

Lessons Learned the Hard Way

Lessons Learned the Hard Way

DR. R. TIMOTHY JONES

Copyright © 2021 Dr. R. Timothy Jones

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior written permission.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of the International Bible Society.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations marked KJV are from the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Dedication

*This book is dedicated to the wisest man I know,
my father—Mr. Ennis Joe Jones Jr.
He gave us the answers before life gave us the questions.
I love you, Pop!*

Table of Contents

	Foreword by Dr. Kelvin J. Cochran	ix
	Introduction	xiii
Week One	Character Is Everything!	1
Week Two	Don't Play with Fire	27
Week Three	The Problem with Vengeance	51
Week Four	It Isn't What It Looks Like	75
	Epilogue: Lessons Learned from a Mistake	101
	Acknowledgments	107
	About the Author	109



Foreword

Dr. Kelvin J. Cochran

One of the most iconic heroes in all the Bible is Samson. In fact, the record of his amazing feats would surely qualify him to be on one of the teams of superheroes, *The Avengers* or *The Justice League*. From the time he was introduced to us in Sunday school, as little boys, many of us dreamed of having the strength of Samson. As a result, the emphasis placed on Samson's power and triumphs has eclipsed his flaws and weaknesses. *Lessons Learned the Hard Way* conducts a spiritual autopsy on the life of Samson and offers profound lessons for men in order to identify and avoid the pitfalls he encountered in his purpose, calling, and destiny.

As is the case for all men, God's plan for Samson was predestined before the foundation of the world. One of the indications of spiritual maturity for a man is having a *conviction*

that God's plan is better than any plan we could ever create for ourselves. The angel proclaimed to Samson's mother and father that he was to be a son (*his purpose*), and that his *calling* was to be a Nazirite-Deliverer. God also established a standard to guide him on the conquest to fulfill his *destiny*.

Men who honor God's standard have convictions for their *purpose in family*. Conviction for our purpose develops character, showing ourselves approved for our calling. When we are faithful to our calling, we will fulfill our destiny. Men who fulfill their destiny leave a legacy of faith and righteousness for the next generation of their family.

It's been said that we have a choice when it comes to decisions, but we don't have a choice when it comes to consequences. Chuck Colson once said, "Decisions have consequences and bad decisions have victims." Both lessons play out in the life of Samson. Samson had a track record of making decisions misaligned with God's standard, leading to consequences and victims. He did not have the convictions of a faithful son, husband, or son-in-law. He used his might for vendettas and vengeance apart from his calling. And though he performed supernatural wonders, Samson paid a great price for deviating from godly standards and convictions.

The conviction to "honor your mother and your father" is still a prerequisite for destiny. It comes with a twofold promise of success and long life. Samson's attraction to Philistine women was against God's standard. He married a woman in Timnah against his parents' guidance, and his near-fatal relationship with Delilah cost him his calling. Listen, brothers.

When a woman is plotting with your enemies and tries to kill you three times, let her go!

Deviating from God's plan, dishonoring family relationships, and being self-absorbed cost Samson his destiny. But thanks be to God for His amazing grace. In *Lessons Learned the Hard Way*, we see the redemptive heart of God in the life of Samson. Men who find themselves in Samson's condition have hope that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound.

Dr. Kevin J. Cochran

Former Administrator, United States Fire Administration



Introduction

*The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength
from distress, and grows brave by reflection.*

—THOMAS PAINE

*For a righteous man may fall seven times and
rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.*

(PROVERBS 24:16, NKJV)

We often make the mistake of romanticizing and even sanitizing the lives of the people in the Bible. Other than Jesus Christ, the women and men in Scripture had issues with both tribulation and temptation. Like us, they were not sinless.

Judges 13–16 helps us to see the dark corners of Samson’s life. There are so many lessons that he learned the hard way, but his life yet had value. He violated his convictions, failed to live up to his destiny, and even compromised his character. Yet he was able to do in death what he could not do in life. The last words spoken on his life in Hebrews 11 are a testament to God’s mercy.

Lessons Learned the Hard Way was written to help men experience God’s grace in light of our deepest disappointments and areas of failure. Our hope is the men who read this book would be reminded that they are deeply loved by our long-suffering God.

This text is presented in a devotional format. In about ten minutes each day, men can read Scripture, pray, reflect, and prayerfully take the next step toward personal revival (see James 4:7-10). There is a lesson for each week that is best done in a group setting for purposes of connection, accountability, and encouragement—“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17, ESV).

It is our prayer that this book restores the joy of our salvation. May our lives be changed forever. Be strong! Be encouraged!

Dr. R. Timothy Jones



Week One

*Order my steps in thy word: and let not
any iniquity have dominion over me.*

(PSALM 119:133, KJV)

*To thyself, be true.
To God, be faithful.
To others, be kind.*



Character Is Everything!

Judges 13

As intellectual creatures, we are all endowed with the capacity to learn. We learn in a variety of ways. Visual learners prefer pictures or images. Aural or auditory learners favor sound or music. Verbal learners are best taught with words (speech and writing). Some are best engaged through logic.

When it comes to life, many of us are slow learners. We have learned some lessons the hard way. There is a Norwegian proverb that says, “Experience is a good teacher but the tuition is high.” Some of us are still paying for past experiences!

