**Teen Camp Notes**

**Session 1 Does Truth Matter?**

Opening: Imagine that you are Mohamed Atta the 911 bomber who drove the plane into the World Trade Center. (Walk through what the last day was like and how his beliefs motivated his actions) What happens to you when you die? Do you experience a heaven full of virgins?

Imagine you are Jim Elliot. (Again walk through what his last day was like, and how his beliefs affected his actions) What do you face? Heaven? Or an Angry Allah?

Now imagine you are Dylan Klebold. (Walk through his last day and the school shooting, again showing the consequences of his beliefs that we are nothing more than evolved slime.) What do you face as you leave your body and this life behind?

Which of these three men were right? Where any of these three men who died for what they believed correct in their assessment of reality? You can see that their beliefs had tremendous consequences.

**Why Should We Believe Anything at All?**

James Sire travels around colleges and gives a talk where he asks students why we should believe certain things. Should we believe something because it makes us feel good? It made the Germans in the thirties feel good to believe that they were a superior race, did that make it right? Should we believe because parents tell us to? What about the parents who taught that blacks were animals and not fully human? Should we believe something because our friends believe it or because an idea is popular? Was slavery right, because most people thought it was? Should we believe something because a spiritual leader, such as a priest, pastor, rabbi, or guru tells us something? What about when they contradict each other? What about a holy book? Then the question becomes which book really speaks for God?

The only reason we should believe something is because it is true? What does it mean for something to be true? It means that what is believed or claimed is the way things really are. An idea is true when it corresponds with reality. The idea that there is one sun in our solar system is true because it lines up reality. The idea that the world is round is true because our world really is round. Even when people believed it to be flat, it was still round. Reality remains the same regardless of what we believe. So to answer our question, the only reason we should believe something is because it is true, because it is the way things really are.

But how can we know if an idea is true? As we have seen we can’t rely simply on feelings, parents, culture, majority vote, or even a holy book. The way to discover truth is through reason, evidence, and observation. This brings us to the reason for Apologetics.

Apologetics comes from the Greek word which means defense. Apologetics is the spiritual discipline which provides reasons for belief. Apologetics seeks to prove that Christianity is rooted in history and evidence, that Christianity is consistent and corresponds with reality. It also deals with answering objections such as how could a good God send someone to Hell. Is Jesus really the only way? Why has the church been so hypocritical and brutal?

***Biblical Support for Apologetics:***

1 Peter 3:15, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

2 Cor 10:4-5, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”

Jude 3, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Titus 1:9, “ holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

Isaiah 1:18, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.’”

Apologetics shows that the Christian message is rooted in reality and not just private belief. As Christians, we are making a truth claim about reality. I am not interested in religion, but reality. When we say Jesus is the only way, we are not just saying what Christians believe, but what is true about the universe. When someone says “my God wouldn’t send someone to hell”, or “to me God is like a Santa Claus”, it doesn’t change the fact of who God is. When someone says, “to me the world is flat”, it doesn’t change the fact that the world is round.

There is a common idea out there that all religions are equally valid, and all you need to do is pick one that works for you. They picture religion like a Super market. In this picture we could say the Jews are the meat department since they place an emphasis on animal sacrifice, Christianity is the produce section since they focus on new life, Islam is the bakery since they took a mixture of both Christianity and Judaism and mixed it together and baked it accordingly. Hinduism could be pictured as the cold cereal section where the boxes say, “look inside for new god, collect all three hundred million.” Buddhism says to look inside rather than looking to a God, so it represented by a man pushing himself in the cart, and the Atheist is the one who can’t find anything in the store. In this idea of religion people are just free to pick whatever suits their taste. But is this an accurate picture of religious belief? The problem with this picture is that the grim reaper is at checkout counter, and there is a reality beyond the store. Personal happiness is not all that matters. For instance, It would be far better to be unhappy and have a difficult ride on a bus that arrives safely, then to be happy on a luxury bus that will end in destruction.

Religion is not just a luxury like ice cream where it doesn’t matter which flavor you pick as long as you like it! A far more accurate picture of religion is that of a cure or a medicine for our illness. Something is dreadfully wrong with this world. We all feel it deeply; this is not the way things are supposed to be. This is a sick planet, and we are sick humans. Physically it is just a matter of time before we die. Spiritually we are sick too, we keep doing the things we hate, we keep hurting others and getting hurt in the process. Religion claims to have the cure, to be able to set things right. But which one has the proper cure? Do any of them actually do what they claim?

With a cure for an illness you can’t just pick whatever suits your fancy and expect good results. Let’s say you are stung by wasps and you develop a severe allergic reaction. You are swelling so badly you are in danger of dying. Your friends gather around you and suggest different cures. Some of the suggestions are ridiculous, like spin around 10 times and then do a somersault. Some sound fun like eating half a gallon of ice cream. One suggestion sounds scary getting stabbed with an epi-pen. At this point do you want to pick the cure that sounds the most fun? Or do you want one that will actually fix the problem? If you are sane you will pick the epi-pen over the ice cream.

In a similar way each religion offers us a way to get right with God, to live forever, to find forgiveness. Each one offers us a cure. But which one is the right one? We are dying and it is critical we make the right choice. This brings us to the purpose of apologetics.

**Why should we care about apologetics?**

 First, for your own safety. In the early thirties the US army had a problem - The recruits kept falling asleep in class. This material was boring and the soldiers were confident they wouldn’t need this stuff, after all, the world had just seen the war that was to end all wars. Fast forward ten years. The new recruits in the same class were sitting on the edge of their seats, taking notes as fast as they could. They didn’t want to miss a thing. What made the difference? These students knew there was a war going on and when they left the class they were going to be in the heat of battle. They knew that this information could be the difference between life and death. In the same way, there is a battle today that is ongoing. It is a battle of ideas. As we saw at the beginning ideas have consequences. There are many deadly ideas out there that you will face, such as all morality is relative, there is no God, no afterlife. What you believe will affect your actions and will also affect your eternal destiny, you can’t afford to not be equipped in battle, your soul is at stake.

Secondly, being equipped with facts and evidence will enable you to persuade and save the people you care about. Imagine your sister was stung by a wasp and she developed a severe allergic reaction. You want to save her and you know the only cure. You know that the only cure that will work is the painful epinephrine pen. How can you convince her to take the painful, but effective cure, when all her friends are suggesting fun cures like ice cream and jolly ranchers? It won’t be enough to tell you sister to take the epi-pen “because I say so.” No, you will have to offer reason and evidence to convince her that she is in danger and needs to take the epi-pen. In the same way a person will be unlikely to give up the pleasures of sin and take up their cross until they understand their fatal condition and the true hope of the cure. We need to be able to offer the reasons and evidence to prove the truth of Christianity so that people will receive Jesus and be saved.

**Session 2: Does God exist?**

***The God Question:***

We must look at the data of the world around us and ask: *Is it more reasonable to believe that all we see came from nothing and was “guided” by impersonal, blind, random chance,* **or** *that what we see had an intelligent, powerful, personal cause?*

Cosmological argument:

1. **Whatever begins to exist needs a cause.** This is simply irrefutable: Nothing can come from nothing, because nothing is… *nothing*. Nothing is what rocks think about. Every effect needs a cause.
2. **The universe began to exist.** There is sound scientific proof that this universe had a beginning. First, there’s the second law of thermodynamics: *the usable amount of energy in this world is being used up*. The first law states that the amount of energy is set. Eventually, the universe, if left alone, would die a heat death. The universe is “unwinding” – losing power. If the universe is unwinding, there was a time when it was wound up. Secondly, the universe is expanding, so if you ran time in reverse, the universe would compress until it disappeared.
3. **The universe needs a cause.** What caused the Big Bang? The cause itself has to be uncaused and outside of time and space and matter. (It is unwise to argue from the age of the earth. If God created the world, He would have created it with the appearance of age. The important issue is not whether the world is six thousand years old, but whether there is a God or not. The atheist’s own theory of the Big Bang can be used against them.)

***Skeptic’s Objection: Who made God?*** The argument used by the atheist is a strawman version of the original. They say that if everything needs a cause, then God needs a cause. If God doesn’t need a cause, the universe doesn’t need a cause. But the argument actually states that whatever *begins to exist* needs a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore, it needs a cause. God *always existed*; He didn’t need a cause.

Teleological argument:

1. **That which is designed needs a designer.**
2. **The universe has highly complex design.**
3. **The universe needs a designer.**

We spot design very intuitively. It is easy to know the difference between things that have natural causes and things that have been designed. Mount Rushmore vs. the Grand Canyon. Rosetta stone vs. a slab of granite.

***Skeptic’s Objection: Who designed God?*** *If the world and its complexity needs a designer, then God needs a designer. If God doesn’t need a designer, then the world doesn’t need a designer.* Answer: If something exists, then something has always existed. Is this cause that has always existed a) blind matter or b) an intelligent being? It breaks no rules of logic to believe in a self existent cause. Believing that something can come from nothing *does* break the rules of logic.

**Why the design we see cannot be accounted for by Naturalism or the Theory of Darwinian Evolution**.

Skeptics have responded to the argument from design claiming that this world is not designed, but merely evolved and adapted to what the universe gave us. However their theories have some fatal flaws, namely **biological information** and **irreducible complexity**.

***What is information?*** Information is an idea or a plan that is symbolically represented by letters or other symbols. Information requires a transmitter and a receiver. Information can be transmitted and received by matter and energy but information is not matter or energy. Example: A blank CD and a CD loaded with encyclopedic volumes and pictures have the exact same amount of mass and matter but one has way more information.

The symbols that represent information contain an idea or message that transcends the actual symbols. Example: Twenty Scrabble pieces scattered randomly will contain no information, but if a mind assembles the letters to form the phrase ‘THE SKY WAS ORANGE TODAY,’ the Scrabble pieces now contain information transcending the wood and ink.

**Nothing in naturalism can account for information: nature cannot produce information. Information can only come from a mind. Darwinian evolution cannot explain how information got into the very first cell.**

***What about random chance or chemical attraction?***Before it will work, evolution needs an organism that can reproduce. But the problem is that cell that can reproduce is already very complex and *needs* the information. Chemical attraction would produce only repetitive phrases such as, *the the the the*. In each of your body’s cells there is over 24 encyclopedias’ worth of information. DNA is the language of God.

***What is irreducible complexity?*** It’s a description of a machine or organism requiring all its parts to be fully intact before it can function. Something that is irreducibly complex could not evolve step by step, because the machine/organism won’t function until it is complete. Bird flight is irreducibly complex, and could not have evolved, because natural selection would weed out the pre-evolved bird.

***Problems with natural selection:*** Natural selection can’t make an animal more complex or add more information. It only brings change by weeding out the unhelpful variations. Example: Picture a bucket full of marbles. If the bucket has half-inch diameter holes, all the marbles smaller then half an inch will fall out, making it *appear* that the marbles have gotten bigger.

***Philosophy of naturalism:*** Rules out the God-possibility before it is given a chance. But since we know less than 1 % of all knowledge, it is foolish to rule out the God-possibility. Many people are not persuaded by evidence for God because they are convinced there is no God before they even look at the facts.

**What you have to believe if you reject the existence of God:**

That something came from nothing.

That life comes from non-life.

That the personal came from impersonal matter.

That consciousness came from dead, brute matter.

That fine-tuning came from random chaos.

That information came out of thin air.

Moral Law Argument:

***The number one skeptic’s objection to the Christian God: The existence of evil.*** *If there was a God, there is no way He would allow such suffering. A good God would want to wipe out evil and an all-powerful God would be able to wipe out evil. So if there was such a God, there wouldn’t be evil. But evil exists, therefore there is no God.*

This argument can be turned on its head to prove that God exists and that He is good. If there is true evil in the world, then there is a God. If there is no God, there is no evil.

***What is evil?*** *A deviation from the way things should be*. For evil to exist there has to be a standard of the way things should be. If there is no God, there is no standard for the way things should be. There are only people’s likes and dislikes. If this is the case, someone can’t call racism or the Holocaust “wrong” in any meaningful sense. If the atheist is right, then this world is simply the result of random forces. There is no overarching moral obligation, since it can’t arise from chance. Example: If you drop Scrabble pieces and the letters form “EAT DOGS,” would you feel any obligation to go eat your neighbor’s Chihuahua? Obligation can only come from a *person*.

 **If there *is* a sense of moral obligation in this world – a sense that there is a moral law that tells us what we should and shouldn’t do – then this sense could only come from one of four options:**

1. **Morality comes from beneath us.** If morality is just an evolved instinct, is that binding on us? No. If the wind is blowing on us, can’t we choose to walk into it?
2. **Morality comes from within us.** But if we choose one thing, can’t we change our mind and do something else?
3. **Morality comes from society.** Isn’t society just a collection of equals, and if so, why should we be obligated to obey our equals? If society is the measure of good and evil, then the Nazis’ genocide wasn’t wrong because their society called it “good.” Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Teresa would be called “evil,” because they went against their society’s dictates and fought for what they knew to be right.
4. **Morality comes from a person who supersedes all other peoples and societies.** Only if this option is correct, is there any real obligation in this world. Only if there is a God can we say that things should be a certain way.

# Is the Moral Law binding or only an Illusion?

* 1. **The moral law is undeniable**. To try to deny the Moral law is to affirm it. If you deny it, what you mean is that we shouldn’t be teaching it because you don’t believe it. But if moral law doesn’t exist, there is no obligation for me not to teach the existence of the moral law. An easy way to prove that the moral law exists is to pull a gun on someone who’s denying that the moral law exists. Ask him if it would be wrong for you to shoot him. If he says yes, then there is proof that there is moral obligation in the world. If he says no, then you shoot him and you win the debate either way. (*totally* theoretical, by the way!)
	2. **Everyone acknowledges the moral law with their reactions.** Some people who have a seared conscience claim that they follow no moral law, and they seem to be proof that there might not be one…until they are wronged.

In summary, if there is no God, then the terrorists’ 9/11 killing of thousands is simply a matter of opinion. Conversely, if there is just one thing that is really wrong, such as torturing babies for fun, or rape, or genocide, then God exists.

***Why did God allow evil?*** Nobody knows exactly. We do know that God is not the cause of evil; He created a world that was only good. He gave us the freedom of choice – a good thing. Without it, love is impossible. (Example: When you pull the string on a wooden doll and he robotically says *I love you*, does your heart melt?) But we took our freedom of choice, rebelled, and brought evil into this world. Much of the evil we see is from our wrong choices.

***What about natural evils, like earthquakes and tsunamis?*** Man’s rebellion fractured a beautiful planet and brought death into the world. God doesn’t tell us why bad things like these happen. I think there are two reasons for this: a) we wouldn’t understand, and b) when we are suffering because of evil, what we really need is comfort, not an explanation.

