ENDORSEMENTS

“Great strategies to outlast the zombies (who are coming), and apply ancient truths to obstacles we continue to face everyday.”

—Ralph Winter, Hollywood Producer (X-Men, Planet of the Apes, Lost, X-Men Origins: Wolverine, and dozens more)

“The Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide for Teenagers is awesome! Actually, it’s brilliant. Part “The Walking Dead” and part survival journal, it is guaranteed to grab the attention of even the most jaded and bored teen, surreptitiously guiding them to think about life’s most important issues. Want your kids to consider life from a biblical perspective? Give them this—it’s that good!”

—Rick Johnson, bestselling author of That’s My Son, and Better Dads Stronger Sons

“Jonathan’s creative new Zombie Apocalypse Survival Guide for Teenagers is exactly the type of devotional teenagers will actually read. This resourceful little tool provides a captivating fictional story about three teenagers surviving against the odds, cleverly interjecting 27 sets of questions that drive young people to think deeply about decision-making, their morals, and truth from God’s word. In a fun, interesting way, Jonathan helps teens tackle tough issues like coping with pain and depression, drinking, loving difficult people, and the temptation to indulge in fleshly desires. The teenage guys in my small group will be blown away that there’s a Christian author who uses the popular post-apocalyptic fictional premise to address their real-life issues--I’m looking forward to hear their response.”

—Doug Fields, Author, Speaker

“The most original student devotional I’ve ever read.”

—Josh Griffin, LoveGodLoveStudents.com
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to God for being my source of hope when life seems hopeless.

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What You Should Expect From This Guide

Zombies, strays, eaters, uglies . . . what are they called? It depends on who you ask. After all, it’s not like there’d been some global communications effort to label them.

Fast, slow, lethal, clumsy . . . which are they? All of the above. Don’t be too quick to make assumptions about them—it could cost you.

This isn’t a normal book. It’s not even a typical zombie survival guide. It’s the story of three teenagers who endured and survived against the odds, adapting where many adults failed. To be honest, not many teenagers survived The Havoc either—probably because most of them didn’t acclimate and learn like these three did.

For one thing, they didn’t carry much in their packs: a crowbar, a pair of bolt cutters, a Bible and a few paperback books, a homemade grill made from a shopping cart, and a few other cherished items.

Does the fact that they carried a Bible surprise you? It was about the only thing that made sense after the rest of the world dissolved into chaos. And it served as a trustworthy guide when they were faced with some difficult choices—much like the choices you face today (but without any zombies, hopefully).

So what was the secret to their survival?

Good question. The answer lies in the following pages copied from Chris’s journal . . . one of the few who survived.
THE SURVIVAL GUIDE
FOUR YEARS AGO
THURSDAY

It’s been almost four years since “The Havoc.” That’s what we call the zombie uprising. Although few use the word “zombie.” We just refer to them as “strays.”

It was the week of March 18, 2019. I remember the date because it was my 14th birthday. Happy Birthday, Chris! Your dead neighbor is tearing through your fence and trying to eat your schnauzer!

Most people were killed within the first month. And those of us who survived were now “learners.” We noticed and adapted. In other words, it was basically just the intelligent people who remained. I’m just keeping it real when I say that. Most of the guys who bullied me in junior high are now corpses roaming around South Sacramento. (I know this for a fact because I dodged one of them when I was driving a Mazda that we hot-wired a couple of years ago. Somehow I resisted the temptation to put the car in reverse and back over him.)

After a couple months, shortly after the power grid went dark, my little brother Cody started keeping a calendar. I followed his lead and recorded key events, writing them on a stack of Applebee’s placemats we’d found. That stack is now a journal of sorts.

Survival hasn’t been easy for the three of us—Cody, Chelle (a girl who joined up with us two years ago), and me. Chelle lost her family and had no one. Cody and I shared some food with her, and days turned into weeks, which turned into years. We care for her like a sister now . . . but a cool sister, not the kind that hogs the bathroom.
It’s surprising how many teenagers didn’t make it. I figured they’d be better survivors than that—they were young, strong, and in better physical shape than most adults. But the majority of them died within the first month—not because of a lack of strength or endurance . . . more often it was because they were careless and irresponsible.