*Experience is simply the name
we give our mistakes.*

—OSCAR WILDE

Don't waste a mistake; learn a lesson!

We erroneously romanticize the people we admire in Scripture as if their lives were not like our own. In anger, Moses committed murder. Leah had no self-esteem. David was an adulterous murderer. Both Job and John the Baptist experienced despair.

Like many personalities in the Bible, Samson learned a number of valuable lessons the hard way. His life illustrates the consequences of poor choices. It is a portrait of tragedy and triumph, a perfect beginning with a not-so-perfect ending.

*So the woman bore a son and called his name Samson;
and the child grew, and the Lord blessed him. And
the Spirit of the Lord began to move upon him.*

(JUDGES 13:24–25, NKJV)

As a result of their grave sin, God delivered the Children of Israel into the hands of the Philistines for forty years of punishment. Then the Angel of the Lord appears to a barren, nameless woman to announce that she will conceive and give birth to a son who will deliver Israel from the Philistines. Her son will also be a Nazirite.

Conviction

The parameters that would govern Samson's life were established before Samson was born. The convictions were established before the conception. (Many people were thinking eighteen minutes rather than eighteen years.)

A child's destiny requires prenatal care.

Samson is blessed to have phenomenal parents. He has a willing mother and a wise father. While Samson is to be dedicated to God, his mother is commanded to observe religious convictions.

Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean.

(v. 4)

It is difficult to raise what you refuse to become.

Samson's father, Manoah, is a wise man. When his wife informs him of her encounter with the Angel of the Lord, Manoah prays for the wisdom and direction to raise the child.

Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "Pardon Your servant, Lord. I beg You to let the man of God You sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born."

(v. 8)

When Manoah meets the Angel of the Lord, he inquires, “What is to be the rule that governs the boy’s life and work?” (v. 12). Manoah commits himself to the convictions that will shape his son’s character and lead him in his calling.

Your conviction shapes your character.

Character

Samson’s mother is told to refrain from wine and unclean things because he is to be a Nazirite from the womb. Nazirites were separated from others and consecrated to God. They observed three vows—abstaining from wine and strong drink (grapes period!), refraining from cutting their hair, and avoiding contact with anything dead.

It is ironic that the Bible discusses the Nazirites’ vows but not their vocation. Perhaps the value is in who they were and not what they did. One’s character is more substantial than one’s calling.

It is easier to do right when we are right!

Character is the external manifestation of internal convictions. Whether precipitated by anger, pressure, or liquor, what’s in you will somehow come out of you. No one can bring you out of your character, but they can bring your character out of you!

*A crooked stick will always
cast a crooked shadow.*

—UNKNOWN

Prior to being elected president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt enjoyed ranching. One day, one of his ranch hands was preparing to brand a cow that belonged to Roosevelt's neighbor.

Theodore Roosevelt fired the ranch hand on the spot and said, "A man who will steal for me will steal from me!"

Your character authenticates your calling.

Calling

Samson is called to deliver the Children of Israel from the Philistines (v. 5). But the greatest enemy Samson has to conquer is not the Philistines. It is himself. To be defeated by one's circumstances is not as bad as being defeated by one's self.

There are two discoveries that everyone should make—who they were created to be and what they are called to do. You may never discover what you are supposed to do until you discover who you are supposed to be.

*Each of you should use whatever gift you have
received to serve others, as faithful stewards
of God's grace in its various forms.*

(1 PETER 4:10)

Discovering one's calling requires embracing three facts: your calling will always be consistent with your unique gift; your calling will always serve the good of others; and your calling will always bring glory to God.

*Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called
and his work will be as sacred as the work of the
ministry. It is not what a man does that determines
whether his work is sacred or secular, it is why he does it.*

—A. W. TOZER

The Significance of the Foundation

There have been basically three periods of architecture—classical, modern, and postmodern. Classical architecture rises from the ancient Greeks and Romans and is known for the use of ornate columns.

Modern architecture is characterized by the idea that “form follows function.” Design became secondary to simplicity and purpose. Postmodern architecture is a more eclectic combination of styles, aesthetics, and expression.

Over time, forms, design, styles, aesthetics, and structures have changed. However, there is one thing that has not changed—the foundation. At the end of the day, the foundation is always more important than the structure.

Are we building structures without foundations?

Jesus Christ says whoever hears and obeys His Word is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock: “The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock” (Matthew 7:25, NKJV).

*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that
I might not sin against Thee.*

(PSALM 119:11, KJV)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

(PSALM 119:105, NKJV)

*Order my steps in Thy word: and let not
any iniquity have dominion over me.*

(PSALM 119:133, KJV)

GROUP DISCUSSION

I hated every minute of training, but I said, “Don’t quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.” —Muhammad Ali

1. What lessons do men typically learn the hard way?
2. How are the lives of the people in the Bible much like our own?
3. What makes a good parent?

What are some things that your parents got right?

What do you wish your parents had done differently?

4. How do our convictions shape our character?
5. In one sentence, write your epitaph.

Week One—Character Is Everything!

Monday

Scripture Reading

Matthew 7:24–25

Romans 8:4–9

Morning Prayer

God, our heavenly Father, we deeply regret all the things that have broken Your heart and shattered our dreams. Thank You for being long-suffering, and may the lessons that we have learned lead to more productive lives. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes. —Oscar Wilde

Reflection

1. What is the most significant lesson that you learned the hard way?
2. Articulate the fundamental convictions that govern your life.

