews 10:19, the verse following today's passage, says, that we have boldness to enter into the presence of God *ourselves*, by the blood of Jesus, by a new way of living. Does your life feel like a new way of living?

Spend time today identifying the life you grew up living and how it shaped the choices you've made up to this point. Don't be super spiritual, be totally honest. What code, motto, creed, or lifestyle did/do you live by? Why?

How has it led to where you are now?

What absolutes would you never consider walking away from?

Pray that you will see your past with new eyes. Ask for help discerning the ways in which your personal history has shaped you and how it competes with your personal longing, the one you often ignore or condemn yourself for having. Ask whether you are listening to the right voice.

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Day 3

This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? – Galatians 3:2-3

Paul wonders what I hope you will begin to wonder. Can you finish a spiritual journey by forcing certain, expected responses? Did you come to faith in your ability to say *no* to sin, or did you come to faith in God's love, faith in Jesus' willingness to be a sacrifice for you?

It is possible that we've taken in only half of the message. It's a good and important half, but it is only half. Clinging faithfully to the portion of truth we trust to save us, we are, in Paul's words to the Galatians, bewitched. We are fooled, led astray, drawn back to seek justification by the very law that condemned us to begin with.

The Gospel becomes something of a heavy car engine. We hear it rev, we see it turn and move. It all looks very impressive. We learn about how it has the power to move us and propel us; we are in awe of its roar. We believe in the engine because we have experienced it first hand. Agreeing to share the engine with others, we strap it to our backs and immediately feel the weight of it. With all of our might we try to do the engine justice, to be a good vehicle to show what the engine can do. Eventually exhausted and fully aware of our inability to go from zero to sixty, we begin to condemn ourselves, and ultimately, we question the engine. But Jesus said His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Maybe the Gospel was not intended to be strapped to our backs.

- What if the thoughts and feelings we condemn or deny in ourselves are the vehicles for which the engine was made?
- What if the love of individuality and acknowledgement of our human capability were part of the vehicle needed to take us where the engine was designed to go?
- What if our censure of self and constant attempts to do the engine justice stood in our way?
- What if there was another half to the message?

How alarming would it be to set the engine into a vehicle you have been taught to fear? Could you do it? Would you? Without the engine, we are just sitting in our empty lives waiting for something to move us, but without a vehicle, we are trying to do the impossible.

Human beings have wrongfully trusted themselves to live into a law that was fulfilled through the sacrifice of love. Rather than experiencing freedom, we believe we have been given new opportunity to keep the law. But "...if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." – Galatians 2:21

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Day 4

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly. – John 10:10

To be sure what kind of life Jesus was talking about, let's take a look at the meaning of the word *life* in Greek:

Life: The state of one who is possessed of vitality or is animate, of the absolute fullness of life, both essential and ethical, life, real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed, in the portion even in this world of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the resurrection to be consummated by new accessions (among them a more perfect body), and to last for ever.

The final part of the definition above talks of eternal life, but all three of the aspects of the word *life*, here, refer to a full and vital, genuine and active existence in this world. Out of Jesus' own mouth, He came to provide abundant life to us, life so powerful and full that death could not stop it.

When was the last time your spiritual focus was on seizing the freedom to live? Is more of your spiritual quest geared toward guilt and renewed effort to stop "letting God down," or is it aimed at understanding what prevents you from experiencing the abundant life?

The above definition of life is perfectly balanced. It speaks of life now *and* forever. It refers to active, animate, vigorous and genuine life, while also mentioning fullness of life, both essential and ethical. The word *ethical* would refer to the moral, just, principled, fair, and decent portion of our existence.

Are you in balance? Is more of your spirituality focused on your view of *ethical* than on the entire scope of life? Some of us become overly concerned with being moral, while forgetting to be active, vigorous, and genuine.

It could be that your disproportionate view of what God has designed for you is what is holding you back.

SUGGESTION:

Write down your tenants of faith. Think about your true beliefs and ask yourself if living into them has been too difficult for you to do. Prepare to examine a new presentation of traditional beliefs. Pray for insight.

