

LESSON 1: WE CAN HAVE A FAR BETTER FUTURE

“What’s wrong with America – and how do we fix it?”

By the spring of 2016, that question had been bothering me for a long time.

So I decided to get serious about finding some answers.

I knew there *had* to be a better way forward than the way we’ve been going.

And I wanted to help us find it.

That year, I started reading everything I could find that might be relevant. This included articles, research papers, and various books.

I studied economics and public policy.

I read up on history and politics.

I dug into science, psychology, and even theology in my search for some answers.

* This is a pre-release lesson from the course “How We Fix America” by John M. Woodman. Copyright © 2021. For more information, please contact the author at: johnmwoodman@abetteramerica.org.

2 Lesson 1: We Can Have A Far Better Future

I also took part in lots of conversations about our country and our politics with other human beings. I tried, if I could, to learn something from every conversation.

I spent five years looking for answers.

And along the way, I learned I was definitely not alone in my feeling that something's really wrong.

As I write this, the last time more than half of us were happy with the direction America was going was January of 2004.¹

That's more than 17 years ago.

But after all this time, and all of those conversations, I've come to a solid, and positive, conviction.

Our problems are big. But pretty much every problem we face has a reasonable solution.

Since this is the case, a much better future for us as a nation, and also as individuals, and families, and communities is *not* beyond our reach.

And when I talk about a better future, I mean *much* better than what it will be if we just keep drifting along.

It's Past Time to Admit – We're Really Falling Short of Our Potential.

Of course, there are different paths to the future that we could take.

As I've already hinted, we've been drifting downward, in many ways, for the past several decades.

For a good part of the 20th century, we Americans had the highest standard of living in the world.² We had the very best of everything.



By 1937, billboards across the United States celebrated that Americans enjoyed the highest standard of living in the world.

But in case you haven't noticed, lately, we're not living up to our promise.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic led to the biggest economic crash we've had since the Great Depression, about 60 percent of American citizens were already living paycheck to paycheck – and we had been for a long time.

The typical family doesn't have enough savings to cover a \$1,000 emergency. Instead, we have to borrow from somewhere.³

This is in one of the very richest countries on earth.⁴

And for at least the last 20 years, we've been spending about twice as much for our health care as anyone else on the entire *planet* – and getting nowhere even remotely near twice the results of other developed nations.⁵

Why?

There are those who would have you believe we have “the best health care system in the world.”⁶

4 Lesson 1: We Can Have A Far Better Future

But overall, our health care system is now ranked 11th – behind Australia, Sweden, and other countries.⁷

Do you find this acceptable? I don't.

Well, hang on, because it gets worse. A *lot* worse.

We're now 18th in the world when it comes to how happy our citizens are. This is obviously a pretty important way to measure our quality of life.

But countries like Finland, Canada, Israel, and Costa Rica have us beat in happiness.⁸

In comparative scores for math, science and reading, we're now 25th – far behind countries like China, which has reached #1.⁹

And when we've fallen to 25th in education, that's a warning that we're likely to slip in other areas in the future.

In the well-being of our children, we're a distant 26th. Kids are healthier and happier in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Greece.¹⁰

Ah, but surely we're on top in the opportunity to get ahead – you know, the stuff of the American Dream?

Unfortunately, no.

Not even close.

You've got a better chance of getting ahead in life if you live in...

Just about *any* European country.

Or Canada. Or Australia or New Zealand. Singapore. Japan. South Korea. Or even the stodgy old United Kingdom.

The United States was once viewed worldwide as *the* place to get ahead. But now, we rank a shocking 27th in social and economic mobility.¹¹

And in spite of all of our talk about “family values,” we're not doing so great for families, either.

Out of 37 OECD countries – and the OECD is pretty much the world’s “developed countries” club¹² – we’re the only country without paid parental leave.¹³

That would be a “37th place.”

Whatever happened to “the highest standard of living in the world?”

We can go on and on.

In spite of America’s vast wealth, we now rank a dismal 45th in life expectancy.

45th.

Sounds unbelievable, doesn’t it? But it’s true.

In Japan, the average person is living a full *six years* longer than we are.

Even up north in cold, snowy Canada, where it’s harder to get out and exercise in the winter, our neighbors are outliving us, on average, by more than three years.¹⁴

And then there are the *negative* categories where we *do* rank at the “top” – but where we’d be much, much better off at the bottom.