Somehow, the three of us survived.

And after the two-year mark, we began sharing our stories and some survival tips with people we met on the road. Not a lot of groups like ours have made it. I guess our little “family” is sort of an anomaly because we’re alive and we still like each other.

A year ago now, David, my friend and fellow survivor, told me he really appreciated the survival tips we shared with him, and he suggested that I keep writing them down. Since then, I’ve been more diligent about recording what we’ve learned and documenting our story of surviving the last four years. I’ve used 60 placemats so far, and I’ve got only seven left. What follows is the story of our journey.

This coming Thursday it’ll be four years.

Happy Birthday, Chris! You’re still alive!
HEADPHONES LEAD TO HEADSTONES

Before The Havoc started, teenagers commonly wore headphones. Undeniably, those were the first to become snacks for some wandering corpse.

Back during the first month of chaos, when we still had electricity, some teenagers kept wearing their headphones to get their Rihanna or Maroon 5 fixes. It didn’t take long before one of those strays would walk right up behind them and . . . well . . . game over.

That almost happened to our friend Jake out by the Arden Fair Mall. Jake had those awesome Beats™ by Dre headphones with sweet bass. He and his buddies got up one morning and went from store to store, looking for food. This was when the stores still had a few canned goods sitting on random shelves. Jake was listening to some Kanye while he perused the aisles of an abandoned Target, so he didn’t even notice that stray wandering around in the sporting goods department.

Jake’s friend Mike was the first to spot the corpse from across the store. He started yelling for Jake, but Jake was lost in his music, nodding his head to the beat as he reached to the back of a shelf for a can of condensed milk. The stray headed right for Jake—it was one of the faster ones!

So Mike grabbed a cricket bat from sporting goods and sprinted toward Jake. The stray was almost within arm’s reach of Jake when Mike embedded the bat into its jaw.

Needless to say, Jake doesn’t like Kanye’s music anymore. He actually gave up on wearing headphones altogether.
It’s this simple: Your ears are one of your greatest defenses. Don’t mess with your hearing. *Ever!*

Before all of this craziness started, my dad never liked earbuds or headphones of any kind. I never really understood his frustration. He thought headphones were nice to wear on airplanes or buses, but he didn’t like it when we wore them around the house or at school. He called it “antisocial” and said, “Headphones just further the divide between teenagers and adults.”

He was pretty adamant about it.

One day, Dad came home with two big boxes from Costco. “Chris! Cody! Here you go!” He’d bought each of us a big docking station for our iPods. It had big speakers and a remote.

“Play them as loud as you want. Just no headphones,” he said.

I didn’t really care. Speakers . . . headphones . . . it made no difference to me. Plus, it was a really cool docking station.

Looking back, I can see what Dad was doing. He liked the docking station because he could hear what we were listening to. That was a pretty smart move for a parent because some of my friends listened to some pretty bad stuff. Plus, with these new docking stations, we didn’t block out the rest of the family with our headphones.

I kind of understand my dad’s logic. My friend Sam always wore headphones. And it didn’t matter where we were—at his house, the mall, or a football game—Sam always had music pumping in his ears. Whenever I tried talking to him, he’d pull one of the earpieces back and grunt, “Huh?”

So frustrating.

I like me some music, but come on.
It’s funny how in this new world, teenage isolation is no longer a problem. Kids aren’t alone in their rooms pumping music into their heads; instead, groups of people, like our little “family,” gather together in the same room for safety and have actual conversations.

I guess that’s something we can appreciate about this new world. It makes me wonder if my dad was right all along.

I miss my dad.

So if you should ever stumble across an iPod with a trickle of power left in it, think twice about putting on those headphones. Because today in this world, headphones lead to headstones.
JOURNAL ENTRY #1

Something to Think About

Back to Reality . . .