The Next Step

Submit—Where is God calling me to complete surrender?

[illegible]

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Tuesday

Scripture Reading

Psalms 119:105

Ephesians 4:1–2

Morning Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for Your Word and the light that it is for my path. Forgive me for all the times that I went against Your decrees. Help me, O God, to live up to the calling on my life. Give me a humble, gentle, and patient spirit. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Don't waste a mistake; learn a lesson!

Reflection

1. How do parents shape their children's destinies?
2. How can mistakes in our past inform our future?

The Next Step

Resist—How do I need to stand against the devil?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Wednesday

Scripture Reading

Psalms 119:133

Proverbs 6:16–19

Morning Prayer

Father, direct my footsteps according to Your Word and let no sin rule over me. Help me to resist the temptations of the world and be all that You created me to be. May every word, deed, and thought bring glory to You. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Experience is a good teacher but the tuition is high. —Norwegian proverb

Reflection

1. Define character in your own words.
2. What is the difference between one's character and one's reputation?

The Next Step

Draw Near—How can I walk more intimately with God?

[illegible]

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Thursday

Scripture Reading

Jeremiah 29:11

Galatians 5:22–23

Morning Prayer

Lord God, I know that You have plans for my life. Pardon me for all the times that I chose my will over Your will. Help me to yield my life to the indwelling of Your Spirit so that I may bear fruit of righteousness. Amen.

Point to Ponder

A crooked stick will always cast a crooked shadow. —Unknown

Reflection

1. How does your life bring glory to God?
2. List ways that you serve others.

The Next Step

Cleanse—What sin in my life requires repentance?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Friday

Scripture Reading

Titus 2:1–2, 6–7

1 Peter 4:10

Morning Prayer

Father above, thank You for the calling that You have placed on my life. I deeply want to be a man who pleases You in all that I do. Help me to serve You by serving others. May You be glorified by my daily walk. Amen.

Point to Ponder

A person often meets his destiny on the road he took to avoid it. —Jean de La Fontaine

Reflection

1. Describe the spiritual foundation of your life.
2. How do we sometimes compromise our convictions?

The Next Step

Purify—What stronghold in my life requires deliverance?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery designed for writing.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Saturday

Scripture Reading

Proverbs 27:19

Matthew 5:13–16

Morning Prayer

Lord of Creation, I am sorry that my life does not always please You, but thank You for loving me at my lowest. Give me a clean heart and a clear mind. Remove everything that blemishes Your glory in my life. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Destiny is the push of our instincts to the pull of our purpose.
—T. D. Jakes

Reflection

Write a brief letter to the five-year-old you about life.

The Next Step

Lament—Is there a regret in my life that I need to let go?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)



Week Two

*Brothers, . . . if someone is caught in a sin, you who
live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.
But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.*

(GALATIANS 6:1)

*Don't gain the world and lose your soul,
wisdom is better than silver or gold.*

—*BOB MARLEY*



Don't Play with Fire

Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother. As they approached the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion came roaring toward him. The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands as he might have torn a young goat. But he told neither his father nor his mother what he had done. Then he went down and talked with the woman, and he liked her.

Some time later, when he went back to marry her, he turned aside to look at the lion's carcass, and in it he saw a swarm of bees and some

honey. He scooped out the honey with his hands and ate as he went along. When he rejoined his parents, he gave them some, and they too ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the lion's carcass.

(JUDGES 14:5–9)

Vincent “Bo” Jackson is regarded by many as the greatest athlete of all time. His strength was likened unto that of Hercules. Bo Jackson’s football career came to an end after being tackled in a 1991 football game.

As the defender clung to his ankle, Bo Jackson’s superhuman strength created enough torque to pull his femur bone out of its hip socket. It may have been his very own strength that ended his football career. One report has it that Bo Jackson “literally ran out of his leg.”

How can a man’s strength lead to his demise?

The answer is in the life of Samson.

The Two Faces of Samson

He is a strong man. He killed a thousand Philistine soldiers with the jawbone of a donkey. In this text, he kills a lion with his bare hands through the power of the Spirit of the Lord.

Samson is also a weak man. Men are typically measured by their strengths, but they are ruined by their weaknesses. “All

that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16, NKJV).

A man controlled by his passions will be destroyed by them. The only person, place, or thing that defeated Samson was himself. When it comes to pride, greed, and lust, don’t ever trust yourself.

Samson’s weakness was greater than his strength.

Don’t Play with Fire!

En route to Timnah with his father and mother, Samson is found in a vineyard. This is a forbidden place in that his Nazirite vows required him to avoid grapes. Why is he there? Perhaps it is a matter of overconfidence.

*Overconfidence is what makes
good swimmers drown.*

—*GERMAN PROVERB*

In the vineyard, Samson is confronted by a roaring young lion. Verse 6 says, “The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him so that he tore the lion apart with his bare hands.”

When Samson returns to Timnah, he decides to revisit the vineyard to look at the lion’s carcass. Why does Samson return to the forbidden place? It is his ego. An ego trip really goes nowhere!

There is no one who can afford to feed their ego. You are the only person impressed with your ego. Your ego is something

you really can live without. An egomaniacal celebration of oneself is a dangerous thing.

