

GOD'S SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

Lesson 1 – King Me

Michelangelo's masterpiece David is enshrined at the *Galleria dell'Accademia* in Florence, Italy. And thousands of tourists wait for hours every day to get a glimpse. But many of them hardly notice the series of unfinished sculptures that line the corridor on the way to David. Like petrified prisoners, their forms are identifiable – a hand here, a torso there, a protruding leg or part of a head. The statues were intended to adorn the tomb of Pope Julius II, but they are *non finiti*. It's almost as if these sculptures are trying to break free and become what they were intended to be, but they are stuck in stone. Michelangelo called them *Captives*. And they are captives precisely because they did not receive enough "chiseling" from the Master. What a parallel to our spiritual lives!

Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, **to preach deliverance to the captives**, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

In His first sermon, Jesus stated His mission in no uncertain terms – to set captives free. We tend to think of that statement in judicial terms, that salvation is like our "Get Out of Jail Free" card, but it's much more than that. Maybe we should think of that statement in artistic terms. Jesus didn't just die to get us off the hook. He also died to resurrect the person we were destined to be before sin distorted the image of God in us.

Jesus doesn't just set us free spiritually – He also sets us free emotionally and relationally and intellectually. We are held captive by so many things – imperfections and insecurities, guilt and anxiety, expectations and lies and mistakes. But Jesus died to set us free from all of this. He doesn't just set us free from who we WERE, He sets us free to become who we were MEANT TO BE. Salvation is not the end goal – salvation is a new BEGINNING. When we experience the new birth, God goes to work. And He begins using our circumstances – no matter what they may be – to chisel us into His image and set us free from ourselves.

But you can call yourself a Christian and still be held "captive" by many things – and this usually happens because, like Michelangelo's Captives, we abort the Master's chiseling. We decide that the curriculum in God's School of Hard Knocks is a little too intensive, intrusive and invasive.

The lessons in God's "school" are not always what you would expect – in fact, He often develops His character in us by allowing us to experience circumstances where we are tempted to express the opposite quality!

And that brings us to the subject of our study, a young man named David whose life was an open book to God – and much later, through the Scripture (especially the Psalms), an open book to all of us as well.

Acts 13:21-22 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, **a man after mine own heart**, which shall fulfil all my will.

Before we can ever be introduced to David, we must be introduced to Saul. David shows us "how to do it," Saul shows us "how NOT to do it." For David, letting God work on his heart was a lifetime decision; but Saul decided to "drop out of school" only a few years into his reign ...

- Saul's son Jonathan had attacked a Philistine garrison in Geba
- Philistines gathered army of 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen and "people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude" to fight
- Israel had no blacksmiths to make weapons (only Philistines) so only Saul & Jonathan had sword & spear – Israel fighting with farm tools!
- the Israelites scattered in fear until Saul is left with only 600 men, and the prophet Samuel has not shown up at Gilgal to offer sacrifice
- that's when Saul offered up his own sacrifice in his impatience

1 Samuel 13:13-14 And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him **a man after his own heart**, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

GOD sits on the throne in David's heart, but SAUL sits on the throne in his own heart – he is the ultimate "KING ME" who thinks he can please God by doing what he thinks is best, instead of what God commands. Saul is being "weighed in the balance" over the next few years of his reign, because God is giving him time to choose which way he will go. **The ultimate test of obedience is what you do with the commands of God that you do NOT understand!** That is the crisis point for Saul ...

1 Samuel 15:1-3 Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but

slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

- Amalekites had been a fierce adversary of Israel for 400 years
- God said to destroy them completely, but Saul chose to do things his own way and spared “the best” and “all that was good” (in his eyes!)
- **PARTIAL OBEDIENCE IS STILL DISOBEDIENCE!**

1 Samuel 15:22-23 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

1 Samuel 15:27-31 And as Samuel turned about to go away, he laid hold upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou. And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent. Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God. So Samuel turned again after Saul; and Saul worshipped the LORD.

- “Honour me now ... before Israel” – this has been Saul’s problem from the beginning, that he is more concerned about his image before others than he is about his heart before God!
- By the midpoint of his reign, Saul has totally rejected God’s “chiseling” in his life – and so God has totally rejected Saul and left him “captive” to himself, to his insecurities, rebellion and fears
- Saul spends the next twenty years resenting his lost opportunities, and resenting David for taking advantage of his own opportunities!
- **GOD DOESN’T DESTROY SAUL – SAUL DESTROYS SAUL!**

In AD 1464, members of an influential Italian guild contracted with a sculptor named Agostino di Duccio to create a sculpture of David for the cathedral of *Santa Maria Del Fiore*. A massive block of marble was provided from a quarry in northern Tuscany and the work began. However, Agostino only got as far as beginning to shape the legs, feet and torso before abandoning the project. The block of marble remained essentially neglected for more than thirty-five years, all the while exposed to the elements outside the cathedral. In AD 1500, an inventory of cathedral property described the piece as “a certain figure of marble called David, badly blocked out and supine.” It seemed that “David” was destined to join the ranks of unfinished “Captive” statues forever.

Then, in AD 1501, this eighteen-foot block of stone – which the citizens simply called “The Giant” – was “raised on its feet” and a search began in earnest to find an artist who could take this large piece of marble and turn it into a finished work of art.