• Chris talked about teenagers’ love for music. Name a few of the songs that you listen to the most.

• What’s your favorite playlist (assuming that you have playlists)?

• Why do you think some young people prefer wearing headphones to playing music out loud through a docking station or on a stereo? Which do you prefer?

• What do you think about Chris’s dad’s statement: “Headphones just further the divide between teenagers and adults”?

• Name something you do that might “further the divide” between you and your family.

• In the new world, people don’t isolate themselves but gather together and have conversations. What would it look like if families in our society today regularly gathered together for conversation?

THE BIBLE PROVIDES SOME GOOD WISDOM:

“Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.” (2 Timothy 2:22, NLT)

• What does this verse tell us to run from, and what are we supposed to pursue instead? How can we do these two things?

• Do young people ever put something in their ears that “stimulates youthful lusts” today? Give an example.
• What does this verse tell us to enjoy?

• How can you make an effort this week to meet with Christian friends or family?

**SOMETHING I CAN DO THIS WEEK:**

Think of some family or friends who are an encouragement to you in your faith. Take a minute right now to make plans to hang out with these people sometime this week. Open up a dialogue with them about what it might look like to “pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace” in your world.
WHY PROVERBS IS MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER BEFORE

About five years ago, just a few weeks before I turned 13, my dad shared a verse from the first chapter of the book of Proverbs:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7, NIV)

I gotta be honest. Sometimes when my dad shared verses with me, it was boring. But for some reason, I can still remember this conversation like it was yesterday. We talked about wisdom, and we discussed examples of how we could make wise choices that week.

I walked away from that conversation with good intentions of seeking out God’s wisdom.

And then I turned 13.

I don’t think the word *wisdom* would accurately describe the way I acted as a teenager. Once I ate a whole cup of kitty litter—*on a dare!* I thought it would impress my friends. It just landed me in the emergency room.

At that age, *wisdom* wasn’t really in my vocabulary. The words *impulsive* or *shortsighted* are probably better descriptions of that stage of my life.

That is, until the dead started walking the earth.
It’s amazing how life-or-death situations tend to change everything. Now when we read the wisdom in the book of Proverbs, the words have a renewed meaning. Chelle probably wouldn’t be with us if it weren’t for that book.

A little over two years ago, Cody and I had a bad experience with a girl named Lindsey. We met her by the Delta, and she convinced us that she was hungry and needed our help. So we shared our food and let her stay by our campfire that night. When we woke up the next morning, Lindsey (if that was even her real name) was gone, along with Cody’s backpack and my bow and arrow.

We were so angry with ourselves for being fooled and getting ripped off. Cody and I argued all day about what we should do the next time we encounter someone who seems nice and helpless. Cody swore he’d never trust another person on the road. I maintained that we should give the person a chance but guard our supplies more carefully. We never did resolve the issue that night. We were probably too angry to think straight.

Three nights later, Cody and I read these words in Proverbs 2:

“For the LORD grants wisdom!  
From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.  
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.  
He guards the paths of the just  
and protects those who are faithful to him.

Then you will understand what is right, just,  
and fair, and you will find the right way to go.  
For wisdom will enter your heart,  
and knowledge will fill you with joy.  
Wise choices will watch over you.  
Understanding will keep you safe.” (Proverbs 2:6-11, NLT)
The next morning while we were hunting duck, we met Chelle out on the levee by the old airport. She was famished and alone. Her clothes were tattered, and her long blonde hair was dirty and pulled back into a ponytail. I remember saying a quick prayer, “Okay, God, you said you grant us wisdom. Help Cody and me make the right choice here. Help us to do what is ‘right, just, and fair.’”

Suddenly, Proverbs 25:21 popped into my head:

“If your enemies are hungry, give them food to eat. If they are thirsty, give them water to drink.”

So we shared some duck with Chelle . . . and the rest is history.

I’m so glad we gave Chelle a chance despite our bad experience with Lindsey. In a world full of strays, wisdom is the difference between survival and death. Wisdom is morality in a world where laws no longer govern.

