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If you want to ruin your life by 30, then . . .

OVERLOOK THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT

AT EIGHTEEN YEARS OF AGE, Jane Lucretia D'Esterre was talented and beautiful. As she stood on the bank of a beautiful, deep lake in Scotland, she pondered plunging into the depths and taking her life. She had lost all hope.

The year was 1815, and her husband, John, had just been killed in a duel. He left her penniless, in a new country, completely by herself, with two babies to care for. Her family was in France, and she was without any kind of support: emotional, spiritual, or financial.

As she gazed into the depths of the lake and pondered the pain and brokenness of her life, she looked up and saw a young man on the other side of the lake plowing furrows on the hillside. He was completely focused on his work. He was not aware of her gaze as he guided the plow behind the horse with a single-minded purpose.

In her moment of despair, she was so impressed with the young plowman's focus and concentration on doing his work well, that his example and concentration pulled her out of her despair. Suddenly,

she was infused with hope. Then the light went on in her head. She knew what she was supposed to do. She had received a timely dose of wisdom.

Jane acted. She decided to move straight ahead as the young plowman was doing. She, too, had a meaningful task to fulfill. Her children needed her. They had lost one parent already—they didn't need to experience the loss of another.

When she looked at the young man's example, she was given wisdom. Or to put it another way, Jane was given a wise heart. And when her heart became wise, it then became brave to do the right and hard thing.

A few weeks after this experience at the lake, Jane came to faith in Christ. A few years later she married Captain John Grattan Guinness, who was the youngest son of the famous brewer, Arthur Guinness.

Os Guinness tells this story in his excellent book *The Call*. Os is a gifted Christian author who has influenced many toward the kingdom of God. Jane D'Esterre was Os Guinness's great-great-grandmother. Os comments on the significance of the events that took place in Jane's life when she was just eighteen:

If it had not been for the duel, our side of the family would not have come into being. If it had not been for the plowman, the tragedy of the dueling husband would have been followed by the tragedy of the duelist's widow. . . .

My great-great-grandmother was unusual for several reasons—including the fact that she conscientiously prayed for her descendants down through a dozen generations. Ours is a heritage of faith, for which I, for one, am deeply grateful.¹

When eighteen-year-old Jane was gazing into the deep, dark depths of the lake and pondering death, she couldn't see five genera-

tions ahead and see Os Guinness or any of her other descendants. All she could see was that her life was finished. But it wasn't finished. By looking at a purposeful young man plowing on a hill, she realized there was hope.

She could take the path of the lake or she could take the life of moving ahead, in spite of her mind-numbing emotional pain.

She had no idea that Christ would call her to forgiveness and purpose in just a matter of weeks. She couldn't imagine that she would have another husband who would love her and her children. All she knew at that moment was that she could choose death or life.

She had a choice to make, and that choice would carry consequences.

That concept is known as cause and effect.

With the wrong choice she could have ruined her life and her future. With the wrong choice she would have ruined the childhood of her young children.

But she made the right choice as an eighteen-year-old. And her family is still grateful today that she did, nearly two hundred years later.

The choices you are making in your life are just as significant.

THE FIRST TWENTY YEARS

In the first twenty years of your life, your parents make the major decisions for you.

From twenty on out, you will be making the decisions. The quality of your decisions will determine what your life will look like at thirty. So from here on, the ball is in your court.

You are no longer a kid. You are an adult. And it will be the choices that you make over the next few years that will make you or break you by thirty.

And thirty will be here before you know it. If you don't believe

that, just ask someone who's there.

So when do you actually become an adult?

That's kind of hard to nail down because it happens in phases. As far as the law is concerned, eighteen is a very real marker of adulthood. But the big one is twenty-one. At the age of twenty-one, you have officially entered into the world of adulthood. And you are a full-fledged member, whether you feel like it or not.

My three kids are no longer kids. They have all passed their twenty-first birthdays and are officially adults.

One night at dinner, Josh, then twenty-two and a senior in college, was giving me some feedback on what he had read. We were talking about the fact that it is a huge transition to go from the teenage years into early adulthood. As I was listening to his feedback, I held up my hand and said,

“Wait a minute, this is pretty good stuff. Let me get a pen and write it down.”

“You don't need to write it down, Dad. I already did.”

“When did you do that, last night?”

“No, I wrote it down about a year ago. I've been giving a lot of thought to this.”

