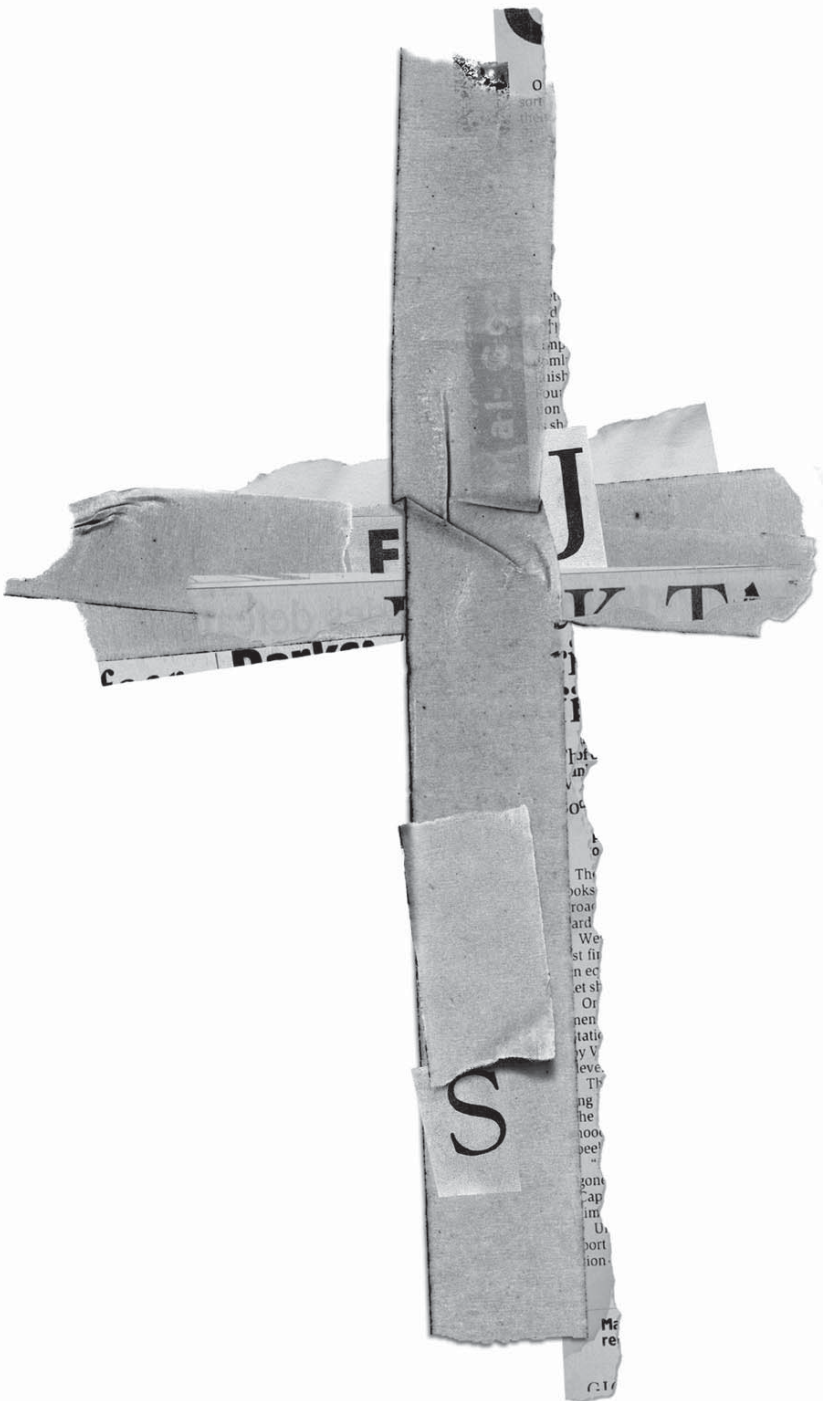


STRIPPED CLEAN

DOWN TO NOTHING BUT THE CROSS



Incredible things will happen®

Loveland, Colorado
group.com

Stripped Clean
Down To Nothing But The Cross

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Credits

Author: Jeff A. Storm
Executive Developer: Patty Smith
Chief Creative Officer: Joani Schultz
Editor: ?
Cover Art Director/Designer and Art Director: Jeff A. Storm
Production Manager: DeAnne Lear