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Day 5

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings death. – James 1:14-15

We looked at the life Jesus intended for those who follow Him and saw that it was balanced, full, and free. What enshrouds our potential to have that fullness of life? We believe sin = death. So the onslaught is to encourage people to choose against sin. “Just stop sinning!” According to the above passage, if we start by stopping sin, we are entering in the middle of the equation; therefore, we are attacking a consequent behavior, rather than the cause. If we take the James equation and begin at the beginning, we will note three important points.

1. We each have our own desires that draw us away and entice us.
2. When we allow those desires to conceive, sin is ushered into our lives.
3. The ultimate end of sin is spiritual death.

The sin is conceived out of our desires, but...

Where do those desires come from?

This is the Key Question. The answer will strengthen your ability to understand where your desires originate, beyond the idea of sin nature, so that you can solve the death equation completely.

What does *conceive* mean?

Here, it means to take captive, like a prisoner. None of us would necessarily think of ourselves as prisoners to our desires -- but are we free to choose against certain behaviors or do they feel ingrained in us? Do some choices seem more like an end we can not escape? What perceptions keep you captive?

How do you define spiritual death?

Understanding spiritual death, beyond the threat of Hell, will serve as the rudder to guide you in discerning which choices to make, which desires to pursue, and which feelings to trust. Start asking yourself what part of you will live forever.

Sin is conceived out of our desires, but where do those desires come from?

The answer is much deeper than the words, ‘sin nature’ imply. Are you ready to come to an applicable understanding of sin that will explain how *even* something as wonderful as generosity can possibly be a sin?

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Day 6

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” – Genesis 3:4-5

What really makes something a SIN? Why does God care if we try really hard to keep the rules, especially if it is in the church? Why does He care if we try to make it all look good from the curb or if we distract ourselves a little?

Could it be more about *why* we do those things? That brings us back to the Key question: **Where do those desires come from?** The answer is found in the very first record of human sin, the garden story. **We can finally start to understand *why* we sin.**

Genesis chapters 1 & 2 are devoted to the creation and perfection of the paradise in which Eve lived. From this background you can figure that even if you had everything you think you want, you would still be vulnerable to the desire that imprisons you and gives way to sin. In the midst of perfection, Eve was persuaded to choose against God (a God she could see and hear and know). What preceded her action of reaching for the fruit? **She believed a lie.**

Yes, “...you will *not* surely die...” was a lie, but even when we *know* sin results in death (spiritually and often physically) we still act on it. Was that the cunning suggestion that derailed humanity? The lie is *subtle* so maybe we need to take a closer look.

He told her she would be like God, knowing good from evil. **THAT WAS TRUE!**

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: - Genesis 3:22

“...you will be like God...” He enticed her with the promise of enhancement. Eve could not resist the thought of improved worth; she believed the lie that she needed more desirable qualities. She believed she was not good enough the way she was, and that one elusive fruit would make her better. The one thing thought to be beyond her was said to offer the hope of making her better.

How can the lie of, *You are not good enough the way you are, and this will make you better*, be the desire that imprisons you? The fleeting thought is common, but how do you react when it takes hold in your mind? Do you think believing that you are not good enough is offensive to the One who made you?

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Day 7

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. – Ephesians 2:10

The idea of being a masterpiece of God's design leads us to ask ourselves if we are accurately portraying His intention for us. Does God specialize in mass production of seemingly identical trinkets? Or would He be more fittingly compared to an artist who creates one-of-a-kind masterworks? In *The Apple You Were Fed*, human beings are compared to the artwork of a bronze statue being poured slowly, over time.

Do you reflect what God is capable of producing? Are you a solid gleaming example of what He intended for you? Or are you lining up next to others, all trying to act the same, look the same, think the same? It doesn't matter who you line up with; Christians, non-Christians, Republicans, Democrats... Are you seeing the beauty in what God made (you) or are you picking it apart? Are you constantly adding to or correcting God's intention for you? Maybe you have abandoned it as worthless, and now you are just surviving in a desolate place in your life.

Could you choose to be beautiful to the One who supplied you with your particular strengths and weaknesses, your nuances and peculiarities? Will you VALUE the fact that you are a one-of-a-kind? He created you the way He wanted you to be.