The argument the atheist once used against God, is actually proof that God will defeat evil. A good God would want to defeat evil. An all powerful God could defeat evil. God is good and God is powerful, therefore evil will eventually be defeated. Our greatest need is not health or wealth, but God himself. When we meet God in person, we can acquire complete certainty. It is his holy presence that removes all doubts.

***In Review:***

1. We can’t wait for complete certainty. We can only look at the available data and determine what is most reasonable.
2. This world had a beginning, so it needed a cause. This cause must be self-existent, or outside of space and time.
3. This world shows amazing complexity that can’t be accounted for by blind chance. Example: The complex information in a cell can’t be caused by blind forces.
4. No effect can be greater than its cause. The personal and conscious exist. Therefore their cause has to be personal and conscious. Blind, brute matter cannot account for these.
5. To reject God’s existence, you have to believe several things that contradict all known observations.
6. If there is just one thing that is really wrong (or evil) in our world, then God exists.
7. God did not *create* evil. Evil is not a material thing; it is a deviation from a standard of good.

Session 3 **Dealing with Doubt: God and the Problem of Evil**

He was a man passionate for God. In his late teens, Charles was rescued from a life of rubbish and filled with the Holy Spirit. His conversion dramatically changed the course of his life. Eager to put his new found faith into practice, Charles poured his life into evangelism. In his early twenties, he became close friends with Billy Graham. They hit the spotlight almost simultaneously. Their sincerity and fervent, yet thoughtful invitations to Christ were an effective combination. Charles’ success continued into his thirties. After attending Princeton Seminary, he carried on his evangelistic mission. A sought-after speaker and an able debater with a very compelling personality, he persuaded many to go to the mission field or to attend seminary. He also hosted a weekly show on CBS and was a rising star in the Presbyterian denomination. If you were looking for a hero of the faith, Charles Templeton was your man.

Despite his outward fervor and success, Charles was haunted by intellectual doubts about his faith. He simply could not reconcile what the Bible had to say with his own intuition and the “facts” of history and science. Charlesjudged the God of the Old Testament as a “petty, jealous, inept, vindictive, unjust, tribal god.” This god repented from making men and then killed them with a flood, hardened the heart of Pharaoh so he could murder all of Egypt’s firstborns, and ruthlessly commanded the slaughter of entire people groups. To Charles, this god simply was not compatible with the God of love he had been told about. Regarding the story of Job, Charles asked “How would *you* feel if God killed all your children just to make a point in an argument?” He denounced the story and the god as “immoral.”

I read about Charles Templeton’s spiritual derailment in his book, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith.* People like Templeton pique my curiosity. Like a moth drawn to a candle flame, I am attracted to atheist websites. I want to understand how “the other side” thinks so that I know how to reach them. I also want to better equip young people to respond to the objections of agnostics like Templeton. But as I read the writings of former Christians and “ex-apologists,” my faith is shaken and my heart is saddened. The website, www.ex-christians.net, has the testimonials of hundreds who have abandoned the faith.

 In my earlier years, I was naïvely optimistic about the facts of Christianity. The evidence was so clear, I reasoned, and the arguments so compelling, that anyone who walked away from the faith must have been simply uninformed. If only these people would read *The Case for Christ* or, *I Don’t have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, then they would be able to *see*! But I was deeply disturbed to hear about former apologists walking away. “What ominous information have these people discovered that caused them to lose faith?” I feared that I too would discover some dark secret revelation and my own de-conversion process would some day be chronicled online. I had to dig deeper. As I read the arguments and reasons given by those “un-born-again,” I realized I wasn’t as equipped to answer their objections as I had thought. Here I encountered the “bitter root of unbelief that defiles many.” (Heb 12:15 NLT)

What is this compelling case against Christianity? It isn’t well-documented historical details, or airtight logical proofs against God and Jesus Christ. Rather, it is bitter emotional attacks on the character of God. These writers question the idea of a God who sends billions to eternal conscious torment in hell: *Hitler burned Anne Frank for an hour and we call him a despot, but God will burn her for all eternity!* I also found several variations on the basic problem of evil: *A God who stands by while cancer destroys a little girl and while another girl is raped and beaten can’t be good. If any father just stood there and let his son be run over by a truck, we all would call him cruel and immoral, yet God sits on His hands and lets tragedy after tragedy ruin those He is supposed to love!* A God who once condoned slavery and commanded genocide, a God who leaves the fate of the billions of un-evangelized in the hands of a bumbling, self-centered church… To the sensitive “de-converted,” such a God is blatantly immoral and cannot exist.

Reading these charges against the God that I thought I knew battered my faith. In some ways I felt betrayed and disappointed. As a bitter root of unbelief sprang up, I began to resent God. I fired my own accusations against Him, “Is picking up sticks on the Sabbath really worthy of *death*? Why do You create people against their will, put them where they won’t even have a chance to hear about Jesus, withhold Your grace from them so they cannot choose You, and then punish them for all eternity? Why don’t You just show Yourself to those who doubt? Your appearing didn’t violate Paul’s free will!” The residue of these bitter accusations formed a dark cloud of doubt over my soul. The doctrine of hell especially began to gnaw at me. After years of studying apologetics, I was shocked to find myself doubting His existence.

1. **Step back from the emotional weight of these arguments and evaluate them critically.**

Stepping back from the emotional weight of these arguments, I decided to evaluate them critically. I soon realized that none of them could refute the overwhelming scientific and philosophical proof that there is a God. Just because a person doesn’t like God is certainly no proof that He doesn’t exist! Among these atheist writings, I saw no historical *disproof* of Jesus’ miracles or resurrection – only unfounded dismissals.

I felt a wave of relief when I realized that, as an apologist, I didn’t have to answer *why* God does what He does (a nearly impossible task) but rather show that these arguments do not refute the strong case for God’s existence. In fact, if there is a God, you would expect Him to do things beyond our comprehension.

1. **When dealing with the charge that God is immoral, we need to ask the question, “By what standard can God be judged immoral?”**

But what about the charge that God is immoral or cruel? The question is begging to be asked, “By what standard can God be judged immoral?” The standard of man? Hardly! The irony is that if there is no God, there is no standard of morality. If there is no standard of good, then there is no rule for the way things *should* be. Morality would be nothing more than a changing description of what *is*. Slavery, genocide, and rape, in the atheist’s naturalistic worldview, can’t be called *immoral* because there is nothing outside of nature by which we can measure *moral* or *immoral*. So the atheist has no logical footing to call God or Christianity “immoral.”

1. **Recognize a critical fact. We are in no position to judge God.**

As for the doctrine of hell and other charges that call God’s character into question, I recognized a critical fact. *I am in no position to judge God.* What percent of all knowledge do I possess? Far less than even one percent! I could never judge the plot of a book or the mind of the author from one phrase in that book. I could never judge the master plan of a blueprint if all I saw was a fragment that contained intersecting lines. Yet, here I was – a mere man – judging the plan of God from my extremely limited vantage point! Something that appears to be an act of cruelty can turn out to be an act of kindness when more information is revealed. A man plunging steel into another man has the appearance of cruelty – until you discover that the steel is a scalpel and the man is a surgeon removing a cancerous tumor.

 Who am I to judge God? I don’t know who will be saved or who won’t be. I don’t know all the factors that prompted to God ask His people to wipe out the Canaanites. I don’t know what happens to someone after they die, *so how can I accuse God of being unjust*? I have insufficient data to make an accurate judgment! When Job began to chew the root of unbelief, he spit out the same questions that continue to be hurled at God today. God answered by putting Job in the hot seat. A few simple questions and Job was repenting in the dust, very much aware of little he really knew.

1. **We don’t know the whole plan of God, but we can know His heart.**

 Jesus Christ is the clearest revelation of God’s character. In Jesus, we find someone who longs to free the captives and to heal the broken-hearted, Someone who forgave His enemies while on the cross, and laid down His life for His sheep. Revealed in Christ, we see that God is pure goodness – there is nothing evil in Him. This should bring us comfort, but it should also alarm us. The wrath and jealousy of God flow from this uncorrupted goodness. Because we are corrupt, we don’t get upset with sin and can’t comprehend the wrath of God. We turn a blind eye to the destructive power of sin… until it affects us with its deadly sting. It is easy to wink at lust until your wife is raped. Then sin’s destructive power is suddenly abhorred. But the omniscient God knows in detail the destructive power of Evil. His love fuels His wrath.

We also have an enemy who complicates the problem. For millennia, Satan has been using his power of deception to cast doubt on the goodness of God. He causes men to sin, tempts them to destroy themselves, sabotages the paradise that God has given us, and then blames God! People, God is not the problem. He is the *solution* to our problem. If you walk away from God, you reject the only source of goodness. Yes, in this tiny piece of the picture, we see decay and misery and injustice, but we also see an abundance of goodness. If you are going to blame God for the evil in the world, at least thank Him for His goodness while you’re at it. Think about your own life. He has showered you with pleasure and joy and the hope of heaven *where every wrong will be made right.*

1. **Question the alternative**

I have chosen to trust the character of God. He is the source of life and goodness. Apart from Him, words like *goodness*, *justice*, and *morality* are only illusions. Sure, there are some really tough questions when it comes to God’s plan and all the evil in the world. But how can I stop believing in the God who gave us the good gifts in life and instead put my faith in man, who is responsible for all this misery and pain? If I walk away from God, my problems only increase.

 At this point, you may be wondering if I have chosen the route of intellectual suicide in order to keep my faith. Am I letting my emotions override my mind? Absolutely not! Rather than be blinded by emotional rhetoric, I choose to think critically. When one encounters difficulties in his faith or worldview, it is easy to give up and walk away. But what will take its place? Yes, as a Christian, I struggle to reconcile the loving God revealed in Christ with the evil and suffering in the world, but if were to walk away from God; my intellectual problems would only increase. Can I really believe that the complex human body is the result of nothingness exploding? If matter is all that is, then thinking is nothing more than a chemical reaction – and the idea of truth disappears. For if someone disagrees with me, I can’t call his ideas *untrue*. His brain is merely having a different interaction of atoms. For an atheist, the intellectual problem of evil dissolves but the actual problem of pain and suffering still remains, only now there is no hope of a solution.

Admitting that I only see a miniscule fraction of the big picture is not turning my brain off. Intellectual honesty means intellectual humility. Far from intellectual suicide, I choose to remain faithful to the One who makes thought valid and reason possible.

1. **No God? No Good, No Truth.**

The only way we would be justified in trusting our minds is if they can be traced back to an ultimate mind. If our minds can only be traced to blind, irrational forces, then we have no reason to trust our minds’ ability to apprehend objective truth. If the cause of our minds is capricious spirits, why should we trust our minds? Perhaps the gods are only playing with us, deceiving us?

We as Christians can trust our minds and/or senses because we acknowledge that they were created by a loving, truthful God. Reason and logic are the tools that God has given us to grasp and apprehend truth. *Logic is grounded in the fact that God cannot lie.*

An atheist has no good reason with which to persuade a Christian to abandon a belief in God. If the atheist is right, our brains are ultimately the product of irrational random chance and we have no power of choice. Because we need to be able to *choose* to correctly label an idea as true or false, then under the atheist’s beliefs, truth and false become meaningless. In order to be free to choose, we need an immaterial mind and soul that stands outside the natural material forces.

I don’t see how it is foolish to take the word of the Man who conquered death and who has had more impact on this world than any dynasty or dictator. What would be foolish, is to take the word of mortal man over the word of God in the flesh. When you begin to doubt the character of God or if God is even there, meditate on how little you know, then look to Jesus. Ask yourself: Who are you going to believe? Another human who also only sees a tiny piece of the picture? Or someone who confirmed His claim to be God by rising from the dead? Who else has the words of life?

In Christ, I don’t find all the answers to my intellectual problems, but I do find soothing comfort in the midst of my struggles. Only in Christ do I find hope and assurance. I cannot grasp God’s purposes for why He does what He does. But I know with confidence that the One who is defines goodness is good, and that the One is the standard of justice will do justly.

Charles Templeton remained agnostic till he died of Alzheimer’s disease in 2001. His life is a sober warning of the danger of putting our faith in limited and misinformed reason, rather than in the God of the universe, the One revealed in Jesus Christ. Don’t waste your life by making the same costly mistake.

Session 4 ***Is the Bible God’s Word?***

# The *Hand*book of Proofs for Divine Inspiration

# *(Some of this material is from Greg Koukl:* [www.str.org](http://www.str.org)*)*

# *Pinkie = Prophecy*

# *Only God knows the future. In Isaiah, God challenges people who think they are God to prove it by prophesying the future. The Bible has many prophesies. How does it fare?*

* *Tyre Prophecies.* Tyre was like New York City: a major coastal center of commerce. Biblical prophets claimed that many nations would rise up against Tyre, tear down its towers and scrape it clean like a rock. The city, prophets said, would become a bare rock that fishermen would spread their nets on. Nebuchadnezzar later came and destroyed the city. Hundreds of years after that, Alexander the Great passed through the area, and, needing a bridge to cross the water, he tore down all its towers and scraped it bare. Today fishermen spread their nets where the city used to stand.
* *Messianic Prophecies.* The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that Isa. 53 was written before Jesus lived. Yet in this chapter, Isaiah prophesies a man who would be: a) Rejected by men; b) oppressed, yet remained silent; c) killed even though he was sinless; d) assigned a grave with the rich; and e) would see the light of life after his death. Jesus fulfilled all of these.

 *By way of contrast, the Book of Mormon has many prophecies that have not been fulfilled, which has led to numerous revisions of the test.*

1. **Ring Finger = Unity**
* Bible was written by 40 different authors
* Written over 1500 years
* Written in three languages
* Written on three continents
* Contains complete unity on controversial issues (matters that bring a variety of contradictory responses) such as: the nature of God, the origin of man, and humanity’s problems. The Bible is clear that man’s problem is separation from his Creator, and has total internal agreement that the solution for this separation is to be reunited with Creator-God through the work of Jesus Christ.

This is very strong proof that there is one divine mind behind the writing. Compare to a collection of medical journals collected across the same time and culture gaps that the Bible spans.

1. **Big Finger = Big Questions**

The Bible answers life’s big questions in a way that lines up with reality: Is there a God? What is God like? What about the problem with evil? What is really right and wrong? David wrote in the Psalms, that he had more wisdom than all of his teachers because he delighted in God’s Word. God’s revelation goes far beyond what we can know with our natural senses, but it doesn’t contradict what we *do* know. It is an owner’s manual that works. Picture an ipod with wrong owners’ manual. If you look at the manual and everything that it points to and describes you find corresponds to the ipod, then you know you have the right owners manual.