For example, we’re #1 among the developed countries... when it comes to *obesity*.¹⁵

And as mentioned earlier, we’re also #1 in the world – *by far* – when it comes to how much cash we get stuck for on our health care bills.

Runaway, no-contest “winners” in how much we spend, but 11th in quality.

Clearly, there’s not just some *room* for improvement here. There’s a major *need* for improvement.

Wouldn’t you agree?

“But We Have the Most Powerful Military in the World.”

Yes, it’s true. No one can touch us when it comes to military might. The last time America invaded a foreign country – Iraq, back in 2003 – it took us less than three weeks to overrun its capital city.¹⁶

Today, we’re still spending more on our military than the next ten countries combined – only two of which, China and Russia, have historically been our rivals.

When it comes to those rivals, we’re still spending well over twice what China and Russia are spending, combined.¹⁷

Now I’m not saying that we should let our guard down – it is a dangerous world out there, after all.

But the fact that we have the most powerful military in the world doesn’t excuse us or relieve us *from all of the things we’re failing at*.

In fact, it can easily be a distraction.

“Hey, look. We’re the world’s only superpower!”

Okay. But let’s not forget about the other things.

We can do both.

How do I know?

I know because we’ve done both in the past.

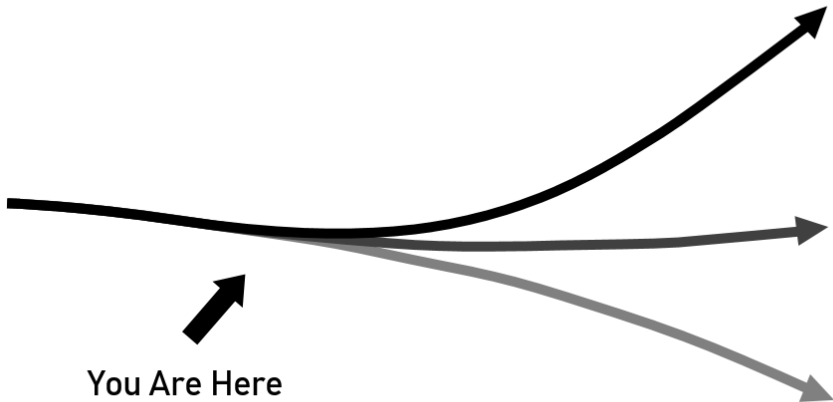
We’ve simply lost our focus.

Which Path to the Future?

If we don’t make a major course correction, we’re likely to keep drifting downward in most or all of these important ways.

I’ve drawn a picture of this with our current, downward path shown in the following illustration.

Possible Future Paths for America



We could straighten up a bit, level off, and at least not keep getting worse.

Or – and this would be much, *much* better – we can rise to new heights.

Our nation led the world in the 20th century. And we can return to leading the world again, in all of the ways that really matter.

It's *not* impossible for us to get back on top.

But our leading the world in the 20th century didn't happen by accident.

And we certainly won't get back on top in the 21st century by accident, either. It's going to take some conscious purpose and clear dedication.

We're also going to have to end some of our squabbles, and move in the same direction, together.

So let me ask you: What direction do *you* want to see America go, over the next 10 or 20 or 30 years?

Do you want to see us keep drifting downwards, on our slow decline, as more and more countries keep passing us by?

Or would you much prefer – as I would – to see America renewed, and rise to new heights?

Do You Want a Really Prosperous Future for Yourself and Your Family – or a Disastrous One??

Let's make this much more personal.

The direction we go as a country has MASSIVE personal implications for you and your family.

The future path we take may well mean the difference between whether you and other family members just get by, or whether you really prosper.

If we change our course and take the path of renewal, it can easily mean tens of thousands or even *hundreds of thousands* of dollars in prosperity for you and your family.

And no – as we will see in later lessons – I'm not exaggerating here *in the slightest*.

The stakes are enormous.

I'm talking about whether or not you and your family members have better and more affordable health care.

I'm talking about whether you will continue to live in a free society, or be restricted by a government that tells you exactly what you can and can't do.

So this is a matter of personal freedom, or a lack of it.

It's about whether you and other family members can ever afford to retire, and what your options will be if you do.

It's about whether you can own no home, or one home, or more than one home.

It's whether you or your kids can afford to go into business for yourself, or are never able to realize that dream.

For some of us, what I'm talking about in this book will even mean the difference between life and death.