Why does Samson return to a battle already won?

Arsonists often return to the scene of the crime because of their sadistic obsession with fire. They are fascinated with the thrill of reliving the crime. This makes them feel powerful and invincible.

If you play with fire, sooner or later you're going to get burned! The same fire that warms the house will burn the house down.

The Blessing and the Curse of the Little Things

When Samson returns to the vineyard, he sees a swarm of bees and some honey in the lion's carcass. In addition to visiting the vineyard, Samson breaks another vow by touching the dead lion to retrieve and eat the honey.

Your sweetness is my weakness.

—BARRY WHITE

The honey was sweet, but it was defiled. How can a man who conquers a lion be defeated by a swarm of bees? John Wooden said, "Little things make big things happen." A little hole can sink a big boat.

Why does the Spirit of the Lord protect Samson from the lion but not the bees? Because there is a difference between deliverance and discipline. Deliverance is what God needs to do for us; discipline is what we need to do for ourselves.

Your destiny is not only what God ordained for you; it is what God expects of you. Unfortunately, Samson never lived up to his destiny.

Don't Lose the Battle after Winning the War!

This story illustrates how to lose a battle after the war has already been won. We should never take our strength for granted. When it comes to sin, we are never as strong as we think.

On May 29, 2010, the Anaheim Angels hosted the Seattle Mariners. With the score tied 1-1 and the bases loaded in the bottom of the tenth inning, Kendrys Morales hit a walk-off grand slam home run to win the game.

And then something strange and most improbable happened. In celebration of the Angels' 5-1 victory in front of 39,382 fans, Kendrys Morales jumped on home plate and broke his leg. He won the game but lost the rest of the season.

Don't let your celebration end your season!

The only thing worse than losing a battle is losing a battle after winning a war.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there. — Stevie Wonder

1. What makes a man strong?
2. What makes a man weak?
3. Why do you think the strongest men often have the greatest weaknesses?
4. Identify self-defeating actions that men often repeat.
5. How do our passions get the best of us?
6. Offer solutions to the following vices:

Pride—

Lessons Learned the Hard Way

Greed—

Lust—

7. List three lessons you learned from failure.

Week Two—Don't Play with Fire

Monday

Scripture Reading

Colossians 3:5

1 Peter 5:5–10

Morning Prayer

Dear God, forgive us for all the times that we operated in our own strength, when we trusted in the flesh rather than in You. Such has often left us frustrated and defeated. Help us to remember that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Overconfidence is what makes good swimmers drown. —
German proverb

Reflection

1. Have you ever experienced failure after feeling overconfident? Explain.
2. How does the ego sometimes disserve us?

The Next Step

Mourn—Is there a loss that I need to grieve?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Tuesday

Scripture Reading

James 4:1–4

1 John 2:16

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, as much as we'd like to think that we are strong, we are weak without You. Our strength is never sufficient. Deliver us from the vices of pride, greed, and lust. Help us to enjoy complete lives of humility, contentment, and love. Amen.

Point to Ponder

One leak will sink a ship and one sin will destroy a sinner. —
John Bunyan

Reflection

1. What do you think is your destiny?
2. How can you maximize your destiny?

The Next Step

Weep—Where am I emotionally vulnerable?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Wednesday

Scripture Reading

Matthew 4:1–11

Galatians 5:24

Morning Prayer

Dear Lord, our passions often get the best of us. The flesh so often overrules the spirit and we are left defeated—even by things we enjoy. Help us to place our confidence in You and not in ourselves. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay. —Unknown

Reflection

1. Define integrity in your own words.
2. How does God's grace respond to our failures?

The Next Step

Humble Myself—Is there pride in my life?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Thursday

Scripture Reading

Proverbs 4:25–27

Romans 13:14

Morning Prayer

God, our heavenly Father, thank You for every victory that we have experienced. May we always know we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Help us to glorify You and not ourselves lest we defeat ourselves. Amen.

Point to Ponder

People pay for what they do and for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it . . . by the lives they lead. —James Baldwin

Reflection

1. Describe the cost of character.
2. Have you ever felt low after a big victory? If so, elaborate.

The Next Step

Submit—How is God calling me to obedience to Him?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Friday

Scripture Reading

Psalms 119:11

Proverbs 6:23–28

Morning Prayer

Lord God, help us to walk humbly before You and Your people. May we never allow our achievements and accolades to go to our heads. Help us to recognize our areas of vulnerability and avoid temptation. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Arrogance really comes from insecurity, and in the end our feeling that we are bigger than others is really the flip side of our feeling that we are smaller than others. —Desmond Tutu

Reflection

1. What causes insecurity in our lives?
2. Have you ever lost a battle after winning a war? If so, please explain.

The Next Step

Resist—Where am I most tempted?

[illegible]

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Saturday

Scripture Reading

Romans 8:6

1 Thessalonians 4:3–4

Morning Prayer

Our Father in heaven, may we never celebrate ourselves at the expense of celebrating You. Help us to remember that every good and perfect gift comes from above. May we not be conquered by battles after wars have been won. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. —C. S. Lewis

Reflection

Write a letter to the twelve-year-old you. Reflect on what you wish you had known as you were entering puberty.

The Next Step

Draw Near—What prevents me from having a closer walk with God?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)



Week Three

*Victory defeats your enemies.
Vengeance defeats both of you.*

It is mine to avenge; I will repay.