Although Leonardo da Vinci and other master artists were consulted, it was Michelangelo, only twenty-six years old, who convinced the officials that he deserved the commission. On August 16, 1501, Michelangelo was given the official contract to undertake this challenging new task, and he began carving the statue just a few weeks later. His first task? It is documented that on September 9, 1501, he knocked off a “certain knot” that previous sculptors had seen as a fatal flaw in the marble. But Michelangelo saw how the defect could be removed to allow the beauty underneath to show through, if only a Master Artist applied the chisel.

Michelangelo would work on his massive biblical hero for more than two years, chiseling a seemingly worthless stone into what many consider to be the greatest statue ever sculpted by human hands. The young artist saw something in that stone others did not – he called it the *immagine del cuore*, or image of the heart. All he had to do was remove the excess stone so David could escape. He didn’t see what WAS, he saw what COULD BE – a masterpiece. And that is exactly how God sees YOU!

Today, the highlight of the *Galleria dell’Accademia* in Florence, Italy is not Michelangelo’s “Captives,” but Michelangelo’s “David.” It is one of the most recognized works of art in the entire world, which just goes to show what can happen when the Master is allowed to FINISH his chiseling!

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

As we said earlier, before we can ever be introduced to David, we must be introduced to Saul. They were different in many ways, but in almost every area of comparison Saul had the advantage. So, in the final analysis, the only difference that mattered was that Saul rejected the “chiseling” of the Master Sculptor, while David welcomed it.

2 Samuel 1:5-10 And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, **I am an Amalekite**. He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was

fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.

WHAT SAUL REFUSED TO KILL EVENTUALLY KILLED HIM!

Lesson 2 – Put Out To Pasture

As you may recall from high school biology class, you have 46 chromosomes. 23 are from your father, and 23 are from your mother. And it's that unique combination of chromosomes that determines everything from the color of your eyes to the number of hairs on your head. Part of your identity comes from heredity. The mathematical probability that you would get the exact 23 chromosomes you got from your father is .5 to the 23rd power – that's 1 in 10 million. But the same is true for the 23 chromosomes you got from your mother. So if you multiply those two together, the probability that you would be you is 1 in 100 trillion. But you also have to factor in that your parent's chromosomal history had the same probability, and their parents, and their parents' parents. The point is that you are incalculably unique – and God intended you to be YOU, not a cheap imitation of someone else!

1 Samuel 17:38-40 And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.

David couldn't be Saul, and he couldn't dress like Saul because Saul's armor didn't fit him. And he certainly couldn't fight the enemy like Saul, because he would have lost. David had never used armor or a sword – that would have posed a greater danger to him than Goliath! However, David was deadly with a slingshot and he knew it. So he made a choice that would forever determine his destiny – the choice to be HIMSELF.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, a pioneering psychologist named Alfred Adler proposed the counterintuitive theory of COMPENSATION. Adler believed that perceived disadvantages often prove to be disguised advantages because they force us to develop attitudes and abilities that would have otherwise gone undiscovered. And it's only as we compensate for those disadvantages that our greatest gifts are revealed. Seventy percent of the art students that Adler studied had optical anomalies. He observed that some of history's greatest composers, Mozart and Beethoven among them, had degenerative traces in their ears. And he cited a multiplicity of other examples, from a wide variety of vocations, of those who leveraged their weaknesses by

discovering new strengths. Adler concluded that perceived disadvantages, such as birth defects, physical ailments, and poverty, can be springboards to success. **And that success is not achieved IN SPITE of those perceived disadvantages, but BECAUSE of them!** Subsequent studies have added credibility to Adler's theory. In one study of small-business owners, for example, 35 percent of them were self-identified dyslexics. While none of us would wish dyslexia on our children, because of the academic handicap that comes with it, that disadvantage forced this group of entrepreneurs to cultivate different skill sets. Some of them became more proficient at oral communication because reading was so difficult. Others learned to rely on well-developed social skills to compensate for the challenges they faced in the classroom. And all of them cultivated a work ethic that might have remained dormant if reading had come easy for them.

Perhaps no individual illustrates Alder's Theory of Compensation better than Nick Vujicic. Born in 1982 in Brisbane, Australia, Nicholas came into the world with neither arms nor legs. A limbless son was not what nurse Dushka Vujicic, and her husband Pastor Boris Vujicic had been expecting. How would their son live a normal life? What could he ever do or become with such a massive disability? But little did they or anyone else know that this helpless, limbless baby would one day be a man who would inspire and motivate people from all walks of life. And now, at 28 years old, this limbless young man has accomplished more than most people accomplish in a lifetime. Since his first speaking engagement back when he was 19, Nick has traveled around the world, sharing his story with millions of people, speaking to a range of different groups such as students, teachers, youth, businessmen and women, entrepreneurs, and church congregations of all sizes. He has also told his story and been interviewed on various televised programs worldwide. As he often says, "If God can use a man without arms and legs to be His hands and feet, then He will certainly use any willing heart!" Watch as he introduces one of his video projects for students, "No Arms, No Legs, No Worries."

