

**THE
GRAD'S
GUIDE TO
CHOOSING WELL**

WISDOM FOR LIFE ON YOUR OWN



NAVPRESS 

With thanks to the college students from the Campus Crusade for Christ group at U-W Oshkosh in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and the students from visiting teacher Linda Taylor's special May term class at Houghton College, Houghton, New York. They took time to write encouraging comments to those coming a few steps behind them in life.

This book is a gift to:

From:

On this day:

I'M PROUD OF YOU

Who you are and what you have accomplished.

I'M GLAD FOR YOU

Your successes and open doors.

*And I'm thankful for this ending wrapped around an
exciting beginning for your life.*



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INTRODUCTION

Someone wants to help you make wise choices. That's why he or she gave you this book. That person knows you're going to be on your own soon and hopes you'll take along some lessons in making choices that others have learned the hard way ahead of you. He or she knows you're going to make some mistakes along the way but hopes you'll consider that some mistakes really aren't worth making. You can tell that person thanks, but the best way to show your gratitude is to read these pages and put what you learn into practice.

In the meantime, congratulations! Graduating from high school is often the first major achievement in a person's life. Whatever your parents may say, this time has arrived too quickly. Yesterday you were taking your first stumbling steps, and today you are walking across the stage to receive your diploma. It all happened in the blink of an eye, even though it

might have felt as if this day would never come. Freedom and life on your own are on the horizon.

On my first day of college, I ended up in the student commons, hanging out between classes with several dozen other students. A girl at the table where I was seated proceeded to chain-smoke her way through a pack of cigarettes. (A few years later, the place became a smoke-free zone.) I finally could resist no longer and tossed her a question through the fog that surrounded her: “Do you really like to smoke that much?”

“Actually,” she said, “I’m not really a smoker. This is just the first time no one is here to tell me to stop, so I won’t.” Then she started coughing and I left.

For many of us, freedom does seem like the opportunity to finally do anything we want to do. As we move away from home, we’ll meet many people who are trying to live out their belief that freedom means not having anyone tell them to stop, so they don’t.

But a person who is developing wisdom sees that when our idea of freedom means doing anything we want to do, it quickly turns into slavery. We become trapped in our wants of the moment rather than living above our wants and desires. Wisdom doesn’t ignore wants and desires, but wisdom doesn’t let wants and desires have the last word or veto power. Wisdom makes decisions that direct feelings to “Deal with this!”

You are making a wise choice at this moment. You have opened a book about making wise choices. That’s a start. Lots of people don’t get that far. They say they don’t want to make stupid mistakes and screw up their lives, but too often they never

actually think about what goes into a good decision. They can't answer the question "What makes a wise choice?" You now have an opportunity to work out your answer to that question.

The Grad's Guide to Choosing Well will start with a story of someone who illustrates that it's never too late to learn true wisdom. Then we will look at the Choice Matrix, the basic idea that there are tools we can use to make good decisions and live wisely. After we understand the Choice Matrix, we will apply it to a number of life situations that you may face in the future and think about how it can be used to make decisions in "everything we do" and "everywhere we go" (see Proverbs 3:5-6).

The apostle Paul pointed to a wise way of living when he told his friends in the church at Ephesus,

Watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get. These are desperate times!

Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

ZAC'S STORY: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO WISDOM

Zac and I met after high school, but over time I realized that our growing-up years had a lot in common. It wasn't that we were born in the same place or lived in the same neighborhood or even faced the same situations, but still, the more I thought about Zac's early years, the more I knew we were very much alike.

Zac was short. We've all got that one thing we think is really obvious about us that really bothers us about ourselves, and for Zac it was his height. It wasn't just his imagination—he really was short. He started out short. You know how they measure babies when they're born? Well, the nurse looked at Zac and said, “Hmmm. What a short baby!”

For Zac there were other reminders. His parents gave him

a longer name but always called him Zac. You know how your mother says your name when she's upset with you? She says your whole name deliberately, and if she's really mad she adds your middle and last names too? Well, Zac's parents didn't do that. They always said "Zac." And when they were angry, they just said, "ZAAAAC!"

Being small can be hard when you start going to school. For one thing, you get overlooked. In Zac's case, this was serious. The first day of class, he found a desk to sit at and then had to protest when a couple other people tried to sit on top of him because they didn't notice him there. "Hey! Someone's already in this chair!"

Zac's growth spurt never arrived. When it came to athletics, some coaches just ignored him, while others treated him like a lawsuit ready to happen. He went out for football, but they couldn't find equipment small enough to fit him. The coach admitted he was relieved because he didn't want to have to pry Zac out from between someone else's cleats if he got stepped on. Actually, there were quite a few jokes that used Zac's size for the punch line. Zac never laughed.

So Zac was relegated to being manager/water boy for every team he tried to join. After a while, he stopped trying to work on his athletic skills and concentrated instead on his resentments. Once he shifted his attention, he discovered he was very good at math. He knew how to juggle figures with the best of them. His grades were good and he began to think about what he might do for a job in the future.

