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DON'T EAT THE FRUIT

I WAS ELEVEN YEARS OLD. I was sitting on the floor in my bedroom, shoes off and headphones blaring. There was nowhere else I'd rather be than in my space, with my music. The deep bass piercing my eardrums was supplied by Jay-Z's *Vol. 2, The Hard Knock Life*, my favorite album at the time.

On track fourteen, Jigga and JD brag, "In the Ferrari and Jaguar switching four lanes, top down, screaming out money ain't a thing."¹ Yes, I had the clean version, so my ears were shielded from the foul language, but not from all harm. There is no edited version that removes worldviews.

What I thought was just fun music was actually far more. When I hit play on my portable CD player, I was going to class. They weren't teaching me math and grammar, but they

were teaching me how to view the world. They were lecturing me about what my aspirations should be, and what is most important in the world. And unknowingly, I was a star pupil. I ate it up and believed the lie that Ferraris and Jaguars are what life is largely about. If I wanted the good life, I needed the money, the cars, and the girls.

Rappers weren't my only teachers though. I heard lessons every day from my parents, my schoolteachers, my friends, and my favorite TV shows. Every day I was bombarded with messages and images that shaped my perspective on life. And I'm not alone. Every single one of us has an idea about what "the good life" is, and we've learned it from somewhere. In the same way our region dictates the accent we speak with, our environments and influences shape our ideas about life.

Every time you hear an idea or observe a behavior, you're being presented with a message. And as we take those messages in, we can either reject or accept them (though we often do this subconsciously). We shouldn't be asking whether or not we're being taught; there's no question about that. We should be asking whether or not we're being taught well.

WE'VE BEEN LIED TO

I know we're just getting started, but can I be brutally honest for a moment? I think we've been lied to. No one wants to be deceived, but we have and we didn't even notice it. They

told us that the good life means seeking our own happiness at all costs. They taught us that our goal should be a life free from any worries. And we believed them.

But we've been duped. They sold us materialism disguised as determination. They led us to counterfeit satisfaction at the expense of the real thing. They told us to center ourselves on ourselves. And when we asked if there was another way, they whispered in our ear an assured yet deceitful, "Absolutely not." We've been deceived. We have eaten the fruit.

But who is "they"? Who lied to us and why?

THE LIARS

We have three great enemies in this life: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The Devil is God's great adversary. He doesn't have horns, he doesn't carry a pitchfork, and he doesn't own hell. But he does have a lot of influence in our world. In fact, he has so much sway that the apostle Paul refers to him as "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). He is constantly feeding lies to whoever will receive them. The Bible calls him "the father of lies" (John 8:44).

The "world" is the system that supports and distributes his lies. "World" refers to the system and method of operation among sinful man. This world system is controlled by the Devil and it leads us away from the truth. And the "flesh" is our fallen, sinful nature. Our flesh receives and believes

these lies. Something has gone wrong inside of us, so our hearts have an appetite for falsehood (we'll talk about what's gone wrong a little later). Instead of rejecting these lies, our fleshly taste buds crave them. The result of this devastating world, flesh, and Devil trifecta is that all of us have aligned ourselves with false ideas about how we should live.

And unfortunately, we've allowed our enemies to control us like we're their little robots. They've told us how to live and we've done as we were told. But we don't have to be robots. We can be freed, and live like we were made to live, but not until we stop believing lies.

This is humanity's greatest problem; it's not sickness or natural disasters. It's that we believe the lies of the enemy over the truth of God. This is what happened with Adam in the garden, this is what happened with God's people in the wilderness, and this is what keeps us from living the good life today.

A GREAT FALL

Genesis tells us the story of Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, created in the image and likeness of almighty God. They're not characters in a fairy tale; they're our oldest relatives. They were created to be connected to God, to be satisfied by Him, and to obey Him. In love, God breathed life into them and gave them dominion over the Earth. But He also gave them boundaries.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Genesis 2: 16–17).

God’s goodness is on display here as He gives them access to every tree in the garden—except one. But God doesn’t restrict their access because He wants to keep them from the best fruit. God gives them this command because He loves them. It is for their good. Adam and Eve would have lived a life free from any hardship, shame, or worry if they had trusted God’s good commands for them. But they didn’t.

Flip over to Genesis 3. This is where Satan, influencing the serpent, first sowed the poisonous seeds of doubt that infect us to this day. His deception is threefold. He questions the content of God’s words, he questions the truthfulness of God’s words, and he questions the motives behind God’s words.

He says to Eve, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’ . . . You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1b, 4–5). After making them doubt God’s trustworthiness, he sets an alternate reward before them, namely, becoming like God. Ironically, Adam and Eve were the one part of creation that was created in the likeness of God. But instead of trusting God, Adam and Eve took the bait and ate the fruit.