Our greatest advantages may not be what we PERCEIVE as our greatest advantages. Our greatest advantages may actually be HIDDEN in our greatest disadvantages, if we learn to leverage them. Your destiny is hidden in your history, but it's often hidden where you would least expect to find it. It isn't just revealed in your natural gifts and abilities; it is also revealed in the COMPENSATORY SKILLS you had to develop because of the disadvantages you had to overcome.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities,

in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

David's greatest advantage was the result of a perceived disadvantage – and without that disadvantage, he never would have fulfilled his destiny! Every past experience is preparation for some future opportunity. God doesn't just redeem our souls, He also redeems our experiences. Not just the good ones, but the bad ones too. How? By cultivating character, developing gifts, and teaching lessons that cannot be learned any other way. And if you learn the lesson God is trying to teach you through your circumstances, you have not failed – no matter how things turn out!

1 Samuel 17:33-37 And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

Every wild animal that attacked David's flock was a POP QUIZ. David could have sacrificed his sheep for the sake of his own safety, but he passed each test by risking his life for his flock. And in the process, he cultivated a COMPENSATORY SKILL that would change his destiny and Israel's history. It looked like David was at an obvious disadvantage – he wasn't even in the army! Surely it would take a trained soldier to face a fighting machine like Goliath! David didn't even know how to wield a sword or throw a spear, because all he'd been doing was tending sheep. But that perceived disadvantage gave him the advantage over Goliath.

Israelite soldiers were trained the same way the Philistines were, in hand-to-hand combat. But no one was going to defeat Goliath that way combat because no one, especially not David, could match Goliath's strength, size or skill. You cannot fight a giant on the giant's terms – you have to change the rules of engagement! The WORST way to fight a giant is up-close with a sword – the BEST way to fight a giant is with a slingshot at twenty paces! So while it seems as if David was totally unprepared, he was actually perfectly prepared! While it seems like he had wasted his time herding sheep, it's critical to note that the battle with Goliath wasn't won in the Valley of Elah (that's just where it was fought) – it was won years before in the shepherds' fields outside Bethlehem!

David's compensatory skill was using a slingshot! And he learned that while serving as a humble shepherd. That's where he learned other compensatory skills too – playing the harp and writing songs!

David wrote some of the most comforting Psalms in the midst of the most uncomfortable situations! You never know how God can use your trials! **Psalm 23:1-6** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

David rightly felt like he had been “put out to pasture” by his father. He wanted to be on the battlefield, but he was stuck in the shepherds' field. He wanted to be on the front lines, but he was stuck on the sidelines. But because David submitted to this season of preparation, God was able to use him mightily. David didn't have “destination disease” – he refused to focus all his energies on the “next season” of his life.

It's so important to realize that there are seasons in your life when learning to FOLLOW is more important than learning to LEAD, when learning to handle FAILURE is more important than learning to handle SUCCESS, when learning to SUBMIT to authority is more important than learning how to EXERCISE authority.

It's not about finally entering into the RIGHT CIRCUMSTANCES – it's about becoming the RIGHT PERSON. And sometimes the worst of circumstances bring out the best in us! So enjoy the journey as much as you can, and realize that God will get you to the destination in His own time. The bigger the opportunity, the longer it takes to prepare for it. The reason we get frustrated is because we think BIG without thinking LONG. So be encouraged when it takes longer than you expected – that simply means that God wants to do something more than you can imagine!

Philippians 1:6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

In obscurity, God was chiseling away at David, just like Michelangelo would do with his “David” hundreds of years later. And because David endured God's School of Hard Knocks, he developed compensatory skills that made him a different kind of giant – a “spiritual giant”!

Ephesians 3:16-21 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded

in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Lesson 3 – Knickknacks

I am an admitted “knickknack aficionado” – in fact, the guys on our staff call me the “knickknack king.” I collect things and, while I wouldn’t consider it an addiction, it’s most certainly a well-established habit. ☺ One dictionary I looked in defined “knickknack” as “a bit of bric-a-brac” – that’s certainly helpful! But actually “à bric et à brac” is an obsolete 16th century French nonsensical phrase meaning “at random, any old way” – and that’s why both “bric-a-brac” and “knickknack” have come to mean “miscellaneous small objects, kept because they are antique, ornamental or rare, or simply because they have sentimental value to the collector.” And that would certainly describe my eclectic collection of STUFF ...

Really, everyone who lives is a collector, maybe not of MEMENTOS, but certainly of MEMORIES ... and those memories are made up, not of MINUTES but of MOMENTS, points in time that have a disproportionate influence on the MOMENTUM of our lives going forward.

Time may be measured in minutes, but life is measured in moments – and some moments are larger than life. It’s those defining moments that dictate the way we see life. Some of them are as predictable as a wedding day or the birth of a child. Others are as unpredictable as an accident or the sudden death of a loved one. You never know which minute in your life might become a defining moment, but identifying those moments is really the key to identifying who you are.

Psychological research suggests that one’s self-concept is defined by a very small number of experiences. 99% of life’s experiences vanish like vapor into the subconscious abyss. Only 1% make it into our conscious memories. And less than 1% of that 1% are not just memorable but absolutely unforgettable. Those are the moments that define us – so the key to fulfilling your God-given destiny is hidden in your past MOMENTS.

