We!r:D

Becoming a not-so-ordinary teenager

By: Lizzy Wilson

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To Be Expected

 Most people cringe at even the mention of the word ‘teenager’.  Others have the mindset that teenagers are ignorant, selfish, irresponsible, lazy, self-centered, and rebellious just to name a few. And, most teens unnecessarily live up to the labels given to them. The last one I mentioned, rebellion fuels them all. Rebellion is a refusal of obedience or order.  The culture we live in considers it normal for a teenager to rebel. They excuse it, brush it off, say ‘It’s just a faze, we all have to go through it’, and even encourage it. An article from Wikipedia states “As part of their development into young adults... teenage rebellion has been recognized within psychology as a set of behavioral traits.” “It is used to express their independence and individuality.” However, the fact that rebellion is accepted in society today bothers me. It is thought that it is necessary or even required to go through this stage during the adolescent period. Rebellion should not, and does not, have to be a part of a teenager’ life. As you are entering teenage life, you can decide now that you will not be a teenager of rebellion.
Submission is the opposite of rebellion. It is defined as: “the condition of being submissive, humble, or compliant; an act of submitting to the authority or control of another; the act of submitting to the power of another.” Let’s study some verses:

“\_\_\_\_\_ them that have the rule over you, and \_\_\_\_\_\_yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” (Hebrews 13.17)

“For \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is as the sin of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.”(1 Samuel 15.22)

“Likewise, ye younger, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ yourselves to the elder. Yea, all of you be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:” (1 Peter 5.5,6)

“\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” (Ephesians 5.21)

“\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4.7)

So, we are to submit ourselves first to God, and second, to the authority that He has placed in our lives. That authority is your parents, pastor, teachers, coach, or boss. Obedience is what God wants from us. Just submit to, or obey, the authority in your life. Whether we want to or not, whether we understand why, we are to *obey right away with a cheerful heart.* Obeying our authority honors God. Choose now that you will have a beautifully obedient life, rather than a stubborn rebellious one. It’s weird to be an obedient teenager, but it is right.

What is rebellion? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Does rebellion honor God? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What are we to do instead of refusing to obey? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How have you not been submitting or obeying your authority like God wants? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How can you better obey the authority in your life today? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 1

It’s Your Move

I know that y’all are not blind to what goes on around you. Y’all can see; you understand it, I know I did when I was your age. I saw people I used to look up to and respect fall and disappoint me. I saw former members of the church leave and forget God. I saw attendance dwindling; I saw my youth group becoming smaller. I saw kids, teens, and adults all hurting. I saw teens in rebellion or defiance of God, or simply have no interest in Him. I saw families destroyed and marriages failing. I saw love fading; love for the Lord, and the love toward other people. I saw friendships crumble as they became enemies through un-forgiveness and bitterness. I saw people who we ‘rubbed shoulders’ with week after week, and yet, were over-looked, lonely, and uncared for. I saw my youth group losing its zeal and determination for the Lord. I saw a loss of faithfulness and increase in ‘comfortability’ in the church. I saw a fear of involvement, and even those who ‘acted busy’ to avoid being assigned a job, and then the resentment for a job they got ‘stuck’ with. I saw a lack of thankfulness. I saw all this, and I know it continues, but God gave us more than eyes.

If you want to see a change, you must make a change; and in order to change, you must be willing to be uncomfortable. One of the first Sundays with my youth pastor growing up - I don’t even remember what He was referring to - I recall him making a remark, “It’s like playing ping-pong, the ball comes to you and you can’t just stand there and do nothing. The balls in your court, you must hit it back...” So, the weight of *this* situation is on our shoulders. Our tendency is to pass the blame, but that won’t change anything. This generation needs to step it up and get in the game. The balls in your court. It’s your move. Quit trying to pass the ball of responsibility off. You can’t just stand there, move! Leave it all on the court.  Be the cheerleader for those who need it. Get in shape yourself! We have no control over what our teammates do, but we do have control over what we do.

What can we do? Pray. Be faithful. Obey God. Invite others. Witness. Visit. Encourage. Care. Love the Lord. Love others. Forgive. Get involved. Give. Be thankful. Work. Support your leaders. Pray for them. Help them. *Get in the game!* So, what are you waiting for? It’s your move.

Acts 9.6, “And he trembling and astonished said, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ must do.”

Ask God to show you what *you* can do. Ask your Sunday School teacher or youth worker. Then, write down one thing you can do for God this week. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 2

Epic Fail

Have you ever watched a little kid, or do you have a younger sibling who is just starting to walk? It is hilarious as you observe their efforts. They are very wobbly and lose their balance easily. Falling is a constant at this point. They take a step, and fall. Get up, and fall. Stand up again, and topple over. They will start to pick themselves back up, and fall in the process… get up yet again, take a step, and do a face plant. Such is the life of a baby learning to walk. Still they always get up one more time than they fall, because they learn how to walk like the rest of us. Failure is a great teacher in that area.

        As I was recently reading through the book of Judges, the first thing I noticed were the subject headings over the different passages. Chapter 1.1-20, "Failure of Judah". Chapter 1.21, "Failure of Benjamin". Chapter 1.22-29, "Failure of Tribes of Joseph". Chapter 1:30, "Failure of Zebulun". Chapter 1.31-32, "Failure of Asher". Chapter 1.33, "Failure of Naphtali". Chapter 1.34-36, "Failure of Dan". Key word? *Failure*. You’re so smart! In the chapter commentary, it was mentioned that this book, Judges, could also be named "*The Book of Failure*".

       The Bible is full of the failures of God's servants. David failed and followed his desires rather than the commands of God. Samson failed the consequence of which was death. Thomas failed having a lack of faith. Peter failed denying Christ. These are just a few. They were all human, as we are, and they failed many times.

           My favorite styles of food are Oriental, Italian, and Southern cooking. In many oriental cuisines, you find a pan-fried dumpling-like awesomeness known as pot stickers which would have never been in existence if it weren't for a failure in making dumplings. Michael Jordan was cut from his high-school basketball team. Walt Disney was fired from a newspaper for "lacking imagination" and "having no original ideas". Oprah Winfrey was demoted from her job because she "wasn't fit for TV". Albert Einstein couldn’t speak until he was almost 4 years old, and his teachers said he'd never amount to much. We all know how these lives turned out. - For most, their *failures* were said to have *encouraged* them to be who they are today.

         If you have never failed, you have never tried anything new. Amateurs built the ark, professionals built the titanic. Failure is proof you are trying. So why did I say all this? Well, like young children, we fall and fail. Trying to pull ourselves back up, we fall flat on our face again. We need the strong hand of our Father to help us up. Everyone has failed -  many times over! Strong spiritual leaders, and laypeople, the same.  We all need forgiveness. When you fail, do not quit and do not get discouraged. Use that time of failure to your advantage. Thomas Edison, in the process of inventing the light bulb failed 10,000 times. He promptly stated, "I did not fail. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work…If I find 10,000 ways something won't work, I haven't failed. I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward." You can use failing to your advantage, it is true. Now, you cannot purposely fail and expect to get ahead, it does not work that way. However, when you do fail, just look up; your Father is waiting to pick you up.

"The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he \_\_\_\_\_\_, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."(Ps.37.23 & 24)

Failing doesn't make you a failure. But when you do fall, do not stay there. Do not get comfortable and make failure your home. Always get back up!

“For a just man \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ seven times, and riseth up \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_..."(Prov. 24.16)

Is failure always a bad thing? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Can God use failure to teach us things? (Romans 8.28) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What have you avoided doing for the Lord in fear of failure? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 3

Girls with Swords

Many thoughts follow that phrase.
For some, maybe a sense of fear. For others, a sense of courage or empowerment. Still, for others, maybe it sparks a picture of the feminist movement. Personally, I see Rapunzel. Or, the old lady from Ratatouille with the house full of mice and a gun. Crazy maybe, but I see a Bible study group.