By way of contrast, other books that claim to be from God disprove themselves on this point: The Book of Mormon says that God is finite and that there are millions of gods, which goes against what philosophy and science have told us. The Hindu scriptures say that evil is just an illusion and that God is impersonal. The Jewish Talmud ignores the powerful effect that Jesus Christ had on the world.

1. **Index finger = Index to History**

Archaeology has proven the Bible time and time again. If the Bible is verified in areas where we can test it, shouldn’t we give the benefit of the doubt in areas where we can’t?

*By way of contrast, no city or town in the Book of Mormon has been verified by archaeology. Nor has the Koran’s claim been verified that Jesus was not crucified.*

1. **Thumb = Life Changing**

After a fight in the Roman arena, the Caesar’s thumbs-up or thumbs-down determined whether a conquered gladiator lived or died.

Millions have testified to the transforming power of God’s word. This is not in itself conclusive proof; anyone can claim that a book was life-changing. However, if the Bible is really God’s Word, this sort of widespread transformation among people is just what you would expect to find.

1. F**ist = Fighter (Enduring)**

Voltaire predicted that the Bible would be obsolete within his lifetime. Less than fifty years after his death, the Gutenberg Bible Society began using Voltaire’s house to publish Bibles.

The Bible is close to being the only book that has been translated into every language. Though dictators have ordered its destruction, professors and skeptics have attacked its credibility, the Bible has sold far more copies than any other book. It has better manuscript evidence than any other ancient book.

By way of contrast, the Book of Mormon has undergone *thousands* of changes.

**Index Finger Pointed Upward = Jesus Endorsed the Bible**

Jesus said that the Scriptures “cannot be broken,” meaning they are infallible. He promised that the Holy Spirit would inspire the New Testament. Jesus used the Bible in dealing with the Devil. The Bible is the only book that has the authorization of Jesus Christ!

***Skeptic’s Objections and Questions:***

***What about the Scriptural canon?*** The canon of Scripture was *discovered*, not *determined*, or voted on by a group of men. It is a fallible list of *infallible* books.

***What about the cruelty of the God of the Old Testament?*** The Bible records events and actions that it does not condone. The actions of God can only be judged in light of the wickedness of the pagans He was dealing with. His severity was mercy. God is holy. He hates evil. His wrath is rooted in his love. We are in no position to judge God. We can only trust that he is good.

# The Implications: *We have the very words of God. He has left His fingerprints all over the Bible. We can know with complete confidence that the Bible is exactly what it claims to be.*

***Are the New Testament documents reliable?***

When looking at an ancient text we need to examine the answers to three questions that will confirm the truth and accuracy of the document.

1. **How accurate are the copies we have?** There are two things a historian looks at in textual criticism. A) how many handwritten copies (MSS) do we have? and B) how close to the original are these copies?

How does the New Testament fare? For comparison, here is how some of the New Testament’s contemporaries measure up:

* 1. Tacitus’ ***Annals*,** a book from which much of our knowledge ancient Rome comes, **has 20 copies, the oldest one dated 1000 years** after the Annals was originally penned.
	2. Caesar’s ***Gallic Wars*: ten copies, the oldest one dated 1000 years** after the original was written.
	3. The ***Iliad*: 643 copies, the oldest one dated 400 years** after the original. After the New Testament, the next best attested book of ancient history is Homer’s *Iliad*, which was a revered sacred writing – the Greek “bible.” Believe it or not, 643 copies is pretty good documentation considering what our ancestors destroyed with all their pillaging and plundering!

***How does the New Testament compare?*** The NT has over **24, 000 handwritten manuscripts, the oldest one dated to less than 50 years** after the originals were written! This is incredible. With so many copies, it is easy to cross-examine them and see where they diverge. Amazingly, the texts show remarkable agreement. An honest textual critic will tell you that only about 1 percent of the NT is in question as to what the original said, and not a single doctrine rests on the disputed passage!

***Why didn’t God preserve the originals?*** The Bible is better preserved through multiple copies. No one can tamper with original. The overwhelming body of testimony cannot be changed: God’s word endures forever.

1. **Were the original writers qualified?** Were they eyewitnesses or did they have eyewitness sources? Were they claiming to write history or myth? How good are they at identifying names and places? Did they write soon after the events, or centuries later, when legends could have crept in and corrupted the original story? Some answers:
	1. The writers are careful to assert that they are either eyewitnesses, or have carefully examined the eyewitnesses.
	2. In Acts, Luke correctly identifies over 80 historically verified details: towns, cities, leaders and politicians, customs, beliefs, and even weather patterns. His gospel is similarly full of details that have since been verified as accurate. John also includes in his gospel over fifty such verified details. No details in these books have yet been contradicted by archaeology. At times, finds *seem* to contradict, but later discoveries have set the record straight.

A modern example: A man writes a history of the village of Foremost covering the years from 1970-75. Suppose he correctly identifies the mayor/s, town council members, weather patterns, each church’s average attendance, what parties and fairs the community held, and what people did for work, among other things. If he got every detail right, wouldn’t it be fair to assume that this writer either lived in Foremost during that time, or at least investigated people who did?

* 1. Internal evidence shows that the writers penned their accounts shortly after Jesus’ death and resurrection. A) Acts ends with a cliff-hanger: Paul is in jail waiting to speak to Nero. The book ends before we find out what happened. This means that Acts had to have been written before Paul died in A.D. 64. B) Luke was written before Acts, so Luke was written around the late fifties. C) Luke uses Mark as a source, so Mark was written even earlier. That means that Mark and Luke were likely written only 20-30 years after the death of Christ – not nearly enough time for legend to creep in. D) The Gospel of John was most likely written before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, because John writes as if the temple was still standing, and makes no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem. This is significant, because Jesus had predicted that the temple would fall *within* *His* *generation*. If you read a history of New York City that purported to be current, but made no mention of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, wouldn’t you assume it was written before 2001?
	2. The writers have an intimate knowledge of Jerusalem, something they wouldn’t have had had they been writing centuries later.

*If these writers are correct where they can be verified, shouldn’t we give them the benefit of the doubt where they haven’t yet been tested?*

1. **Can the writers be trusted to be telling the truth?** Were they writing history of propaganda? Below are eight compelling reasons why it seems impossible that these writers were lying or telling anything but the whole truth.
	1. **The writers include embarrassing details about themselves.** There is an inferiority complex that accompanies lying: When telling a lie, there is a need to make yourself look as good as possible to add credibility to your lie. If the disciples had been fabricating this story, they’d have made themselves appear bold, intelligent, and faithful to the end. Instead, the gospels portray them as dim-witted cowards who abandoned and betrayed their master in His time of need. These writers would only have included these incriminating details because they really happened. Their teacher, Jesus, taught a very high code of morality. Truthfulness was very important to the One who claimed to be the Truth. Why would His disciples completely abandon this teaching when writing their Teacher’s history?
	2. **The writers include embarrassing and difficult-to-understand things about Christ.** The Gospels record that, Jesus didn’t know the time of His return, that the Father was greater than He, that He was baptized by a sinner, and that, at times, He couldn’t perform miracles. These are not details you include if you are trying to make up a character who is supposedly the God-Man. In fact, Jesus is unlike any man-made hero ever concocted. The sacrificial lamb that is willingly led to the slaughter is the complete antithesis of a man-made hero. The disciples showed great attention to accuracy and were unwilling to record anything but the truth about their leader, even if doing so led to possible confusion.
	3. **The writers left in demanding sayings of Jesus.** Jesus taught that to look at a woman lustfully was to commit adultery, that divorce was not permitted, that we must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and serve those who spitefully abuse us. These are among the most demanding commands ever taught. If the disciples were willing to play fast and loose with the truth, these demanding sayings would have been the first to go. There was no personal gain involved in being careful to accurately record these demanding teachings. The writers must have been telling the truth.
	4. **The writers are careful to distinguish Jesus’ words from their own.** Some critics claim that the church put words in Jesus’ mouth years after he died – that His claims to deity were later additions. Yet the evidence shows that the church was very careful to remain faithful to what Jesus actually said, even when it would have been easier to make up teachings of Christ to resolve controversy. Example: The first-century church wrestled with the issues of tongues, women teaching in the church, and circumcision, yet nowhere in the recorded gospels did Jesus address these issues! If the critics’ accusations are true, it’d have been easy to put words in Christ’s mouth that would have easily resolved these issues. Yet, because they were so committed to the truth, the writers did not do that.
	5. **The disciples died for their beliefs.** The deathbed is often the place where confessions are made. At the point of death, one realizes there is no more earthly gain to be earned by a lie; now is the time for the truth. However, though all the disciples faced torture and brutal deaths for their beliefs, not one of them ever recanted. They had everything to lose in this life by sticking to their story, and much to gain by abandoning their beliefs, yet they were so convinced of the powerful truth that Christ was God, that He rose from the dead, and that they would stand before Him on Judgment Day, that they refused to back down.
	6. **The critics (or enemies of Christ) confirmed the big details.** The enemy has no motive to prove your point, so confirmation from a hostile source is worth a lot. The Jewish Talmud says that Jesus was a sorcerer. This confirms that Jesus was a real, historical person who did miracles. The Talmud also states that Mary conceived Jesus by a Roman soldier, which confirms that there was something unusual about his birth. Lastly, the Jews said the disciples stole the body – which proves the tomb was empty.
	7. **The Gospel accounts differ slightly.** There is just enough variation in the account to prove that these are individual account of something that really happened. If the accounts were identical, the whole thing would have looked like a conspiracy.
	8. **The writers point to eyewitnesses to verify their story.** The writers are confident enough of what they record that they tell others to check their story out with source witnesses.

If a historian were to doubt the reliability of the New Testament documents, by that same standard of doubt, we couldn’t be certain about any history before the Middle Ages! Conversely, if a secular historian is confident of his knowledge about Alexander the Great or any of the Caesars, then by that same standard of confidence, the New Testament is completely trustworthy.

**Session** 5 ***Who is Jesus…God or Fraud?***

What are the facts of history? Those given below are accepted by most liberal scholars and by all conservative ones. As we have already seen, the documents recording these facts have proven very reliable.

1. A good, wise man walked on this earth 2000 years ago and claimed to be God.
2. This man was crucified and his body laid in a tomb.
3. Shortly afterward, the tomb was reported to be empty.
4. Reports that the resurrected Christ had appeared to over 500 people began to circulate.
5. Jesus’ followers were radically transformed from dim-witted cowards to courageous revolutionaries who turned the world upside down, and who were willing to die for their convictions.
6. Within a few years of Jesus’ death – in the very area where Jesus lived and died – thousands of Jews abandoned long-held traditions and began worshiping as God the very man whom they’d seen crucified.

This is the data that we have to explain. Take an honest look at the historical evidence and documents that report these facts, and subject them to the same criteria you would use to examine other historical evidence.

***Who Is Jesus?***

Because He claimed to be God, He removed himself the category of normal human and simply a great moral teacher. This claim leaves us with only four options.

* **Liar?** *He knew His claim to God-hood was false, thus making Him a liar and a devil.*
1. Wrong psychological profile: He was passionate about truth, selfless, and compassionate.
2. He had no motive to lie. People lie for selfish gain – wealth, pleasure, or power. Jesus gave up all of these things, and even *died* for His claim to God-hood.
3. He had no hope of convincing the Jews that this lie was true; Jews were strict monotheists. Wrong group to try and pull off a falsehood like this!
* **Lunatic?** *He didn’t know this claim to God-hood was false, thus making Him a crazed lunatic with a severe case of divinity complex.*
1. Wrong profile again: People who have a divinity complex are egotistical, narcissists, boring, and predictable. Jesus was none of these things!
2. We feel superior to lunatics. His contemporaries only felt three things towards Jesus: hatred, terror, or adoration.
3. There is no way a lunatic could have had such a powerful effect on the world!
* **Legend?** *He never claimed to be God. This idea was later inserted in the text by His followers.*
1. Jesus’ followers were very careful to distinguish His words from their own. The early church faced several controversial issues that are nowhere addressed by Jesus. If the church had been willing to tamper with the words of Jesus, this would have been the prime opportunity for them to do so.
2. The Gospels were written too close to the time that Jesus lived for any false claims to go unchallenged by eyewitnesses.
3. Jesus’ actions show that He viewed Himself as divine: forgiving people’s sins, acceptance of worship, assuming the divine prerogative of giving a new command. He saw Himself as the Jewish God by saying that He and the Father were one. He called Himself “I AM,” the ultimate claim to God-hood.
4. Jesus’ claim to be God is the only valid explanation for why He was killed;

 He was not crucified for being a good teacher.

5. In just a few years after His death, there was widespread belief that Jesus was God.

* **Lord?** *He was who He said He was.*
1. Jesus backed up his claim by fulfilling OT prophecies, particularly Isaiah 53, which has been conclusively proven to have been written before Christ was born.
2. He lived a sinless life, and even challenged people to convict him of sin. No other prophet can legitimately make this claim.
3. Jesus offered the proof of the resurrection, both by predicting it and fulfilling it.
4. Look at the spectacular, world-wide impact this one solitary life made.

If you deny the deity of Christ, you have to provide a more reasonable explanation of the fact that a good and wise man claimed to be God. This has only happed once in recorded history. God becoming man is possible. If it happened, what would you expect to find, and has anything like that happened?

***What Actually Happened in the First Century?***

The available and agreed upon facts of history presented at the top of these notes present us with three basic options:

1. The disciples were deceived and the resurrection is false.
2. The disciples were the deceivers and the resurrection is false.
3. Or the disciples were neither deceived or deceivers and the resurrection is true

**Were Jesus’ disciples deceived?**

***Skeptic’s Swoon Theory* debunked:**

* The Romans were trained to perform successful crucifixions, and knew how to make sure their victim was dead. Bungling an execution could cost a Roman his life.
* Jesus wouldn’t have survived the spear thrust through his heart.
* He was embalmed by friends, who would have noticed if He showed any spark of life.
* Suppose His barely alive, mangled corpse somehow survived the time in the tomb, escaped the guards, and appeared to His disciples (who were in hiding). This pathetic survivor would not have inspired His disciples to hail Him as the conqueror of life and death.