1 Samuel 17:54 And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent.

1 Samuel 17:5 And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass.

I love this – David was a knickknack collector! Except the knickknack he kept in his tent weighed 125 pounds! Goliath’s armor probably weighed almost as much as David – in fact, just removing the armor was more work than killing the giant. But every time David packed up his tent and pitched it somewhere else, that armor went with him. Why? Because that massive knickknack was a daily reminder of a defining moment in David’s life, when he learned that His God was bigger than any giant. You see, **our defining moments double as altars to God.** Do you ever wonder if David also kept the bloodstained stone that had been buried in Goliath’s forehead? I would have! And if I had been Abraham or Jacob, I might have taken my annual vacation on top of Mount Moriah where God provided a sacrifice just in time, or near that stone pillar at Bethel where God met with me. If I was Peter, I would have rowed out once in a while to the spot on the Sea of Galilee where Jesus empowered me to walk on the water. If I was Daniel, I would have walked by that Lion’s Den in Babylon every so often with a smug smile of holy confidence on my face. I’ll bet that Zacchaeus let his grandkids climb the sycamore tree where he got his first glimpse of Jesus, and I can almost guarantee that every time the Apostle Paul traveled on the road to Damascus he stopped at the mile marker where God literally knocked him off his high horse. And if you were Lazarus, wouldn’t you have made an annual trek to put some fresh-cut flowers by the tomb where you had been buried for four days?

You could say that **“I am my office, and my office is me”** – because that’s where I keep most of my peculiar little treasures. Some of my knickknacks are just SENTIMENTAL objects, but some of them are almost SPIRITUAL objects, like the photo that marks the very moment that the Holy Spirit was poured out in the city of Lahore, Pakistan and 4500 people were instantly filled with the baptism of the Holy Ghost on Friday, April 7, 2006. I was there at that moment, and I will never forget it as long as I live. I don’t need the photo physically, but I do need it spiritually. It is a holy keepsake that reminds me of the sheer power of the God I serve. So maybe you could say it better this way, about me and about you: **“I am my moments, and my moments are me.”**

The art of “altar making” is a lost spiritual discipline with many Christians today. And because we’ve lost our “long-term memory” we create a lot of spiritual problems in the short-term for ourselves. The primary reason we lose faith is because we forget the FAITHFULNESS of God – maybe that’s why the word REMEMBER is repeated almost 250 times in the Bible! But we have a tendency to remember what we should forget and forget what we should remember. That’s why God was always telling His people to build altars or establish memorials, because without those physical reminders we quickly forget the spiritual lessons we’ve learned along the way. In my office, there are days when I simply take a few minutes to look around at some of the knickknack altars that jog my spiritual memory. They are not just physical objects, they are spiritual

milestones in a life lived for the Lord. They are reminders from the past that give meaning to the present and confidence for the future.

What are some of the altars in your life? A pivotal church service? A hospital room? A conversation with a trusted friend? A challenging sermon? A promise made beside the deathbed of a loved one? Or maybe a long walk alone with just you and God? NEVER FORGET! Alex Haley, the author of *Roots*, had a picture in his office, showing a turtle sitting atop a fence. The picture was there to remind him of a lesson he learned long ago: "If you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he had some help." Haley said, "Every time I write something significant, and begin to feel proud of myself, I'll look at the turtle on top of the fence post and remember that he didn't get there on his own. He had some help." I think having Goliath's 125-pound armor in his tent and carrying it around from place to place served the same function for David. The sheer size of the armor was clear evidence of the fact that David had some help. Goliath's armor was David's turtle on a fence post!

By the end of his illustrious career as a neurosurgeon, Dr. Wilder Penfield had explored the brains of 1132 living patients. Many of them suffered from epileptic seizures, and Dr. Penfield wanted to know why. Once a hole in their skull was made with the help of local anesthesia, patients were awakened so they could communicate with Dr. Penfield during the surgery. It was during some of these operations that Dr. Penfield made a fascinating discovery. Using mild electrical currents to stimulate different parts of the brain, Dr. Penfield found that his patients experienced flashbacks, vivid memories from the past that replayed in their mind's eye. One patient recalled every note from a symphony she had heard at a concert years before. The same spot was electrically stimulated thirty times, and each time she recalled every note. Another patient recalled sitting at a train stop as a child, and she could describe each train car as it went by in her mind's eye. Another patient visualized a childhood comb and was able to recount the exact number of teeth it had. Not only were the flashbacks extremely detailed, but in fact many of them predated the patient's first conscious memories.

Dr. Penfield concluded that every sight, every sound, every smell, every conscious thought, every subconscious dream is recorded on our internal hard drive, the region of the brain known as the cerebral cortex. Here is how it works. When you hear a song or see a picture or read a verse of Scripture, a line is traced on the surface of the cerebral cortex called a memory trace or engram. The brain essentially functions like a deluxe Etch-A-Sketch. If you hear the same song or see the same picture or read the same verse of Scripture again, the line is retraced. With each repetition, the engram gets deeper and deeper until finally that song or picture or verse is engraved on the surface of the cerebral

cortex. We could also say that it is engraved on your heart – not the physical, blood-pumping organ in your chest, but your HEART, your soul.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Not all memories are created equal. In fact, there are three kinds of memory. Sensory memory is as fleeting as a seven-digit phone number. Short-term memory has a little longer shelf life. You can recall what you wore, what you ate, and what you read yesterday, but those details fade like an old photograph. Finally, there is long-term memory, and only a very small number of experiences make it into long-term memory, but it is those memories that shape your soul. Generally speaking, the length of memory and how deeply an engram gets etched depend on the strength of the emotion tied to the event. So the stronger the emotion, the longer and stronger the memory.