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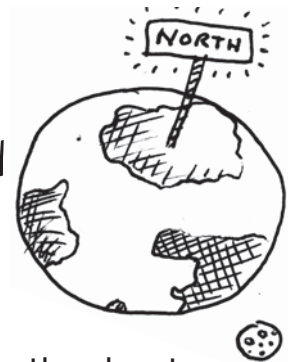
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Introduction

In the beginning God made perfect stuff. Including you. He provides exactly what we need when we need it so that we will enjoy life and live it through him.



But unless you've been living in the northern most point on the planet, chances are good you're living to consume and not consuming to live.

Marketing messages bombard us daily drowning out God's voice as they sell us the lies that it's all about us. The messages create a spiritual disease called materialism.

We're not becoming a disposable nation.

We're there.

And you can blame me for this assault of messages that can lead to an accumulating addiction.

In part anyway.

It was my generation of Gen X'ers who spent so much on stuff and cared so much about getting more stuff that corporate marketers took notice. They started spending thousands of dollars aiming the product ads right at teens.

They're still doing it—and it's working.

Today U.S. companies market to you with an annual budget of over \$15 billion. They don't blink an eye spending that much to sell you a

\$15,000,000,000

lie because every year you buy it. To the tune of over \$600 billion worth of spending.

I remember attending Christian youth conferences and hearing speakers passionately cry out, "YOU are the generation that will change the world. YOURS is the generation that will share your faith at any cost." (And don't leave before you buy a conference t-shirt.)

I still attend youth conferences as a volunteer and often hear that same tired rallying cry drone on year after year after year.

And I see teens who remind me of me.

The ones cheering the idea of changing the world as they're checking out the girl a few rows away and texting their friend about her (while wearing last year's conference t-shirt.)

Surprise! My generation didn't change the world, the generation before mine didn't, and I suspect that on a generational scale—yours won't either.

Truth—you can't change the world without first being changed.

Let's start changing by peeling away the layers that stand between us and passionate relationship with Jesus.

I questioned whether I was qualified to write this devotional journey but my friend Patty inspired and convinced me that I should because in addition to being an artist, youth volunteer, father, and friend—I'm a recovering material-holic who hasn't been sober that long.

My pulse still quickens at the word "upgrade".

I'm not going to pose as the expert and pretend I know everything about you. Thanks to Solomon and his research journal-Ecclesiastes—we'll have a guide that walks us through what is important and how to find true joy.

Solomon's a qualified guide because he was very rich and very powerful, a have-it-all-did-that-been-there kind of guy who has great insight to doing life without God and solutions to removing selfish pursuits.

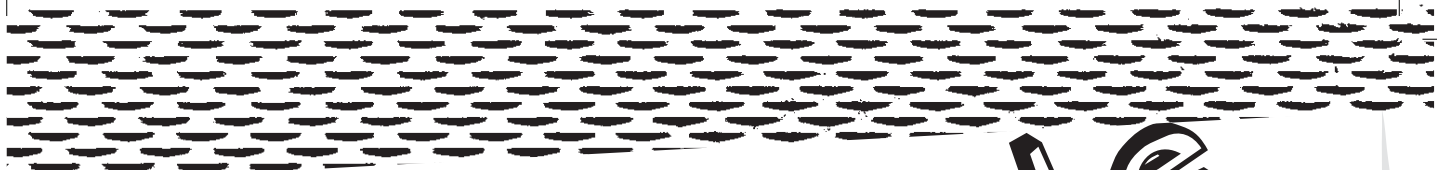
Solomon wrote that there's an opportune time to destroy and to construct (Ecclesiastes 3:3 NLT). It's time to destroy.

Each page of this 128 page journal is designed to be torn out and experienced. This devotional is an active reminder of getting past or getting rid of the layers we put between us and Jesus everyday. It's time to get stripped clean.