*The fact that Jesus died is one of the most well-attested facts of history!*

***Skeptic’s Hallucinations Theory* debunked:**

* Hallucinations come from within you, and only manifest what you already know. Jesus’ disciples were not expecting His resurrection. Hallucinations do not change your mind; they only confirm what you already want. (Plus, in three of His post-death appearances, Jesus was not immediately recognized.) Hallucinations can’t account for the transformation of: James, Jesus’ brother who was skeptical of Jesus’ claims to divinity; Paul, who was trying to squash the “myth” of Christ’s resurrection; or Thomas, who doubted the other disciples’ claim to have seen Jesus.
* Jesus appeared to over 500 people at one time. A hallucination of this scale would be unprecedented – a *real* miracle.
* If Jesus’ appearances were mere visions, those who wanted to squash this budding religion would have simply gone to the tomb and produced His body.
* Jesus manifested a corporeal body that could both eat and be touched by others.

***Skeptic’s Wrong Tomb Theory* debunked:**

* The Jews and Romans would have found the right tomb and produced the body.
* The appearances, and not merely an empty tomb, transformed the disciples.
* An empty tomb would not have persuaded Thomas, James, or Paul.

***Skeptic’s Mistaken Identity Theory* debunked:**

* Jesus’ body exhibited supernatural qualities: an ability to go through walls and ascend into heaven.
* If the appearances of Jesus were actually done by a human imposter, Paul would have killed him rather than devote the rest of his life to him.
* Jesus’ brother, James, would have known the difference between a look-alike and the real Christ.

**Were the disciples the deceivers?**

**Did the disciples steal the body and fabricate a resurrection story?**

* 1. The disciples had no motive to concoct such a lie. Conspiracies are made for the purpose of earthly gain. The disciples “gained” only torture, persecution, being boiled in hot oil, scourging, and, finally, martyrdom. Hardly perks! People will die for a lie, but not for what they know to be a lie, especially if telling the truth will save their life.
	2. None of the 11 disciples broke down and admitted fraud. As Pascal pointed out, the human heart is fickle, but especially the heart of a liar.
	3. This theory doesn’t account for the radical transformation the disciples or, especially, of James and Paul.
	4. Millions of people have been transformed for the better, becoming selfless and more virtuous. It is ridiculous to think that this transformation happened because of a dubious deception.

**Jesus rose from the dead!**

* 1. Jesus can be experienced to day, and millions testify of his transforming power. This alone does not prove that he rose as this transforming power could be explained other ways. But if Jesus did really rise from the dead, this is what you would expect to find, and it is exactly what you find!
	2. The evidence has convinced skeptic after skeptic. Several have undertaken to prove it all wrong, but the more they uncovered, the more compelling the evidence became.
	3. Jesus transformed five social institutions: a) Animal sacrifice, b) keeping the ceremonial law, c) keeping the Sabbath, d) strict monotheism, and e) belief in a conquering Messiah.

These were the beliefs that the Jews were willing to die for; the pagans couldn’t beat these ideas out of them. Yet suddenly, within a few years of the resurrection, thousands of Jews abandoned these beliefs and were following Jesus. James died for the belief that his brother was God.

 d. Jesus’ followers began *celebrating* his death!

Look at the first century: We find that from a small, ragtag group of disheartened, grieving, uneducated men came the church, which grew like wild fire and eventually toppled the Roman Empire. Today, one-third of the world’s population claims to follow Christ. What caused this? What can account for such mysteries? It’s obvious that only the physical, historical resurrection of Christ can adequately explain these phenomena. Any other theory takes too much blind faith to accept. Many skeptics have postulated many other hypotheses but they all break down due either to lack of evidence or an inability to explain the evidence.

***What Would You Expect to See If God Became A Man?***

* The God-man would be sinless, since sin is violating God’s moral standard.
* He would have power over the forces of nature.
* He would have the ability to perform miracles
* He would have profound insight into life.
* He would have a life-changing effect on people.
* He would have power over death.
* He would have a lasting impact on history.

 Jesus fulfilled every one of those things. Jesus: A simple peasant who never wrote a book, never traveled more than 200 miles from home, never amassed an army, never held a political position, and died owning only the cloak on his back. Yet this man has had more influence on the world than any king, writer, or invention. The resurrection is the best-attested fact of ancient History. Of all the prophets who walked this earth, Jesus is the only one who conquered the problem of death. He is the only one worth dying for!

**Session 6 *What Is the Gospel Message?***

 This is the most important question you will ever face – “What must I do to be saved?” We have three possibilities:

1. **Everyone will be saved.** This idea is so appealing and it appeals to God more than anyone. Yet Jesus spoke more about hell than heaven. The gospels are full of warnings of eternal destruction.
2. **God chooses regardless of what we do. In other words we have no choice in the matter.** God does choose who will be saved. He has the final choice and no one can argue his decision. However, God calls us to choose who we will serve. And Jesus says that “whoever wills may come.” What God sovereignly chooses is beyond our comprehension. We know God will choose, but we don’t what the choice will be or what it will be based on.
3. **Our choices will affect where we spend eternity.** It seems that we will affect where we spend eternity. Jesus talks about eternal life, and eternal destruction. The critical question is, “What must I do to receive eternal life?”

 Is the deciding factor right knowledge? How high do you have to score on a theology exam to be saved - 85% - 92%? Is good living the deciding factor? How many good deeds do you need? Is faith what matters? If so is, “pretty confident” enough to save you, but if you have some doubts, that’s not enough?

**What is the critical component that separates the blessed from the damned?**

Whatever it is, we should make it our life’s goal to seek that thing, and make sure others are seeking it as well. Human opinion is of little value. The only way to know for sure is to hear from God himself.

**Passages that cite the importance of faith and belief**

* John 5:24: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."
* John 6:40: "For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."
* [Acts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acts_of_the_Apostles) 16:31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved."
* Romans 3:28: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."
* Romans 10:9: "That if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you shall be saved."
* [Ephesians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_Ephesians) 2:8-9: "For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”
* [Galatians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_Galatians) 2:16: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."
* Galatians 2:21: "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."
* Titus 3:5: "...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit..."

### Passages that cite the importance of obedience and actions

* Matthew 7:21 (part of the Sermon on the Mount): "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."
* Matthew 12:36-37: "I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."
* Matthew 25:44-46: “He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."
* Matthew 28:19-20a: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."
* Romans 2:6,7; 13: "For he will repay according to each one's deeds. To those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; for it is not those who hear the law who are just in the sight of God; rather, those who observe the law will be justified."
* [2 Corinthians](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Epistle_to_the_Corinthians) 5:10: "For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil."
* James 2:24: "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."
* Revelation 22:12: "Behold, I am coming soon. I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds."

**What is our primary problem?**

The key to understanding a solution is to first understand the problem. Here is man’s dilemma:

**God is our source of all life, goodness, and beauty.** We were created to be in a relationship with God. God designed it so that He would be God and we would be the worshippers and recipients of His love and good gifts.

**God is also the one who defines right and wrong**. Since He created this world, and we all belong to him, he alone has the right to set the rules. He is the source of the moral law.

**We rebelled against his authority.** Beginning with Adam in the Garden of Eden, we have all rebelled against God’s moral authority and decided we wanted to be god. In doing this we have severed ourselves from this life-giving Source. We want to be god, but it is all a big pretense because we have no life in ourselves. Like an electric robot that has been unplugged, we are spiritually dead.

In this state of being cut off from God, it is only a matter of time before we perish eternally in Hell. Because we cut ourselves off from the source of goodness, we became corrupt and have committed moral crimes against a righteous God. And because God is righteous, these crimes have to be punished. Only a corrupt judge will let an unrepentant criminal go unpunished. The penalty for these crimes is hell. If you feel this is unjust, let me remind you that the penalty fits the crime, because the penalty (separation from God) *is* the crime (separating yourself from God through self-deification.) Hell is the absence of God. To be cut off from God is to be separated from all goodness. This is what makes hell terrible.

**Our problem is threefold.**

1. Because we have rejected God’s claim to ownership, we are separated from Him and will perish in our current state.

2. We have committed moral crimes that must be punished – sins that prevent us from being united with a holy God.

3. We are in a state of rebellion. Rebels must be quarantined.

**What is our primary solution?**

If alienation from God is our primary problem, then reconciliation to Him is our primary solution. What does it mean to be reconciled to God? It means we can approach God without fear of condemnation because of what Christ did on the Cross. Our sins have been removed. It means we have surrendered the control of our life, and have submitted to God’s claim of authority. And, because God is once again our God, we receive the life-giving flow of His Spirit. How do we obtain this reconciliation?

 **What is the deciding factor that ensures salvation?**

Scripture talks about the importance of faith and belief as critical ingredients. There is nothing we can do to earn God’s favor, or merit the benefits of the cross. We can only call upon the name of the Lord with empty hands. There can be no bargaining, but only a grateful receiving of the gift of God.

**The importance of repentance:** *I tell you, no; but unless you* ***repent*** *you will all likewise perish. Luke 13:3*

***Repent*** *therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. Acts 3:19*

There are several times Scripture talks about the importance of repentance as vital for salvation. Does this contradict the fact that we are saved by faith alone? We are saved by faith alone, but what kind of faith?

**What is Saving Faith?**

Saving faith is more than mental assent to the truth of the gospel. The demons would score higher on a theology test than any of us, yet they are not saved.

Saving faith is more than a feeling of certitude. Many bound in cults are certain of their faith, yet this is clearly not what saves.

Saving faith is the willful acknowledgement of God’s claim to your life. It means you lay down your arms and surrender to his authority. It is the acknowledgement that you are helpless apart from God, and that there is nothing good in you that is worthy of his favor. It is completely trusting in the finished work of Christ for your good standing with God. It is the soul saying to God, you are God and I am not. I am yours. This is saving faith.

We are not saved by faith plus works, but if you have true saving faith and not just a “said” faith, or a “felt” faith, there will be a dramatic life change. This is not legalism. Legalism is relying on your own good deeds for God’s approval. It is saying to God, “I don’t need you, I can be good enough on my own.”

**What is the Gospel message?**

**1. *God.***

**God is the Creator**. He has a claim on our life, we belong to him.

**God is the moral law giver**. God decides what is right and wrong, and he will ensure ultimate justice.

**God is the source of all goodness, life, beauty, meaning and pleasure**.

**2. *Man.***

**Man is created in the image of God**. Thus, man has great dignity and worth. There is a nobleness that the fall has not been able to erase.

**Man is in rebellion**. When man tries to play God, he wreaks havoc in his own life and the life of those around him. Look at the world! Everywhere you look, you see the disgusting consequences of this rebellion. Severed from God, man is in conflict with himself and mankind.

**Man is under God’s wrath**. As long man is in rebellion, he is cut off from the source of life. God is so passionate about reconciling this universe to himself, that all who refuse to submit to his rule are a cancer and must be removed. Sinful man is on a collision course with ultimate justice. It is important to emphasis that man is the problem. God is the one willing to forgive and full of grace and longsuffering. The problem is not that God coldly rejects the sinner. The problem is that God honors the sinner’s rejection of Him.

**Man is bound for hell.** God is the source of all goodness and pleasure. There is no other person who has the ability to produce the good stuff. If you reject God, you reject all beauty, goodness, and pleasure. This is total misery – hell.

**3. *Christ.***

**His teaching.** When we preach Christ, we preach good news! The Gospel means good news. People complain about how bad this world is. Jesus taught the kingdom of God or the rule of God. Man has totally messed up the beautiful world God created. But God in his mercy has begun the process of reconciling the world to himself through the incarnation. First he will reconcile all willing humans and then he will restore the entire universe. But the only way this can happen is if you are restored to a proper relationship with God. Jesus spent three and a half years explaining what a person who is reconciled to God will look like. He warned against the things that sever our relationship with God: lust, infidelity, self-righteousness, covetousness, unforgiveness, worry, pride, insensitivity to others. He taught about things that bring us closer to God: humility, prayer, dependence on Him, confession, gratitude, and trust. He taught us that if we really love God, we will love humanity. He taught us what that looks like: forgiveness, having a servant’s attitude, sacrificial love, fidelity, and treating others the way we want to be treated. The great commission is to teach others to obey all he has commanded. It is not the gospel when you don’t proclaim the importance of obedience.

**His death.** Jesus took the eternal consequences of our sin on himself. He has taken away our sins. He took our place. We can have great confidence because we have been given a clean slate. We must place our faith in the work of the cross, not in our own good deeds.

**His resurrection**. Jesus conquered death. He rose to demonstrate the truth of his claims, and give us pledge that he is going to make all things new. What happened in the death and resurrection of Christ is a picture of what Christ will do for the entire cosmos.

**His Holy Spirit.** Jesus not only commands us to live better, and removes past sins; he also gives us the power to overcome the sins that keep us in bondage.

**His Lordship**. Jesus is not simply the answer to our problems. If this was the case he would be irrelevant to the person who has no problems. Jesus is the Creator who has a claim on our lives. He not only made us, but He also bought us back with his own blood. We need to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, and that all who refuse his rightful claim will be cut off.

**4. *Our response.***

**Faith and repentance.** It is critical that we proclaim both. If we preach one without the other, we will be misleading. If we preach faith without repentance, then the unsaved won’t understand the radical nature of salvation, and the change of authority that must take place. However, if you preach repentance without faith, you will place a burden on the unbeliever that they won’t be able to bear. The gospel is not just a call to change, but is rather the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to overcome the bondage of sin.

Saving faith is as simple as the cry of the thief on the cross. All you have to do is admit your helplessness and ask for God to save you and you will be saved. However, saving faith is also costly, because every day after you asked for God to save you, you belong to Him. He must be the boss of your life.

**Can you lose your salvation?** Jesus is the author and finisher of your salvation. From the perspective of God, once you have received eternal life, there is nothing that can snatch you from the Father’s hand. However, it is possible to be deceived into thinking you are saved when you really aren’t. Scripture warns us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith, and to make our calling and election sure. Our hope must always be in the living Savior, not in a past decision. Saving faith will result in a life change. If you walk away from the Savior, you were not relying on him for your salvation, but were relying on your own works or beliefs.

 Eternal security is a doctrine that should give us assurance, not apathy. If you are apathetic to God, then it is possible you are not in a saving relationship with God. Your response should not be, “I said a prayer when I was younger, so I’m covered.” But rather to get down on you knees and ask for a filling of the Holy Spirit. He is the seal of your eternal salvation.

**Some Simple Illustrations of the gospel**

 Pictures and stories help us to communicate across the language and culture barriers. Jesus constantly spoke in parables and stories to make his points.