Almost all of our long-term memories are associated with intense emotions, positive or negative. That's just the way God has wired us. 99% of our past experiences are quickly forgotten because they are barely felt. They may still be stored in the subconscious of the cerebral cortex, but they are like computer files that can't be accessed.

WE NEED TO MANAGE OUR MEMORIES. Certain memories need to be consciously deleted, and others need to be consciously saved.

According to the research of psychiatrist Emory Cowen, the level of popularity a child experiences in the third grade is the greatest predictor of mental health when that child becomes an adult. Now, it might not be exactly third grade – it might be second or fourth grade. But it is true that early childhood experiences shape us in profound ways because children are like wet cement. If you had a great childhood, that's easy to admit – but if you had a difficult childhood, it's hard to even think about. But difficult childhoods have produced some of the most remarkable human beings – including a young shepherd boy who became a king.

David was a punching bag for his older brothers – they were still picking on him when he visited them in the Valley of Elah! Really, his older brothers were the first giants he faced in his life. And his own father didn't see David's potential – when the prophet Samuel was lining up the sons of Jesse to anoint the next king, Jesse didn't even bother to call David. That had to hurt, but David didn't allow any of his difficulties to define him. Instead, he seized on every "altar moment" that life handed him, whether it was negative or positive.

Leonardo da Vinci once made a distinction between two types of imagination – preimagining and postimagining. Preimagining is imagining the future before it happens. But postimagining is reimagining the past after it happens. Memories are not objective, they are very subjective. And we all have a tendency to romanticize or catastrophize the past to one degree or another. We all distort memories by minimizing some while magnifying others. And how we manage those memories has a major bearing on how we view ourselves in the present and in the future. Our memories can either empower us to live by faith or imprison us to live by fear. How we postimagine the past can make us or break us spiritually. That's why it is important to see our past through the eyes of God. Mismanaging our memories can be as debilitating as a mental handicap. But the solution is postimagining the past in light of God's faithfulness to us. Isn't that what David's Psalms are? He is looking back over the experiences of his life, searching for reasons why, and looking for Providence in the midst of his pain. He is finding ALTAR MOMENTS in his past to strengthen him in the present and sustain him in the future.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Your explanations of your past will either empower you or debilitate you. They can be a catalyst for change or they can be as imprisoning as iron bars. And it's all up to you. You can't change the past, but you can learn from it – and that's how you change the future. There are lots of different explanations for the same experiences – the tough part is choosing the right one. That's where we need holy hindsight to see the hand of God.

Philippians 2:5-9 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

During the Nazi occupation of Holland in World War II, the Ten Boom family risked their own safety by hiding Jews in their house. Then on February 28, 1944, their home was raided and Corrie Ten Boom, her father and sister were sent to a concentration camp. They died but Corrie survived. In 1975, her life story was made into a movie called "The Hiding Place." For many years, Corrie Ten Boom traveled the world sharing her experiences, or maybe, her explanations of her experiences. Corrie would often speak with her head down – it looked like she was reading notes, but she was working on a piece of needlepoint. Then, after telling her story of atrocities at the hands of the Nazis, Corrie would hold up the backside of the needlepoint first and recite this poem:

My life is but a weaving between my God and me,

I do not choose the colors, He works so steadily,
Oft times He weaves in sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I the underside.
Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

One of the great joys of Heaven will be "postimagining" our lives! **Lesson 4 – Don't Cut Corners**

Have you ever heard the expression "climbing the corporate ladder"? It's not really a nice image in many ways. In fact, one writer compared the normal shenanigans that go on in the typical workplace to a game of "Snakes and Ladders." Remember that game? It was actually an ancient Indian game that became a worldwide classic board game. Players made their way through a numbered grid by the roll of the dice, but their progress could be suddenly accelerated if they landed on a square containing a ladder, or suddenly setback if they landed on a square containing a snake.

Here are some of the "ladders" that people typically try to climb at work:

- Self-promotion, image-management and office politics
- Portraying activity, busyness, and efficiency at any cost
- Taking credit for successes, while tagging coworkers with failures
- Networking and being seen with important people in the company

And here are some of the "snakes" that people try to avoid at work:

- Honestly telling it like it is (that gets them in trouble)
- Acting ethically at any cost (that loses deals for the company)
- Taking responsibility for their mistakes (it could cost a promotion)
- Quietly doing their very best (their achievements go unnoticed)

Tragically, the corporate game of "snakes and ladders" has crept subtly into the church in recent years, and it seems that many Christians spend an inordinate amount of time trying to make sure that everything spiritual they do gets noticed, that every mistake they make gets buried, and that they climb the church or ministry "ladder" as quickly as possible!