Proverbs gives us guidance that is more useful than ever before. Rarely does a day pass when we aren’t forced to make a decision that has consequences, good or bad, for everyone in our group. It’s good to know these decisions aren’t being made based on selfishness or some quick moment of fun. Our decisions are grounded in justice and righteousness that comes from a truth we hold close to our hearts.

I’m 18 now and the three of us read a portion of the book of Proverbs almost every night.
JOURNAL ENTRY #2

Something to Think About
Back to Reality . . .

- Chris confessed something he did on a dare that was really foolish. What’s the most foolish thing you’ve done to impress someone?

- Chris claims the words *impulsive* or *shortsighted* are probably better descriptions of teenagers. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- When life became dangerous for Chris and his group, they all became more interested in wisdom. Why?

- The author of Proverbs writes, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” What does that mean? And what does “fearing God” actually look like?

- The author of Proverbs explains that when we pursue God and the wisdom that flows from him, we’ll understand what is right, just, and fair. Give an example of what this might look like in your life.

SOMETHING I CAN DO THIS WEEK:

Write out a specific example of something you can do to pursue godly wisdom. If it’s a task, set a reminder in your cell phone or write it on your calendar. Once you’ve done it, talk with a friend or family member about what you learned from the experience. Set a time to do it again. Make it a habit.
KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Never assume.

That’s what my dad used to tell me every time I jumped to a conclusion. Like the time I caught my first grounder during baseball tryouts when I was 11.

“Easy!” I pronounced.

My dad just smiled. “Chris, no ball ever comes at you the same way. One easy ball just means the next one is more likely to be difficult.”

He was wrong. It was two balls later. The coach cracked it hard; it hit a lump of grass on the ground and jumped up with a spin. I misread the direction and underestimated its speed. The ball hit me right between the eyes.

Twenty minutes later, I was sitting next to my dad on the bleachers with a towel on my nose, trying to stop the bleeding. My dad refrained from saying what I know he wanted to say. Easy, huh?

Sometimes we don’t learn lessons unless they hit us right in the nose.

Ever since that moment in sixth grade, I’ve tried to never assume. This little piece of wisdom has come in handy since The Havoc. None of the dead are the same.

Some of the first strays we encountered were bodies from the morgue down the street. We’d seen what was happening on the news, but it didn’t seem real until we saw three corpses meandering in our cul-de-sac. One of them had a huge line of stiches across his chest from the post-mortem autopsy. These three
were slow and clumsy. My neighbor Brian walked outside with a baseball bat and took them down with one swing each.

Brian’s mistake was assuming they would all be like that. A little while later, one of the neighbors from the big yellow house around the corner walked into our cul-de-sac, saw Brian, and exploded into a full sprint. He pounced on Brian and bit his neck like a lion taking down a gazelle. Its movements didn’t even look human; it looked more . . . animalistic and unrestrained. This creature began devouring Brian right before our eyes.

Our neighbor Steve ran over to try to help Brian. But then the stray—human in form, but not in movement—sprang at Steve so quickly that Steve didn’t have a chance to defend himself.

That single stray took out eight people on my street before my dad finally arrived with his shotgun and blew a hole through its chest.

Until that day, I’d never seen anyone get shot. It was nothing like you see on TV. The impact of the shotgun slug sent the creature soaring backwards about 10 feet. But it wasn’t over yet. When the stray hit the ground, it twitched like a squirrel after a car hits it, but the thing wouldn’t die. Eventually, it tried to get up, so my dad put another slug in its torso.

More twitching.

Walt, from the big two-story at the end of our cul-de-sac yelled, “Headshot! Take the headshot!”

My dad agreed. He pumped the action one last time, pointed the barrel right at the creature’s head, and pulled the trigger.

The end result was much messier than it was with the baseball bat, but the stray was definitely dead . . . or gone . . . or what-
ever it’s called when they finally stop moving.

I committed these experiences to memory. In this world we must learn and adapt to survive.