So I'd like for you to imagine yourself 20 years from now.

You're struggling. If you have children, your children are struggling, too. There are problems with money. Or health.

Or, maybe, your kids are doing okay...

But *nobody* is doing very much better than they are today.

Twenty years from now, and just not much progress.

That's not the future you'd prefer to imagine, is it?

Well...

Then let's imagine a different future.

Now I'd like for you to imagine a future in which *none* of you or your family are struggling.

Your finances and health are fine. In fact, you're doing so well that you have the freedom to do things you wouldn't have imagined yourself doing 20 years earlier – back on the day when you first encountered this lesson.

If you can have one of these futures, or the other, which one do you want?

I know which future I want.

The goal of the rest of this course is to explain how we *get* that better future – for your family, for mine, and for our fellow Americans as well.

I'm going to help you gain a better understanding of what our major problems are, what the barriers are, and what we will have to do to overcome them.

I'll Keep It as Brief as I Can.

To get off of our pathway to decline, ***we've got to change course.***

And to pinpoint exactly what we have to change in order to reach that higher path, we need to talk about our biggest, most important issues.

These include things like an economy that's gotten way warped from what it used to be.

They include things like our rigged and broken politics.

They include finding ways to conquer partisanship and lies.

And they also include a few specific, really divisive "hot button" issues that divide us and cause us to turn our guns on each other.

These are issues such as abortion, immigration, and guns.

After five years of work, I could now write an entire book on any one of these things.

In fact, at this very moment, I have enough notes to write *two* different books just on the topic of abortion alone.

But that's not what we'd like to do today.

Starting right now, *I just want to give you the 30,000 foot overview.* I want to zoom back and show you the big picture.

Because we so often fail to see the forest for the trees.

Truth We Haven't Heard Before Can Lead to Enlightenment.

Now let me prepare you up front. It's possible that I'm about to say some things that will be different from what you've been told before.

What I have to say might even be *very* different from some of the things you've been told by others.

But assuming that what I'm going to tell you is all true – **and it is** – then some of the things I have to say may help you gain a new, and improved, understanding.

When we improve our understanding, we sometimes call that “enlightenment.”

It's taken me five years of hard effort to gain some nuggets of enlightenment. And I'd like to share them with you.

There's also another way we might put this.

When I was a boy, the newspaper in my little home town had a Bible verse printed right across the top of the front page.

“You shall know the truth – and the truth will set you free.”¹⁸

Of course, the truth will only set you free if you *recognize* it and *accept* it.

And unfortunately, many if not most of us have been trained to reject at least some of the truth that might enlighten us.

In fact, I myself was trained this way. For a long time, I never even realized it.

This sounds sort of dark and conspiratorial, and in some ways, it is.

Why? Because I fully believe there are in fact people out there who really do not want us to wake up and see and understand the truth.

As we go along, I'm going to explain who these people are, how they've worked to control our minds, and why.

But some of it, too, is simply due to our own natural inclinations.

You see, once you or I have made our minds up about something, it's often a lot easier to just keep believing the same thing – no matter what new information might come along.

And most of us – myself included – have a tendency to just keep arguing in favor of the things we already think we know.

This isn't exactly my fault – or yours. It's how we were born. It's human nature.

But in order to become more enlightened, we have to decide that's *not* what we're going to do.

So I'm going to ask you to resolve that you'll really give a fair hearing, with a completely open mind, to what I have to say.

I'm going to ask you to make the same kind of commitment that I made at the start of my own journey.

It's a commitment to *learn*.

And learning often means being willing to change your mind about things you were certain you already understood.

And No, This Is Not Some Kind of Trick.

Now I know that all of this might sound a bit like a sales pitch from someone who's going to try and trick you into something.

But as you'll see, my goal is the exact opposite. It's to *untrick* everyone I can.

There's a huge problem, though, with ever trying to untrick people.

*Almost nobody who's ever been tricked, or fooled, **ever** believes that they've been fooled.*

I know this from my own experience.

I personally was fooled...

And I was completely, absolutely convinced that I wasn't.

So one of my goals is to train others – you – in how to tell the difference between who’s telling you the truth, and who isn’t.

Because it’s not as easy as you might think. And it’s certainly not automatic.