 In reference to God's Word, it is "\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_than any two-edged \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and  marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

 "Put on the whole \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.... the sword of the Spirit, which is the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_" (Ephesians 6.11, 17)

 We are in a battle. A fierce and fiery battle between the right and wrong; a battle not against \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in high places. (Eph. 6.12) Our war is invisible, but that does not make it any less powerful, or minimize the importance or risk of this battle, by any means. This is something that needs to be taken very seriously. War is not a joking matter. It is no game. Look around, see the casualties. Many are wounded. Others have betrayed Who they are fighting for, switching sides. We, who are saved, are part of His army. But who are we really fighting for? Are we giving the enemy (Satan) opportunity to advance, or are we standing our ground? Take your place in this battle. The awesome part about it is, Jesus already fought, and won, for us. Ultimately, the victory is guaranteed. But we are still here to fight the daily battle against the flesh. This means war. We have been called to put on many pieces of armor for protection from the darts the enemy will throw at us. But, we have been given *one* weapon. Only one opportunity to fight back. That is our sword, the Bible. It is our only defense. Now, you cannot just run out there into the heat of battle and aimlessly wave it around, you must first learn how to use it; master it; to study it.
Pick up your cross, grab your sword and fight! Don't sink into complacency, and don't give in to the enemies advances. We are children of God- royalty. We are princesses and this is WAR!

 Have you been preparing for defense against the enemy every day through studying your Bible and listening as God speaks to you? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Commit to a specific place and time to read your Bible every day. It will be less likely to be forgotten if you make a habit out of it. “I will read my Bible every day at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (location) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (time).

Read: Proverbs 4

Faith or Fear

At any given point, one of two things is ruling your heart. Both cannot exist without conflict; they cannot coincide. Being opposites, you must choose between the two which one you allow to control you. Either*faith* or *fear*will be prominent. If we truly have faith in God and are trusting Him in each circumstance, fear will fade away, because both cannot exist in your heart. You cannot have total faith and be fearful at the same time. Studying this subject on a personal basis really brought comfort to my heart and, honestly, I can add nothing to it. So, I will simply allow His words do all the talking.

**FEAR IS NOT OF GOD**

 "But without \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ it is impossible to please him..." (Hebrews 11.6)

"For God hath not given us the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1.7)

" ...for whatsoever is not of faith is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_." (Romans 14.23)

**FAITH IS NOT LOGICAL**

"That your faith should not stand in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but in the power of God." (1 Corinthians 2.5)

 "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_." (Proverbs 3.5)

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of things not seen." (Hebrews 11.1)

 "(For we walk by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, not by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_:)" (2 Corinthians 5.7)

**FAITH OR FEAR?**

"No man can serve two \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6.24)

**FAITH IN HIM BRINGS PEACE**

 "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: because he trusteth in thee." (Isaiah 26.3)

 "Peace I leave with you, \_\_\_\_\_ peace I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14.27)

"And the peace of God, which passeth all \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, shall keep your \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4.7)

**FAITH IN HIM BRINGS PATIENCE**

 "Knowing this, that the trying of your faith \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ patience." (James 1.3)

**FAITH IN HIM REMINDS US OF HIS PRESENCE**

"Fear thou not; for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." (Isaiah 41.10)

"Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go before thee; he will not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thee, nor forsake thee." (Deuteronomy 31.6)

Read: Proverbs 5

Unseen

Growing up, my Pastor's youngest daughter got married at a garden in Missouri. The location was very beautiful. Afterwards we were encouraged to stick around on the property. My younger siblings and I were able to convince my parents and another couple to go explore one of the caves there with us. The cave had a lot of clay within the walls, and we were unprepared, so we were careful what we did. We started our journey with our small group of seven - three of which were not overly adventurous - and limited knowledge of what we would find. Small crawl spaces, a few snakes, bats and a drop off were what we knew from those who had gone before us. A few hundred feet in, we hear the group of little boys ahead of us. They had found the bats and were doing everything in their power to stir them up which terrified the moms of the group. Coming up behind us was the dad of one of the little boys going to get them who also retrieved the flashlight we had been borrowing, the only light source we had.  So, there we stood. Four adults and three kids in the darkest dark I had ever seen. Hundreds of feet into the cave with no idea where we were. I think the women we having panic attacks. I thought it was amazing! Adrenaline rushing, I wanted to push on. Practically crawling, we tried to go ahead. Only to make it a few feet and walk into a wall. I accidentally bumped into the other lady that was with us, and scared her half to death. Our perception was off, assumingly due to the darkness. Common sense beat adventure and we were forced to disappointedly turn around and go out the way we came.
 We have all been placed into dark situations where we cannot see the light of the end of the tunnel. The light we've held onto gets taken from our hands. Into the darkest dark we've ever experienced, we're on your knees, crawling ahead, afraid of what we may meet. We know danger is out there just waiting for us. Our perception is off and have no idea where we are. Every small thing we bump into is magnified into epic proportions.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, hath shined in our hearts, to give the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4.6)

 “People are like stained glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.” (Elisabeth Kubler-Ross) Without the light of Christ shining in us, when we get in the dark, we would be completely lost.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and in him is no darkness at all.” However, If His light shines in the darkness, and He is always here, then why do we still find ourselves in the dark with no light? (1 John 1.5)

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (John 1.5)

His light is always present, we just do not always see it or understand it. We overlook it. We do not always see the way He is moving in our lives or sense His presence. But that does not mean He is not here and working. *Simply because our comprehension of light is limited, doesn't mean it isn't in existence.*
Don't make hasty assumptions that The Light is not around simply because you cannot see it.

Have you ever seen God working in your life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What would His working in someone’s life look like? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Does God sometimes feel far away? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Have you been seeking Him in prayer and Bible study? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 6

Expiration Date

Knowledge of the future is reserved for God alone. Such knowledge bears much power and responsibility. So much so that we as humans are incapable of controlling it. If for only one moment human beings were given the ability to see the future, the course of mankind would forever change. Life as it is known would cease. A new world would begin. A world of insanity. A world of death.
 We have made our home in this shifty race we call "life".  Life is cruel and unfair; it proves itself on a daily basis. This world, with each passing day, everyone dies a little more, knowing they have one less day to live. The reality is harsh, staring them in the face. Everyone is born with a date that they will die. The hard truth cannot be ignored. Everyone dies. But some die early because they refuse to live. Many never live to their full potential for they either believe they have all the time in the world that was never promised them, or they give up early knowing there is nothing they can do to change their fate.

 Ecclesiastes 3.1-2, [To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:](http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Ecclesiastes-3-1/) A time to be born, and a time to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_…”

   We all have an expiration date. Such a date is unknown. For some it may be sooner than expected. Others, may have years ahead of them. All we have is NOW. Life is now, this is not a rehearsal.

   “Watch the sunrise at least once a year, put a lot of marshmallows in your hot chocolate, lie on your back and look at the stars, never buy a coffee table you can’t put your feet on, never pass up a chance to jump on a trampoline, don’t overlook life’s small joys while searching for the big ones.” –H. Jackson Brown Jr.

   “Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, that appeareth for a little time, and then \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ away.” – James 4.13 & 14

   How many days do you have to live? You do not know. Today could be your last. How many more breaths are you destined to take before your last? With each passing moment, you are one moment closer to dying. What are you doing with those moments you have been given? What mark are you leaving in your world; your town; your school; your workplace; your friends; your church; your family? What steps are you taking to make a difference and change lives?

   Proverbs 27.1, “BOAST NOT thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ may bring forth.”

    We are given a set amount of time. Every second is precious. Are we wasting it, or are we using them to each moments’ full potential for Him?  You are a perishable item. Live accordingly.

How are you redeeming your time? How could you be using your time for a better purpose? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What do you spend the most of your time on? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Could you be using that time for anything better? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 7

My Greatest Strength

 “What’s that? Are you okay?” These are questions that send me on a frantic search for words and a shortened explanation. My response would be, “It’s normal.” Educating others on my physical ailments is something I tend to shy away from. I leave doctors speechless, educate nurses, and gross out my little brother. All of which can be very entertaining. Three years ago I received a label to what had followed me through my teen years. “Hidradenitis Suppurativa.” I had no idea what it was, but at least I had a name. I saw more doctors, specialists, and surgeons that were clueless as to what to do with me than ever before.