(DEUTERONOMY 32:35)



The Problem with Vengeance

Judges 15

Haven't we all been mistreated, abused, hurt, or taken for granted? Aren't there times we want to get even or get back at someone? Let's be honest—it is not always easy to forgive (not to mention forget). For many, “turning the other cheek” is out of the question.

Vengeance is a prison.

The desire for revenge is what keeps your wounds fresh.

There are people worthy of justice, but there is no one worthy of revenge.

Revenge is giving another person the power to control your emotions.

The fourteenth chapter of Judges closes on an interesting note: Samson's bride becomes the wife of the best man at his wedding (v. 20).

In the opening of chapter 15, it seems Samson is oblivious to what has transpired as he goes to visit his wife with intimate intentions. However, her father denies Samson access to her bedroom: "I gave her to your companion. Isn't her younger sister more attractive? Take her instead" (v. 2).

Samson is livid and decides to wreak havoc on the Philistines. He takes 300 foxes, ties their tails together, and attaches torches to each pair of foxes. The foxes destroy all of the fields, vineyards, and orchards of the Philistines.

In retribution, the Philistines burn the woman that Samson loves (although she is married to his best man) and her father to death. Samson strikes back with great fury and kills many of them.

The Philistines retaliate by setting up camp in Judah, leading 3,000 men of Judah to hand Samson over to the Philistines. The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson again, and he slays 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey.

It is difficult to win a fight over something that is not yours. Even if you win the fight, you might not enjoy the prize. It is possible to hold hands without holding hearts. Samson learned the hard way that the woman he had to have didn't have to have him. She was his bride, but she never became a wife.

Samson's wife was given to . . . his best man.

(14:20, NKJV)

If someone took your lover, they may have done you a favor. Bobby “Blue” Bland said, “Get your money where you spend your time!” At the end of the day, what God has for you is for you!

Vengeance never satisfies.

When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Samson, he slays 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. However, after the victory Samson almost dies of simple thirst. Samson always wins big wars but loses little battles.

Samson was now very thirsty, and he cried out to the LORD, “You have accomplished this great victory by the strength of Your servant. Must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of these pagans?”

(15:18, NLT)

Samson is victorious externally but totally depleted internally.

God provides water out of the ground to revive Samson as he drinks. How ironic it is that Samson fights first and prays last. Perhaps if he had prayed initially, there may not have been a fight.

Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

(ROMANS 12:19)

Victory and vengeance are not the same thing. What's the difference? Victory defeats your enemy. Vengeance defeats both of you.

In one of Aesop's fables, a wasp landed on the head of a snake. The wasp tormented the snake by stinging it over and over again. In an effort to destroy the wasp, the snake placed its head under the wheel of an oncoming wagon. They perished together.

*He who seeks revenge must dig two graves;
one for his enemy and one for himself.*

—CHINESE PROVERB

Marcus Aurelius said, "The most complete revenge is not to imitate the aggressor." When we get even with a person, we become what they are. A principal mark of our faith is how we treat the people who mistreat us.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those

who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons [children] of your Father in heaven.

(MATTHEW 5:43–45, NKJV)

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

(1 PETER 3:9)

The Paradoxical Commandments

by Dr. Kent M. Keith

People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of
selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends
and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest
ideas can be shot down by the smallest men

and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be
destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack
you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and
you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

© Copyright Kent M. Keith 1968, renewed 2001

GROUP DISCUSSION

An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.
—Mahatma Gandhi

1. Have you ever been violated and desired to get even? Discuss how you felt.
2. What is the hardest thing that you have ever had to forgive? How did you do so?
3. What is the moral of Aesop's fable of the wasp and the snake?
4. According to Matthew 5:43–45, how are we to treat our enemies?
5. Which line in Dr. Kent M. Keith's "The Paradoxical Commandments" speaks most to your life?

Week Three—The Problem with Vengeance

Monday

Scripture Reading

Colossians 3:12–14

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Morning Prayer

God, our heavenly Father, all of us carry the residue of hurt and painful experiences. We have been wounded by people that we have trusted. Honestly, some wounds are still fresh. We ask that You would heal those areas of brokenness. Amen.

Point to Ponder

The desire for revenge is what keeps your wounds fresh.

Reflection

1. How can unresolved hurt ruin our lives?
2. Describe the freedom that comes with forgiving.

The Next Step

Cleanse—What thoughts, words, or deeds in my life are unlike God?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper appears to be a standard notebook page or a sheet of stationery.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Tuesday

Scripture Reading

Matthew 5:38–42

Romans 12:17–21

Morning Prayer

Father, we have been betrayed, violated, and hurt by people near and dear to us. Frankly, O God, sometimes we want to exact revenge. Help us to remember that vengeance is Yours and in Your time, You will repay. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Stronger than lover's love is lover's hate. Incurable, in each, the wounds they make. —Euripides

Reflection

1. Why is it sometimes difficult to forgive?
2. Identify three benefits to forgiving.

Wednesday

Scripture Reading

Matthew 5:43–48

Ephesians 4:26

Morning Prayer

Father God, we confess that we have sinned against You and others. We have in some cases betrayed the trust that others placed in us. We ask that You would forgive us. Direct us in the way to reconcile with those whom we have hurt. Amen.