**The Fatal Disease:**

Imagine that terrorists have discovered a way to pollute all the water in the world. Your government has been aware of this problem and has stockpiled sanitary water to drink and is offering it free of charge to everyone. The government is also strongly warning people not to drink ordinary water. But people ignore the warning, and drink the water. Before you know it, the entire population is infected and the world is dying. Now the president is the last person who has not been infected; he has only drunk the pure water. His research department tells him that if they can find the blood of someone who has not been infected, they will be able to find a cure. The president gives his own blood, but loses his life in the process. A cure is found and is again made available free of charge. People are commanded to come into the treatment center and receive the cure. It would seem like a no-brainer to receive this treatment, but many people decide not to come because they’ve been told that the rules you have to obey afterward are so strict. They would rather die following their own rules than live and obey someone else. The government has tried to tell people the rules are not harsh. They are simply rules and procedures that are necessary for the cure to work. Some people listen, receive the cure, and are made healthy and try to tell others, but many still refuse to be cured. Some don’t come to the treatment center because of fear, or because of pride (even as they are dying, they refuse to believe there is a problem).

 The problem is not with the government not being “loving” enough, or not doing all they can to help those dying; the problem is that people refuse the treatment.

**Judgment Day – Two Scenarios:**

Imagine you are standing before God on judgment day, and it is your turn to be examined. The prosecution pops in a DVD of your life. This particular DVD also has a running commentary of your thoughts and motives. You cringe while deeds and sinful actions you had long forgotten about are played before thousands of watching eyes. After the film, the prosecution sets down mounds and mounds of legal documents itemizing each of your sins: lust, blasphemy, theft, willful treason against the Lord of the Universe, lying, hypocrisy. You know you are guilty and hang your head in shame. The judge stands up and with tears in his eyes, says, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” This is complete justice. You can’t protest, because after all, your sins are all fresh and stinking in your memory.

 Alternate ending: The judge stands up and walks towards the pile of legal documents and stamps on them in big, red, bloody lettering, “paid in full.” He turns to the prosecution and says, “In life, this one gave me his life, he surrendered to my claim on his life. I in turn gave him my perfection: I paid the penalty for every one of these sins.” He turns to you and says, “Enter into the joy of your King!”

**Summary:** Salvation is not found in enough correct theology (the demons understand reality better than any of us). It is not found in doing enough good deeds (relying on our own works is still a refusal of God’s saving grace). If you have not surrendered to the authority of Jesus, you have a false god (yourself), and are cut off from the source of life and are perishing. Salvation (a restored relationship with God) is made possible only because of the work of Christ. You are saved when you repent and allow God to be God. If God is your God, this *will* result in a changed life. Jesus is the only way, because He is the only true God. A rejection of Jesus is a rejection of God. A rejection of God will result in Hell. Come to the cross and let God be your God.

### Session 7 Our Story: Love Comes Loudly

### *Jesse’s side of the story*

 **Jesse:** I am going to admit something right now that I never would have admitted while growing up with seven brothers: I am a romantic at heart. I love candlelit dinners and long moonlight strolls. I love spending time with the most beautiful woman who has ever walked the face of this planet – my wife, Heidi. In 2005, Heidi burst into my life with a brilliant blaze of color and changed me forever. I have fallen under her spell and hope to remain captive for life.

God made us to crave romance and the companionship of some special member of the opposite sex. While single, I dreamed – far more than I let on to my brothers – about how wonderful it would be to enjoy the companionship of a wife. Nights when I would baby-sit, after everyone else was asleep, I’d sit up in the living room and wish I had a wife to share this quiet moment with. Whenever we would meet a new family, my first thought was, “I wonder if they have a girl my age.” I was always on the lookout for the future Mrs. Jesse Jost. My path to nuptial bliss was not what I expected (as you will read in the following pages), but what did prove true was that there is a good God who has shown time and time again that He can be trusted. As a young man, I committed to God my desire for a wife. He has blessed me beyond my imaginings.

I am the oldest of eleven children and I loved all that this distinction entailed. I changed diapers, enjoyed cooking, loved sporting and working with my seven brothers, and simply adored my little siblings. But even though I loved my family, I longed for the day when God would give me my own family, especially a kind-hearted and thoughtful woman with whom I could share my deepest thoughts and feelings.

Longing for marriage led to some mild heartache and disappointment. However, I tried to remember that since it was my Creator who made me with this desire, my Creator would also fulfill this desire to the greatest degree. I also realized that these single years were a valuable time in a young man's life. I immersed myself in some of the great works of literature. I took several journeys through church history, examined different philosophies, studied numerous arguments for the truth of Christianity, and memorized much of the New Testament.

 Through all this, I eagerly awaited the day when God would say, "The time has arrived! Come meet this beautiful bride that I have prepared for you!" There were a couple of times I excitedly thought this day was dawning, only to see the imaginary sun dissipate and awaken to the cold reality that it was still night and I should still be asleep. These experiences taught me humility and gave me a firm grasp of how deceptive human hearts can be.

**Love at first sight**

When I was nineteen, I met – and was immediately attracted to – a girl who lived far away. I didn’t care what James Dobson said; I suddenly believed in love at first sight. I’d grown up hearing that when my mom met my dad, she had the thought cross her mind, “I just met my future husband.” I believed I was having a similar experience. I should have noted one key difference between Mom’s experience and mine – this girl that I liked was beautiful and attraction to her was natural. On the other hand, when Mom and Dad met, Dad had yet to emerge from his gangly, geeky stage. Today, of course, Dad is a rugged, handsome hulk, but back then it had to be the voice of God giving Mom a thought like that.

Over the next year and a half, I prayed that God would give me this girl as my wife. I was really sincere about the whole thing, surrendering her to God and sharing my feelings about her with my mom. I prayed in a somewhat cowardly way, “God, if she’s not the one you have for me, please take away this desire, but if she is the one, help this desire to grow.” I thought it was a win-win prayer. If God took my desire away, there would be no disappointment if nothing came to fruition. I should have realized that we are responsible for directing and diligently guarding the desires of our heart instead of expecting God to do it for us. So rather than guard my heart, I followed my heart and found that my infatuation increased. I thought I was falling more and more in love.

The crazy thing was that I had only seen this girl a few times and really didn’t know her. I have since discovered that it’s easier to have crushes on people you don’t know very well than on those you do. When you meet someone for the first time, huge unknown areas make up who that person is. It’s like a lift-the-flap grid put over a picture. You flip back a flap at a time, trying to guess what the rest of the picture is like. It’s similar in new relationships. You get to pull back a few flaps as you spend a little time together, revealing a bit of the other person’s nature and character. We don’t like living with unknown areas, though, so we often fill in the blanks ourselves, assuming things about the other person that may or may not be true. When a girl is outwardly attractive, it’s easy to assume she is perfect and godly in other areas. (On the flip side, it’s easy to be critical of a less attractive person’s character.)

When we know a person really well after years of time together, many more of the flaps have been revealed and we see more of that person’s faults and shortcomings. But with a new friend, there are still so many delicious blank spaces; our searching heart loves to imagine what lies behind that beautiful face.

I found this happening with me. This girl was beautiful and I assumed many things about her. I took her face, name, and the few things I had observed about her, entered these facts into my mental “create the perfect lover” program, and it filled in the rest of the picture with details I wanted to be true. Voila! A classic recipe for infatuation. I am not saying that this girl was not a wonderful person in real life, but rather that, in hindsight, I see I really didn’t know her as well as I thought I did.

**A cruel awakening**

Finally, after much prayer and waiting, my mom and dad suggested that I approach the young lady’s father about beginning a relationship. So we went to visit their family. The first night we stayed there I was woken up by a little sibling who wet the air mattress we were sharing. I cleaned up the puddled mess but could not get back to sleep. Lying down on a big bean bag couch, I contemplated what I was about to do… and then the gravity of the situation hit me full force. My conviction was that when I started a romantic relationship I wanted it to be for life. I was not in this for casual fun; I was about to commit for life. It suddenly dawned on me how little I knew this girl. What was I in for? I tossed and turned and committed the whole thing again to God.

The next afternoon, with great fear and trepidation, I trembled up the stairs and into her father’s office. He was on the phone and asked me to wait in the hall. “What am I doing?” I quivered. The young lady’s father turned out to be very kind and relaxed. I poured out my heart, trying to persuade him that it was God who put this desire in my heart and that I would do my best to take care of his daughter. Graciously, he said he would pray about it with his wife and get back to me in two weeks. Immediately after the conversation, I was flooded with peace. I had been obedient and stepped out in faith. I felt like I was Abraham, George Mueller, and Hudson Taylor all rolled into one, and God was beginning one of the greatest love stories of all time. It seemed I had done everything right. Now it was just a matter of time. The two weeks were filled with apprehension, but by the end of the second week, I had a growing certainty. I was really excited.

Then the phone rang. It was the girl’s father, and he wanted to talk to my dad first. Not a good sign. I talked with him a few minutes later. Actually, “talked” is too strong a description. It was more like I mumbled a few things while trying to get rid of the huge lump in my throat. With a few simple words, my fairytale train crashed abruptly into the face of rocky Heartbreak Mountain. It was over and I was stunned.

Was this some cruel cosmic prank? I had surrendered her to God, waited for confirmation from my parents, and now it was over! How could this be? Did this father have any idea that he’d just thrown to the wind a golden opportunity to guarantee his daughter’s lifelong bliss? Did he know who he’d just turned down? I went downstairs to my bed and soaked the covers with tears. When I got up, I reached for “A Grief Observed” by C. S. Lewis. I thought maybe he knew how I felt. After reading his heart-wrenching account of *real* grief, I realized things weren’t really all that bad. While it hurt my pride to be turned down and it was painful to have my expectations crushed, I was glad I had approached her father before starting a relationship. I had not communicated my affection to the girl and we had no shared romantic experiences so there were no soul ties to be severed. From what I have heard from others, that is when the real pain occurs.

**A woman of my (not) choosing**

Broken and humbled, I moved on. Ten months later, still feeling like a total failure in being able to read God’s direction for love, I told my parents to choose a girl for me and that I would just learn to love whoever they picked. I know that decision may sound crazy, but I was beginning to realize that true love is a choice, something you cultivate and nourish. I now saw that there can only be infatuation at first sight, not true love. So I was willing to let them pick The Woman for me, trusting God to lead through them. My parents had been praying for my future spouse since the day I was born; I knew that they wanted what was best for me even more than I did.

They talked and prayed about it together and felt that there were two godly young women who were possibilities for me. One of them was someone I had been interested in before; the other one had not caught my fancy at all. They decided on the former, a young lady whom we all knew well. I had been attracted to her when I was younger, but had since totally died to that interest. Though I was not in love with her, I knew that, with time, I could be. But I was not joking when I said I had *totally* died to my desire for her. So when they told me who they had chosen, I had a sinking feeling in my chest. I was excited that my life would be moving forward, but struggled to wrap my head around this one. I stayed up till one in the morning praying and trying to turn my heart toward this girl. I felt like a noble martyr of love…with a case of nausea.

With slightly less apprehension, I called the girl’s father and asked to begin a relationship with his daughter. He sounded positive at first, but decided to wait awhile before giving me permission. So for the next six weeks, I was learning to love the young lady my parents had chosen. It was beginning to work, too. The only problem was that the young lady’s father was not getting back to me. I couldn’t figure this out. When the opportunity of paradise for your daughter knocks on your door, why take so long to decide if you should let him in? Isn’t it a no-brainer?

Eventually, the second father did decide: No. He said he really wanted to say yes, but he had no peace and was not getting any sleep. I began wondering if there were any monasteries for Protestants. Thankfully, I couldn’t find any. But I did wonder if my strong desire for marriage would ever be fulfilled.

**Look who’s available!**

Shortly after false awakening # 2, I began to take more notice of a young lady in our church fellowship. She was the other girl my parents had thought was a good fit. They had suggested her to me before but in the past I had always rejected the idea. You see, I thought my cousin was interested in her. My cousin is about 6’1” and built like a lumberjack. I can make 5’10” with a good hair dryer, and am built for reading, so I wasn’t about to get into a stag fight for her. I already had enough headaches in the love department. It turns out that my cousin was interested in this girl’s younger sister and they had just announced their engagement a few months earlier. Their announcement opened up a new world of possibilities, and I had no idea just how wonderful this world would be!

I had always respected this slender, blond woman but could never figure out what she thought of me. I loved talking with her; she struck me as a very thoughtful person who listened carefully and weighed what was said without becoming defensive or argumentative. Nevertheless, even though my cousin was out of the way and The Girl was now available, I could not think of her as more than a friend – a possible great friend perhaps – but just a friend. Love was NOT my favorite topic any more.

  Turning twenty-two had brought a dose of reality about all that marriage required, and that, much as I wanted to be married, I would be unwise to try to manipulate things to make marriage arrive sooner. “Just trust God for His timing,” I said to myself, for with His timing would come His grace. I decided the wisest thing to do would be to pursue my interest in writing, be open to more job opportunities, and be content right where God had me.

**She loves me, she loves me not…she at least knows I exist, right?**

  A growing fascination with this striking blonde led to more and more "coincidental" encounters with her. Our chats reinforced my belief that she would make an awesome friend, but I was still clueless about how she felt. I was pretty sure she didn’t hate me! Beyond that, I couldn’t figure her out.

   In spite of everything, I could not ignore the increasing hold she had on me. I began to look forward to seeing her, and tried harder to arrange coincidental conversations, all the while trying to convince myself she would just be a great friend. I started to look hard for any indication that she might view me as more than a friend, but alas, I could find none! I thought about approaching her father, but wanted to first make sure *she* was interested. I didn’t want to finally get past the father only to be turned down by the girl!

In early June, I went hiking with a group of friends that included this particular young lady. I was eager to talk to her. I had recently begun writing an article for a periodical, and used it as an excuse to talk to this girl, who just happened to be a very talented writer. (A disclaimer to you guys: The pickup line, “I’m a writer, would you like to edit my work?” worked great for me, but it might not have the same effect on all girls.) The amazing thing about the hike was that I almost always found myself with HER! The young lady, on the other hand, appeared to be running away from me down the hill, forcing me to inauspiciously run after her. I couldn’t figure out why she kept running away! “She wants me to follow her,” I assured myself, proving once again that the male brain's version of logic is worthless when it comes to figuring out a female. At any rate, I loved every minute of talking to her. I found out later that during this hike my dad was praying that God would bring me and this young woman together if it was His will.

**Love written in red**

  The next day, our church had a Sunday school picnic. I could not fight my newfound attraction. I watched The Girl closely – I wanted her attention. Where I was concerned, the facade of "just friends" was gone! This change of heart resulted in frustration for me, because this girl would not give any hint of interest! I was confused. I knew where my heart wanted to go, but because it had led me wrong before, I tried to keep my desires in check and wait on the Lord. When I got home, I sent her the article I was working on. She promptly sent it back full of red ink. At this, I fell hopelessly in love. Not only was she beautiful, she also knew how to edit! What more could a man want?