What if the sin was devaluing yourself? That would mean the *acts* of sin were not as important as the motivation behind them. That would mean we were all guilty of the same SIN even when the outward expressions of SIN were different.

What if the drive behind every choice you made was a belief that you were not good enough the way you were, and you needed to improve your worth?

Do you think sin is offensive to God because it causes us to be less than intended? What if sin is offensive because it causes us to be stuffed full of things that mar God's design, or because it compels us to reach for things we never needed?

Can believing the lie of not enough tempt you to distract yourself to escape feeling unworthy, compel yourself to accomplish things that you think will disprove the threat of unworthiness, or hide yourself to escape feeling unworthy?

The next three days are devoted to simplifying our understanding of how sin (the lie) generally plays out in our lives. There are many verses about sin in the New Testament, to keep it simple we will use the same list for all three days: The works of the flesh from Galatians 5.

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Day 8

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: **repetitive, loveless, cheap sex**; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; **frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness**; trinket gods; magic-show religion; **paranoid loneliness**; cutthroat competition; **all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants**; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; **uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions**; **ugly parodies of community**. I could go on. – Galatians 5:19-21MSG

For the next three days we will divide the above “works of the flesh” into three categories: Gauzing, ladder climbing, and carnival cut-outs. This will help us to better identify the human tendency to fall short of God’s intended design

1 GAUZING 1

For gauzing, the correlating “works of the flesh” are highlighted (in the verse). Similar behaviors are found elsewhere in the Bible:

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. – 1 Peter 4:3

A life threatening, physical injury elicits frantic attempts at self preservation, such as packing a bleeding wound with gauze. In that same way, gauzing, as defined in *The Apple You Were Fed*, is the thoughtless grabbing at whatever temptation presents to us in the moment. It serves as a distraction from everyday life and keeps us preoccupied with the seeking of temporary fulfillment. Gauzers are impulsive and expect more from people and things than they are capable of providing.

When gauzing, there is very little thought given to long-term penalty, cost, appearance, or results. Gauzing can range from semi-controlled behaviors to completely out of control addictions.

These are the “sins” which are the most easily identifiable acts of self-indulgence: over eating, excessive shopping, alcohol and drug abuse, indiscriminate sexual behavior etc... The unavoidable consequences make gauzing difficult to hide long-term.

It is most important to note that only a portion of the Galatians list of “works of the flesh” is categorized as gauzing. Identify these behaviors in your life. If you are relatively free of these outlets of sin, ask yourself if that fact has lulled you into a false sense of “holiness.”

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Day 9

Bible character example of Gauzing

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)

Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."

"Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright. – Genesis 25:29-34

Esau couldn't see past what he wanted right that minute, food. He said he felt as if he were about to DIE. He was willing to trade his birthright for a bowl of red stew. The birthright, according to Matthew Henry, was a symbol of spiritual privilege, including the excellence of dignity and the excellence of power. The first born stood to inherit twice as much as his siblings. So, even if it were not spiritual, it represented the great honor of who he was. He traded his very identity for a meal of bread and lentils.

The deep down desperation felt when we think we have to have something right now tempts us to forget the importance of who we are. We become careless with the very essence of what makes us significant.

The idea that we are not enough to count for more than an instant fix (here it was food) is offensive to the One who created us to live into our inheritance.

Have you grabbed for something in the moment and then, without even realizing the significance, walked away? Have you believed the lie that you are not enough, and so failed to value yourself?

PRAYER SUGGESTION:

Father, I'm undone. I have traded myself for temporary escape. Please help me understand the significance of who I am, who You have created me to be. From today forward, fortify me with the assurance that I am more valuable than these careless choices indicate. Strengthen me to move forward with a clear sense of the value You have placed on me. Be glorified as I turn away from the lie that I am worth nothing more than the food, shopping, drugs, alcohol, zoning out in front of the TV, computer, video games that tempt me... Teach me to live an expression of who I am to You!