Point to Ponder

The best revenge is to be unlike him who performed the injury.
—Marcus Aurelius

Reflection

1. Can you think of a person that you may have hurt? If so, what are you willing to do to make that person whole?
2. How can you safeguard your most important relationships from hurt?

The Next Step

Lament—Is there something that I need to forgive myself for?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Thursday

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 4:31–32

1 Peter 3:9

Morning Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank You for Your love and Your grace. We celebrate that You are long-suffering and forgiving. Today there is a need for us to forgive those who have trespassed against us. Honestly, it is not easy sometimes but help us to extend mercy as we have so often received mercy. Amen.

Point to Ponder

You can't tell us how to feel, how much it hurts or how to mourn. —Carlos Wallace

Reflection

1. Discuss a battle that you regret fighting.
2. Have you ever won a war only to lose a battle? If so, please explain.

The Next Step

Mourn—What am I grieving and need to forgive God for?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Friday

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 32:35

Philippians 3:12–14

Morning Prayer

God in heaven above, today we seek Your face with respect to repressed anger and hurt. Deliver us from the deep-seated resentment that may be ruining our lives. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Man must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love. —Martin Luther King Jr.

Reflection

1. Does revenge *really* make us feel better? Does revenge make us better?
2. Read 1 Peter 3:9. How are we to handle insults?

The Next Step

Weep—Where is my life shattered?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Saturday

Scripture Reading

Proverbs 20:22

1 Corinthians 13:4–8

Morning Prayer

Lord God, forgive us for all the times that we have not extended the grace that we have received. Help us to forgive, knowing that we cannot be forgiven until we do. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Where there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you. —African proverb

Reflection

Think about finishing high school and write a letter to the eighteen-year-old you.

The Next Step

Humble Myself—How do I think more highly of myself than I ought?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)



Week Four

*The lost causes are exactly those which
might have saved the world.*

—G. K. CHESTERTON

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

(PSALM 51:10–12, ESV)



It Isn't What It Looks Like

Judges 16

In Judges 13, Samson's destiny is revealed to his parents—he is to deliver the Children of Israel from the Philistines. As a Nazirite, his convictions are established before his conception.

Samson kills a lion in a vineyard in chapter 14. He returns to that forbidden place and consumes honey from the dead carcass, which violated his prohibition to touch anything dead. Samson loses a battle after winning a war.

Chapter 15 teaches us that vengeance imprisons us. The desire for revenge keeps our wounds fresh. When we get even with a person, we become what they are. Samson's story seems to end in chapter 16, but it is not what it looks like.

Samson falls in love with a woman who does not love him. Delilah teaches Samson that everyone who is “with” you isn't

“for” you. She conspires with the rulers of the Philistines to learn the secret of Samson’s strength.

Samson plays a cat-and-mouse game with Delilah. The problem is he doesn’t realize that he was the mouse. Three times, Samson tricks Delilah, so she stops playing with his head and starts playing with his heart.

She said to him, “How can you say, ‘I love you,’ when you won’t confide in me? . . . You have made a fool of me and haven’t told me the secret of your great strength.”

(JUDGES 16:15)

Samson discloses the secret to his strength: “If my head were shaved, my strength would leave me, and I would become as weak as any other man” (v. 17). While he sleeps, Delilah calls the Philistines to cut his hair. They also blind and enslave him.

Rethinking Samson’s Problem

Samson’s problem was not women. His obsession with godless women was a symptom but not the real problem. Samson’s problem was Samson. His moral weakness was greater than his physical strength.

Don’t blame Delilah!

Neither Delilah nor the other women destroyed Samson; he destroyed himself. Why was he attracted to godless women? Because the women he dealt with were a reflection of the man that he was.

The bait you use most often determines the fish you catch. If you attract people with the physical, you attract them to the physical. A person will never connect with your mind if they don't know that you have one.

Women didn't defeat him; he defeated himself. The one enemy Samson could never conquer was himself! When your convictions are compromised, your character is compromised.

It was Samson's responsibility to protect his strength. Why was Delilah consumed with the secret to Samson's strength? Perhaps because the secret to a man's strength is also the key to his weakness. Samson's problem was the lack of discipline.

Your passion should not preempt your purpose.

Revisiting Samson's Purpose

Before his conception, Samson's purpose was ordained by God. As a Nazirite, Samson was to observe three vows: abstain from wine and strong drink; neither approach nor touch anything dead; and never shave or cut his hair.

Samson was "set apart to God" for the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines (Judges 13:5).

Don't take your strength for granted!

After Samson's hair is cut in this chapter, he becomes "as weak as any other man." When he awakes from his sleep, he thinks he can handle the Philistines—"But he did not know that the LORD had left him" (Judges 16:20).

Yes, the Lord left Samson; but Samson left God long before God left him. The Philistines seize him, blind his eyes, and take him captive "grinding grain in the prison" (v. 21).

*But the hair on his head began to grow
again after it had been shaved.*

(v. 22)

One evening, the rulers of the Philistines come together to celebrate their defeat of Samson by offering a sacrifice to Dagon their god. While they are in "high spirits," they bring out Samson to entertain them.

Samson asks a servant to lead him to the pillars that support the temple. With 3,000 people on the roof, Samson prays, "Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more . . . Let me die with the Philistines!" (vv. 28, 30).