With each passing week, I experienced a growing certainty that, if it was what God wanted, I would be thrilled to have this girl as my wife. My parents gave their approval when I shared my desire with them, but they also expressed a need for confirmation from the Lord and some indication that this young woman's heart was turning my direction. "Even if she isn't attracted to me now, she still could be the one!" I hedged.

  Once again, I made the mistake of trying to interpret her actions using male logic. Was she blushing? Was she comfortable or uneasy around me? Was she looking at me? These questions yielded no answers. I knew as much as rocks do – nothing!

  While I had no idea how she felt, I knew how I felt! I couldn't get her off my mind. One evening, on August 12, 2005, I sensed I had clear confirmation from the Lord: *Yes, she's the one for you*.  I was instantly excited, but I quickly tempered my soaring emotions by reminding myself that one's thoughts tend to be deceitful and mine had deceived me before. Still, it seemed clear. I prayed that God would unmistakably direct in this situation. God had showed me in the past that if something wasn't His will, He could protect me from it.

  I felt I needed to approach her father.  Having gone through the pain of being turned down in the past, I was reluctant to do so now. I had to be sure this was God's will before venturing down that difficult road again!

**She what?!**

  God sure knows how to surprise us! The young woman's parents contacted my parents about meeting together for coffee. Because they live a hundred miles away from us, the get-together was not some casual suggestion. Mom suspected that it might have something to do with their daughter. I went for a walk with Mom the night before the parents’ meeting and once again shared exactly where my heart was, but also said the future looked so uncertain.

I left early for work the next day (Tuesday, Aug. 23), anxiously awaiting news about the meeting. Shortly after 11 a.m., I got a call at work from Mom. She relayed the conversation, sharing that the girl’s parents started things off by saying they had noticed how much attention I was giving their daughter, Heidi, and were concerned about it. My heart sank. Oh no, not again! Strike three.

"They wanted to know where your heart was," Mom continued, "because" – her next words jolted my mind with a rush of joy – "Heidi has believed you were the one for her for six to eight months!!!" I discovered then what it was like to lose touch with reality. My head was in the clouds – I ran on air all the way to cloud nine!

"Heidi has so much respect for you,” Mom said. “She just thinks the world of you!" I simply could not believe what I was hearing! I finally knew what ecstasy felt like: I’m twenty-two and for the first time in my life I know that a girl likes me!

**Life in the clouds**

  I hung up the phone in a daze. I couldn’t stop grinning. In my delirium that afternoon I ran into a combine – which is different from a concubine – on my way home from work. There were four in a row coming down the gravel road toward me. I missed the first two, but the third one’s header hit the corner of the windshield and scraped along the roof. This temporarily dampened my enthusiasm, as this was my brother’s car I was driving. (He later sold it to me at a reduced rate.) But not even a damaged windshield could keep my spirits down.

 The next morning I experienced two firsts – writing my first love letter and filing my first police report. The love letter is more interesting, so I’m including it here.

*My beautiful and lovely Heidi,*

 *I am so totally excited and overjoyed at the sudden turn of events that God has brought into our lives. As you may have noticed, I have gradually been falling madly in love with you. (Despite the fact that, frustratingly, I had no idea how you felt… I was pretty sure you didn’t hate me! ☺) When Mom called me at work, telling me about the visit and how you felt, I was rocketed to cloud nine, I felt like I was on top of the world, the luckiest man alive! (Please overlook all the clichés. I will work hard on avoiding them in future letters!) I had a big goofy grin on my face for hours. I would try and sober up before asking someone a question, and then I would go back to my work and just grin!*

 *I had a great talk with your parents last night. They are awesome people that I already love dearly! They have given me permission to ask you if it would work to take you on a walk Friday afternoon. I hope you will say yes. I am so excited about talking to you and pouring out my heart! I am simply overwhelmed with God’s goodness that He would honor me with such a gem as you. I can’t wait to start sharing life with you, growing closer to God with you, and together enjoying the great adventures He has in store for us.*

 *I LOVE YOU, Heidi Wahl!*

 *Love, your not-so-secret admirer, Jesse Jost*

I had it delivered to her as she was staying at some friends in the area and waited for her reply. On Thursday, morning I received the first of hundreds of special emails from Heidi:

*YES! Any time on Friday afternoon works GREAT! - I don't know what else to say... Jesse, I don't even feel like I'm me anymore, and I'm not sure what daydream I just walked into, or who I'm sharing it with, or why this happened to me of all people. I don't know which way is up right now, and seeing you - talking to you - would straighten it all out. You have always straightened things out for me, seems like, ever since I first met you. And I can't wait to tell you what God has done over the past year! He is amazing! I am so in awe of His love - open-hearted, unreserved love. Like yours. I don't deserve either, can't comprehend either!*

*Don't examine and re-examine this email, please, Jess. I'm not sure what to say or how to say it just now and my words are clumsy. There are a million things I want to say, but email isn't the place for it. I just need to see you and be reassured that you are the same person I have always looked up to and appreciated, and then maybe the reality of all of this will begin to settle in!*

 *Learning to love,*

*Heidi*

**Caught in love’s overwhelming flow**

  Contrary to what she said, I did read that letter over and over and over. It is hard to describe the rush of emotions I was feeling. It was like I entered some kind of alternate reality. Friday morning, (August 26, 2005) I finished up a job and then, with fluttering insides, drove to meet Heidi. After pondering what I would say first, I stepped out of the car, and walked toward Heidi, who was sitting on the lawn in front of her sister’s house. Ultra-smooth, I began, “Nice day, isn’t it?”

I sat down beside her and handed her some gifts. Every member of my family had written her a note welcoming her to the family, so I gave those to her. I had also bought her a white gold necklace with a ring through a heart.

“It symbolizes that my heart is yours forever,” I said, and bashfully looked away. My metamorphosis from he-man to soggy milksop toast was underway.

On that hot sunny afternoon, Heidi and I officially began our relationship with an eight-hour conversation. I shared my heart, which had already been obvious to Heidi, and then Heidi shared part of her journal with me. I sat dumbfounded to hear this account of her long-time interest in me. She read how she became convinced that I was the man for her. She read of her struggles to surrender me to the Lord and how difficult it was to see me on Sundays... and how difficult it was when I wasn’t there. She read of her growing certainty that I was the one she was going to marry. I was blown away!

We began our relationship that day with commitment to marriage. I told her that I had received the green light from God, my parents, and her parents, and that I was committing to marriage. No matter what, I would not back out of this relationship. I did tell her that if she found something in me that she did not like, she could back out. She refused the offer and committed to me as well.

This commitment soon became important to the health of our young relationship. I let loose twenty-two years of pent-up emotion. This emotional outburst – I wore out my exclamation point key in my e-mails to her – put the brakes on her falling in love with me. But because we were committed, we didn’t panic; we worked it out and I learned the proper way to win a woman’s heart. Hint: The best way to cause a delicate flower to blossom is *not* to spray it with a pressure hose.

To propose to her, I’d carved out a ring box-sized hole in a big green book entitled “Life Begins” and took her for a walk. I handed her the book and watched as she flipped though the first few pages. I wanted her to get further back where the ring was, so I said, “I think chapter ten was a good one.”

She found the ring and said, “Would you put it on?” I shakily slipped it on her finger. Twenty-four hours later, I worked up enough courage to hold her hand for the first time. The first time either of us had held hands, actually… in a romantic sense, of course! Those who have been initiated know the difference between holding hands and *holding hands* - much different from the family prayer circle! WOW! Six months later we shared our first kiss immediately following our wedding vows.

God is so good! There have been so many times I have looked at Heidi and been flooded with gratitude that those two previous fathers turned me down. God showed me that He is sovereign and that when I surrendered the choice of my lifelong spouse to Him, He lovingly ensured that I would marry the woman He had for me. I love her more than I can say.

### Session 8 Understand God’s Design for Lifelong Romance

**The gift of romance and physical intimacy**

God loves to give His children good gifts! His creativity, wisdom, and love manifest themselves in the varied pleasures He bestows on us. But with any gift, there is a right way and a wrong way to enjoy it. We can maximize the enjoyment of the gift or misuse it so badly that it actually becomes a curse. With each gift comes a responsibility to not let it go to waste or to use it improperly.

Suppose your parents give you the sports car of your dreams. You are blown away! This is the most awesome gift you have ever been given. However, the car comes with some strict rules: you must only fill up the tank with gasoline, you have to make sure that the fluid levels are topped up and that you don’t run the engine dry, not to mention that you also have to follow the rules of the road.

At this point, you have two choices. You can say, “This is *my* sports car and I can do whatever I want with it.” Or you can decide to submit to the regulations. Now imagine that you decide to treat the car any way you please. You put diesel in the gas tank, you ignore the oil light, and you run it hard even though you are low on coolant. Where will that “freedom” lead? A sports car engine needs the proper fuel and coolant or it will cease to run. It may be your car, but this does not change the fact that if certain conditions are not followed, the car will quit working and you’ll be left with a lifeless hunk of metal.

Or let’s say that you decide that the sports car would make a really cool tree house, so you hoist it up in a tree. Such an idea may be enjoyable, but you would be completely missing out on the true power and potential of the sports car. To maximize your enjoyment of the sports car, you need to know its real purpose.

 In the case of a sports car, what constitutes real freedom? Making any choice you want? Using the gift for whatever you desire? Is it being stuck high in a tree or stalled in traffic? Or is the real freedom found in restricting yourself to the rules laid down for you and having a powerful car that will enable you to cruise the highways wherever you want to go? Do you see how the rules were not restrictive, but were instead empowering? In the same way, God’s rules for the gifts that He gives us are for our pleasure, enabling us to find the real potential of the gifts.

 Romantic love and physical intimacy are amazing gifts with the capacity to bring great pleasure and fulfillment. But they come with “For best results…” and “Caution: do not…” labels. Love and sex were to design to operate best under certain guidelines and conditions. If these instructions are followed you can enjoy these gifts to the fullest. However, if you ignore the Designer’s instructions and misuse these gifts, they won’t function the way they were designed to. God’s instructions are to keep romantic love and sex in the context of lifelong commitment. This may seem strange or radical to you, but God’s instructions serve to ensure that His carefully crafted engines of sex and romantic love run smoothly. Let’s take a closer look at love and romance and ways to maximize their horsepower.

**Commitment and romance**

Any realistic view of love needs to make a distinction between the choice to love (commitment) and the feelings of love (romance). Like all emotions, the feelings of love will come and go no matter how strong they seem to be. But committed love is an unchanging choice. To really love your wife or your husband is a choice, not a mere feeling. True love says, “I will stay faithful to you no matter how I feel. I will serve, protect, honor, and cherish you even when the feelings go.” When a couple wants a divorce because they “no longer love each other,” they are demonstrating ignorance about what true love really is. True love is not something that you verify is there by taking emotional inventory. Rather, it is a decision you make. Marriage is a vow before God to stay committed to loving your spouse till death separates you. This vow does not say that “I will have feelings for you always, but that I will always choose to serve you and stay faithful to you.”

 That being said, the feelings of love are not unimportant. God has given us an incredible gift in these feelings of romantic love and physical intimacy, overflowing with pleasure almost too great to comprehend. But, like the sports car, this gift is not a mere toy to be enjoyed any way you please. And just as the sports car has a functional job of transportation, the gift of erotic love has the function of cementing lifelong commitment in marriage and developing genuine intimacy.

**Romantic superglue**

Physical affection and romantic love are powerful adhesives that bond a man and a woman together and make them one. Things such as hand holding, kissing, long intimate one-on-one conversations of pouring your heart out and sharing your deepest dreams and fears, love notes, and romantic dates – these are all ingredients of the romantic glue that pulls a couple together. The more these activities are enjoyed, the stronger the bond between young people grows.

 Much is made of the bonding that happens in the sex act, but serious bonding happens in all romantic activity. It is not just through intercourse that your souls begin to adhere and form soul ties. There is emotional and spiritual bonding that happens through the expressions of romantic love. When couples start to see themselves as “an item” and have their own identity, they are acknowledging the welding of their souls.

God designed the glue of erotic love to be permanent: One man and one woman cemented for life (Mark 10:6-9). Listen to any love song, or overhear any lovers’ conversation and you’ll find that they are full of promises to forget all others and stay faithful forever. Lovers love to promise *forever*. That is the way God intended it to be. Any person who has been through a breakup knows the horrendous pain it brings. It hurts because the love-glue holding these young people together was designed to hold forever. Hearts bonded with romantic-erotic love glue cannot separate cleanly; they will inevitably break and tear.

Not only does the breakup tear the heart and cause pain, but a callus will form on the wound, making it harder to bond to someone else next time. Or think of it this way: Our hearts are like a sticky piece of tape; the first time it is applied to a surface, it sticks very well and is hard to remove. But when it’s pulled away, it becomes less sticky. The more the tape is applied and removed, the less sticky it becomes.

Sadly, young people have been taught that it’s normal and healthy to enter into several romantic relationships before marriage, and that kissing, hand holding, long heart-to-heart talks, and love notes are all harmless parts of young love. But these young men and women are playing with superglue – stuff far more powerful than they realize. They are bonding and breaking many times before marriage. They are scraping and tearing their tender hearts because they don’t know any other way to love. And millions of them are paying the consequences, not only in the pain and heartache of breakups, but with a lessening “stickiness.” The calluses on their hearts are making it more difficult to bond permanently. It is no wonder that the divorce rate is so high. How God must weep to see His wonderful gift so abused. Because of the many lies out there, many people never get to discover just how wonderful God-designed love can be.

Thankfully, there is a better way. But it requires a radical shift away from the world’s thinking.

**God’s Word on romance**

If you want God’s best, then you will make Christ the Lord of your love life and seek absolute purity. I want to be clear and upfront that I don’t simply want to sit here and spout a lot of rules and laws that you have to follow. Rather, I am trying to look at God’s ideal for love and romance and inspire you to seek God as to what is the best way to submit your love life to His design. There are so many beliefs that the culture and media are feeding us. Some of these beliefs are false and it’s easy to swallow them uncritically and end up being led astray.

 Each age has its blind spots. Many people growing up in the South during the early 1800s thought nothing of treating African-Americans like animals. When slave-holders consulted the Bible for guidance, they discovered that there was no verse explicitly stating that slavery was wrong or that blacks should have equal rights with whites, so they assumed that this was a grey area and they didn’t need to worry further about it. In the meantime, millions of blacks were suffering the terrible consequences of these wrong beliefs. The Abolitionists looked at the biblical text a little more carefully, listened to the spirit of the law, and followed biblical passages to their logical conclusion to form their convictions. They saw that all men were created in the image of God and were therefore equal (Genesis 1:26 and Job 31:13-15). Paul saw slaves as brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Timothy 6:2). And they realized that the way we treat other humans is the way we treat Christ (Matthew 25:40). From these passages, they drew the accurate conclusion that slavery was wrong and that it should be abolished.