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Day 10

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; **a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage**; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; **trinket gods**; magic-show religion; **paranoid loneliness**; **cutthroat competition**; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; **a brutal temper**; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; **small-minded and lopsided pursuits**; **the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival**; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; **ugly parodies of community**. I could go on. – Galatians 5:19-21MSG

2 LADDER CLIMBING 2

For ladder climbing, the correlating “works of the flesh” are highlighted (in the verse). Similar behaviors are found elsewhere in the Bible:

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. –
1 Timothy 6:6-8

Just as the name suggests, a ladder climber cares about maintaining or achieving a better position. Ladder climbing, as defined in *The Apple You Were Fed*, is the driven-ness to excel, succeed, maintain, and move ahead. Ladder climbing moves beyond achievement into power-positioning one’s self above others or advancing for the fleeting feeling of preeminence. Ladder climbers are preoccupied with their status and often the status of those around them.

When ladder climbing, there is much effort given to accomplishment. Time and exertion are rarely spared in the ladder climber’s assent to the perceived “top.” It creates a life out of balance in the pursuit of an elusive sense of accomplishment.

These are the “sins” which are easily masked as a tireless effort to do one’s best and often viewed as admirable qualities. The consequences (of self promotion and discounting the successes, or desiring the successes of others) keep the lives of those who engage in such behavior in endless striving and are often blamed on others.

Do you imagine yourself to be “above” people who do less, know less, have less, than you? Do you burden yourself too heavily when you fail to reach a goal you’ve set?

Ask yourself: Can I identify this behavior in my life? Do I decide how I’m doing by comparing myself with others (judging people’s lives)? Am I driven by a constant need to advance myself? Do the expectations I have of myself, or allow others to have of me, prevent me from experiencing genuine respite?

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Day 11

Bible character example of Ladder Climbing

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, **so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.**" – Genesis 11:1-4

The people wanted to "make a name for themselves..." Does that sound familiar? They thought they needed a high reaching tower to be great.

The story goes on to say that from this, their language became confounded and they could no longer communicate. Metaphorically, how does that reflect the results of stepping on others to make a name for yourself? Have you ever been used or walked over as someone made a name for themselves? More often than not, the result is broken communication and possibly severed relationships.

Our need to find value in achievements or accomplishments and status tempts us to place the importance of who we are in external things. We surround ourselves with valuable things to feel a sense of worth. Jesus warned against this in the New Testament:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Matthew 6:19-21

The idea that we are not enough to count for more than our accomplishments is offensive to the One who created us to live our lives as an expression of our abundance.

Trusting in position, power, or possessions to make us believe we are enough sets us up for a fall. When those external "treasures" are gone or destroyed or taken away, we will be left with ourselves. If we think that is nothing... then we will believe we've been left with nothing, we will believe the lie.

Think about what gives you a sense of value. If it is something external, shift your spiritual weight – begin to see those things as *expressions* of who you are NOT the sum of who you are.

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Day 12

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; **divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits**; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; **ugly parodies of community**. I could go on. – Galatians 5:19-21MSG

3 CARNIVAL CUT-OUT 3

For carnival cut-outs, the correlating “works of the flesh” are highlighted (in the verse). It should be easy to picture a carnival cut-out. If you’ve ever stood behind one, and had yourself immortalized as whatever was painted on the front, you can draw an accurate conclusion as to what the behavior implies. Carnival cut-outs, as defined in *The Apple You Were Fed*, are the roles we hide behind, or images we seek to project. Carnival cut-outs go beyond living into our responsibilities and into pretense and disingenuous behaviors. It offers a sense of purpose and fortification when a person attempts to live into an expectation. Carnival cut-outs are afraid of letting others down; they take exceptional satisfaction in being the picture of perfection.

When a person hides behind the image they trust in and becomes a carnival cut-out they fight and justify their behaviors, often believing God requires them to act a certain way. In many ways, carnival cut-outs resemble ladder climbers; in fact, the two are often intertwined as people seek to maintain position. The key difference is that a carnival cut-out serves the image of perfection, and often trades him/herself for approval.

The *Bible* describes this behavior in other places:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. – Ephesians 4:25

These are also the “sins” which are easily confused with success in the Christian life and viewed as admirable qualities. The consequences (of performing in expected roles or pretending responses) cause those who engage in such behavior to feel separated from those they wish to impress.