 So then, what is it? Hidradenitis suppurativa (HS), is a chronic inflammatory skin condition. Outbreaks are painful and may persist for years with interspersed periods of inflammation and infection. This process often forms open wounds that do not heal and frequently leads to significant scarring. At this stage, complete healing is usually not possible, and progression is variable, with some experiencing remission for months to years at a time, while others may worsen and require multiple surgeries ultimately progressing in severity. As the deep bumps heal, scars can form. As the skin continues to heal and scar, the scars thicken. When thick scars form, moving can be difficult.

There is little confirmed but much speculation as to what causes HS. It has very little support, next-to-no treatment, and no awareness. The disease is not contagious. Heredity is indicated among certain ethnic groups and is autoimmune in nature. Onset is most common in the late teens and early 20s. Currently no cure nor any consistently effective treatment is known. Incision and other procedures may provide symptomatic relief. “HS has the highest impact on patients’ quality of life among all assessed dermatological diseases.” It has been one of the most painful, emotional, and trying experiences of my life.

 That being said, HS is the greatest gift I have ever received. I am not “just saying” that. This is fresh on my mind because its pain is a daily reality. HS is one of my greatest weakness – physically and emotionally. I do not enjoy it, however, my greatest weakness, if taken properly, is also my greatest strength. Given the opportunity, I would desire to remove it from my person, but the more I consider it, the more I realize how precious the pain is. A seemingly hopeless situation then turns into one that radiates hope. How does a physically and emotionally debilitating disease provide a measure of comfort? The knowledge of God’s control and plan in the lives of His children.
*"I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of* *pain."* **~ Charles Spurgeon**
*"God never allows* *pain* *without a purpose in the lives of His children. He never allows Satan, nor circumstances, nor any ill-intending person to afflict us unless He uses that affliction for our good. God never wastes* *pain. He always causes it to work together for our ultimate good, the good of conforming us more to the likeness of His Son."* **~ Jerry Bridges**

 “Suppur”-girl. Part of me leans toward independence continually. The need to be “tough” and tackle everything on my own. My problems are my problems, that how they have always been. Who am I to place them on someone else? Despite that, I find myself learning excuses such as, “I’m short, can you get that?” What I am saying is, "It is more convenient for you to get this," when reality says, “I cannot.”  I know it is an impossibility for me to accomplish, and I do not want to prove that reality so I will not try. I brush it off with many excuses but when it comes down to it, I can’t. Accepting limitations and reliance upon someone goes against what I know, and yet it is exactly what I am supposed to do. It is only through the Lord that I can accomplish anything. By Him have all of us received life, breath, and strength to go through life. Greater than any human help is the comfort, help, and presence of the Lord.

“I can do all things through Christ which \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ me.” (Philippians 4.13)
**“**And he said unto me, My \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12.9-10)
 “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thee; yea, I will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thee; yea, I will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” (Isaiah 41.10)
“He giveth \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that \_\_\_\_\_\_ upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isaiah 40.29-31)
“But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26)

 There are many things I have learned and realized through these experiences. "*Pain* *is no evil, unless it conquers us."*  **~ Charles Kingsley.**Not only do I recognize and am reminded of my frailty and weakness, it is used as a means to humble me. Once you have come to the point where you can no longer hide it, you are then faced with a new reality of expressing it to others without turning them away or grossing them out. I like to live an open, un-hidden life however, very few know or understand this side of me.
 HS places the unknown and uncontrollable at the forefront of life and causes it to be required to be accepted in order to deal with it. If the world stopped spinning for a moment, we would all fly off its surface. If the earth shifted a bit, we would all either burn or freeze. God is in control of everything at all times. No matter the situation, rest in knowing that He is in control of it. He has the capability to take it away with just a thought. If He chooses to allow you to continue to experience it, there is greater growth available with it than if it were not in your life.

 It has also reminded me to look beyond myself no matter how I feel. I realize things are said with good intentions, but at times words meant to comfort are simply quite humorous. I find it entertaining to listen to others speak of not feeling well. How flippantly many view chronic illness. It can be frustrating as others believe I am faking it, simply lazy, unsocial and rude, or "tired" and sleep all the time. It would be easy to sulk into self-pity and elevate my "problems". But you know what, everyone has issues they have to deal with and even the smallest thing to us may be the largest burden to their heart. There is always someone who has bigger problems than you. Do what you can with what you have, use it to push you to be a blessing to others, and praise the Lord through it all. Moments of pain have been some of the most precious moments with my God. Never underestimate the blessing of pain. I leave you with these quotes by Davidd Wilkerson and Elizabeth Elliot

*“As I look back over fifty years of ministry, I recall innumerable tests, trials and times of crushing pain. But through it all, the Lord has proven faithful, loving, and totally true to all his promises.”*  **~ D.W.**

*“I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.”* **~ E.E**

**Read : Proverbs 8**

Playing God

I have played a lot of different games in my life. From Uno, Apples to Apples, Dixit, Organ Attack, to Chutes and Ladders. "The Quiet Game" is my mom's favorite. There's another type of reality game we tend to play, but in doing so we are playing something riskier than a trivial game of Pictionary. I'm talking about 'playing God'. I think we play God in many ways without even realizing it.

 We 'play God' in how we ***perceive*** Him. We try to create this idea of Who He is in our head, and then attempt to play it out, or find it in reality. We have this idea of Who He is, and how He thinks. When no one can find out the ways of God, and His thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts that we cannot understand them. Our position in the game is revealed when a tragedy hits our life. One who doubts or questions God and His goodness; one who asks, "Well, if God is good, why did He allow this?"; that is one who has had an active position in the game of "Playing God". They have allowed this personal idea of who He is (or, rather, who He is NOT) to overshadow who He really is. They have placed their idea of Him higher than Who He is. We need to destroy our view of God and replace it with the knowledge of who He really is.

 We 'play God' by ***second-guessing*** His will. We tend to conjure up this plan in attempt to 'help God out'. I suppose, in attempt to figure out how things should work out, what He should do, and when He should do it. We question and doubt Him when things do not go the way we planned them out. All the while believing that we are listening to His leading and following His will – myself included. I question in moments when all I need to do is trust Him. His way is perfect. We tend to 'play God' by attempting to play out *our vision* of His perfect will in our lives. When things do not go as planned, we look up and wonder what happened. Instead, we should be looking inside ourselves and asking the same question. His plan doesn't match up to yours? Good! To quote Tangled, "Your dream stinks!". Do not question His way; do not place your will in higher priority than His.

 We 'play God' by allowing***pride*** in our hearts. When we become prideful, we sin. There is no doubt about it, and there is no changing that fact. Any sin we commit, pride can and will be found in the center of it. We esteem ourselves higher than God, allowing pride to steal the throne of our hearts. God resists the proud. He hates pride. Allowing our hearts to become filled with pride is esteeming our will higher than His commands**. (Prov. 8.12-13; Prov. 6.16-17; Proverbs 15.5)**

 Lastly, we 'play God' by ***becoming a god****;* we 'play God' by taking our life into our own hands. When you place anything above God in your life, it has become a god to you. The god most often found in peoples' lives is self. The god of self will destroy your life. The god of self is wicked. The god of self is a liar; it tells you that what you desire will satisfy you, only to find yourself lacking and empty. Our life is not our own., and when we take life by the reigns and try to steer ourselves, we are headed for a dead end. There is a point when God will allow you to go your own way. He will give you to your own lusts. But, when you win that battle, you actually lose. **Ecclesiastes 2.10 & 11** says, "And whatsoever mine eyes desired I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy..... Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do; and, behold, all was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." When you seemingly "win" the battle of wills, you lose. When you follow your will, 'all is vanity and vexation of the spirit'. And, before you brush this warning off, thinking it would never happen to you, the Bible says to the man that thinketh he standeth to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ lest he \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. **Ecclesiastes. 2.15,** There are no sins specific to bad people. I would rather be able to say as the psalmist did in Ps. 139.13, "thou hast \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ my reins". I want to be able to say, "Thou, God, hast led me all the way... and it was in that perfect way that I followed."