Four Basic Steps to the Truth

Getting a good understanding starts with simple things – like *listening to both sides of an issue, and checking all of the things you’re told, to find out whether they’re true or not.*

Folks who are trying to fool you will often tell you not to listen to *anybody but them.*

And that’s a strong telltale sign that they just may be trying to put something over on you.

On the other hand, I’ve seen very few people advising folks to do what I’m going to tell you to do in this book, which is to *go ahead and listen to both sides.*

That’s a sign that someone (in this case, me) just might be telling you the truth.

Now you also have to combine that with some skill and honest dedication in actually sorting through who’s giving you good information, and who’s giving you bad info.

Telling the difference between good information and bad often isn’t a part of our education – and even when it is, it often isn’t taught very well.

We’ll say more about this along the way.

In the meantime, finding the truth starts when we do four basic things:

1. Don’t just listen to one side of an issue.

Listen to *both* sides.

And do so as fairly as you can. Do your best to set aside your own preferences and your current beliefs, ask questions, and *sort out* what things are true, and what things aren't.

Remind yourself that you're not likely to be fooled by the people you disagree with and don't like.

It's the people you want to believe who are *far* more likely to lead you astray.

2. Check facts. *Carefully.*

This won't just tell you what's true and what isn't. It will also tell you who's giving you good information, and who isn't.

3. Do your best to *test your beliefs and replace them with more accurate ones* – instead of doing your best to defend your beliefs, and hold on to them.

4. When you figure out that someone is consistently leading you astray, stop believing that person.

So go ahead and verify the things I tell you.

*Read and check endnotes.*¹⁹

Check my sources. See how credible they are.

And remember: Even if the truth takes us into unfamiliar territory, it's going to set us free.²⁰

In fact, the truth is the *only* thing that will enable us to make the *right* decisions, instead of the wrong ones.

Because you can't make the right moves in the darkness.

It's true at an individual level, and it's true at a national level as well.

We can't make the right decisions as a nation unless our path is lit up by the light of the truth.

In the same way that driving down the highway at night with no headlights is going to lead to bad results, we can't possibly make good decisions about what to do, unless those decisions are illuminated by the bright light of truth and reality.

Tiny Steps Add Up to a Journey

The way to accomplish anything is one small step at a time.

Wanna build a business or walk the 2,000 miles of the Appalachian Trail? Then take a first step. And take another one after that.

And another after that, and so on.

You don't take all of those steps in one single jump. You take them one at a time.

But if you just keep taking those tiny, easy steps, you can eventually walk the entire length of the Appalachian Trail.

In this course, I want to get you – and a lot of other folks – started on a series of small, easy steps that will lead *all* of us to a better future, and a better America.

Maybe these will be new for you.

But if you should happen to find that you already know everything I'm going to say, then maybe you can use this resource to help others find the right path.

Now our very first step is this:

To make this course the thing that you're working on now.

To decide that you're going to *keep going* until you finish it, and that you're going to take every reasonable step along the way to help build a better future for yourself, your family, and our nation.

It's to *decide* that you're willing to cross over the line from casual, ho-hum interest, to being an active *participant* in a *great renewal* of our American story.

It's to *decide* that you're going to join a particular community – a tribe of patriotic people who are all determined to help bring about a better future.

And it's to decide, also, to invite at *least* the person closest to you to take this journey with you. And maybe your whole family, and – eventually – all of your friends.

Why is it so important to invite others?

It's not just important because we want to reach more people – although we do want to do that.

It's important for *you* – because, as the old saying goes, “No man is an island.”

No woman is an island, either.

One of the reasons we believe the things we believe is because those around us believe those things, too.

And one of the important reasons that we resist embracing more accurate, truth-based beliefs is because if we do, it might put us at odds with those who are important to us.

You see, it's really important for us to belong.

And my goal is *not* to put you at odds with your family, by causing you to start changing your ideas, and suddenly believing things that they may not.

My goal is to bring a clearer, more accurate understanding of the truth to entire families and groups of friends.

Therefore, I invite you to take this step, that I've already taken.

I invite you to sign your name to the pledge below.

And I suggest that you read this chapter to at least one friend or family member, and get them to sign with you.

This should be the most important person, or most important people, in your life.

Why am I asking you to do this?

So that we can change America for the better. And our own lives and futures as well.

These are truly high and important stakes.

So start now. Begin to take this journey together with that important person or persons. Go back through this lesson with them. Talk together about the things I'm going to tell you. Verify together whether or not they are true.

Test what I have to say.