START HERE Tear out this entire introduction. Then, get a Bible—one you'll actually read. Borrow one, take one that's just sitting in the back of the church, ask a hotel desk clerk for one from a bed-side dresser. If necessary, buy one.

Then fold this intro in half and use it to book mark the beginning of Ecclesiastes. Find Psalm in the middle of the Bible and turn right two more books—you're there.

fold in half



It's all smoke

Early in Solomon's life, he was faithful in honoring God and his dad, David. So one night God tells Solomon, in a dream, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you and it's yours. 1 Kings 3:5

That's an offer even Bill Gates couldn't make.

Solomon humbly asked for and got a discerning and wise heart. Pleased with Solomon's answer, God said there would be no one wiser or more discerning. Not before Solomon, not after him.

Ever.

And for his winning answer God even gave Solomon what he didn't ask for. The things I probably would have asked for initially. Riches and honor and a long life.

Later on, wise Solomon shelved God to indulge in the diversions of the world. And in the evening of his life, Solomon collected his thoughts and research in an attempt to answer this question: what is the real meaning of life?

Did you read the ending to the Harry Potter series before you read the whole book? I did.

I know, I know. But before you judge me know that Solomon, who God made wise, did something similar by starting his journal with the ending—life under the sun is meaningless. This from the guy who had it all.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 Then wrestle with these questions.

What are some things you're working really hard for?

What do you hope you'll gain from all that hard work?

Add your own page numbers if you want.



Was the answer to either of the questions—"my relationship with Jesus"?

If only I had () I would be really happy.

Solomon's question: After all the pleasures of life are used up, what do you think will remain to satisfy your hunger for life?

Jesus asked a similar question in Matthew 16:26. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?

Grab a pen

Write your ending here at the beginning.

What do you hope the evening of your life looks like?

What type of house do you plan on living in?

What kind of car will you drive?

How many Benjamins will you be pulling in?

Will you have kids? A dog? A cat? A fish? A hermit crab, a plant?

Who will your friends be?

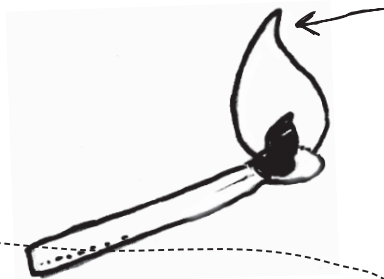
What will you wear?

Where will you live?

What will your job title?

What makes you happiest in 20 years?

Start burning here.



Grab some matches

After you've written your answers on this page, tear it out. As you start or end your day, read through your answers. Begin your prayer time by burning this page (in a safe place like over a sink, in a fireplace, or over an outdoor fire pit maybe). Pray that God would be your success and your happiness. Pray for a present and a future experienced with God.

FREE, FREE, FREE

There is a scene in the classic 1970's movie version of Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory where Willy, Charlie, grandpa Joe, and the rest of the guests enter what, to me seems, to be a dream-come-true-room.

Willie releases his visitors to explore the massive space informing them that everything they see is edible. Try it. Enjoy it.

How cool would it be to go into a room and eat a chocolate couch?

And yet, with all the freedom there remain boundaries.

Like not swimming in the sterilized, waterfall mixed, chocolate pond— as cool as that sounds.

In the end, even sweet, innocent, humble Charlie breaks a few boundaries. Willie's account of these broken boundaries is brutal.

But it ends really well.

In Ecclesiastes 11:9, Solomon sounds like Willie Wonka.

Sort of.

Young people, it's wonderful to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do, take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do. So refuse to worry, and keep your body healthy. But remember that youth, with a whole life before you, is meaningless." NLT

When's the last time you had an impulse to do something and just did it?

What, if any, limits did you set on this impulse?

If you shared this impulse with Jesus, would or did the limits change?