Is there any way you are not trusting in His plans for your life and trying to handle things on your own? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Are you fully committed and willing to do whatever God asks of you, even if it means giving up what you desire? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Is there any way that you have not given God His rightful place in your life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 9

Growing Pains

 How many of y'all, either now or when you were younger, have experienced growing pains? Throbbing, literal pain in your legs or arms? I struggled with that as I was growing. Sometimes it would wake me up in the night, and I couldn't go back to sleep. Massaging them would slightly soothe it at times, or I would get up and walk around. The pain would be so intense I could not do anything until it passed. At the age of 22, the time of growth is passed for me, and I am still short. In fact, I can sit on a curb and swing my legs. I'm also always the last person to know when it rains.

When we are saved, we are born into the family of God. That thought alone is incredible. At that point, we are a new baby Christian. Whether that is age 5, 15, or 25. We cannot stay that way though, we must grow up. I cannot stand it when older kids, teenage boys especially, whine. They throw a fit and cry because they don't get their way. Really?! Grow up already! Someone asked me, "Are you twelve?". I simply replied, "Yes, on a scale of one to ten." As we age, we should mature physically, mentally, and emotionally otherwise, there's a problem. God created life for growth. If you're not growing, you're wilting. We should also be growing spiritually. You can't be 20 years old and still ride a bike with training wheels... that's just weird. So, why are the years passing by, and you're still acting like a baby Christian?
 As we grow, more is expected of us. We gain more responsibility. We can stand on our own, without someone helping us. We become stronger. An infant is 100% dependent on its parents. As we grow, we learn to do things on our own. We make personal decisions, big and small, good and bad. However there comes a point in every persons’ life where they must choose to grow up.

1 Corinthians 13.11, "When I was a child, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as a child, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as a child, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_as a child: but when I became a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, I put away childish things."

 We must mature and learn to grow up. Personally I did not want to grow up. I did not want the added pressure, stress, and responsibility of adult life. I'd rather get the benefits of age, while staying a child. Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. We must grow. As much as I may not enjoy it, I choose to try to grow up.
Okay, so, let's say we have decided to go along with this whole 'growing up' thing. You can expect to experience growing pains.
 Growing up, the fear of the future sent shivers down my spine. I hate the fact that I could not understand it, or see it. I plan things. Patience is not my best quality. But, on things like my future, I would rather have everything planned out. If I could have one 'super power', I would now say that it would be to be able to see into the future.

 When I was out hunting, my dad and I were walking back to the car. It was incredibly dark and I could barely see in front of me. The dim flashlight I was carrying only illuminated a few steps ahead. Then, at that moment, it was like God spoke to me. “Trust me. I know the path. I will enlighten your darkness one step at a time, I will lead you where you are to go. You may not be able to see the whole way, but I will show you what you need to see to make it there. But you must keep your eyes straight ahead, otherwise, you will fall.” You may ask, when will I know His will?!!! “God never hurries, there are no deadlines against which He must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves” ~ A.W. Tozer. I have had to patiently wait and trust in Him. As much as I want to plan my life, it has a way of surprising me with unexpected things that will make me happier than originally planned. The Lord has blessed me with so many unexpected blessings. I’ve had to understand that my unknown future is safe in the hands of my al-knowing God, and I don’t have to be afraid of missing it because if I am following Him, I can’t. I don’t have to figure it out. He hasn’t hid it from me. The Bible never once said, “figure it out.” but over and over it say’s “trust God.” He’s already got it all figured out. Man says, “show me and I’ll trust you”, God says, “Trust me, and I’ll show you.”
 Maybe we face the uncomfortable growing pains of having to learn the lessons of trust, or patience. Trials and tests of our faith can be a pain, but in reality, they are a blessing. They work for us.
2 Corinthians 4.17-18, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, but at the things which are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: for the things which are seen are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; but the things which are not seen are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."
Romans 8.28, "And we know that all things \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for good to them that love \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to them who are the called according to his purpose."
 Each lesson is a precious blessing placed into our care. It's always just for blessing meant and in love from Heaven sent. Or, maybe you are learning to "take your training wheels off"; to take ownership of your relationship with Christ. Whatever you're growing pains are, they will be worth it. The seasons of pain in my life always benefited me in some way. Even when I didn't understand them, or still don't, there's was a purpose for it. My purpose through it is to glorify him. I fail miserably. Daily. But by His grace, I can bring honor and glory to Him.
 The only soothing comfort and relief is Christ. The only thing that can comfort the human heart is the One who made it. The only way we can grow is through the help of our Father. Yes, I need Him. Ten years from now, I will need Him. Twenty years from then, I will still need Him. We are His child, and no matter how old we get, we will ALWAYS need Him! You're never too old, too cool, or too mature to hold your Father's hand. As we journey along this road to adult-hood, we need Him all the more. We can't make it alone. There's too much pain involved, too much stress and pressure we will face. But with Him as our guide and comfort, we can do it. Are you with me?

Read: Proverbs 10

Pain Reliever

 Pain in life is inevitable. Suffering is optional. For example, any dedicated athlete goes through pain during training. However, they will explain to you that it's a "good pain". They know that pushing through the temporary pain and uncomfortableness they are experiencing is only making them stronger. It's not the pain that tears you down, it's your response to it. As, some of the happiest people live in constant pain.
 Some people can handle pain better than others, but either way, it affects us all. Most of us have an extremely low pain tolerance. It doesn't take much before we can't handle it any longer and we desperately search for some relief. We don't like to be uncomfortable. Physically, emotionally or spiritually. When we are in pain, we run for something to take it away. We each have our pain relievers we rely on. Physically, we seek out the Tylenol and Advil bottles, or one of *my* best friends, Panway. Medication or natural remedies bring us comfort in times of physical pain. Other types of pain that come with life are often more excruciating, harder to deal with, and more difficult to relieve than physical pain. Still, we each have our arsenal of "pain relievers" we use when the pain begins to make its way into our lives again.

We take a dose of ***Denial***.
 This pain reliever may possibly be the worst one could take. I have learned those who suffer, and try to deny the pain, cover it up, and pretend it never happened hurt worse than those who deal with it. The pain magnifies when you try to pretend it's not there. You can't run away from pain. Pain attaches itself and becomes part of your life; you can't run away from yourself. Not only that, but when denial wears off and we finally do face reality, it's going to be a lot harder.

We take a strong dose of ***Friends***.
 Now, I'm all for friends. However, we can tend to use friends as our pain reliever, thinking they can make it go away. Friends, or family, were never meant to take that place in our life. There is a great comfort that can come from knowing someone else is there for you and that will listen. But, every human has their own problems, and knows just as little about relieving your pain as you do.

We consume ourselves with ***Hobbies*.**
 For some reason, I suppose video games stand out the most to me. Probably because I have seen it done. Before all the gamers get defensive and mad at me, it can be applied to anything such as that. For example, *Pinterest* is my "video game" in that, it's my go-to activity. Other things including, but not limited to, *Music, Work,*and*Exercise*tend to be use as ways to escape our pain. Even *food* can be a "pain reliever" in many ways. Come on, why else would there be so many "Comfort foods"?! We all have our things we turn to when we are in pain.

We ***sleep***the pain away.
 As I opened my Bible last night, my eyes went to this verse. Job 7:13, "...My \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint" Isn't that what we do sometimes? Well, it doesn't go away. The next verse says "Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions". You can't escape this way! And kind of like denial, we're hoping it will go away on its own. Rather than facing the issue and enduring the pain, we ignore it, trying to gain some relief through our sleep. After all, when you're asleep, you're not sad, you're not hurt; you feel nothing. But, it's not going to help; it'll only make it worse.