Today, of course, we recognize that the views of slaveholders were wrong and damaging. But back then, overturning the majority mindset on slavery required people who were willing to question the accepted norms and see if they lined up with God’s revealed principles. I want you to do the same thing and re-examine some of our culture’s assumptions about love and romance and prayerfully consider some ideas that at first you may find radical.

When it comes to determining right and wrong in our romantic relationships, God has not spelled out in specific detail exact boundaries or clearly defined how far is too far. However, He has given us some straightforward principles that we can apply to these areas. Much of what I suggest in this book comes from these biblical guidelines.

1. When God designed marriage, He only included one man

and one woman (Genesis 1-2).

1. When a couple comes together in marriage, God designed

their bond to be permanent (Mark 10:6-9).

3. God tells us to abstain from all sexual immorality (Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:3). This includes fornication (sexual immorality before marriage) and adultery (sexual immorality after marriage with someone other than your spouse). In Ephesians 5:3, Paul tells us, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.” By consulting your conscience, seeking the Holy Spirit, and looking at erotic love from a few different angles, I believe God will make clear what He means by “sexual immorality.”

4. Impurity involves more than overt acts; it starts with and includes our thoughts (Matthew 5:28).

5. God specifically commands us to not defraud each other in the area of sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:6). Defrauding happens when you promise something and don’t pay up, or you create false expectations and don’t come through. I think single people defraud each other when they begin bonding to each other in a romantic way outside the safety of marriage commitment. Romantic involvement implies permanence and if one or both young people are not willing to commit, they are misleading each other. By doing so, they’re not only causing future pain in the person they are defrauding, but they are also stealing from that person’s future spouse.

6. We are to love our wives like Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25). This kind of love, I believe, includes fidelity to her during *and* before marriage.

7. All of our relationships should be governed by agape love (I Corinthians 13), which means that we should put the needs of others (including our future spouse) ahead of our own (Philippians 2:4).

8. God loves to see sex and erotic love enjoyed in the proper boundaries of marriage – just read Song of Solomon.

I think we can glean some guidelines for our romantic relationships by reasoning from these principles.

**One man. One woman.**

God designed romantic love to be exclusively between one man and one woman. When you add another man or woman to the equation it results in damage far greater than putting diesel in a gasoline engine. This is not just some arbitrary social invention, but a law of nature that cannot be violated without doing harm. The addition of a third party into romance creates problems with jealousy, insecurity, suspicion, guilt, withdrawal, feeling compared and criticized.

 Most people try to follow this one-man-woman, one-woman-man rule after they enter marriage. They abstain from entering a romantic relationship with someone who is not their spouse and would find it wrong to hold hands with another woman, or kiss another man, or go out for a long, romantic, candlelit dinner, because they want to stay faithful to their spouse. But what people often don’t realize until it’s too late is that infidelities to your spouse *before* marriage can be just as damaging to your relationship as infidelities that happen after marriage.

When you do something romantic with another person, your action exists for all time. You can’t change the past. The tape of what you did is playing somewhere for all eternity, and that act can keep popping up in your memory. *The things you do become a part of who you are.* Many people refuse to kiss another woman after they are married, but when you kiss another woman *before* marriage it is just as wrong because it’s something you can’t change. Memories of that kiss will haunt you and your spouse because that kiss is a part of you. You have added an intruder that will mess up the sacred formula of one plus one that profound intimacy requires.

What I’m saying may sound ridiculous to some, but really, it’s not that far off from what most people believe. Even young people who enter casual romantic premarital relationships expect that the person they are in the relationship with shouldn’t be doing romantic stuff with anybody else. If the other person was caught holding hands or snuggling with someone else, they would call it cheating. We feel this need for exclusivity in love very strongly, and we are hurt when it’s broken.

For romance to operate at optimum levels, it requires more than just “one lover at a time” – rather, “one lover for life.” If you think this sounds too restrictive or too narrow-minded, remember the sports car. Filling the car’s tank with only gasoline – is that restrictive? You bet! But it’s also the only way the car will run smoothly because that’s how it was designed. So, too, with romance: The engine of love that was purring like a kitten on the clean fuel of exclusivity will start to howl and back fire if you add the foreign substance of infidelity.

When you are romantic and physical with a person outside of commitment, your actions can take on a life of their own and become an enemy that will continue to torment you for life and rob you of the fullness of bliss that could be yours. What you do becomes an indelible part of who you are.

I am jealous for my wife, past, present, and future. Even past interests that she had slightly bother me, but what thrills me to no end and makes me want to shout hallelujah is that she has no romantic ties with any other guy! I could time-travel through her life and never feel uncomfortable with the way that she interacted with other guys.

**The blazing fires of passionate romance**

The feelings of erotic love are powerful, consuming fires. The commitment to lifelong fidelity (marriage) provides the necessary framework to keep these fires under control. The pioneers had a saying that fire was a wonderful servant but a terrible master. When fire is under control, it can cook your food, provide warmth, and create a delightful atmosphere on a cold winter night. However, when this same fire gets out of control it can be devastating. Five years ago, some close friends of ours, a family with nine children, got a call two days before Christmas that their house was on fire. They rushed back only to find the place engulfed in flames. Everything was lost. The fire that was so useful and pleasurable when confined brought such terrible devastation when it got out of control.

Song of Solomon 8:6 says love “burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame.” In the context of commitment, the fires – or feelings – of love can be more pleasurable than you can imagine. But when they are allowed to burn freely and take control of you, much that is precious to you can be lost in the flames.

Romantic passion can put an absolute spell over you, making wrong seem right and convincing you that the only thing that matters in life is being with your special mate. From the outside looking in, it is obvious that a couple claiming to be madly in love, even though they have known each other for just a few days, are only experiencing infatuation. It can’t be true love because they don’t know each other; their love hasn’t been tested.

But when you are on the inside, you may only see that, right now, your feelings are so strong you both just have to be right for each other. And as long as you let this fire that you feel for your lover be the driving force of your life, it won’t matter to you what your family thinks, what God thinks, what life purpose you neglect, or what beliefs you previously held. The fires of romance have destroyed marriages, stolen girls from loving homes and made them heartbroken and destitute, robbed young men of their passion to serve God, and left children weeping.

Because of the misuse of these God-given desires and feelings, God is passionate about purity and fidelity before and after marriage. He only has your best in mind. He has heard all the prayers of regrets and the teary confessions. He’s been in on all the marriage counseling sessions that dealt with the pain and difficulties caused by extramarital relationships. He wants to spare you all that, and He wants to bless you beyond what you can imagine. So He insists that you make purity an absolute priority in your life.

In lifelong commitment to a member of the opposite sex, there is deep pleasure in becoming saturated with the glue of romantic love and physical affection and binding yourself to a spouse who also is saturated with this God-given glue. There is joy in fidelity – in knowing that your wife is the only woman you will ever bond to and that you, in return, can have all of her because you are the only guy she has or ever will bond to. The idealization that comes with infatuation becomes a great blessing in marriage. When Heidi is under the spell of romantic love and passion is strong, in that moment I am the most wonderful guy in the world, my looks are flawless, and I have wit and charm beyond what mere mortals can comprehend. In this context, it is wonderful to be consumed by the fires of romance and I want no part in breaking the spell.

**Commitment before romance**

Because of the permanence of the glue and the power of the flames, I believe that true purity calls for saving all romance and physical affection until both parties have committed to lifelong fidelity. In other words, you choose to not light a fire until there is a fireplace strong enough to contain it. You choose to not spend a lot of time gluing yourself to someone you’re not sure you want to stick to permanently. I believe there is much wisdom and protection in keeping your pre-commitment relationships with members of the opposite sex at a non-romantic level. That means refraining from telling them that you love them in that “you and only you” way, refraining from romantic affection (kissing, hand-holding, slow dancing, etc.) and from too much time alone together and intimate heart-to-heart talks.

 One of the most common relationship flaws among singles is one person taking the relationship more seriously than the other person does. They will both say they are committed but this commitment means different things to each one. The commitment I’m talking about is not simply saying, “For the time being, I love you and only you, but that could change someday.” Rather, it’s a choice to covenant before God to stay together for life and that you’re willing to live out that commitment by becoming engaged and asking the body of Christ to hold you accountable to your commitment. I think it is very important that this commitment level be spelled out clearly and have actions that back it up. Because when a couple is in love, of course they feel committed – that’s the nature of love. But it is important to ask yourself and your lover if this commitment is a mere feeling or a choice you are both willing to stand behind.

I know this idea may sound strange and maybe even impossible to implement, but my wife and I and many other young couples we know have used the *commitment before romance* principle in our relationships and have greatly enjoyed the results. Now I need to be clear: I am not saying that there needs to be commitment before you get into any kind of relationship with the opposite sex. It is fine and important to have fun with them and to develop quality relationships. There are all kinds of enjoyable, non-romantic activities you can do together that will enable you to develop close friendships and really get to know each other. *Young people need healthy relationships that allow them to get to know each other as friends before they have all the pressure of being lovers.* However, young people need to make sure that they are willing to stay together for life *before* they start enjoying the things that are designed to cement two souls together.

I’m also not saying that you should commit early in the relationship. It is important that you know a person very well before you commit to him or her. But you can get to know a person well enough to commit without first enjoying romance together. Like I mentioned before, romantic activities can blind your eyes from seeing what a person really is like. Physical touch is powerful and can make you feel like the person you are with is more wonderful than he or she really is. Infatuation is a breathtaking ride down a very slippery slide. Once you start, it is very hard, if not impossible, to stop. Before you dive into romance, take every precaution necessary to make sure this is someone you are willing to be tied to for the long haul.

 In His Word, God is clear that He delights in bringing young people together into a wonderful lifelong affair. He also loves us as a good father does his children. And as a Father, He longs to protect us from the painful consequences that come from misusing this gift.

 When a man and woman begin giving their hearts, minds, eyes, and bodies to each other, God wants to bless them. He designed the whole process. He wants to see it enjoyed to the fullest! But we can’t change the fact that love is meant to be lifelong. Before a couple begins bonding their hearts together, they should know for sure that this is the person that they want to commit to for the rest of their life and that they are mature enough to handle the responsibilities of sharing a family.

**You said we should keep all romance till after a marriage commitment. Are you saying we shouldn’t even hold hands or have intimate conversations until the wedding day?**

What I’m suggesting is that all romance, i.e. the things that cause soul ties, including love notes, hand holding, long intimate conversations, etc, should be saved till engagement or an unbreakable commitment to marriage, but the sexual aspects of the relationship should be saved till the wedding day. I think the Hebrew pattern of betrothal is helpful here. When a couple was betrothed, a divorce was required to break it off, even though they still were to keep sex until after the wedding day.

After engagement but before marriage, Heidi and I held hands and I put my arm around her. However, before we had taken our relationship to the level of romantic involvement, I made sure we were committed for life. Even though we weren’t married until March 25, 2006, I viewed our commitment as an unbreakable one from the day I asked her to marry me. If some problem came up, I knew we would have to stick it out and deal with it; in the same way, if a problem arose in the first year of marriage, we would work through it. Divorce was not an option for either of us.

I’ve read a number of books that advise young people to feel free to break off the engagement at any time up until the wedding day. I agree that breaking off a relationship before it is physically consummated will have fewer consequences than one that is broken off after the honeymoon. I don’t think breaking an engagement is as devastating as a divorce. However, engagement is a promise and God takes breaking promises very seriously. So if there is still in the back of the mind a possibility of a breakup, then it is wise for the couple to refrain from *all* romantic activities. I firmly believe that if a man is going to start taking the affections of a woman, he had better be prepared to stand by her come hell or high water! If there is any lingering doubt, he needs to protect both of them and keep emotional and physical distance.

I think that engagement gives the couple a secure time to begin bonding emotionally and spiritually in a way that will make the transition to married life much easier. Engagement is a time to get comfortable with each other without the pressures of living in the same house. Early on in our relationship, Heidi needed space to adjust to the idea of a wild, passionate, Syrian lover. But by the time we got married and started living with each other, we both felt very comfortable with each other.

While engagement is a time for a couple to bond emotionally and spiritually, God states very clearly that sex should be saved for after the wedding day, when the couple has covenanted before God *and* the church to stay together for life. I don’t think there are specific, universal laws regarding what kinds of affection engaged couples should or shouldn’t express to each other before marriage. However, there are the clear principles I mentioned earlier: that men and women should not defraud each other sexually and that they are bound by the law of love to protect each other and put the needs of the other before their own. How these universal principles apply to couples will look different in each case.

 Because sexual arousal was designed to end in intercourse, anything that causes arousal should be avoided because it will be an act of defrauding – stirring up a desire that can’t be fulfilled. It is not loving or an act of deference to generate frustration in your partner. But what causes arousal will be different for each couple, not to mention each individual. For some couples, holding hands might produce too much arousal in one of the partners and should be avoided. Other couples might even be able to kiss and not get aroused, although I think that such a couple would be the exception. Most couples probably have too much passion to handle kissing without getting their motors running. It’s easy to fall into a selfish mindset, thinking only of what you can handle and what an activity is doing to you. However, what gets a woman aroused is often different from what gets a man aroused. Each one needs to be sensitive to the effect a certain type of affection is having on the other and show deference.

Any kind of physical affection that would bring guilt into the relationship should be avoided at all costs. It simply isn’t worth it! You will belong to each other for the rest of your life and after the wedding day, you can begin to enjoy all of each other guilt-free. You will never regret saving something for marriage, but you’ll regret going too far before marriage.

When Heidi and I were engaged, our two priorities were to make it to the wedding day free of guilt and to demonstrate our trustworthiness to each other. I saw this time as a chance to show Heidi that I could be trusted to stick to our boundaries. We made a distinction between affection that got us aroused and affection that simply communicated love and protection. If anything started getting our motors running (it was different things for each of us), then we talked openly together about it and backed off. I am very happy to say that we made it to marriage and fulfilled our goals, and we thoroughly enjoyed kisses one to one thousand on our wedding day.

**Heidi:** While engaged, we called off-limit touch “not now” pleasures, instead of “not good” pleasures. That little distinction helped us to remember that the physical love we desired so much was truly a good thing given by a good God, and it also turned our focus to Him in times when we were filled with longing for each other.

I can’t express well enough how much it meant to me to see Jesse demonstrate that he could be trusted. He didn’t step outside our self-made boundaries, and when I told him about touch that got me going, he totally backed off. My respect for him grew and strengthened, because of the trustworthiness he showed me in upholding the decisions we’d made on touch.

