

A country boy heard that the circus was coming to town. So on the day it was to arrive, he was standing on the sidewalk when a train pulled into the station, the circus rolled off, and a parade moved past him to travel to the empty lots where they would set up their tents. As the parade moved past, the boy was overjoyed to see the magicians and musicians, the acrobats and jugglers, and the animals and other center ring acts. Last in the parade was a clown. The boy ran up to the clown and asked “*Who do I pay?*” Realizing that the boy misunderstood what was happening, the clown said “*Pay me.*” So the boy handed over his money and went home.

Just as that boy missed something, mistaking the parade for the circus, Dudley Rutherford missed something in God Has An App For That. He missed 6 verses in James! This means that as we look at those verses today, I will be sharing just MY thoughts about how to download a spiritual app to be about the process of what I have titled as “*Alleviating Foolishness*.” As I do so, I invite you to return to the image of the circus. At first, it may seem like the ultimate image of foolishness. But the circus can actually teach us lessons. The circus can help us walk with God. The circus can help us share God’s love. To see how, let’s use Rutherford’s God Has An App For That imagery, and download several circus program modules.

To be about the process of “*Alleviating Foolishness*” from our lives, we need to download a module titled Embrace Your Act. We have been created by God with abilities, talents, and gifts. It is easy to celebrate those things. But we also have things in our lives that embarrass us, parts of our lives that handicap us, and aspects of our lives that sadden us. And the pain of those things can often overshadow our abilities, talents, and gifts - leaving us foolishly trying to become someone we were not been created to be. In response, we need to embrace who we ACTUALLY ARE so God’s wisdom can so flow in our lives that foolishness is pushed aside, and His wisdom is not only downloaded, but installed and allowed to run in the background to keep watch over all we think, say, and do.

We see how this works in The Greatest Showman. Early in that movie, P.T. Barnum begins to gather performers for his “*American Museum of Curiosities*.” He starts at the home of someone he later names Tom Thumb. “*I AM PUTTING TOGETHER A SHOW, AND I NEED A STAR!*” Barnum says in his best sales pitch voice.” “*You want people to laugh at me,*” Tom says. Barnum responds by describing what he envisions for the young man’s act: “*I see a soldier, no a general, riding across the stage with a sword and a gun and the most beautiful uniform ever made. People will come from all over the world. And when they see him, they won’t laugh; they’ll salute.*” Those words prod Tom to choose to look past the difficulties life has caused him, and to embrace the opportunity to become the best version of himself that he can be.

But Barnum was not the first to understand the wisdom of living this way. The Apostle James asks “*who is wise and understanding among you?*” and then declares that it is the one who shows it “*by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.*” This is because life isn’t meant to be a trivia game where wisdom just helps us know the right answers. Life is meant to be the process by which wisdom helps us become the beings God created us to be through the deeds we choose to perform. But that can only happen if we embrace every part of our lives - even when some

parts embarrass us, handicap us, and sadden us. For it is only when we are honest with ourselves in this way that God's wisdom can be at work in us, for us, and through us. Which is why Proverbs, an entire book about wisdom, tells us to "*accept instruction,*" for "*a wise man listens to advice.*"

To be about the process of "*Alleviating Foolishness*" from our lives, we also need to download a module titled Own Your Monkeys. Since each of us has been created by God with abilities, talents, and gifts, but also has things in our lives that embarrass, handicap, and sadden us, the pain of those things can not only threaten to overshadow our abilities, talents, and gifts (and lead us to foolishly try to become someone we have not been created to be) it can also tempt us to blame others for our shortcomings. In response, we need to not only embrace who we are, we also need to take responsibility for how we live so God's wisdom can so flow in our lives that the foolishness of human wisdom is pushed aside, and God's wisdom is not only downloaded but installed and allowed to run in the background to keep watch over all we think, say, and do.

We see how this works in The Greatest Showman as well. After Barnum opened his museum, he encounters a theater critic on the steps outside. "*Come to take in another show?*" Barnum taunts. "*Does it bother you that everything you're selling is fake?*" the critic asks. "*Do the smiles seem fake?*" Barnum replies, "*it doesn't matter where they come from, the joy is real.*" "*So you're a philanthropist?*" the critic asks in derision. "*Hyperbole isn't the worst crime,*" Barnum replies, "*people suffer from imagining too little, not too much.*" "*The creed of a true fraud,*" the critic declares. "*When was the last time you smiled?*" Barnum asks, and then adds "*[you're a] theater critic who can't find joy in the theater. Now who's a fraud?*"