But whether in a company or in a church, when you climb over people to get further up the ladder, you'll find it awfully lonely at the top. And if you skip rungs in your hurry, you may get to the top quicker, but you'll also be much more likely to fall. Really, the so-called ladders (shortcuts) are the snakes in this game! Because when you sacrifice integrity, the ladder you are trying to climb has nothing to lean against. Without integrity, you can never really fulfill your destiny, because integrity IS your destiny!

1 Samuel 24:4-5 And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

Everyone else thinks this is David's opportunity to accelerate God's promise – only David sees it as it really is, a test of his character!

The word INTEGRITY comes from the same root as the word INTEGER, which in mathematics is a "whole" number or a "complete" entity. That's why integrity also carries the meaning of "ONE" – the same inside and outside, the same in private as in public, having consistent character.

So many people fixate on WHAT God is doing for them, WHERE He is taking them, and WHEN He is going to do it, that they forget God's most important concern is WHO they are becoming! God won't get you where He wants you to go until you become who He wants you to be! **They try so hard to manufacture opportunities for themselves, but anything manufactured by human effort doesn't come with God's warranty!**

Most of us wait to do something WRONG until NO ONE is watching, and we wait to do something RIGHT until SOMEONE is watching. Those tendencies are our old nature's desires for sin and for self-glorification at work. But the very essence of integrity is to be a BETTER person in the shadows than in the sunlight, that those who know us BEST would respect us MOST. And that test is never taken on a THRONE, it is taken in a CAVE – right where David took it!

As Saul is relieving himself in the very cave where David and his men are hiding, it must have felt like an eternity to David as he weighed his options. Do I kill the king and assume the throne that rightfully belongs to me? Or do I risk missing the opportunity of a lifetime and keep living as a fugitive? Hard questions. And all the feedback he's getting from his friends is BIASED because they have a vested interest in the outcome!

Finally, they push David hard enough that he creeps forward and cuts off the corner of Saul's robe – but thankfully, that's when his heart smites him, because you can't "cut corners" when it comes to integrity! Have you ever had times in your life when the voices of good people all around you were telling you something was okay when you knew it wasn't?

The book of James likens the Bible to a mirror, because meditating on God's Word is the only way we can get an accurate picture of who we are. And it not only reveals the sin in our lives, it also reveals how much we are being formed into the image of Christ.

James 1:22-25 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

But have you ever looked at yourself in one of those crazy mirrors that distort your face and figure? Those mirrors are in our lives too!

In a very real sense, every mirror is a crazy mirror except Scripture. The Bible is the only perfect mirror because it reveals how our Designer sees us. So most of our "identity problems" are simply the result of looking in the wrong mirrors. For many people, their primary "mirror" is the opinion of other people – but no matter how well meaning those people are, their opinion of you will always result in a distorted image!

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

One of the hardest lessons for a leader to learn is that you don't really care about people until you don't care what they think! You have to actually die to their opinions, or you end up "leading by the polls" like a politician, and actually trying so hard to be liked that you can't love them properly. Pastors do this. Parents do this. Friends do this. YOU do this!

All the voices in David's life right now are pushing him to take advantage of this opportunity to take a short cut to his destiny. But David knows that **AN OPPORTUNITY ISN'T AN OPPORTUNITY IF YOU HAVE TO COMPROMISE YOUR INTEGRITY!**

Taking short cuts spiritually always short-circuits God's long term plans for your life. It SEEMED like integrity was forcing David to miss an opportunity – but he needed to PROVE that he wouldn't take matters into his own hands, because that is how a man after God's own heart acts!

If God can trust you to do the right thing when SAUL is on the throne, He can trust you to do the right thing when YOU are on the throne! CAN GOD TRUST YOU IN THE CAVE? Integrity is who you are when no one is watching!

It was probably harder for David NOT to kill Saul than it was for him to kill Goliath. Killing Goliath was an act of POWER, but not killing Saul was an act of WILLPOWER – and willpower is the purest form of power!

The New Testament makes a distinction between two types of power. DUNAMIS is the ability to DO things beyond your natural ability. EXOUSIA is the ability to NOT do things you have the ability to do.

The CROSS is the ultimate example of this second kind of power. Scripture is explicit – no one took Jesus' life from Him – He says four times in John 10 that He is voluntarily sacrificing His life!

John 10:18 No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power (EXOUSIA) to lay it down, and I have power (EXOUSIA) to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

I'm impressed with the DUNAMIS of Jesus, but I'm even more impressed with His EXOUSIA. It's not what He COULD DO that changed me when He died on the cross – it's what he could have done but CHOSE NOT TO DO that changed me.

Matthew 26:53-54 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

DUNAMIS is “DOING power” ... EXOUSIA is “RESTRAINING power”

Ephesians 3:20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power (DUNAMIS) that worketh in us,

1 Corinthians 6:12 All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power (EXOUSIA) of any.

Resisting the temptation to take Saul's life was a defining decision for David – he refused to “CUT CORNERS” and he passed the integrity test!

You will find most times that the integrity tests in your life come ... (1) privately, not publicly; (2) personally, not collectively; (3) to test what you will NOT do rather than what you will do.

The Bible is full of stories about people who refused to compromise their integrity – and it was often their unwillingness to compromise that actually set the stage for God to work miracles in their lives!