**What if I’ve already messed up?**

 Violating God’s design for love, romance, and sex will bring pain and damage. You can’t do things that destroy the engine of a sports car and expect it to run as smoothly as the vehicle that’s well cared for. In fact, some kinds of damage will prevent a car from being able to run at all. Willful rejection of God’s rules will do serious injury to your love life and pain is inevitable, not only to you but to others that your wrong choices will affect.

But here is the great news. It’s never too late to start applying God’s principles to your love life. God is both willing and able to bring healing to the wounds formed by your wrong choices. If you feel you have messed up, or if you have been the victim of painful relationships, please keep reading.

This is the exciting thing about Christianity: Though our wrong choices will have lifelong consequences, Jesus came to take what we ruined and restore it so that it is more pristine than it was in its original condition. If you give your torn or callused heart over to Jesus, He can restore it, giving back to you a brand new heart. You can have another chance. In fact, giving your whole heart to your spouse is not something that just happens on your wedding day; it is a choice you make every day, and one that you can only make by God’s grace.

If you have violated your purity, looked at immoral images, or given away part of your body, there is a second chance. You can repent and surrender yourself to Christ’s lordship and let Him make all things new! You’ll be given a clean slate because of what Jesus did on Calvary. You can have secondary virginity. Only through this purifying process can you be happily married. But if you want to be restored, you have to surrender your life to Him and seek to follow His will for your life. If you go on ignoring His design for romance, you’ll continue to bring harm to yourself and many others. But when you bring your brokenness to God and submit to His plan, God can bring unimaginable beauty into your life.

Saving yourself for your future spouse is not enough to ensure a successful marriage. If this were the case, a nun and a monk could step out of convent and monastery, marry, and stay blissfully married the rest of their lives. But in reality, they would still face struggles. Purity and fidelity are daily choices, not mere one-time commitments. Heidi and I are so grateful that we’ve been spared the consequences of multiple breakups, and that we entered marriage with a sticky piece of tape; our transition to married life has been so much smoother because of it. It has been so much easier to learn to trust each other. We don’t face the difficulties of feeling compared to past lovers, or struggle with the guilt and regret of past memories.

However, we are still such sinful people. Only when we humble ourselves and cry out to God for His grace, and cast ourselves on Him, do we find the divine grace we need to love each other selflessly. When we rely on God, our marriage is truly better than anything we could have imagined. But when we lose sight of God, our selfishness rises to the top and we begin to ruin a good thing. But God is always there, chipping away at our pride and selfishness, and when we repent before Him and each other, once again there is a sweet freshness to our relationship.

**Romance to the glory of God**

Some of you will write off our ideas as unattainable. But before you categorize me as a pie-in-the-sky idealist, remember that, by God’s grace, I’ve worked through the trials of saving myself for my wife. I know what it’s like to want a relationship and to have to say no to what my hormones are telling me. I know what it’s like to be scorned for not having a girlfriend. I know, however long or short the wait, that it’s a difficult one. However, I have now also experienced the euphoria of knowing that I am the only guy who has ever held my wife’s hand, that I’m the only guy who’s kissed her lips, and that I belong completely to her and she belongs completely to me. Thankfully, I don’t know the pain of bonding to a person only to have to tear my heart away, and for this I can only thank my merciful Creator, and encourage other young people to “do love” God’s way and enjoy the results.

Yes, we agree that it *is* hard to save all romantic relationships till you have committed to marriage. It’s tough to wait patiently for your future spouse. But it’s not as painful as one breakup after another. You might say that you’ll take the risk, though, because a pre-marriage romance is just too much fun to pass up, or it takes away some of your loneliness. However, you must ask yourself what motivation lies behind your current romance. Is it just for self-gratification? As followers of Christ, shouldn’t we do things out of a higher motivation, namely, to glorify God? (1 Corinthians 10:31)

We need to ask ourselves if Christ is Lord of our love life. If He is not, we are subjecting ourselves to the lies of the one who seeks to kill, maim, and destroy. Satan wants to destroy your love life. The master of illusion and deception, he will make lust and harmful relationships look so enticing and harmless, but behind the shiny lure is a razor sharp fish hook, designed to keep you captive.

In contrast, if you surrender the control of your life to Jesus, making Him the Master of your romance, you will find that He only wants to bless you with satisfying, good things. You’ll also find that Jesus has higher priorities for your life than romance. Don’t get me wrong – romance is His idea! He gave you those desires, and He can fulfill them better than anyone else. But more important to God is the health of your soul and your relationship with Him. These ultimately matter far more, so don’t be surprised if romance doesn’t come along when you expect it. When it does come, I hope your relationship will still have the overarching purpose of making you Christ-like and advancing His kingdom.

 God has demonstrated repeatedly that, with His unlimited power and wisdom, He is so trustworthy. He may bring you through difficulties, and you may experience disappointment along the way. But it’s all part of His plan. Put yourself in the hands of a first-rate Author who knows how to write the ultimate “happy ending” story.

**Session 9-10 God’s R-O-M-A-N-C-E for singles**

By Jesse Jost

Being a single can be very hard. Desires for intimate love and companionship are woven into the fabric of our very being. We seem to be made for marriage. Even God said it is not good for man to be alone. So when you find yourself at a very “marry-able” age, and single by choice – but not your choice! – life can be hard. I have been very happily married for over a year now, but I remember the struggles of being single, the infatuation difficulties, always being on the lookout for Miss Right, the temptations to fantasize relationships and give away my heart, and wonder if I was ever going to *actually* get married. I was haunted by the pressing questions that every godly single person faces: *How do you wait for marriage? What can I do with these single years? How can I prepare marriage? How do I learn to have a healthy romantic relationship if I don’t date? What do I do with these strong desires now?*

 Love, sex, and romance are some of God's greatest gifts to us. Romantic love is one of the most powerful forces in the world. But this is not a gift to be enjoyed anyway we see fit. God gave us strict rules regarding love. It is only to be used in the context of lifelong commitment. God gave us these rules not to restrict our pleasure but to restrict our pain. If you violate these rules the gift ceases to function the way God designed it. A sports care will cease to function if you put the wrong kinds of fuel in it and don't take proper care of it. In the same way, sex and romance can be ruined if the owner’s manual is not followed. Misuse of this gift can bring terrible pain and heart ache if God design is ignored. However these gifts are also the most amazing pleasurable experiences known to man, if they are accompanied by purity and holiness.

The gifts of romance are a like a super glue that binds two hearts together for life. If a man and woman bond together through sex and romance outside of bonds of lifelong commitment, when they separate, it will tear their hearts and calluses will form. The more times they bond and tear apart, the less "sticky" their hearts will become, and the harder it will be to permanently bond with the one they marry. These heart calluses will also make trust and deep love so much harder to achieve.

Marriages are under attack. Young people today don't have much confidence that theirs will last. But God does have a better way. When you save all of yourself for you future spouse, your heart, your mind, your eyes, your body, the fusion can be so much stronger. Trust is so much easier to attain, because you know your spouse stayed faithful before marriage.

Now will staying pure and faithful is powerful glue, but for a marriage to really last it needs two young people who are filled with God Spirit, who have his love to give. It requires two people who are committed to becoming the right person, who are willing to changes themselves instead of wait for their partner to be changed. To become the right person there are several things a single person can work towards that will not only help them save themselves for their spouse, but will shape them into the kind of person that is required to make a marriage successful

It was in the trenches of struggling with singleness that I sought ways to glorify God with my single years, and spend these valuable years the way He wanted. I came up with seven practical ideas to help with the single years, and ways to begin investing in your future marriage. These things were a huge help in maintaining focus and saving myself for Heidi. Now that I am married, I have seen the reward of these investments. To make these suggestions more memorable, I have turned them into an acronym: ROMANCE. I pray that these ideas are as helpful for you as they were for me.

**R-*eality of your future spouse***

It will be much easier to remain faithful to your future spouse after marriage, if you remain faithful to him or her *before* you are married – even before you meet. If God has marriage in your future, your spouse is alive and waiting for you right now. He or she is a real person and the choices you make now will affect him or her just as much as the decisions you make after you’re married.

Begin the habit of praying for him or her. Save your heart and your eyes for your future spouse. When you are tempted to look at something immoral, picture you future wife standing there, and think about how she would feel. If you are tempted to flirt with or be affectionate toward a guy or girl that you have not committed to, again ask how your husband or wife would feel if he or she saw this. Make your future spouse a reality and commit to him or her NOW.

And guys and girls, don’t fall into the trap of thinking that the person you’re flirting with or being physical with *might* be your future spouse and then justify your wrong actions that way. Remember that until you commit to marriage you don’t know who your future spouse is. That guy or girl does not become your future spouse until commitment. Don’t be deceived! Wait for commitment. You will save yourself a lot of heartache and your future spouse will be very grateful!

**O-*pen up to your parents***

Heidi and I found that the most effective way to battle infatuation (and believe me, we did have to battle it!) was to be very open and honest with our parents. Anytime I developed a strong attraction to some godly young lady, I would share these feelings with my mom. Bringing them out into the open made them so much easier to deal with. Mom helped a lot by reminding me of principles that I had lost sight of, and I was strengthened just knowing that she loved me so much and really wanted what was best for me. She often prayed with me about my current struggle and also for my future spouse. It was often during these prayer times that I found the inspiration I needed to guard my heart.

There have been so many benefits that have come from learning to be open with Mom. I learned how to understand her (as much as any guy can understand a woman!), and the things I gleaned from my relationship with Mom have paid huge dividends in my relationship with Heidi. It has been easy to share my thoughts, feelings, dreams, and fears, because I had learned to do that with Mom.

**M-*arriage Training Grounds: your family***

Your family provides you with a great training school for marriage. You can learn so many valuable things about communication, patience, servanthood, selfless love, repentance, and forgiveness. All of these are absolutely vital to a happy successful marriage. I know when you’re young and your understanding of love comes from romance novels and your own daydreaming, you expect married life to be one long, blissful fairy tale. The reality is that marriage has just as many relationship difficulties as you find at home. If you often fight with your siblings or parents, don’t expect your relationship with your spouse to be much different. If you can’t communicate with your family, don’t expect a honeymoon to magically transform you. If you are difficult to live with and don’t get along well with your family, expect the same kind of problems in marriage.

The secret to a successful relationship is being filled with Christ’s selfless agape love. Your relationship with your family is an excellent test of what kind of relationship you will have with your spouse. If this section has sobered you, remember that it’s never too late to begin anew in your relationships. Invest in your future spouse by investing in your family right now.

**A-*ll you really need is God***

  True love is selfless. In order for us to be selfless, we must be satisfied by God. Our deepest emotional needs can only be met by God. If these needs are not met by God, nothing will satisfy. It is not fair to put on any person the terrible burden of looking to them to meet your deepest needs.

  If you desire marriage, prepare for it first by a diligent seeking after God. The closer you are to God – the more you love Him – the closer you will be to your spouse and the more vibrant your love will be for each other! Learn to be emotionally fulfilled by God right now and be content right where he has you. If you can’t find contentment now, marriage will not provide a lasting solution.

**N-*on-romantic relationships***

When you are not blinded by infatuation and not feeling the pressure of trying to impress a certain someone, you will find a delicious freedom to enjoy a healthy relationship with the young people you spend time with. You can then begin inspiring each other towards godliness; rather than drag each other down by defrauding and distracting.

Guys, learn to be a gentleman who treats every young lady and woman with courtesy and respect. The world needs examples of men who know how to honor and respect woman and show them their true worth. As a guy, you have a high calling to provide protection for the women and children you encounter. Lay down your life for them right now. Chivalry that is only inspired by infatuation is worthless!

Girls, learn how to respect the men in your life and how to encourage the men you see towards greater purity and God-ward focus. Dress modestly to help prevent your weaker brother from stumbling.

**C-*atch your calling***

As a single, you never have to feel like your life is on hold until you are married. God always has a work for you to do, a life’s calling that He has for you to fulfill. Pour all your energy into serving God and advancing his kingdom. God created you for His purposes. You will always find the most fulfillment in doing what God made you to do and in becoming the person you were created to be. As a single it is easy to think about marriage as the be all and end all, partly because this is how the fairy tale ends – the hero and heroine get married and live happily ever after. But marriage is not the end; it is a means *to* the end. Your life purpose is not marriage. God may bring marriage to you so you can be more effective in fulfilling your calling.

**E-*nvision God as He truly is***

In some ways this last step is the most important. It certainly is the most helpful in learning to wait. When I was finding it hardest to be satisfied, the thing that helped more than anything was meditating on who God was.

*He is infinite in love*. This means He wants what is best for us. He wants to satisfy us with good things. He wants to see us satisfied. He loves you like a Father. Until you are a parent yourself it is hard to grasp just how awesome God’s love is. When I look at John-Michael, a love so strong swells in my heart that I can’t contain it. I marvel that I could love anyone so much. I want do anything that I can to protect little Jonny-Mike, and provide for his every need. To realize that this love is just a tiny taste of the love that God has for us – that thought is truly overwhelming!

*He is infinite in wisdom*. He not only wants what is best, but He, better than anyone else, truly knows what is best. He knows what you want in a spouse even better than you do and He knows what you *need* in a spouse. He created you with all of your unique attributes and He created a person to compliment you. He also knows the perfect timing to bring you and your spouse together. He knows when both of you are truly ready. We have such a limited perspective. We can’t see who a person is behind-the-scenes. We don’t see the person they will become. We don’t see the trials and struggles we will face down the road. But God does, and He knows which person will best be suited to face life with you.

*He is infinite in power*. God is in complete control of every detail of the universe; there is not a molecule that is outside of God’s sovereign rule. Therefore, God not only wants what is best and knows what truly is best, He has the power to bring it to pass! If He has the power to create you and fling this universe into existence out of nothing, then He has the power to put you with a spouse that will be all that you want – and more.

God has proved Himself so trustworthy. He has lavished upon us gifts far greater than we deserve. He has given us His only Son and eternal life with Him. He is good. As Hudson Taylor said, He does “save the best for those who leave the choice with Him.” God created romance to be life-long and to be exclusive, because romance is a picture of how God loves us. He never splits up with us, He will never dump us, and He wants us to love Him above all else. He wants to be our all-in-all. God loves you so deeply; He only wants to protect you. His rules are empowering, *not* restrictive burdens.

Even as a single person I knew that God wouldn’t let me down. I asked myself once, “Will I ever wish I hadn’t trusted God so much?” I answered immediately, “NO, I will only ever wish I had trusted Him more.” When I gaze into the eyes of my beautiful wife over the candle-lit dinner that she has prepared and I am overwhelmed with love for her, I echo those sentiments. I only wish I had trusted Him more. He knew what was best all along.

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