Many seek relief from ***Drugs or Alcohol.***
 Personally, I do not struggle with these as others have but I have seen the effect it can have on a life. This is an empty road. Some try to 'drown their sorrows' and forget everything, even for a moment on some high. But, once reality returns, you're left in a worse off position than you were before. Not only are you still in pain from before, but now you're in the grips of potential, or probable, addiction. It's much better to stay away from this type of "Pain Reliever" all together. "\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is a mocker, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." (Proverbs 20.1)

 Now, I haven't even touched the surface of the many things we use, but I think you get the idea. However, there's a flaw in the whole "Pain Reliever" thing. What we use to bring us comfort, doesn't take the pain away, it simply covers it up. We *do* or *use* things to drown our sorrows and escape reality for a time, but numbing the pain only makes it worse when you finally do feel it. None of our remedies will ever remove the pain. That's because we are using fake versions of it. We're not using the real thing. The only thing that can soothe the human heart is the presence of the One who made it. As humans, our lives are consumed with a never-ending search of something (or someone) that will comfort us. We are often led to believe that there are many paths to relief from the pain this life brings but we are left disappointed and wanting. That's because we are indulging in things that are faulty. They have been tested, and the results prove they lack what's necessary to provide true comfort and relief.
 When we need anything, we really need Him. He is the only true comfort, peace, and relief available. Even if we must simply endure the pain, He will give us the strength and grace to do so. Nothing else on this world can give us such a hope and promise. The next time you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation, you get hurt, or the pain and struggle returns; don’t grab your all-too-familiar pain reliever, run to Christ. Go to the real thing. Get relief from the source. Settle for nothing less than the best.

Deuteronomy 31.8, "And the LORD, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed."

Matthew 11.28-29, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you \_\_\_\_\_..."

2 Corinthians 1.3-7, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_;..."

Psalms 55.22, "Cast \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

John 14.27, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Psalms 23.4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Psalms 9.9, "The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in times of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."

John 14.18," I will not leave you \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_: I will come to you.”

Read: Proverbs 11

O, Be Careful Little Eyes

 Psalm 119.37, “Turn \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.”

 In this present time, graphic images and descriptions of violence and lewdness are not only around every corner, but thrown in our faces consistently. Violent and sexual images deeply affect us, yet they are common elements in popular television, books, games, and movies, and influence everything posted online.  It is more than just suggested themes and innuendo, though those are wrong enough- such sin is blatantly “out there”, flaunted, and glorified. When we repeatedly entertain ourselves with – for lack of a better word - bad things, we change our values and attitudes without realizing it.
 Psalm 101.3, “I will \_\_\_\_\_ no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to me.”

 “I will set” means more than simply seeing something, it implies the idea of intently looking. The word set means simply to put; to set, station, appoint, fix, set mind to. To set something in front of us means that we are choosing to place ourselves under the influence of it. There is no chance involved.

  “It shall not cleave unto me” or, their evil works shall not become mine. It gives me the impression of the evil that not only sinks into them, but attaches itself to them and becomes part of their existence and who they are.
  What we see effects what we think about, and what we think about effects what we do. In turn, what we think about affects who we are. It actually becomes part of who we are.

 1 John 2.16, For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (Italics added for emphasis)

 Little choices cause a snowball effect until we are so desensitized to the wickedness in our entertainment. We use “entertainment” as an excuse to engage in things we would not normally do.

 “For as he \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in his heart, so is he…”, Proverbs 23.7

Philippians 4.8, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever thing 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, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on these things.”

  It kills me to see the ones I care deeply about – who are Christians – engage themselves in various forms of entertainment that is laced with violence, language, sensuality, and glorifying various types of sin.

 Lamentations 3.51 says, “Mine \_\_\_\_\_ affecteth mine heart…”

 What you see, what you play, what you watch… affects you deeply.

 Oh be careful little eyes what you see…

Does what you see effect your heart? (Lamentations 3:51)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Have you been playing or watching things you know are wrong? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What can you replace those things with? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 12

Loving God. Loving Others.

 Mark 12. 30-31, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

 I love people, almost to a defalt. It comes natural for me. I am not best friends with many, but I am a friend to all. I simply want to be there for people, love them, and help them. When I care about someone, it is very deeply. When I am close to someone, I try to give them every bit of love and care I have. Despite that, I’m not perfect. I fail. I fail to show how I really feel and express it in a way they can understand what I am really trying to convey. Yet life happens. I don’t know, maybe I am the only one this happens to. You pour your life into someone and it appears to be not only unappreciated, but resented. All the love you invested seemed to be unseen, or as you attempt to gently warn them of the road they are headed down, you are all the more pushed away and your warnings disregarded. Instead of being appreciated, for one reason or another, the person takes your highly valued, cherished, and invested relationship and throws it to the ground. Instead of bouncing, it shatters. The flying pieces cut deep and the wounds are still painful. Misrepresentation, misunderstanding, and accusations are just the beginning.
 There have been situations in life that left me with the wonder of if it is worth it… all the effort, all the time, all the investment of emotion and love, and it seems it was all for nothing. I was reading in Corinthians one day in the midst of the struggle and found a verse where Paul expressed his heart that I saw mirrored in my own.
 Galatians 4.11, “I am \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

 Paul had been writing to the church in Galatia warning them and encouraging them to do right. However, two verses earlier he expressed, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” They wanted to go back to their old ways of living. Then he said, *I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.*Paul was worried for them. He worried that everything he had taught them and warned them about was for nothing. He was worried that they had learned nothing from all he had invested into them. One book earlier Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12.15, “And I will very \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I be loved.” Both verses mirror and begin to express the frustration I have wrestled in my heart.

 The latter verse expresses how we should value a life. He says that he will *very gladly* give him everything he had no matter how they treated him in return or how they responded. The verse emphasizes *unconditional love.*

 Romans 12.9-10 says, “Let love be without \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_one another;” Dissimulation means sincere. It is saying that love is to be sincere; real; not fake. This passage is teaching to love others to the point of placing them above ourselves; placing their feelings above your own. Despite the value they place on you or how they respond to you. Again, its *unconditional love*.

 1 Corinthians 13.4-7, “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ all things.”
This is love. This is *true*, Christ-centered love. **True love for others is unselfish.**

 [Matthew 5:44](http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Matthew-5-44/), “But I say unto you, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ your enemies, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_them that curse you, do \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to them that hate you, and\_\_\_\_\_\_ for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;” This verse makes it very apparent that that love has no contingency. Regardless of how one may treat you, we are still to **love them sincerely.**1 Peter 1.22, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:” Unfeigned; sincere.

 **Loving others is a command.** It was never *suggested* that we should love others, or given an option to love people, but rather told to love others. There are many verses which convey this truth…
John 15.12, “This is my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, That ye love one another as I have loved you.”

John 15.17, “These things I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ you, that ye love one another.”

John 13.34, “A new \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

If we love God we will love others. True love comes from Him.
1 Thessalonians 4.9, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of God to love one another.”

1 John 4.7, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_; and every one that loveth is born of God, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ God.”

1 John 4.12, “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in us.”

1 John 4.16, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God \_\_\_\_\_ love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

1 John 4.8, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

In Galatians 5.22, “But the fruit of the Spirit is \_\_\_\_\_\_, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” Love is a fruit of the Spirit. It is evidence of Christ’s indwelling of you. You can’t produce fruit on your own. While in fact, He doesn’t expect you to.  John 15.4, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” He expects you to trust Him to come to Him realizing you can do nothing and by doing what is right, allowing Him to do the work through you.

 It all boils down to unconditional love. Loving others without an \*asterisk. Even if they hurt you. Even if you disagree. Even if they do not listen to you. Even if they hate you. Love them anyway. Serve them, invest them, prefer them and how *they* feel above yourself. This lesson can be a painful one to learn. Learn it now so you don’t have to learn it the hard way.

Has someone hurt you seemingly without cause? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Have you tried to restore the relationship? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is something you can pray for them about? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How can you be kind toward them and love them still? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

List one loving act you can express toward them this week, no matter how they respond to it. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 13

You Can’t Ice Skate on Shaky Ankles

I remember a youth rally I attended on my birthday about six years ago, and we went ice skating after the meeting. I had only been on either one other time in my life, but I thoroughly enjoyed it. I'm not great at it, but I'm not horrible either. Although, when I compare myself to the kid who split his head open, I'm awesome at it. Now, this specific kid would continually fall - and hard. He messed his knee up, and each time he fell.... well, he would leave his mark on the ice. Ultimately, he ended up falling and hitting his head on the wall of the rink. After that point, there was a trail with puddles of blood leading off the ice. We all tried to ignore that part. His problem, aside from a lack of bubble wrap, was that he had weak ankles. When he skated, his ankles would turn in, and he would then be skating on the side of his blade; which turned his skate outward, and he fell every time. Now, I am not an expert on ice skating by any means... I'm not an expert on anything. However, I have enough sense to realize that you can't ice skate with shaky ankles. Your ankles must stay straight in order to keep yourself up. Otherwise, your skate will turn out, and you will go down. That's why lacing them up properly is extremely important. Tight boots aids in straight ankles.