**Live free with God today.
Enjoy every minute of it.**

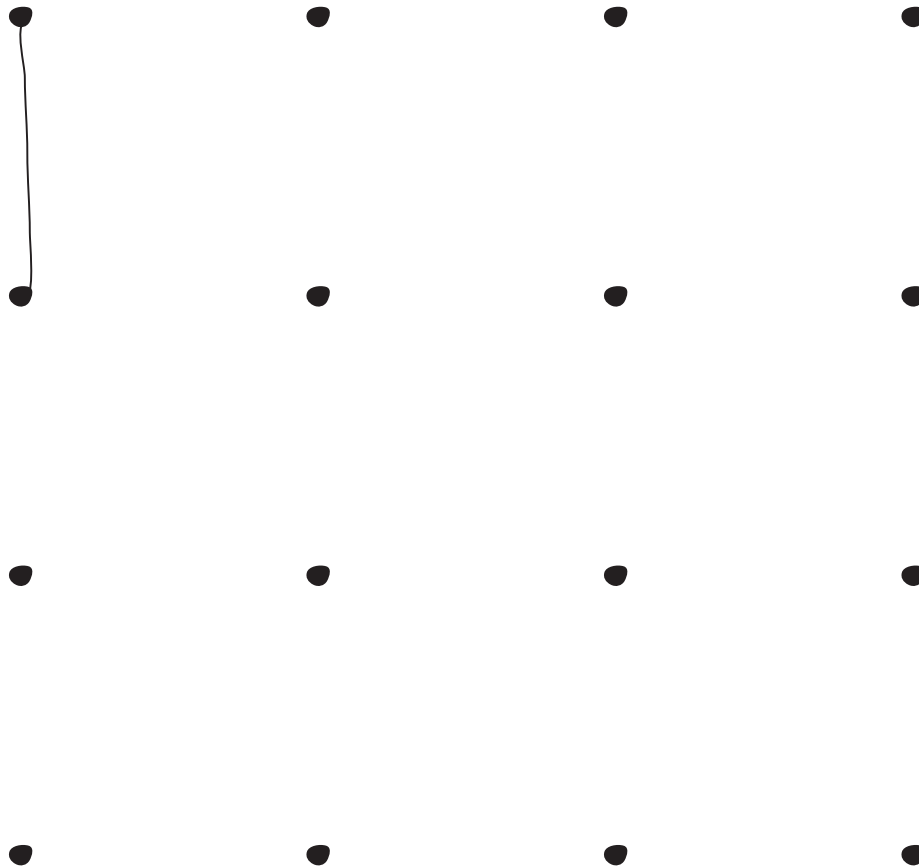
Start by painting anything you want on this side of the page after you tear it out.

Find some chocolate syrup or coffee or what ever consumable liquid is in the house. Use that as your paint. Only limitation: paint with anything but a brush.

Let your painting be a part of your conversation with God today. Thank God for the strength and passion you have right now. Let's both ask God to guide the impulses of our hearts.

I'm free in Christ

Winning Thought



Classic game rules: two people take turns connecting dots to form squares. Whoever draws a line that forms a square wins that square.

This one though, is played by yourself at the end of the day.

Tear this page out and then, one line at a time, start connecting two dots with a straight line or a wavy line.

The straight line represents thoughts you had of God today or moments you took talking to Jesus. _____

The wavy line represents junky thoughts and wasted time. Thoughts of buying new stuff, how to get more money. Time spent on the internet , in front of the TV, playing video games. ~~~~~

Connect all the dots-who won today?

Read this today. **Ecclesiastes 2:1-11.**

True or false: whoever has the most toys wins?

Advertisers want us to believe that's true and deceptively use words and images to lure us into believing more toys=happiness.

Not just more but new too.

I've fed my quest for newness by bouncing from new thing to new thing, obsessing over acquiring more.

But the obsession isn't enough. It's never enough.