He killed many more when he died than while he lived.

(v. 30)

It was in Samson's strength that he became weak; yet in his weakness, he learns the true source of his strength. After praying for strength, Samson sacrifices himself, killing thousands of his enemies by pulling down the pillars of the temple of Dagon.

Samson was able to accomplish in his death what he couldn't achieve in his life. Samson died the way he was called to live.

Finish the Story!

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is called "the Hall of Faith." It records notable feats of giants in the faith like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Listed among the likes of Moses, Gideon, David, and Samuel is Samson. What a surprise!

Samson made it in! He violated his vows, compromised his convictions, and dishonored his destiny—yet he made it in.

*I do not have time to tell about Gideon,
Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David
and Samuel and the prophets.*

(HEBREWS 11:32)

Pete Rose—one of baseball's greatest players—is not in the Hall of Fame. He was the 1963 Rookie of the Year, the 1975 World Series MVP, and a member of the All-Century Team. Pete Rose holds the batting record with 4,256 hits and played

in more winning games than anyone in the history of professional sports.

In 1989, baseball's commissioner Bart Giamatti permanently barred Pete Rose from major league baseball for gambling on games played by the Cincinnati Reds, the very team that he managed. This lifetime ban would prevent Pete Rose from being inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.

Why did Samson make it into the Hall of Faith but Pete Rose not make it into the Hall of Fame? Because baseball never forgave Pete Rose, but God forgave Samson.

God would rather forgive than judge.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

(1 JOHN 1:9)

GROUP DISCUSSION

There is no better than adversity. Every defeat, every heart-break, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to improve your performance next time. —Malcolm X

1. What do many men have in common with Samson?
2. Discuss how lust affects the human heart.
3. Elaborate on the difference between love and lust.
4. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. What is God's promise to us for the times that we are tempted?
5. Describe what it feels like to be disciplined at the hand of God.
6. Reflect on this statement:
We gain the strength of the temptation we resist. —
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Week Four—It Isn't What It Looks Like

Monday

Scripture Reading

Proverbs 6:25–29

Hebrews 11:32

Morning Prayer

Dear God, thank You for creating us in Your image and likeness. Thank You for saving us from sin and for the calling that You have placed on our lives. Help us to live up to the destiny that You have ordained for us. Amen.

Point to Ponder

It is easier to stay out than get out. —Mark Twain

Reflection

1. Describe the struggle with lust.
2. Read 2 Corinthians 10:5. How can we conquer lust?

The Next Step

Submit—How must I yield to God's will for my life?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Tuesday

Scripture Reading

Psalm 51:1–12

1 John 1:9

Morning Prayer

Lord God above, we do not always appreciate the convictions that You have established for our lives. We know that they really are for our own good. Help us to walk in destiny and to live up to Your calling on our lives. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. —James Baldwin

Reflection

1. Identify any self-defeating behaviors in your life.
2. List your personal convictions regarding your walk with God.

The Next Step

Resist—How do I fight my spiritual weaknesses?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Wednesday

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 10:13

James 1:13–15

Morning Prayer

Lord, we know that holiness is Your character reflected in our lives. May Your Word shape our lives and Your will govern our daily walk. Amen.

Point to Ponder

The battles that count aren't the ones for gold medals. The struggles within yourself—the invisible, inevitable battles inside all of us—that's where it's at. —Jesse Owens

Reflection

1. Have you ever felt disconnected from God as a result of sin? Please elaborate.
2. How does God restore us when we fall?

The Next Step

Draw Near—What have I put in the place of God in my life?

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Thursday

Scripture Reading

Galatians 5:16–21

2 Timothy 2:22

Morning Prayer

God, our heavenly Father, we have fallen so many times yet we have been sustained by Your grace and mercy. Forgive us for our sins and deliver us from self-destructive and self-defeating behaviors. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Your peers will respect you for your integrity and your character, not your possessions. —David Robinson

Reflection

1. How have you experienced the redemptive hand of God in your life?
2. Read Hebrews 12:5–6. Why does God chasten us?

The Next Step

Cleanse—What immorality needs to be confronted in my life?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Friday

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 4:17–24

1 Peter 2:11

Morning Prayer

Lord, Your Word says You chasten those You love. While it is not always pleasant, may we cherish Your discipline as evidence that we are Your children. Amen.

Point to Ponder

Stumbling is not falling. —Malcolm X

Reflection

1. Describe God's mercy during a fallen time in your life.
2. Read 1 John 2:16. How can we avoid the trappings of pride, greed, and lust?

The Next Step

Purify—How will I live a temperate life for God?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

Saturday

Scripture Reading

Proverbs 4:23

1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Morning Prayer

Father God, we have fallen so many times. We deeply regret all the times that we have broken Your heart and compromised our convictions. Today, we ask You to restore us and to help us conform to Your image. Amen.

Point to Ponder

The greatness of a man is not in how much he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively. —Bob Marley

Reflection

Reflect on the life you wish to live from this point forward and write your eulogy.

The Next Step

Lament—How will I face my deepest insecurities?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Evening Prayer

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23–24)

*How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping
it according to Your word. . . . I have treasured Your
word in my heart, so that I may not sin against You.*

(PSALM 119:9, 11, NASB)

EPILOGUE



Lessons Learned from a Mistake

*And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils;
then he ate and drank, arose, and went his
way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.*

(GENESIS 25:34, NKJV)

Captain Edward Smith ignored warnings of icebergs in the path of the *Titanic*. The ship sank and 1,517 people perished. That was a mistake.