Do you agree with things to be well thought of? Are you thought of as the perfect _____? Do you feel a need to discern the responses expected and give them? Do you hold your thoughts, feelings, and opinions until you are confident they are in line with those of others around you? Is it hard for you to say *no*?

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Day 13

Bible character example of Carnival Cut-Outs

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God." – Acts 5:1-4

Ananias and Sapphira were the first Christian Carnival Cut-Outs. They wanted the church in Acts to believe they were donating all of the money from the sale of their land, when in actuality they were keeping part of it for themselves. It is clear, by what Peter says first to him and then, to her that the "lie" was pretending to give it all. They were free to KEEP it all, keep some... they could have lit it on fire for all the church cared. But they PRETENDED to give it all.

They both died as a result of their deception. How does it suffocate the life out of you to pretend to be something or someone you are not? Why was Peter so swift in his accusation against them? Do you think it was because pretending to be your idea of a Christian could have serious harmful implications for others who are trying to learn how to serve God?

When we try to gain a worth through living up to an expectation, it tempts us to hide the truth of who we are and how we really feel. We want to be well thought of, so we say and do things that are not genuine. We are lying ourselves and to God.

Thinking that we are not enough unless we meet the expectations of others around us is offensive to the One who created us to daily express who He designed for us to be.

Have you betrayed yourself and the people in your life by trying to please their expectation instead of being genuine – instead of living as who you were created to be?

SUGGESTION:

Read the story of Esther in the Book of Esther in the Bible. Ask yourself how Esther was tempted to hide behind the King's perception of her instead of revealing the truth about who she was. What would the outcome have been?

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Day 14

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full grown, brings death. – James 1:14-15

We are tempted by our own desires (to feel a sense of value or to feel worthy).

In summary of the past five days, where does that desire come from?

That desire comes from a belief that you are *not* valuable or worthy.

We grow up internalizing a lie. That lie tells us we are not good enough, or perhaps convinces us to trust in some outside entity to *make* us good enough (think money, power, fame, beauty).

This lie plays out differently in each of our lives, which accounts for our “own desires.” For example, a child growing up with a substance abusing, single parent, in a low-income lifestyle, may wonder, *Why doesn't my parent care about me enough to stop?* A child growing up in an upper-middle class lifestyle with a work-a-holic father and a PTA president mother may wonder, *Why doesn't my parent care about me enough to stop?* Clearly, the surroundings and the situations are different and each carries its own unique repercussions, but the message conveyed in both cases is the same.

Even in “perfect” effort parenting, the lie can leech into a person’s mind. Think of a child growing up in the home of well established and successful, attentive parents. The thought can be subtle, but if the child decides he/she must become a little copy of the parents, or if the child decides they could never live up to the parent, the lie wins by painting an expectation in the child’s mind. You are not enough unless you...

So, the more we struggle to quiet the idea of not being good enough, or disprove the lie of not being good enough, the further we move from God’s intention for our lives.

Think about what it means to have God’s plan, specific to YOU. His ideal is not a type. His assessment of us is absent of outside influence, which is why there are so many diverse individuals in the *Bible* to represent those capable of doing His will. The ingredients that make you -- *you* are all included in God’s recipe for your life. The frustration will never end if you believe He wants you to become a chocolate cake, when He has filled you with spicy entrée ingredients.

Maybe you grew up knowing you didn’t have to live into an expectation, did you see yourself as worthy and complete? Do you have this perspective in your life already?

If not, what do you think is missing in your life? Take time to think about what outside voices are influencing you today or have influenced you all of your life.

The Apple Concept

Day 15

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? - Matthew 16:24-25

To find your life, you have to be willing to lose it. What does that mean?

It means we have developed habits and even addictions to: 1. Our vices (Gauzing) 2. Our pursuits (Ladder climbing) 3. Our images (Cut-outs)...

And we need to realize that in order to find real life -- the life God intended for us, we have to be willing to question why we can't turn away from those things (even when we are sure they are sinful). We do not need a grunt effort to stop disappointing God, but a self-awareness that what we are trusting in can not change how we feel.