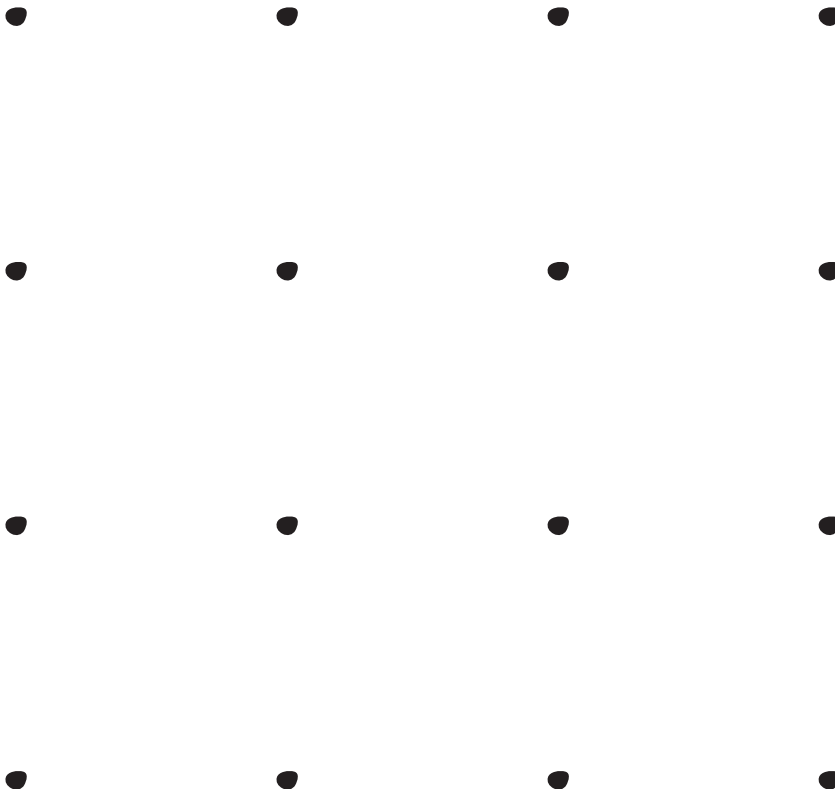
It leads to believing we'll never earn enough, never be beautiful enough, that our cars aren't fast enough, clothes not fashionable enough, gadgets not new enough, rooms never furnished enough, relationships never romantic enough, parents definitely not "cool" enough...

Enough!

Tomorrow, I choose to be inspired by God and enjoy the music on the mp3 player I already have and not be consumed with getting a newer, thinner, faster, touchy-feely, mp3 player with optional back scratcher attachment.

No matter how cool that TV ad makes the back scratcher look.

Play the line game again tomorrow. See if you can live a day where the straight lines win.



Read Ecclesiastes 2:12-17 today.

Meaningless smarts

There is no meaning in accomplishment unless it's linked with God.

Is the key to happiness a perfect 1600 on the SAT?

I don't know if it would have made me happier but it might have made college a little cheaper... which would have made me happier.

Or not.

Solomon aced every subject he tried and he tried them all.

Architecture being one of them.

He was a driven and brilliant architect. The guy built at least 6 cities from the ground up, built a palace comparable to none, and built THE Jewish temple. He was renowned for his architectural abilities—which required he master math, art, physics, and language.

However, not a single one of his projects stands today.

Not one.

Without looking it up on the internet, could you tell me who Jack Kilby is?

Clue: If it weren't for him you couldn't look him up on the internet.

Solomon's observation:
Neither the wise or the foolish will be remembered.
Smarts won't fill the God shaped hole in your life.



Answer: Jack Kilby is a Nobel Prize winner who pioneered the integrated circuit that led to the moon landing, personal computers, cell phones, and the internet.

Pray for God to guide you in your pursuit of knowledge and that he would leave his fingerprint on everything you study and learn.

Tear this page out then write a prayer in each of the subject blocks below. Cut the blocks out and place them in your school text books or keep them near where you do your homework.

Read a prayer you wrote every time you start to study. Pursue Jesus in every subject.

If happiness were found in education alone, then Ph.D.'s would be the happiest people on earth.

Math

cut out and place in text book

English

cut out and place in text book

History

cut out and place in text book

(other subject)

cut out and place in text book

Two lefts don't make a right but three do.