 Anyway, as I was skating through the rink, enjoying the fact that everyone else was falling and I was not, I had a light bulb moment. Just as you cannot ice skate with shaky ankles, you cannot build your life with shaky faith.
The first thing that comes to my mind is the children's song, “the wise man built his house upon a rock.” Not only is it a catchy (and potentially annoying) little song, it was the actual teaching of Christ while He was on this earth. This was part of the Sermon on the mount. Matthew 7, starting in verse 24 the parable was told. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."
 The circumstances were the same between both these men. However, one fell and one didn't. The difference is obvious, one chose sand as his foundation, while the other chose the rock. Christ is the rock. He refers to Himself as the Chief Cornerstone. You have two options on which to build your life. One, the crowded beach of the world, or The Solid Rock. The sturdiest foundation is rock. If this decision over what you build your life upon is uncertain, you're in trouble. You can't build your life on a shaky foundation.

Your faith in Christ determines your stability through life. Not only in Salvation, as just referred to, but in everything. A lot of people trust Him for Salvation, but nothing else. They place their eternal security upon Him (which is right, by the way), but they then run to the beach to build their life upon it. When the rains, wind, and floods come in your life, that is not the time to choose where you stand. It's before that time. What type of faith you have determines whether you will stand when the storms come. There is much said of faith in the Bible. It's an incredible study, in fact. But if there's one thing I know: You can't go through life with shaky faith. Neither, can you ice skate with shaky ankles.

 This kid I told you about at the beginning of this post, I do give him one thing. He had determination. If I failed that miserably at ice skating, fell every time, and messed my knees up like that, I would have instantly crawled off the ice. Not him. He persevered, he kept trying, he was determined to learn how to skate. This is one thing I hope for all of you. Even if it seems you fail miserably in your walk with Christ; even if you fall time after time; even if it results in pain and heartache; don't walk off, keep going! Even if this little boy was a prime example of "How not to Ice Skate", He was also an incredible example of determination, even simply on the rink. And I commend him. I also suggest he get some bubble wrap ASAP!

Are there areas that you are standing on shaky faith in your life? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How could you strengthen those areas? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Ask your teachers for a book you could read to help strengthen your faith, or to learn about Baptist Distinctives.

Read: Proverbs 14

One Point to The Other

 I could write page after page of people I have known that have turned away from the Lord and are running from Him. If you have been in church very long, I'm sure you can as well. It is nothing new. They seem like strong Christians, serving Him, involved in the church, then almost overnight, they throw it all away. The question that continually stayed in my mind was HOW? How did that happen? How did they get from one point to the other? How can I keep myself from doing the same thing? Those questions laid hard on my heart one night as I read these verses; Zephaniah 3.1 & 2. "WOE to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city! She \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ not the voice; she received not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_; she \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ not in the LORD; she drew \_\_\_\_ near to her God." This rebuke is also a warning and a guide for *us.*
**1. Learn from others' mistakes**
 I observe others' lives quite often. I'm not a stalker, I just enjoy watching others. Whether they end up being a bad example, or a good example, they will have taught me something. That is, if I choose to learn from their mistakes. I could think that I am above them, and what they fell into couldn't happen to me. However, 1 Corinthians 10.11 & 12 tells us differently. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition...Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." All the lives of those written of in the Bible are there for our admonition; our advice; our examples - often of 'what not to do'. But it's our choice whether we heed them or not. We wouldn't stand by and watch as every driver that takes a certain road ends up driving off a cliff, and then take the same road our self, thinking that it won't happen to us. That's insanity; Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. And yet, we do this very thing with our lives. Learn from the mistakes of others.

**2."Obeyed not the voice"**
There are many 'voices' that come to us.
        **The voice of God; the Holy Spirit**
            The Lord makes His way known through many different avenues. We have the Holy Spirit inside of us that convicts us. We know in our conscience what is right and what is wrong. We may attempt to 'write it off' and push it aside, but it tells us what not to do. As well as His Word. Ignoring it, disobeying it, and not doing what it says are each signs of backsliding. You must consciously choose to obey His voice.
    **The voice of authority**
        The Lord has also placed Christian people in our lives to help us along the way. You must listen to and obey them (unless they order you to do something contrary to what the Bible says, obviously). Obeying them and what they say, is obeying God. Ephesians 6.1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_." John 14:15, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Colossians 3.20, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ unto the Lord." Not only your parents, but all God-given authority. Hebrews 13.7, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Not only in Spiritual matters, but in every-day commands, disobeying them, is contrary to the Bible. Obedience means to comply, submit, yield, surrender. To refuse to do so is rebellion. 1 Samuel 15.23, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is as iniquity and idolatry...". To rebel is to defy authority. Such an act is compared to witchcraft. There is no doubt, doing so, is against God and His Word. If you are determined not to be another statistic of those who used to follow Him, you must also determine to obey the voice of your authority. Which brings us to the next section.

**3."Received not correction"**
 Correction would be your parents punishing you for some wrong you did. The punishment isn't solely for what you did wrong, but to correct the pattern of behaviors; to shape your live into what you will become. Correction comes when something is not wrong. When there has been a mistake, or a wrong choice. The correction is there in attempt to fix the problem. When your pastor, youth pastor, parents, or some other Christian leader reproves you, it's for your good. They don't enjoy to do it, but they do it because they love you. They love you too much to leave you how you are. If the reproof is disregarded, you're hurting yourself. It's pride for one, but your sight at times is hindered. But, those who know you best can see where you are headed, and can warn you. Ignoring the warnings is only speeding past dead-end signs. The warning is only as good as the one who takes it. Proverbs 9.8 & 9, "Reprove not a scorner, lest he \_\_\_\_\_\_ thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet \_\_\_\_\_\_: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning."

**4."Trusted not in the LORD"**
 Proverbs 3.5 &6, 11 Corinthians 3.4-6, Psalms 118.8 & 9, Psalms 18.2, Psalms, 91.2, Nahum 1.7, Proverbs 30.5, 2 Samuel 22.31, Job 13.15, Psalms 37.5, Psalms 56.3 & 4, Psalms 71.5 Isaiah 26.3, 1 Timothy 4.10. The Bible has much to say about trust. These are only a few portions of scripture that talk of trust in God. Trust in someone is believing that they are reliable, good, honest, effective. Having assured reliance on the Character, ability, strength and truth of them. Having dependence and faith in them. If we don't have solid trust and faith in Him, we will become as most other teens do. But what is keeping us from trusting Him? He has proven time and time again that He is trustworthy. He's the definition of good. What is there to doubt of His character, His ability, or His strength? What flaw is there to doubt His honesty and truth? There is nothing. Only an immense amount of proof that He IS all these things. In Isaiah, He is called, Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, and The Prince of Peace. To not trust in Him is to trust our self. Trusting our self is to trust something that is defiled, deceitful and wicked. Why would we trust something that is going to destroy and lie to us?! Don't! I remember doing an exercise that was prompted by a book I was reading at the time. It had me write down everything I wanted to do, become, or gain; every dream, every desire, everything; which I did. Over the top of which, in BIG, **bold** red letters, (also known as crayon), was written **"Do Not Trust This!"**. It put into perspective how often we trust ourselves and our judgement in our day to day lives. While it may not seem to be a big deal at the time, every choice and every decision, no matter how small, will play itself out in our future. If we truly desire His will to be done in our lives, we must trust Him with every area of our lives, down to the seemingly insignificant areas.