Where does someone work who gets overlooked by people,

carries some resentments about past treatment, but isn't really big enough to get even with people for the way they've treated him? Zac soon found the perfect job: He went to work for the IRS.

Now, in Zac's day, IRS stood for the Israeli Revenue Service. And the system worked a little different than the IRS we are familiar with today. In Zac's time, IRS agents made their wages by overcharging their clients on taxes for the Roman Empire. Zac had very simple business cards made, and he took pride in the fact that his were just a little bigger than standard. On his he had a scribe write, "Zacchaeus, Tax Collector."

For Zac, this arrangement was perfect. People brought in their W-2 forms and Zac worked his magic. He never found a deduction he couldn't deny, he had a nose for undeclared income, and he created fees and surcharges out of thin air. He didn't care that his clients resented the size of their tax bill. He was getting even (and then some). He was a skillful tax collector. Before long, Zacchaeus was a wealthy man—lonely and despised, but rich. He lived in a fine house in Jericho and was feared and hated by his neighbors. He was well on his way to living unhappily ever after.

Along the way, however, Zac developed an interesting quirk. He spent a lot of time by himself, but he observed others carefully. He was fascinated by unusual people. His line of work made everyone so ordinary that he was instantly drawn to figuring out people who lived outside the stereotypes. He noticed freaks, partly because he considered himself one.

So it was probably inevitable that when Zac started hearing

about a healer/teacher named Jesus, he became curious. The stories he heard about Jesus puzzled him. Here was a guy who went around doing good yet was resented by a lot of people. Zac chuckled and thought, *I know why people resent me. I wonder why Jesus is so hated?*

One busy day, Zac heard that Jesus was going to be passing through Jericho, and he made a note to watch out for the traveling show. But he got a little occupied in his work, and by the time he heard the commotion of people gathering on Main Street, he realized he might be too late to catch a glimpse of Jesus.

The last thing a short person wants to do is show up late for a parade. When Zac left his office and approached the main road through town, all he could see was an endless row of back-sides as far as he could look either way. Many who made up the solid wall of humanity in front of him at that moment were his disgruntled clients. There was no way they were going to step aside to let the “short tax guy” get a look.

The excited roar of the crowd told Zac that Jesus was approaching. He started to panic. Then he noticed a sycamore tree close by that stood behind the crowd but overhung the road. He rushed over and started to climb up. It was one of those rare times when his size worked to his advantage, because the branch didn't even crack as he crawled out over the crowd and hung on for dear life.

About the time Zac reached his perch, Jesus came walking along, surrounded by his disciples. He stopped under the tree and looked up at the strange fruit hanging there. Jesus' action

was so sudden that the noise got quiet in anticipation. People's eyes gradually shifted upward to see what Jesus was looking at. In the momentary stillness, Jesus said, "Hey, Zacchaeus! Why don't you climb down—carefully! I'd like to spend the afternoon at your house."

Zac was so surprised, he almost fell out of the tree. As he hurried down, he heard the roar of surprise and anger from the crowd. People were not happy about Jesus' choice of homes to visit. Resentments toward Zac were almost instantly directed toward Jesus. The refrain he heard several times was "You can't go to *his* house!"

Meanwhile, Zac's heart was in overdrive, reacting from the adrenaline of exercise and excitement. He wondered how on earth Jesus knew his name. And he had a hard time not agreeing with the crowd—why would Jesus want to come to *his* house? He couldn't get over the sudden strange feeling of being noticed.

Zac never told me exactly what Jesus said that afternoon or even what he served the sudden crowd who showed up at his house, but Zac never tired of telling how the afternoon ended. His feelings of being noticed gradually changed into feelings of being accepted for the first time in his life. As Jesus was leaving, Zac knew he didn't want to let this amazing person walk out of his life without making a commitment. The fact that even though Jesus knew his name and (as it turns out) everything about him but still wanted to spend time with him gave Zac a whole new perspective. His priorities got turned upside down. As the New Testament puts it, Zacchaeus said, "Master, I give

away half my income to the poor — and if I'm caught cheating, I pay four times the damages" (Luke 19:8). Zac became the kind of person who stopped thinking about what he was going to get out of a situation and started thinking about how he would influence a situation for good. Zacchaeus got a good dose of wisdom that day with Jesus.

As for Jesus, his comment was, "Today is salvation day in this home! Here he is: Zacchaeus, son of Abraham! For the Son of Man came to find and restore the lost" (verses 9-10). Zac came away with a renewed identity and a new life to go with it.

Funny things happen on the way to wisdom. If you want a full, interesting, satisfying, and godly life, make sure you pursue wisdom. And pay attention! You might even find yourself hanging around in a strange place when wisdom comes along. Be ready to go with wisdom anytime it shows up.