This is the most devastating event in human history. The problem wasn't that Adam and Eve ate fruit. Fruit is a good gift from God. The problem was that they ate the wrong fruit. Instead of enjoying the fruit God gave them to enjoy, they disobeyed and went after the fruit that would destroy them. They believed the serpent when he suggested that God gave them boundaries to keep them from good things.

We're being fed those same lies today. The world is casting doubt on God and His Word, but will we take the bait? Will we believe the lies?

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Every day we're being fed a variety of lies about living the good life, and most of them fit into at least one of these three categories:

1. *Hedonism*

This is a thousand-dollar word that basically means seeing your own happiness and pleasure as the most important thing in life. Most people would never actually say that their happiness and pleasure are the highest good, but they don't have to. Their words reveal it and their actions show it. When they say things like, "Just do whatever makes you happy," their perspective is on full display.

Many of us value our own happiness and pleasure far above everything else, and this value guides all of our decisions. We

just want to be pleased. Most people think rappers and rock stars are the only hedonists, but that's not the case. Hedonism doesn't always look like a life full of drugs and sex; sometimes it looks like a life full of comfort and laziness. This lie basically tells us to do whatever it takes to be happy.

2. All-you-can-be-ism

This lie can be deceptive because it seems more sophisticated and noble. Just be the best you that you can be. This lie says the greatest thing you can do is "make it out the hood." Or maybe "Do well in school so you can go to college, so you can get that job, so you can reach that status, so you can get that promotion," and so on. The highest good in this view is achievement. The end goal is greatness. So do whatever it takes to be the best you can be.

3. It's-all-about-me-ism

This worldview expects everyone, including God, to focus on us. It teaches us that the good life means feeling loved by all those around us. It teaches us to do whatever it takes to get the respect of our peers. Everyone else is here to affirm us and give us what we want.

This worldview gets even more dangerous when it's distributed by religious people. It says that we should dream big and believe God to give us whatever we desire, because that's what God does. It says that if we obey God, He will fix all of our problems in this life. This lie makes God your servant, instead

of the other way around. It tells us that God will do whatever it takes to give us what we want, if we will only believe in Him and obey Him.

There really isn't much difference between these three lies. They have a core value in common: self. They are world-views built around the idol of ME. But there is a way to live life that centers on God rather than me. The problem is that none of us naturally pursue that way of life. Every one of us has bought into the lies.

If we're going to live the good life, we can't be robots. When we turn on the TV or walk around our neighborhoods, we see a lot of clones. We see beautiful people made in God's image whose lives have been marked by faith in falsehoods. We'll see the same thing if we take an honest look in the mirror. But none of us have to be robots. We can be freed, and begin to live the way we were created to live. We can stop spiraling down and start living it up.

FIXING THE PROBLEM

Recently, I watched the movie *Limitless*. The movie centers on a young man who is full of potential but has sabotaged every chance he has. He's a good writer, but his book deal is about to disappear because he hasn't written a single word in months. His creative wells have dried up, he just lost his long-time girlfriend, and he drinks far too much alcohol. So

how do these problems get solved?

He meets an old friend who introduces him to a new, revolutionary drug. It allows him to use 100 percent of his brain function, and with this increased brain function, his whole life changes. Not only does his creativity explode, but he becomes a better person; he's a hard worker, he's no longer a drunk, and he wins back his girlfriend. And all of this because he can think clearly now and make the right decisions.

Wouldn't you like to have this pill that could magically fix your life? It sure sounds like an easy path to the good life. I really enjoyed the movie, but it obviously isn't meant to be very realistic. Aside from the fact that a pill like this will likely never exist, the storyline builds on false assumptions. Even if someone did create such a pill, it would never have the same effect on us. Yes, maybe we would be more creative, and maybe we would become the most capable in whatever field we chose, but it could never do anything to fix our laziness, unreliability, and drunkenness.

A pill that allows us to think clearer could never help us to make all of the right decisions because our main problem is not rational, it's spiritual. The people who think the most clearly and rationally are still born sinful. We love our sin. We choose to disobey God, not because we don't think clearly enough, but because we don't love, value, or trust God enough. We need to be freed from bondage to sin, and no percentage

of brain function can do that. We need new hearts.

But we can't go in for surgery if we don't realize we're sick. No one likes to be lied to, but until we recognize that our hearts are ill and that we've been living in light of lies we will continue walking off the cliff. Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."

These lies promised the good life, but in reality they only kept us from it and led us to death. We need a better teacher.

LYRICS FROM "ROBOT"

Hey I was born "less than human," I know it sounds crazy
But I was really born a robot as a baby
No real life in me, I just played my role
No self-control, I just did what I was told
I got my first order, I was just a day old
But I didn't have a chance 'cause my heart was way cold
My heart took the orders, it couldn't break the mold
I was sold under bondage and I couldn't take control
So I was just chillin' in my robot clothes
With my robot friends and my robot flow
Livin' robot ways 'cause that's all I know
Till I heard I could be freed from my robot soul.²