**4."Drew not near to her God"**
 (James 4.8, Psalms 73.28) It should be a daily priority to become closer to, and more like Christ. God isn't merely a high, powerful being - though He is, He is also a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. He is not unapproachable. He desires a close relationship with you. The Cross provided an opportunity to have this fellowship with Him. He desired it, and loves you that much. I could sit here, study, and type for hours on the 'awesome-ness' of God. My God is an awesome God, He really is! There's nothing comparable. I desire that intimacy; that closeness with Him above anything at this moment. But when you stop drawing near to God, when you stop working on that relationship; when you stop trying to get to know Him - simply to *know Him...* you're in for some trouble. Such is a big warning sign.

 Ever wonder how peers, or former Sunday School member went from one point to the other? Now you know. They didn't learn from others' mistakes. They didn't obey the voice of God. They rebelled against authority. They ignored correction. Didn't trust in God, neither did they draw near to God.
If you don't want to turn out like those who have fallen, you must not do what they did. Simple, right?!

Is there any of these areas you struggle with? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What is something you could do every day to fix it? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 15

Weird

What is normal?
Normal: Conformance to an average; Expected patterns of behavior; Conforming to a type, standard, or regular pattern.

Society today says rebellion is just part of the “teen experience”. Physical relationships are normal; “everybody does it”. Wearing... well, nothing ... it’s normal. Laziness, irresponsibility, dis-respectfulness, immaturity... it’s expected from a teen. It’s all normal. Or is it?

Normal isn’t working. Don’t believe me? Take a look at what being ‘normal’ produces. What’s going to happen if this generation continues to be ‘normal’? This societies idea of 'normal' isn't working.

I absolutely adore youth. Each and every one of them. From babies to teens, I love them all. I love to watch them as they grow, especially younger kids. They are our future. They will decide our future. The child you run across in Walmart may be the next president, the next great inventor, or the one who will take your place when you are gone. They are the future of your church. Kids, they bring with them energy. It makes a church feel alive.
I can’t wait to have kids of my own. I’d love somewhere between three and five, and I really want to adopt! I love kids. My future children already have names, and their own Pinterest board. :) Now, for the sake of the future children, including our own, we must stand now. We must be weird!

Well, what is weird? Even the word itself is the very definition of the word. You grew up with the saying “’I’ before ‘E’ except after ‘”C” drilled into your head. The mere word goes against all logic. Weird means; Odd, strange, different, creepy, peculiar, freaky.... all of the above. Weird would be the opposite of ‘normal’. To be weird, you must go against the ‘expected patterns of behavior’. That means the outcome will be the opposite of that which ‘normal’ produces. To be weird, you’re going to have to be a little different. You’re going to have to stick out. But that’s a good thing. If you go to walmart (sorry, that’s the only store we have around here), and begin to ‘fit in’ with the crowd, you’ve got a problem. People should be able to tell there’s a difference in you. In a good way. You don’t have to be weird simply to be weird... there are enough weirdo’s out there. Instead, just follow Christ as closely as possible, in doing so, you’ll automatically be repelling the ‘regular pattern’ of the world.

1 Peter 2.9 "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"

We are royalty. Royals are held to a different standard. We are a peculiar people. Ya, we are different. The world, they’ll think you’re weird, but that’s a good thing, trust me. Let's be peculiar!

Colossians 2.8
 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

This verse is the explicit description of the world's philosophy. It's a warning to us all to follow after Christ, and not get caught up with the norm. The world’s philosophy say’s “NORMAL”. But normal isn’t working. Weird, however, is.

Read: Proverbs 16

Castle or Cage

 When I was about fourteen, my little brother was playing in our laundry basket. Apparently, it was a castle/fort. My nephew who was at our house that day decided he wanted to join in on the excitement. As the little 1 ½ year old was placed into the basket, he seemed to be enjoying himself. That is until my little brother decided to tell him it was his cage. "You're locked up now... you can't get out.", my little brother told my nephew. Instantly, my nephew's attitude toward being in the basket changed. He no longer wanted to be in there! A split second earlier he was laughing and loving being in the basket... now, he's trying with all his might to get out of it. When he viewed it as a castle, he was content and happy within it. But, within the exact same circumstance, but a different attitude, he instantly despised it and tried desperately to escape the confinement.

 The same happens to us in our lives. As children of God, we are called to stay in the castle of His will. The walls of the castle were not built to confine, but to protect. However, we tend to peer over the walls and view what we are "missing out" on. In turn, we want to get out of the boundaries as quickly as possible. After all, they're holding us back. Or are they?  Every wall of protection that has been placed by God is there for a reason. He has never placed any boundaries up just because He can; even though He has every right to. Every "rule", every command, every principal is there for our good. Yes, I know, we don't tend to accept that saying. Whenever our parents have said, "It's for your own good", what follows has never been a pleasant experience. However, He really does have our best in mind. The boundaries are not there to confine us and keep us from enjoying ourselves and getting the most out of life. No, they are set in place to protect us and keep us from harm. In fact, they are there so we can truly enjoy ourselves and get the most out of life! There are good reasons for them.

 If you haven't yet, you will find yourself in a place very soon where your parents, pastor, or some other godly authority will place some boundaries in your life that don't make sense to you. And though you may not completely understand them right now, choose to place yourself in them.  Even though everything in you screams to break out, choose to place yourself within the walls of protection. It really is for your own good.

Proverbs 1.5 & 8, "A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:...My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother"

Proverbs 8.33, "Hear instruction, and be wise, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ it not."

Hebrews 13.17," \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

Romans 13.1," Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_: the powers that be are ordained of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

Do your parents or youth leaders have rules you do not like or understand? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Has your response been obedience and submission? Do you continue to respect the leader? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Pray for God’s grace to have a right response.

Read: Proverbs 17

 Be Held

 **Isaiah 41.13,  "For I the LORD thy God will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."
 Isaiah 40.11, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall \_\_\_\_\_\_ the lambs with his arm, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."
 Psalms 61.3, "For thou hast been a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for me..."
 John 10.28, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ them out of my \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."
 Deuteronomy 33.27, "The eternal God is thy \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and underneath are the everlasting arms:"**
 It has been scientifically proven that babies *need* to be held. They cannot survive without human contact. Babies need that contact to thrive. It's not surprising that as we grow, we still need and desire that contact; that comfort. Some more than others, but all just the same. Think back if you can to when you were young. If your memory is like mine and can't remember anything, then consider some of the young ones you know. I used to teach preschool and I had a large group of little ones I absolutely adored. What do they want, or need, when they get hurt? When they're sad, lonely, or when they're scared? What provides the most comfort or security for anxious little ones? Physical contact. Nothing weird. Holding hands, a hug, a simple hand on their shoulder, or holding them in your arms. They beg for it. What is often the best way to get a young, tired child to sleep that is not desiring a nap? Again, that contact. Holding a little baby. Patting a child's back, or cuddling them till they fall asleep. Being in your arms gives them that assurance that everything is ok. They're safe. They're loved. They find their rest in your arms. Nap time for the babies hold some of my favorite moments.

 Now compare that to *your* life. I know, you are almost teenagers, teenagers and adults now. You are not little kids, and so I am not going to treat you as one. We are mature, grown up human beings who have it all under control. Quite the contrary. When we are tired, hurt, scared, lonely, or anxious, there's that child in all of us crying to just be held. We long for that sense of security, love, and peace found through being held. But we can't. There's no one around. And there's dignity after all. So we do our best to be strong, hold everything together and under control. Attempting to make sense of what's going on around us and longing for some sense of peace. Some sort of answer that would make sense of what's going on around you.

 Maybe I'm the only one, but I get to a point where I am so hurt that my heart refuses comfort. It pushes everything and everyone away. At times it even ignores positivity, and refuses to consider the lessons in it, or how God is moving. Actually, I know I'm not the only one....

**Psalms 77.2, "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to be comforted."**

However, one thing could change all that. When you're tired, alone and in tears. Sick of fighting. Everything seems so far away. And you're longing for some comfort. You go to Him. YOU don't do anything, but...*God still speaks.*

**Isaiah 41.13, "For I the LORD thy God will \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee."**He holds us! He will hold our hand; He will carry us; He will hold us in His arms.
He has everything under control! He knows everything we go through. He knows how it affects us. He is working, whether we see it or not. He is with us, whether we sense it or not. God works behind the scenes... RIGHT NOW!