If what I'm telling you is untrue, then by all means, quit. Throw your course materials in the trash.

But if I *am* telling you the truth, then you hold in your hands a really important key to America's future – and yours.

If you're sharing this course, or want to do so, and need another copy or copies of the pledge below, you can get a printable version at: www.abetteramerica.org/step1.

There's space here to write down additional thoughts, or to rewrite the same type of commitment in your own words.

Did I say "commitment?" Yes, I did.

Because we aren't going to change America without making *some* kind of commitment to *do* a few things.

Now I'm not asking you to commit to anything that's unrealistic, or excessive.

I'm not asking you to join a cult.

I don't want your firstborn child. Or any child. My wife and I have six of our own, and that's good enough for us.

But again – if we want a great future for ourselves, our families, and our nation, and *not* the downward drift we're currently on, we're going to have to *do* some things to help change our course.

So let's do it.

Together.

I'm willing to lead the way.

I've made the commitment.

Will you go with me?

Step One: "I Commit to Learning How We Can Create a Better Future – And Also to Inviting Those Closest to Me to Come Along and Learn With Me."

"I realize that America is made up of all of us.

I realize that we as a nation can only move forward if We the People move us forward.

I realize this means that – if we're to change our pathway toward a better future – every single one of us has a responsibility to do our part, whether big or small, to help make that happen.

I realize that in order to do this, we need to genuinely understand what our problems are, get clear on what reasonable solutions are, and work together to push for such solutions.

And whatever my part is, I'm willing to do it.

*I **want** to do it.*

*I choose to do my part, because **I choose to be an American who builds a great American future.***

I choose to do my part, because I realize that there are far too many others who are going to fail or refuse to do theirs.

And I know that we can only make things better if as many of us as possible pitch in and help.

I know that a lot of people, moving together in the right direction, can make things better.

And I want us to make things better.

*Why? Because **I want a better future for myself, for my family, for my fellow Americans – and for my nation as a whole.***

Therefore, I commit to learn.

I commit to continuing with the lessons in this course, until I finish them.

And I commit to inviting at least one other person to take this journey along with me.

I will talk these ideas over with that person or persons.

If possible, we will go through these lessons together.

And we will join together with others, who have a similar commitment to help make our future a better one.”

Signed: _____

Person or Persons I'm Inviting: _____

Thoughts: _____

ENDNOTES

- 1 See: "Satisfaction With the United States," Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1669/general-mood-country.aspx>, accessed Feb 17, 2021.
- 2 The illustration is of a road sign near Kingwood, West Virginia, in February 1937. Photo by US Farm Security Administration, Edwin Locke, photographer. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017728485/>, accessed May 2, 2021.
- 3 "A \$1,000 emergency would push many Americans into debt," Annie Nova, CNBC, January 23, 2019, <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/23/most-americans-dont-have-the-savings-to-cover-a-1000-emergency.html>, accessed April 14, 2020.
- 4 When you measure "richest" by how much wealth we're producing, per person, we're actually about fifth in the world. Luxembourg is at the top, at \$110,000 of wealth per person per year, followed by Switzerland at \$82,000, Ireland at \$80,000, Norway at \$68,000, and the United States at \$63,000. See: "Mapped: The 25 Richest Countries in the World," Avery Koop, Visual Capitalist,
- 5 "U.S. Health Care from a Global Perspective, 2019: Higher Spending, Worse Outcomes?," Roosa Tikkanen and Melinda K. Abrams, January 30, 2020, The Commonwealth Fund, <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/jan/us-health-care-global-perspective-2019>, accessed, June 10, 2020. That this has been going on for a long time now is shown by a 2003 paper that deals with US health care spending in the year 2000: "It's The Prices, Stupid: Why The United States Is So Different From Other Countries," Gerard F. Anderson, Uwe E. Reinhardt, Peter S. Hussey, and Varduhi Petrosyan, *Health Affairs*, May/ June 2003, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/full/10.1377/hlthaff.22.3.89>, accessed June 10, 2020.