In the early days we were constantly learning, so I began writing down what we observed. We learned a handful of realities about strays within the first couple months:

• They’re unpredictable. No two strays move the same way. If they’re old or have been dead a long time, then they’re slow movers. But if they’re fresh, like the neighbor from around the corner, then they’re quick, agile, and extremely lethal.

• They have no sense of fear or life preservation. This is one of their scariest traits. They just keep coming at you. They’re either really smart or really dumb, but they never quit. There’s no shooing these things away.

• They always seem to be looking for food. They’ll eat anything alive. A lot of the neighborhood dogs learned that the hard way during the first week of The Havoc. Sadly, a lot of my neighbors did too.

• Strays produce waste, but they don’t know how to take off their clothes when they do. So they smell horrible. If you’re downwind, you can smell them coming from more than 100 yards away.

• If strays are starving, they’ll turn on one another for food, like coyotes or dingoes do. Similarly, if they’re in a group and you shoot one of them in the leg, oftentimes a few of them will turn on their injured companion, going for the easy meal.

• It always pays to know your enemy. You never know when a small detail might shed light on a truth that could save your life.
JOURNAL ENTRY #3

Something to Think About
Back to Reality . . .

- What do you think Chris meant by, “Sometimes we don’t learn lessons unless they hit us right in the nose”?
- What are some lessons that you didn’t learn until they “hit you right in the nose”?
- What are some ways young people today are vulnerable to “danger” because they underestimate the consequences?

THE BIBLE PROVIDES SOME GOOD WISDOM:

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” (1 Peter 5:8-9, NIV)

- How does this passage describe the devil? Why do you think the devil is described in this way?
- What are some ways the devil “devours” people today?
- How does the verse say we can resist the devil?
- Describe what “standing firm in the faith” looks like when you resist these temptations.

SOMETHING I CAN DO THIS WEEK:

Write down three ways that the devil might attack you this week. Then try to find a Scripture passage for each temptation—a verse that tells you the truth of the situation. For example, if the devil is going to tempt you to lust over sexual
imagery, read Proverbs 5:18-23 and see God’s amazing plan for sex in the context of marriage, as well as God’s warnings about looking elsewhere for physical satisfaction (also see Matthew 5:27-28).
“What was your best day?”

Cody would always start the question game whenever we got settled around a campfire. He loved asking questions. Last night’s question was, “What’s the first thing you’d do if the power came back on?” Fun discussion. (I said I’d watch a movie while drinking something cold. Man, I miss overpriced, extra-large soft drinks on ice at the movie theatre.)

But today’s question was to reflect on our best day. I’d just started thinking when Chelle chimed in, “My 16th birthday.” As she said it, her words were choked with emotion. From across the fire, I could see her eyes welling up with tears.

Chelle didn’t have much of a childhood. She never knew her dad, and her mom was an addict. So Chelle was raised by her aunt who had three kids of her own. Chelle always felt like an outsider in her aunt’s home. The love she received was always leftovers and hand-me-downs, much like her clothes and her toys. The only new gift she ever received came from her grandfather before he died—it was a small stuffed monkey with long arms that would wrap around her and clasp together with tiny Velcro hands. She named him Fling.

Living in that dysfunctional house, Chelle felt like Fling was
her only friend. In the dark, she would embrace him whenever she was scared, but especially when she heard her uncle come home after a night of drinking.

He was a mean drunk. Whenever he got drunk, he realized how pathetic his life was. And then he took it out on anyone in his path. Chelle could deal with the yelling and even the hitting. It was the touching that pushed her over the edge.

Chelle was eight the first time her uncle did unspeakable things to her. The abuse continued almost every night for two years straight.

She never told anyone about it because she was too scared. But apparently someone was looking out for her. One Friday night at 2 a.m., her inebriated uncle stumbled to his car, merged onto Highway 49, and played chicken with a semi-truck.

He lost.

It wasn’t until two years after his death that Chelle finally told her aunt what the man had done to her. Her aunt went ballistic, called Chelle a liar, and eventually kicked her out of the house. Chelle went into foster care at age 12. She’d lived in three different houses before The Havoc started.