**Romans 8.28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to them who are the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ according to his purpose."**
Not all things are good, but all things work together for good. If you are living according to His will, your life will work for our good and His glory. It's such a comfort to know that the One Who made the universe and keeps the stars in place, the planets in orbit, and the universe intact, holds me. He's got me, and He's got you! Despite circumstances, despite whether or not anyone else can hold me, He is!

What are you holding onto or struggling with? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Give it to Him. You can't do anything, He can do everything.
Stop holding on. Just be held.

Read: Proverbs 18

Playdough

Proverbs 13:20, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of fools shall be destroyed.”

 There are people that are told about in the Bible that had bad friends and good friends and became like the other. Lot, for example, is talked about in Genesis 13.9-13. He chose to live and make friends with those in Sodom. In Verse 13 it says, "They were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly". This is who He chose to be around and become friends with. At the end, he finds himself begging God not to complete His will in destroying the city, his wife turns into a pillar of salt, and he is the daddy of his grandchildren.

 Johnathan and David on the other hand are a completely different story. Johnathan, the son of King Saul, and David the well-known giant killer. These childhood friends had a love in friendship. They were willing to risk their lives for each other. Johnathan was willing to do what was right despite the consequences and David was a "Man of God's own heart".

 So earlier we read that, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.” That means you whoever you are close friends with, they will rub off on you and you will rub off on them. If you have bad friends, you will become like them. But if you have good friends, they will make you better. For example, do you like playdough? I certainly do. I have two containers of it in my dorm room currently and I am not ashamed. Take two different colors. They represent you and your friend. They are both different; both unique. As you chose someone to befriend, spend time with them, do things with them, the two of you mix. You become like them and they become like you. As you mix two colors together, you can still see parts of each of the two colors. But then you can see a new color as well. You can no longer take the two colors apart completely. They have become part of the other. That’s what happens when you get close with someone. Your friends effect you. If you have bad friends, you will become like them. So be careful who you chose to be friends with.

 Lot chose to hang around with bad influences and it did not end well for him. David and Johnathan on the other hand were both people who followed the Lord and were good friends toward each other. They helped each other grow closer to the Lord. Just like the playdough cannot be separated completely any longer, neither could they. They became like each other, and that was a good thing because they made each other more like God. So, think about who you are friends with. Are they good for you? Would your parents be happy you are friends with them? Are they someone you would like to be like? Do they encourage you to be more like Jesus? Do they try and get you to do wrong or skip church? Who you are around, you will start to become like them. And, make sure YOU are good for your friends. Because just as you will become who they are, they will also become who you are. And you want to make them more like Jesus, not take them away from Him.

Are you helping your friends become more like Christ? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Are they drawing you toward God, or pulling you away? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What can you do today to encourage one of your friends in the Lord? \_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Read: Proverbs 19

The Pancake

Years ago, I attended a ladies’ retreat with my church. During this retreat, one of the ladies read a story which greatly impacted my life, and I hope it does the same for you. It went something like this.

 “Making pancakes for my daycare is quite a saga.  I have two kids that are gluten free and five that are not!  I would make all of the pancakes gluten free but the mix is just so stinkin expensive!  I was feeling like taking on the world today, and by taking on the world I really mean just cooking a breakfast instead of cereal and a banana!  Like the chef in dinner dash, I flinging flour and eggs everywhere…  Minutes later two frying pans a fryin and pancakes are just about to be cooked to perfection, again by perfection I really mean one second from setting off the smoke detector!

 I get the plates all ready and start passing them out.  The Ladies are always first, a strict rule here in daycare world, then I set baby C’s plate in front of him (you need to note baby C is only 14 months old).   I quickly realize that the pancake I gave him was a *regular* pancake and not the gluten free one he needs.  With my cat like reflexes I scoop up the plate and give it to a child that can have the poisoned gluten pancake!  Baby C let out a scream that I am relatively certain, half the city heard, and then threw his adorable little face down into his highchair tray and began to scream/cry, snot and slobber flowing freely! Now poor baby C didn’t understand that I had a perfectly good reason for taking, his long awaited pancake away.  He didn’t understand that what I was doing was saving him from the problems that the gluten might cause him.  He only saw that his very mean, Ms. Daycare lady, was taking his food away, and proceeded to voice his displeasure very loudly and very emotionally! Like always the Lord really spoke to me, THIS IS ME!
 There are so many times that I throw myself on the floor kicking and screaming, proverbially of course, because it wouldn’t be acceptable for an adult to do that, right?  God didn’t give me what I felt I needed or wanted at the time and I am gonna let him know!!!   Why can’t I just trust that God knows best and is intervening on my behalf to save me from something that might hurt me?  Instead, I assume that He hates me or that I have done wrong, because of my sin He isn’t going to help me anymore, Romans 8:1.  I know I am the only one that thinks this way, but I am just being honest.  I am a drama queen and I often wonder if God laughs at my hysterics!  For some reason I just imagine Him shaking His head and saying, “Oh, get up and trust Me!” I would love it, if when God takes away my pancake, I just take a second to acknowledge that my God loves me and EVERYTHING He does in my life is for my good!  The pancake He will give me will be the best there ever was and it will be worth the wait!
Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

*Read: Proverbs 20*

Carrots, Eggs, or Coffee Beans?

You have a great imagine, right? Good Now imagine with me that there are three bowls in front of you. Inside one is some carrots, the other has an egg, and yet another some coffee. Feel the carrots, they’re soft and mushy. Take the egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, observe the hard-boiled egg inside. Sip the coffee. Taste its richness and savor its aroma. What is common with each of these? Each of these objects had faced the same adversity — boiling water.  Each reacted differently.

 The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting.  However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak.
The egg had been fragile.  Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened.
The ground coffee beans were unique, however.  After they were in the boiling water, they changed the water.

 Which are you? When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond?  Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean? Are you the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity do you wilt and become soft and lose you strength? Are you the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Does your shell look the same, but on the inside are you bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart? Or are you like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain.  When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor that was inside it all along.  If you are like the coffee bean, when things are at their worst; you become even better and change the situation around you.

 You know this probably better than I do. Life is crazy. It’s overwhelming, and things don’t go the way we think they should, most of the time. But instead of getting frustrated, overwhelmed, and fearing what the future will hold; instead of viewing life in that moment and our mixed up plans as an ordeal, trust Him. Be excited to see what He will do; anxious for the adventure of your life that awaits. Changing the perspective from ourselves and how we think life should go, and onto Him and how He made it.

 “God will not permit any troubles to come upon us unless He has a specific plan by which a great blessing can come out of the difficulty” - Peter Marshall

 Whether you like it or not, where you are right now, He put you there. He had a reason for it. He allows what happens in your life to happen, and there are things He desires for you to learn from it. So when things are crazy, accept the challenge, and get ready for the adventure… cause it’s gonna be a blast. God didn’t bring you this far to abandon you. He is faithful. And following Him will lead you to the best life you could ever ask for, despite the “bad things” you may face in the process. “...Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but \_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” (2 Chronicles 20.15) “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ whithersoever thou goest. (Joshua 1.9)

 Every situation in our life causes us to change. When faced with a situation whether bad or good, you will not come out the same. You will change either for the better, or the worse. You can face circumstances like a carrot and seem strong on the outside, but with pain and adversity you will wilt, become soft, and lose your strength?
Do you face life as an egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Your shell looks the same, but on the inside you are bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart. Or do you face life as the coffee bean? Actually changing the very circumstance that brings the pain.  When the water gets hot, what’s inside will come out.  If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst; you become even better and change the situation around you. You realize that your strength is not your own, drawing from the Lord’s supply daily. And you stay teachable and moldable to what the Lord is trying to teach you.

 I have been guilty of all three at times, but the latter is the goal.
So I will ask once more, Are you a carrot, an egg, or a coffee bean?

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 Read: Proverbs 21