Saul's biggest failure took place when he made his throne an IDOL, and David could have easily made the same mistake. If we aren't careful, our

God-given dream can become more important to us than the God who gave the dream! God is no longer the end, He becomes simply a means to an end. And that is when the dream God has given you to glorify Him becomes an idol that actually robs Him of the glory He deserves!

If David had killed Saul to assume the throne, the throne would have become an idol in his life. But it was David's willingness to GIVE UP the throne that proved to God he was ready to sit on it!

Most of us spend most of our lives trying to prove ourselves to people, when all we have to do is prove ourselves to God!

Lesson 5 – The Devil's Workshop

The Johari Window, named after the first names of its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, is one of the most useful psychological models in understanding interpersonal communication and relationships. Like a four-paned window, its four quadrants reveal four dimension's of one's identity – it's like seeing yourself from four different angles.

The first window, the ARENA quadrant, consists of those things YOU KNOW ABOUT YOU and OTHERS KNOW ABOUT YOU. This is who you are when everybody is looking. It is your public persona.

The next window, the FAÇADE quadrant, consists of those things YOU KNOW ABOUT YOU but OTHERS DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU. This is who you are when nobody is looking. It's who you are after you get past the polite and the superficial. Behind the façade are the deep disappointments you've had, the hidden dreams you've never realized, and the secret sins you've never conquered. This is the person that you know you are, but no one else knows you are.

The third window, the BLIND SPOT quadrant, consists of those things OTHERS KNOW ABOUT YOU but YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU. This is what others see in you but you cannot see in yourself. This is where you need friends who see the potential in you that you cannot see in yourself; this is also where you need friends who have the courage to confront the problems in you that you need to change. And if you don't have someone who has permission to speak openly and honestly into your life, your blind spots will never change.

The final window, the UNKNOWN quadrant, consists of those things YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU and OTHERS DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU. This is what only God knows about you, and this is where His Spirit plays such a vital role in your life. And this is where the Bible's revelation of who you can become in Christ is so important, because until you see yourself through God's eyes, you'll never get a vision of who you can become. And this unknown window will remain closed.

Notice that in three-quarters of our lives, some part is HIDDEN!
In Q. 2 (Façade), we need to learn to be honest with others.
In Q. 3 (Blind Spot), we need spiritual leadership to be honest with us.
In Q. 4 (Unknown), we need God's divine intervention!

If you want to "find yourself" you have to look for God – ignoring God is like ignoring yourself – you can ignore Him, but if you do you will always be a stranger to yourself! But if you dare to enter the third and fourth quadrants, you'll discover dimensions of your God-given identity and destiny that elude most people for their entire lives!

The life of David is associated mainly with TWO names, not one. One name marks his greatest success – GOLIATH. The other name marks his greatest failure – BATHSHEBA. However, at the point of his greatest failure, thankfully David (now a king) had the courage to face his Blind Spot – but he needed some help to be able to do that.

2 Samuel 11:1-2 And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.

David is bored, and **BOREDOM IS THE SEEDBED OF SIN**. We sin because we have nothing better to do, literally! So the cure for sin is a vision from God for your life. If you are consumed with a God-sized vision, you have less time and energy left over to spend on sin. You're too busy serving God to sin against God! But if you're not busy, look out!

The old saying is true, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." But so are idle eyes, idle ears, an idle mouth, or especially an idle MIND!

David's accountability structure is absent and he is not occupied with his kingly responsibilities for one tragic, unguarded moment. He should be on the front lines of battle, and instead he's on the sidelines of boredom. And that is when the enemy is at his best and we are at our worst – if we are not on the offensive for God, the enemy will put us on the defensive by attacking us in our unguarded moments.

As the image of a bathing Bathsheba passes through his optic nerve and into his visual cortex, David has a decision to make – look or look away. It's that simple, it's that difficult. It's always that simple, it's always that difficult. The same conscience that convicted him the day he cut off a corner of Saul's robe convicts him again this day, but in an unguarded moment of boredom David doesn't obey his conscience. And that is the moment – for all of us – that temptation turns into sin.

James 1:14-15 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Sin always ends in DEATH – because sin always kills something in us! And sin comes in many varieties, but one of our main temptations is "**legitimate illegitimate sin**" – that's when we try to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. We aren't patient enough to follow God's plan and meet the need legitimately, so we selfishly rationalize our actions – we use the legitimacy of the NEED to justify the SIN.

Hebrews 11:24-27 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Sin may yield a moment of pleasure, but the side effect is always long term misery – and the misery is as enduring as the sin is fleeting. Anytime we take a sinful shortcut, we short-circuit God's purpose in our lives. SIN IS SELLING GOD AND YOURSELF SHORT.

Sanctification is not just about controlling ourselves so we sin less – it is about actually coming to grips with just how sinful we actually are! As we allow ourselves to be made into God's image we will become aware of sinful motivations that can infect our actions and decisions. If we underestimate our sinfulness, we underestimate God's righteousness – and if we downplay our sin, we downplay the grace of God.