Ford Motor Company introduced the Edsel in 1957. Within a couple of years, that proved to be a mistake.

Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden and “Lion of the North,” lost his life in the Battle of Lutzen after refusing to wear armor. That was a mistake.

After winning three World Series titles, the Boston Red Sox traded Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees. That was definitely a mistake!

Everyone makes mistakes. There are things we wish we could undo, places we wish we had never gone, and words we wish we could take back. Winston Churchill said it best:

*All men make mistakes, but only wise men learn
from their mistakes.*

Few people have made mistakes more dreadful than that of Esau. He made the devastating error of selling himself out. Esau obviously never learned that you don't sell anything you could never replace.

As the firstborn son of Isaac, Esau possessed the birthright. Its privileges were a double portion of the family estate, the authority of the father in the event of absence or death, succession to the throne (among kings), and the covenant promise made to Abraham.

One day Jacob (Esau's twin brother) prepared a stew of lentils. Esau came in from the field hungry and requested food of his brother. Jacob replied, "Sell me your birthright" (v. 31). Hebrews 12:16 says Esau sold his birthright for a single meal.

Never sell what you cannot replace.

Every Sale Isn't a Bargain

There are some things we cannot afford to sell. Cherish all of the priceless things in your life. If you evaluate what you have, you may discover that you don't need what you want. Perhaps if you love the spouse you have, they'll give you the spouse you want.

Esau's problem was the lack of a value system—"Esau despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34). He despised it in the end because he despised it in the beginning. One way to truly test the character of a man is to give him everything. Then you will see who he really is.

What was trash to Esau was treasure to Jacob. Esau gave up so much to gain so little. He lost more than he gained. The tragic truth is Esau cut himself short. That's the nature of shortcuts—they cut short! Esau was born with everything but died with nothing.

Always Look beyond the Moment

It is always tragic to allow the immediate to preempt the ultimate. Esau makes a life-changing decision on an empty stomach. A hunger-driven decision leads Esau to trade a double portion for a single meal.

Life is a matter of choices, and choices have consequences. Let us remember the moment usually does not last as long as the consequences. Many of us didn't realize that we were trading eighteen minutes for eighteen years.

Look at what Esau lost by not looking beyond the moment—the right to a double portion of the family estate; his eventual position as priest and patriarch of the family; and the covenant promise of Abraham. Esau made a decision in his weakness, not according to his worth.

Don't Live a Profane Life

In the NKJV, Hebrews 12:16 calls Esau “profane.” In our culture, profanity usually refers to language, but it more accurately refers to lifestyle. To be profane means to live a godless, blasphemous life. It is to be a lover of the world.

The Latin literally means “far from the temple.” As the holy place for the people of God, the temple established the standard of holiness. A thing was considered profane if it was inappropriate for the temple.

While we have placed much emphasis on attire, we are called to reflect the character of God in our affections, our actions, and our aspirations alike. God challenges us in 1 Peter 1:16: “Be holy, because I am holy.” We cannot be pure and profane at the same time.

Esau's Greatest Mistake

Esau's greatest mistake was not despising or selling his birthright. His greatest mistake was not living a “profane” life. It was not a series of foolish decisions. Esau's greatest mistake was that he never repented; perhaps, he did not see a reason to. There

is something wrong with you if you cannot find something wrong with you.

*A man must be big enough to admit his
mistakes, smart enough to profit from them,
and strong enough to correct them.*

—JOHN C. MAXWELL

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive
us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

(1 JOHN 1:9, NKJV)

Acknowledgments

I am indeed grateful for both my immediate and extended family. You all have made my life complete. As this book is dedicated to my father, Mr. Ennis Joe Jones Jr., this book would not have been possible without his wisdom.

The love and encouragement of our church is both indescribable and unwavering. The Peaceful Rest Missionary Baptist Church (The Family of Faith) is a phenomenal group of believers. I am extremely grateful for the men of our church. Their shared wisdom and experiences have informed this work.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my editorial team—Reverend O. Christopher Buckner, Dr. Cherry H. Burton, Sherra Crawford, and Emma Shepard. Without you, this project and others would not have been possible.

Much Love and Many Thanks!

About the Author

R. Timothy Jones is married to the former Sherbrina M. Trammel and father of three fine children—Timothy Jr., Titus, and Mauri. He earned a Doctor of Ministry from Virginia Union University. Dr. Jones has served as pastor of the Peaceful Rest Missionary Baptist Church (The Family of Faith) since 1994.

In the summer 2008 issue, *The African American Pulpit* magazine cited him as one of “Twenty to Watch.” He was also featured in the September 2019 issue of *Epitome* magazine. Dr. Jones has served as a denominational leader at the local, state, and national levels.

Dr. Jones is an Adjunct Professor of Religion at Jarvis Christian College. He is the author of *A Blessed and Highly Favored Life*, *Soul Care*, *Joy*, and *Lessons Learned the Hard Way*. He is a 2015 Fellow of the Black Theology and Leadership Institute at the Princeton Theological Seminary. Dr. Jones lives by three daily affirmations: “To thyself be true, to God be faithful, and to others be kind.”