Needless to say, by the time The Havoc began, Chelle had experienced more havoc than any human being should experience in a lifetime. She was only 13.

Chelle, a particularly resilient and self-sufficient little girl, had survived by herself for two years. She’d encountered some other groups during that time, but she never trusted the men. (I don’t blame her.) So she wandered around by herself most of the time, until she found us.
It took her a while to warm up to us. Don’t get me wrong; she was polite and seemed truly grateful for the food and water we gave her, but she was always . . . distant.

A few months after she joined us, Cody happened to be working on his calendar when he proclaimed to no one in particular, “It’s almost Valentine’s Day!”

Chelle sighed and said quietly, almost as if she were talking to herself, “I’m going to be 16.”

Cody heard her. “Your birthday is on Valentine’s Day?” he asked curiously.

“Yes,” Chelle replied, staring off into the distance.

I don’t think she gave it another thought that day, but I couldn’t stop thinking about it.

The next morning, I told Cody I needed to go scouting for supplies. We were bunkered in a nice house in Carmichael, right off the American River. The place I needed to go was only an hour’s walk away.

Fifty minutes later, I saw it: an abandoned Toys-R-Us. A quick crank of my crowbar, and I was inside the back door. During the first year of The Havoc, we quickly acquired a few “must have” tools to survive: one was a crowbar, and the other was a pair of bolt cutters. Both were necessary if you needed to unlock doors and get to abandoned supplies that no one remembered.

The store was cluttered but surprisingly well stocked. I guess toys stores weren’t much in demand in this era. The grocery store and drug store down the street were depleted of supplies. (We’d helped deplete those years ago.)
After about 15 minutes in the toy store, I found exactly what I needed and carefully made my way back to Cody and Chelle.

That night, we had a birthday party. Dinner was rabbit and orange slices. Cody and I sang “Happy Birthday” and presented Chelle with an orange slice with a birthday candle in it. (The cake mixes all had about a one-year shelf life. I’d checked. Plus, a cake was really hard to bake over a fire.) She laughed and blew out the candle.

That’s when I handed her my present.

It was wrapped in pink Hello Kitty paper, which was all I could find in the store. She didn’t open it at first. She just stared at the present for a while and then smiled and hugged it. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she thanked us.

“Don’t thank me yet,” I said, trying to break the tension. “You don’t even know what it is. It could be lame.”

She finally began to open it, carefully removing the tape and gently unfolding the paper. She peeked inside one end, but saw only brown fur. With a quizzical look on her face, she continued pulling back the paper, eventually uncovering the stuffed monkey curled up in a ball, his long arms wrapped around himself and Velcroed to his sides. She bit her lip as she unfolded the furry beast, running her fingers over the soft fur.

“Does it look like Fling?” I asked, breaking the silence.

“He’s a little bigger.” Chelle answered with a smile.

“Maybe he grew,” Cody offered.

We all laughed.
“I know, right?” Chelle said, tightly hugging the gangly monkey.

I remember the moment like it was yesterday, and apparently Chelle did too.

“Definitely my 16th birthday. Best day by a long shot.”
JOURNAL ENTRY #4

Something to Think About
Back to Reality . . .

• What’s the best gift you’ve ever given to someone? What made it a great gift?

• What’s the greatest gift you’ve ever received?

• Why was Chelle’s stuffed monkey, Fling, so important to her when she was a little girl?

• Why did Chris make such an effort to get her that special gift?

• What did Chris’s gift communicate to Chelle?

THE BIBLE PROVIDES SOME GOOD WISDOM:

“For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God’s wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:17, NLT)

• According to this verse, what gift does God give us?

• The verse says we can receive righteousness from Jesus. What is righteousness?

• When we put our faith in Jesus, God makes us right. Then we triumph over something—what does the verse say we triumph over? What does this mean?

SOMETHING I CAN DO RIGHT NOW:

Write a thank-you note to God for this awesome gift, telling him why you appreciate it.