1 John 1:8-9 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

David was called a man after God's own heart in the Scriptures. And this a man who not only had an affair with another man's wife, but actually had that man murdered so he could cover up the affair! So God's opinion of David certainly wasn't because he was perfect – it was because he was honest with himself, with others, and with God. When Nathan the prophet confronted him with his sin, he didn't try to HIDE it any longer – he CONFESSED it. Psalm 51 may actually be the most public confession in human history, having been read millions of times ...

Psalm 51:1-12 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before

me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Nothing is more isolating than secret sin – and nothing is more liberating than FORGIVENESS from God. But we are sometimes so afraid of God’s School of Hard Knocks that we run from the chisel of the Master Artist who wants to sculpt us into His beautiful image. We don’t realize that resisting the conviction of His Spirit will make us as bound as Michelangelo’s “Captives” – when we could be as majestic as “David.”

Remember this verse?

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Well, there’s a verse after it ...

Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

C.S. Lewis said, “When I invited Jesus into my life, I thought He was going to put up some wallpaper and hang a few pictures. But He started knocking out walls and adding on rooms. I said, ‘I was expecting a nice cottage.’ But He said, ‘I’m making a palace in which to live.’”

King David didn’t just LIVE in a palace – he WAS a palace, and so are YOU. God wants you to be His TEMPLE, but that is going to require major RENOVATION, and it may just start with DEMOLITION.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.

His sin with Bathsheba is the WORST chapter in David’s life, but because of his repentance it is not the LAST chapter in his life! All the Old Testament kings are divided into two categories – those who did what was RIGHT in the eyes of the Lord and those who did what was WRONG in the eyes of the Lord. David should have belonged in the last category, but Scripture doesn’t leave him there. That’s God’s grace!

1 Kings 15:4-5 Nevertheless for David’s sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

The Bible doesn’t ignore David’s sin, but it says it was an exception to the rule. **When you confess your sin, it no longer defines you** – you are no longer defined by what you did wrong, but by what Jesus did right!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Lesson 1 – King Me

1. Describe some of the situations you have observed where Christians seem to be still held “captive” to something that keeps them from being everything God intended for them to be. Are you struggling in one of these areas?
2. “The ultimate test of obedience is what you do with the commandments of God that you do NOT understand.” Describe a commandment of God that you have difficulty obeying, or one where it is difficult for you to fully understand God’s reasoning. Are you obeying it regardless, or are you still struggling?
3. “Partial obedience is still disobedience.” Describe an area of your life where you tried to partially obey God’s commandments and actually ended up disobeying Him. What did you do to turn that situation around in your life?

Lesson 2 – Put Out To Pasture

1. Describe a “compensatory skill” that you’ve developed – something you’ve learned to do to compensate for a disadvantage. How do you think this compensatory skill helps reveal God’s destiny for you?
2. Have you ever known someone who seemed to suffer from “destination disease” – focusing all their energies on the NEXT season of their life? How did that appear to negatively affect their Christian walk in the PRESENT?
3. Looking back on your past, describe one way that God took a delay, disappointment or disadvantage and used it for GOOD in your life. How did this cultivate your character, develop your gifts, or teach you a lesson you couldn’t have learned any other way?

Lesson 3 – Knickknacks

1. “One’s self-concept is defined by a very small number of experiences.” What are some of the memorable moments throughout your lifetime that have made you who you are today?
2. “Our defining moments double as altars to God.” What tangible knickknacks, symbols or mementos could you use to remind yourself of some of the defining moments in your life? Do you feel that doing this would be valuable to you personally?
3. “Your explanations for the events in your past will either empower you to live by faith or imprison you to live by fear.” Describe a negative life circumstance where you’ve had to try and look at things through God’s perspective instead of your own. How did that change your attitude and actions going forward?

Lesson 4 – Don’t Cut Corners

1. Describe some of the situations you have observed where someone’s desire for attention or approval from other people actually threatened their Christian integrity. What boundaries do you have in your own life to protect yourself in this area?
2. “Taking short cuts spiritually always short-circuits God’s long term plans for your life.” What are some of the ways you’ve seen Christians compromise their integrity and mess up their lives in trying to take advantage of seemingly good opportunities? Has this ever happened to you? What did you do to get back on track?
3. “Willpower is the purest form of power.” Describe a test of integrity that you faced at some point in your life where you chose to please God by choosing NOT to do something that would have been a convenient, common choice for many other people. Have you ever FAILED an integrity test like this? How did that impact you?

Lesson 5 – The Devil’s Workshop

1. Describe a time when Scripture convicted you of wrongdoing, or when someone acted as a prophet in your life, helping you to recognize or admit your own failure. How would you feel about speaking into someone else’s life that way? Would you still do it regardless, if you saw that a friend was in trouble spiritually?
2. “One of our main temptations is legitimate illegitimate sin – when we try to meet a legitimate need in an illegitimate way.” Describe a

situation in your life when you struggled to be patient enough to follow God’s plan and meet a need in the right way. What helped you most in finding the strength to WAIT and do it God’s way?

3. “Boredom is the seedbed of sin – we sin because we have nothing better to do!” What are some of the ways that you stay on track with God’s vision for your life? Other than your personal devotions, what things do you do to stay busy serving God between church services? How do you feel that has helped you stay away from sin? Do you think there is something else that would help you even more?