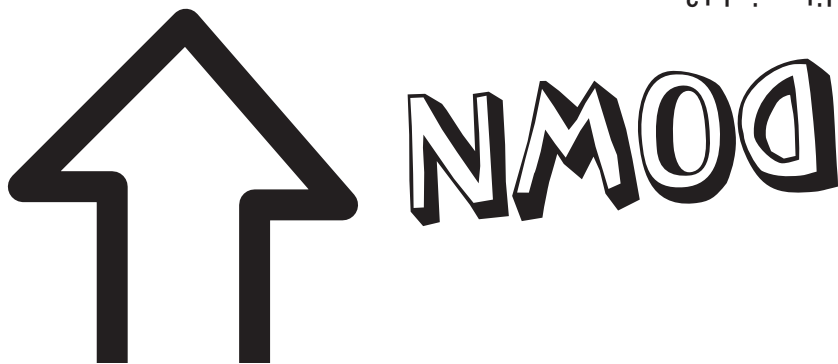
**What you see is
not what you get**

Perception is reality, right?
Up is up and down is down. Owning the right clothes, the right electronics,
and hanging with the right friends bring happiness. Right?
Perception is part of the decision making ability in our brains. It involves
the senses and senses are easily tricked.
I've driven past huge, 8 bedroom, 4 bath, double car garage homes with a
pool out back and, staring at them, I start thinking, man, if I had that pad I'd
be happy. I also believe leaving my shirt un-tucked makes me look thinner.
Not everything you see is what you get.
You identify your place in the world partly through how you perceive the
world around you. And everyone perceives the world or even a moment
differently.
The beauty of this is what makes a poet passionate about words and a
plumber passionate about copper pipe.
Wrong perception is believing anything other than that God can truly make
us happy and give us meaning in life.
Solomon concluded that excluding God renders life meaningless.
Is your perception of yourself, God, friends, family, happiness, or meaning
blurred? Why?

Tear this page out and take the visual test on the flip side. It's a classic

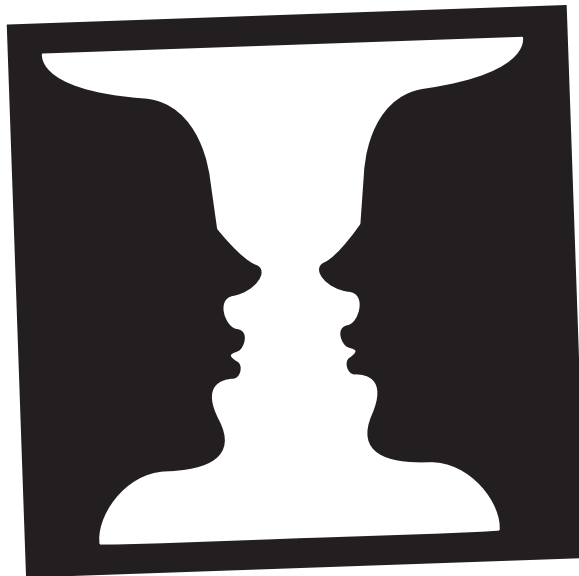
illustration of perception you may recognize.

After you take the test a friend.



Tear page out.

What do you perceive?



Do you see the white vase or the two faces in profile?

Eventually you'll see both. Your mind will move back and forth uncontrollably from one image to the other.

Here's the real test. Now that you have found both images in the single image, choose to stare at just one—either the vase or the two faces for at least 30 seconds, without bouncing to the other image. **Ready? GO!**

How did you do? If you're like most people, even though you chose the vase your mind slipped into the faces and vice versa.

It is virtually impossible to keep your mind on a single perception once you're aware of an alternative interpretation.

This was a harmless optical illusion. There are alternative perception tests have real-life consequences. Like flipping back and forth between saving money and spending it or perceiving the world with God or without God.

Jesus offers "perception protection". "Then he said, 'Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own.'" Luke 12:15 NLT.

(Can you imagine this verse as an ad for one of those self storage businesses?)

Is there an alternative perception dragging your attention from Jesus?

Why does Jesus not seem to struggle with perception alternatives?

Is there real danger if we're not focused on Jesus all the time?