As Barnum starts to walk away, he turns back to the critic and says "*Oh, that word you used to describe my show; it has a nice ring to it.*" The camera then pans out to show the critic looking up to see that Barnum has used the man's review of his show as "*nothing more than a circus,*" to change the name of his show from the "*American Museum of Curiosities*" to "*P.T. Barnum's CIRCUS.*"

But Barnum was not the first person in history to understand the wisdom of living this way. James writes that "*if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*" This is because life isn't meant to be a trivia game where wisdom just helps us refrain from certain sins. Life is meant to be the process by which wisdom helps us fully become the beings God created us to be. But that can only happen if we take responsibility for our spiritual growth, looking at how we have responded to pain and sorrow in the past, and moving on from blaming others for why we are not yet who we were created to be. For it is only when we are honest with ourselves in this way that God's wisdom can be at work in us, for us, and through us. Which is why Proverbs, an entire book about wisdom, tells us "*the wise of heart will receive commandments,*" and "*a wise son hears his father's instruction.*"

To be about the process of "*Alleviating Foolishness*" from our lives, we also need to download a module titled Tour the World. Since each of us has been created by God with abilities, talents, and

gifts, but also has things in our lives that embarrass, handicap, and sadden us, the pain of those things can threaten to overshadow our abilities, talents, and gifts (and lead us to foolishly try to become someone we have not been created to be), tempt us to blame others for our pain and sorrow (and foolishly let ourselves be less than we were created to be), and stop us from moving outside our comfort zone to be a witness for Jesus.

In response, we need to not only embrace all of who we are, and take responsibility for what we have not yet become as a follower of Jesus, we also need to realize that God seeks to have us grow in such ways not just for our own benefit, but also so we might help others be on that same journey, so God's wisdom can so flow in all our lives that the foolishness of human wisdom is pushed aside, and God's wisdom is not only downloaded, but installed and allowed to run in the background to keep watch over not only what we think, say, and do, but also what others think, say, and do.

We also see how this works in The Greatest Showman. When Barnum meets Philip Carlyle, a theater producer, he invites him to leave the theater and begin promoting his circus. But Carlyle turns him down, saying *"I can't just run off and join the circus."* *Why Not?"* Barnum asks. Carlyle replies *"Let's just say I find it much more comfortable admiring your show from afar."* *"Ah,"* Barnum replies, *"Comfort . . . the enemy of progress."* But eventually, Carlyle gives in, joins the circus, and - just like in the real life history of the circus - goes on the road with the circus, traveling from city to city to entertain the world.

But Carlyle was not the first person in history to understand the wisdom of living this way. James writes that *"the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere."* As a result, James says, *"peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness."* This is because life isn't meant to be a trivia game where wisdom just helps us refrain from sin. Life is meant to be the process by which wisdom helps us fully become the beings God created us to be.

But that can only happen if we are willing to take responsibility for that growth process, looking at how we have responded to pain and sorrow in the past, and moving on from blaming others for why we are not yet who we were created to be, so that through God's grace we can help others become who they were created to be. For it is only when we are honest with ourselves in this way that God's wisdom can be at work in us, for us, and through us. Which is why Proverbs, an entire book about wisdom, tells us not only that *"the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,"* but also that *"the heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips."*

As we seek to download a spiritual app to be about the process of *"Alleviating Foolishness"* by letting God help us Embrace Our Act, and Own Our Monkeys, as well as Tour the World, we see how to do so in a practical way in the story of a boy and his father who went to the circus. At the ticket booth, they waited behind a family with 8 children. When the father of that family stepped to the window, and was told how much the tickets would cost, there was silence. Obviously, the father did not have enough money. But before he could say anything to his kids, or the ticket lady could speak again, the boy watched his father take the \$20 that was going to pay for THEIR tickets

and drop it on the ground behind the man. Then he tapped the father in front of him on the back, and pointing to the money said “*excuse me, sir, but I believe you dropped that.*”

The father wasn’t looking for a handout, but appreciated the help in an embarrassing moment. “*Thank you, this means the world to us,*” he said after a moment of awkward silence. And with that, the boy and his father returned to their car and drove home, as they now couldn’t afford to go to the circus themselves. But they went home with more joy than if they had seen the circus. That is because in the moment they had allowed the wisdom of God to take them a step further in embracing who they were created to be as followers of Jesus, and in so doing were able to witness to the fact that (as James says) “*by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom*” we are able to be “*pure . . . peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere*”, as well as the fact that when we live in such ways God can work in us, for us, and through us to “*raise a harvest of righteousness.*”