In fact, Jesus asked what good it would do if you gained the whole world, gained the whole broken marriage, the bigger house, the better looking wife, the body you've always wanted... if you had to give up your soul to have it. He asked what you would trade in exchange for your soul: to be well thought of, admired, accepted, needed... ?

To find your life, you have to be willing to develop some self-awareness of the new ideas presented to you. You must begin to apply the insights to your life so that you start to see the wisdom in them. This is not a fancy way of saying you have to stop sinning – remember, we determined that would be starting in the middle of the equation...

Let's go back to the James equation. We concluded that the most effective route to change is to cap the source of our destructive desires, not to reign in the results of desire.

If the outlets we choose are ineffective and sinful, but we still feel like we are not good enough, where do we turn to be healed or to feel whole? How do we cap the source?

According to the *Bible* the ability to “cap the source” is the great gift Jesus made available to us. He died to set us free. Since we have re-thought the desire underlying all the manifestations of sin in our lives, and we have identified the truth that simply trying harder to say *no* to sin is the wrong place to start, maybe we should take another look at what was provided to us at the cross.

PRAYER SUGGESTION:

Father, I trust Your Spirit to guide me into all truth. Please give me wisdom, courage, and clarity as I allow my faith to be examined. My confidence is in Your love. –Amen

The Apple Concept

Day 16

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. - John 3:17

John 3:16 is possibly the most commonly known Bible verse. Today's verse is the one immediately following it. As well as we think we understand the character of Christ, how are we possibly getting a few things wrong? Why did God send His Son into the world?

It was *not* to Condemn: to judge, to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong, to be judged, i.e. summoned to trial that one's case may be examined and judgment passed upon it, to pronounce judgment, to subject to censure, of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others, to rule, govern, to preside over with the power of giving judicial decisions, because it was the prerogative of kings and rulers to pass judgment, to contend together.

It was to Save: to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction, one (from injury or peril), to save a suffering one (from perishing), i.e. one suffering from disease, to make well, heal, restore to health, to preserve one who is in danger of destruction, to save or rescue

How do these definitions fly in the face of your understanding of God? Can it make sense to you that God did not send His Son into the world to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong (that took me a while to reconcile)?

God sent His Son into the world to rescue it from danger. How often do we misinterpret the message of salvation to mean that we must *judge* the world and tell people how wrong they are in what they do? How often do we attempt to save the world through judgment? Humm...

Think about your opinion of "the world"; do you focus more on healing, preserving, and rescuing -- or judging?

God does and did judge the world and the people in it, but He did not send Jesus into the world to judge it. He calls us to be ambassadors of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20).

While Jesus never participated in sin with the people, he engaged the people and healed them, restored them, and loved them. Even if you think you have to "preserve" your personal sense of holiness, how are you failing to be an imitator or ambassador of Christ?

The Apple Concept

Day 17

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. – 1 John 4:18

What is PERFECT love?

Perfect: Wanting nothing necessary to completeness, perfect, that which is perfect

Agape love (God's love) is love that is finished, perfect in that it knows it doesn't require anything from us to be complete. He is complete already. God's love is different from all other love because He is not looking to us for His whole-ness. He wants a relationship with us, but it is not essential to His value.

Receiving His unconditional love frees us from performance or from seeking to earn approval. When we live and breathe and move in the abundant love of God, we can be ourselves. It is in the environment of total acceptance that we can find the safety to choose against the lie of not enough. We can believe that we had infinite value to a perfect Creator; to Him, we were worth the life of His own dear Son.

In the shelter of God's love, we can stop distracting from the lie (gauze) -- we can stop trying to disprove the lie (ladder climbing) -- we can stop hiding because we believe the lie (carnival cut-out)... And we can believe God instead. We can choose against the lie, thus capping the source of our desires.

God's love, His total, absolute, unrestricted goodwill toward us is all we need. Once we gain the perspective of ourselves that the very Creator of the universe draws us to Him as we are, it would be preposterous to trade ourselves for the fickle love of a demanding person, crowd, family, inner voice, etc... You will *not* be living into a church blueprint, the world's expectation, or your own desperation.