So here's what Josh wrote. I asked him to update it for this chapter. See if it doesn't resonate with you and your personal walk into adulthood:

A WIDE-EYED DRIVER TAKES THE WHEEL

In American culture, it is the first rite of passage into adulthood.

It is the one day every youth looks forward to with more anticipation, more excitement, and more sleeplessness than any other day in life: the day of the driver's license. For a sixteen-year-old, the driver's license is the ticket to a gratifying new world of freedom. By

Thirty will be here before you know it. . . . Just ask someone who's there.

sixteen, the enjoyment of toys without horsepower and rides to the mall from Mom are entirely dissolved, and life has nearly lost its ability to entertain. But to sit in the driver's seat, to hear the car door slam shut, to be left entirely alone, and to feel the surge of power with a push of the pedal—this is the pinnacle of maturity's benefits. The excitement that a new driver feels is an incredible rush, one that he or she can never imagine losing.

But, as we all know, the loss of the thrill of driving is an inevitable occurrence. The roads, once the remedy to all that was boring, eventually become merely roads and nothing more. Then a very strange thing begins to occur. While driving, you are suddenly jolted out of a state of complete distraction to realize you have not focused on the road in what seems to be several minutes. These moments are personal mysteries, attesting to the power of the wandering mind and, I should add, the grace of God. One day you're driving wide-eyed, hugging every turn with intent, and engaging every on-ramp with alertness. The next, you're nearly running into the median, looking up to realize that time has flown by and you were lost in a thought.

Life is like driving on a long road trip. You are moving down the highway of life at a very fast clip.

AND THEN YOU'RE THIRTY!

One day you will look up, perhaps after being detained by a very long thought, and realize that you are thirty. Life in the twenties is characterized by a continual introduction of new places, new people, and new experiences. Every day is met with a higher level of intent and alertness. But as days pass by like the white lines on the highway, the speed of life increases with every year. Thirty will be here before you know it.

But the coming of age and growing old is not what this book is concerned with. There is nothing wrong with wrinkles, and there

is nothing shameful about slowing down; age is not the enemy. This book is concerned with the coming of consequences—whether good or bad.

Deeply ingrained into the fabric of all creation is a law that every action must have a reaction. There are no exceptions to the rule. Every choice in life—every thought, word, and action—brings a return of circumstances with it. You will reach the age of thirty only by traveling the road through eighteen, twenty-one, and twenty-five. And the choices in life during those quickly passing years will entirely determine the person you will be at thirty.

GET A GRIP!

This is a scary thought, and it should be.

This is also a thought that may seem too obvious and simple to even bring up. Doesn't everyone grasp this concept of cause and effect? Apparently not.

There is not a single person who would answer yes, if asked the question, *Do you want your life to be miserable when you are older?* Yet the majority of young people engage in decisions every day that are leading to that very end. This is evidence of a great disconnect in modern thinking. There is a denial of the law of cause and effect. Many lies have penetrated the mind of this generation, but none greater than this.

Every young man or woman has an image in their head of who they will be in several years, but that image is hardly ever the natural outcome of the life they are living. The truth is that most young people are comforted with a future perception of themselves that is based on the solid evidence of nothing.

This book is intended to realign the disconnect and to awaken a hope for the future that is based upon truth.

MY TWO CENTS

I couldn't agree with Josh more.

Mark it down.

Causes have effects.

Actions have reactions.

Choices have consequences.

That will be the story of your life.

The decision that Jane made as she stood by the lake had consequences. Those consequences have rippled through her descendants for two hundred years. Have you thought about the fact that the decisions you make in the next few years have consequences not only for you but also for your descendants two hundred years from now?

This book is an invitation to think deeply about your life and the critical decisions you will make over the next decade of your life. Wisdom will be the deciding factor. George Moore was right: "The difficulty in life is the choice." When it comes to your personal decisions, you can seek wisdom or ignore it. It's up to you. But your decisions will affect not only you, but also others, some who have yet to be born.

This is no small matter you are facing.

You need the very wisdom of God.

Thirty will be here before you know it.

So teach us to number our days,

That we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12 NKJV)

He gave wisdom to Jane Lucretia D'Esterre to know that her choice would have a consequence.

He is more than willing to give you the same wisdom. And you will need it more than once on the way to thirty.

*Wisdom will
be the deciding
factor.*