- 6 I particularly remember talk radio host Sean Hannity beating this drum a few years back. It's true that the most advanced technology in the world is generally available here in the US – *if* you have enough money to be able to pay for it. But what good is it to be in the same general geographical area as services that you simply can't access?
- 7 Mirror, Mirror 2017: International Comparison Reflects Flaws and Opportunities for Better U.S. Health Care, Eric C. Schneider, Dana O. Sarnak, David Squires, Arnab Shah, and Michelle M. Doty, The Commonwealth Fund, July 2017, https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/documents/___media_file_s_publications_fund_report_2017_jul_schneider_mirror_mirror_2017.pdf, accessed June 9, 2020.
- 8 World Happiness Report 2020, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, <https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2020/WHR20.pdf>
- 9 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 Worldwide Ranking, factmaps.com, <https://factsmaps.com/pisa-2018-worldwide-ranking-average-score-of-mathematics-science-reading/>, accessed March 25, 2021.
- 10 “Child Well-being in Rich Countries: A comparative overview,” Innocenti Report Card 11, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence, 2013, https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc11_eng.pdf, accessed June 9, 2020.
- 11 World Economic Forum Social Mobility Report 2020, Social Mobility Rankings, <http://reports.weforum.org/social-mobility-report-2020/social-mobility-rankings/>, accessed June 9, 2020. Colombia, which joined the OECD in April 2020, is not counted in this report.
- 12 “OECD” stands for The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. As of June 2020, the 37 OECD member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Israel, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Costa Rica is also seeking membership. (<https://www.thebalance.com/organization-economic-cooperation-development-3305871>)
- 13 “Parental leave systems,” OECD Family Database, OECD, http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf, accessed June 9, 2020. Colombia also joined the OECD in 2020, as the 37th member. They have paid parental leave as well. See: <https://www.angloinfo.com/how-to/colombia/healthcare/pregnancy-birth/maternity-protection>

- 14 The World Factbook, Country Comparison: Life Expectancy at Birth, US CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/355rank.html>, accessed June 9, 2020. This shows 86 years for Japan, 83.4 years for Canada, and 80.3 years for the United States.
- 15 The World Factbook, Country Comparison: Obesity – Adult Prevalence Rate, US CIA, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/367rank.html>, accessed June 9, 2020.
- 16 “Timeline: Iraq War,” BBC News, July 5, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36702957>, accessed May 2, 2021.
- 17 “As Congress Debates Military Budget, U.S. to Spend More Than Next 10 Countries Combined,” Jason Lemon, Time Magazine, July 22, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/congress-debates-military-budget-us-spend-more-next-10-countries-combined-1519753>, accessed April 22, 2021.
- 18 John 8:32.
- 19 Good job! Now keep going! :-)) Of course, you don’t necessarily have to read every endnote. But if there’s anything you doubt or disagree with, go ahead and do some more digging. And remember: People aren’t often led astray by those that they disagree with and dislike. It’s the folks you want to believe, and the stories you really *want* to believe, that are more likely to fool you.
- 20 The Bible, which we already quoted on the value of truth, also talks about some of these key principles for getting to the truth.

“In a lawsuit the first to speak seems right, until someone comes forward and cross-examines.” (Proverbs 18:17) This shows that if we want the truth, we shouldn’t just listen to the first person to speak, or one side, before reaching a judgment. We should always listen fairly to both sides.

“Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” (Acts 17:11) These people were commended for not just listening, and not just listening and accepting – they listened, and then spent every day *fact-checking* to try and determine whether what they were being told was true. They did this even though the speaker presented things that sounded good.

“Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others.” (Proverbs 12:15) “Your own way” consists of the things you already believe and are inclined to act upon. Listening to others involves being willing to change your mind, accept their point of view if it’s true, and change course. (Other versions translate this as “listening to counsel” or “listening to advice.” This is essentially the same thing as the

process I referred to – that of testing your beliefs and changing them at every opportunity for better and more true ones.

“I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.” (Romans 16:17-18) Here, the Apostle Paul warns his followers to avoid people who are teaching false things. He points out a couple of characteristics of such people. They’re attractive. They use smooth talk. They use flattery. But their goal is to deceive people, for the sake of their own benefit. And the key admonition is this: “Keep away from them.” In other words, when you find out that someone is consistently working to mislead you, *stop listening to such people.*

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” (Matthew 7:15) This final reference comes from Jesus himself. It highlights the innocent and deceptive presentation of those who want to lead people astray – again, the motivation is for their own benefit. They look innocent. They look *cute*. But their goal is to mislead you and to use you to satisfy their own appetites. Usually, in the modern political arena, this is a matter of using you for money, power, fame, ego-boosting, or some combination of the above. And the tactics of wolves work, which is why they keep using them.