Instead, we will evaluate ourselves simply upon who we were created to be. We will assess our God given strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, capacity and need without being defensive, or having pretense. We will be free to live.

Since the acts of sin are outward manifestations of believing the lie, our ability to turn away from sin (the definition of repentance) will come from believing God instead. Likewise, we will begin to view others as having the same limitless value from God, even when we don't like what they are doing. We will begin to see sin as a disregard of the worth God has placed on us and it will grieve us when we see others living in exchange for the fickle affections of a broken and hurting world. We will not look to others to complete us, since we will be complete in Christ already (that is agape love for others!).

This single understanding allows us to both love God with all we have, and love our neighbors as ourselves. How does that make you feel?

The Apple Concept

Day 18

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. – Romans 8:5-8

Changing your life takes repentance. Not a bowed head, deep feeling of sorrow for our past choices – repentance; though, that is certainly a bi-product... It takes changing your mind. It takes turning away from the lie and facing the truth instead.

The lie masks itself with clever words, but they all add up to the simple temptation to create worth for ourselves based upon believing we are worthless – or distracting from those feelings of worthlessness... You should easily recognize the lie since it is whispered to you every day, *Everyone will laugh at me... People will know what I did... no one cares... what difference does it make... If I were prettier, smarter, funnier, thinner, stronger, wealthier, more educated...*

These thoughts have one purpose: they derail you from living your intended life. The result of these thoughts is a life of fear, toil, frustration, judgment, sorrow, and missed opportunities. Living under these thoughts leaves you confused, discouraged, empty, bitter, and alone. When we believe the lie, the negative thoughts pierce us and render us ineffective.

To change your life, you have to change your mind (repent). Based upon God's opinion of you, you simply have to redirect your life away from the deadly lie. *Everyone will laugh at me, but I will try to do it; who knows... it may be fun, and someone could probably use a good laugh... People will know what I did, but that way maybe someone can find comfort in knowing they are not alone – maybe they will find freedom and encouragement – and I could really have a great friend who understands what I have been through... No one cares, but if I can help them become aware, maybe they will begin to care... What difference does it make? My future may be effected by choices I make today, it makes a huge difference if I hurt my body with too much food, alcohol, drugs – hurt my finances with too much spending, wreck my relationships with infidelity...* You get the point! When we believe God created us with a purpose and with value, nothing can stop us from living.

These renewed thoughts keep us on track to live fulfilling, active lives that blossom others into faith in what God has provided for *their* lives through His abundant love. The result of these thoughts is a life of love, comfort, freedom, peace, patience, joy, and fullness.

The principle is SIMPLE enough for a child to understand, but takes active, thinking, living, action oriented, faith to execute; it is NOT a formula: **Does this thought hold the threat of shrinking my life, debilitating me and leaving me reacting out of fear, guilt, flattery, or desperation? If the answer is yes – the lie is talking; turn away.**

The Apple Concept

Day 19

I urge you therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercy, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. –Romans 12:1

Paul follows the logical outcome of understanding the whole message of God. If you live to express the qualities given by One who made you, the One who decided what He wanted to see in you, then you will be living for God. Your life will become an expression of worship to God.

A cactus thrives in the undulating heat of the merciless, desert sun. A tulip thrives in moist soil in the delicate light of spring. A tulip would wilt, die, and be cooked if expected to play the part of a cactus. Is a tulip less glorifying to God because of its particular weaknesses? Are you trying to be a cactus? Maybe you are a cactus, but you think God wants you to be a tulip. We are not all created to be tulips.

You live God's will when you allow yourself to be you. This concept is at odds with the frequent misunderstanding that to be who we are is to live for ourselves. There is a huge difference between living *for* yourself, and living *as* yourself.

The list of expected Christian character traits coming to mind or the fruit of the Spirit that you want to list as required by God in the life of every believer, are supposed to be *evidence* of a healthy love affair with God, they are fruits. They are produced naturally as you draw from the fertile soil of perfect love. Those qualities are not things you can **force** by knuckling down with purposeful intent (that would be ladder climbing in the name of God). You can not **act** as if you have those qualities when they elude you due to a wrong understanding (that would be carnival cut-outs for Christ).

