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**A Better Life—Proverbs 12**  
**Proverbs 12:9; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 23:27-28**

**January 7, 2024**

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**PROVERBS READING PLAN - WEEK 1**

<https://www.sb.church/proverbs>

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**INSPIRATION**

*“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.” (Abraham Lincoln)*

Abraham Lincoln, our greatest president (some would disagree, but they would be wrong), used a tree and its shadow to communicate the difference between shadow and substance, image and reality. He used the example of a tree and its shadow, but he was of course referring to people. There is often a gap between our image and our character. Have you known or encountered people whose image and character were different?

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**ICE BREAKER**

1. What do you think motivates people to focus on their image instead of their character? Personal gratification? A need to be accepted? A desire to look like they have everything together? All of the above? Make your own list.
  2. Are you more concerned with your external image or your inner character?
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**DEEP DIVE**

**Read this out loud**

An excerpt from the message this week:

“And it is easy to pretend to be spiritual. It is. We probably fool people all the time with how great we look spiritually. We can pray a prayer out loud with the best. We show up to help with the Christmas decorating team, and we might even volunteer to work at the Halloween event, but inside our relationship with Jesus is a fake. We are phonies. Our prayers have become ritualistic. Our giving has become a chore. Our serving is inconsistent.

We are religious, but that is it. Religious, fake, plastic. It is what Jesus is talking about. Maybe that is what made you walk away from church. It was plastic. You knew the folks were phony. You saw what they were like on Sunday, but you also saw what they were like on Friday, and it was two different people.

I get it. It is sometimes hard to deal with fake and phony religion. But Jesus is the real deal. He is not fake or phony or plastic. He will always deal with us honestly, authentically. He will not do one thing and then another thing later.”



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**Read Proverbs 12:9 and Hebrews 13:5 and then answer the following questions:**

3. Explain the difference between image and substance in Proverbs 12:9. Based on this verse, explain why it is better to be a “nobody” instead of pretending “to be somebody.”
4. List some ways people pretend to be a “somebody” in our culture today. Explain how incurring debt to maintain a desired lifestyle or image adversely affects us, instead of satisfies us.
5. What is the reason given in Hebrews 13:5 why we should be content instead of loving money? Based on this verse, explain where true acceptance and contentment are found.

**Read this out loud**

An excerpt from the message this week:

“We pretend. And we really might be able to fool those around us, but we haven’t fooled Jesus or ourselves. We pretend so that we are accepted – even at church. We pretend so that we don’t have to change. If I can get you to believe this is who I am then you will accept me, and I don’t have to change.

How do I stop pretending?”

**Read Matthew 23:27-28 and then answer the following questions:**

6. As discussed above, we can pretend with money. Based on Matthew 23:27-28, explain how we can pretend spiritually.
7. Explain how hypocrisy harms not only you, but also your example to others.

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**NEXT STEPS**

8. Being people of spiritual authenticity starts with us. Why is being honest with ourselves so difficult? Why is it so important?
9. Being as honest as “Honest Abe,” are you the tree or the shadow?

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**PRAYER**

1. Lord, I know that true contentment is found in you. Help me to seek your acceptance, rather than pretend I am somebody to gain the acceptance of friends, family and others.
  2. If you need to seek the help or counseling of others, to adopt an economic or spiritual “budget” to move closer to Jesus, reach out to a trusted Christian friend, counselor or the church this week.
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