Because we want to please God, we are tempted to demonize one set of sinful manifestations. The gauze is easy to point out and condemn in ourselves and others. We avoid those temptations and feel a false sense of holiness as we continue to sin in areas we can not recognize. Or we give in to them and feel defeated and powerless.

Telling ourselves, our friends, our children, whomever that they must stop sinning doesn't help. It doesn't provide freedom, in fact, it is a yoke of bondage that is impossible to carry.

This was the *religion* Jesus fought against as he walked the Earth. The religious leaders of His day were rule keepers, and they were judgmental. They were ultimately the group responsible for His death. Spiritually, we suffocate the life out of our faith when we expect the "living sacrifice" to consist mainly of outward expressions.

If you have never been alone in the unconditional love of God, where you received assurance of God's affinity for you -- just as you are, take the time to ask for the discovery of who you are to Him.

The Apple Concept

Day 20

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. – Galatians 5:1

What was afforded to us was a freedom and vitality that could withstand the very corruption of our bodies because it is not bound by time or place. Doesn't it make sense that the expressions of this freedom would go far beyond the simple dos and don'ts of a sin-list?

The automatic reaction is usually one of indignation, a question something like this: Well, if people hear this, they will think you are telling them to go off and sin!

Rest easy knowing this is the exact response Paul faced, which certainly indicates we are on the right track. You also need to realize that people who are given onus of their lives and who have experienced the acceptance of a Creator who made them are empowered to live from a position of healthy self-expression. Whole people don't feel a need to use others to complete them; therefore, their acts of compassion are truly selfless. They are free from want, free from a need for approval and acceptance.

Trying to do the right thing for the wrong reason, even if that reason is to earn value with God, is a sin. Once we have the epiphany of what was provided to us in receiving God's unconditional love, we can move forward into creatively living out our freedom. Invariably, those facets of our lives include personal ways of sharing the unmatched experience of knowing who we were created to be.

It makes the pep-talks on evangelism to uninspired congregations irrelevant because when people are armed with the *whole* message, and as they seek to live out their freedom, they will want to communicate it to the world. The church, in general (and in no way entirely), has clearly skipped ahead to the verses which seem most important, or most capable of defining people as "saved." Unfortunately, it has worked against individuals who want nothing more than to please God. As they adamantly attempt to fulfill the expectation, they are exhausted and more self-deprecating (or worse, they are satisfied with their "religion").

This understanding is not something that can be given away. It takes; intense questioning, experience, self-reflection, application, contemplation, and faith. It is so much more than having a salvation ticket punched, or a list of rules to follow. It is a passionate and gloriously awakened thinking and feeling relationship with the One who made you.

God is pleased by you simply because you are His. Take time to decide if this is the love you accepted and received. If not, explore this gift and consider it for your life. Your good works will be birthed from this perspective.

The Apple Concept

Day 21

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. – Matthew 5:16

Good: beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, **beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life**, and hence praiseworthy, morally good, noble, honorable, affecting the mind agreeably, comforting and confirming.

Works: business, employment, that which any one is occupied, that which one undertakes to do, enterprise, undertaking, **any product whatever, any thing accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind, an act, deed**, thing done: the idea of working is emphasized in opp. to that which is less than work

With this perspective, can you see how the “good works” God wants to see from you are based upon who you are?

What is your idea of how to let your light shine?

How do these definitions break open the possibilities of you bringing glory to God?

Have you held a limited idea of what God wants from you?

Think about where your talents lie. What do you enjoy doing; what are you good at doing? How can those things be expressions of light and salt to the world?

Take the rest of this week to recalibrate your spiritual life. Go back and ask yourself the questions on your mind. Read the Bible with new eyes and start to reevaluate your relationship with the Lord (Galatians is a good place to start).

For your life to propel forward, the starting point has to be substantial enough to be outlook altering. Believing on Jesus is more than believing He existed as a man, and He is the Son of God. It means trusting that love to set you free from your dead-end life of routine and closed mindedness. It is relying on that acceptance to dislodge the lie of not good enough that directs your life away from the Master’s intention for *you*.

