



# NOISE

Finding Clarity and Common-Sense  
in a Confusing and Complex World

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# INTRODUCTION

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In a world full of pontificating, advice-giving, and moralizing, the noise can become overwhelming. When everyone is an expert and wants you to know and “like” it, how do you discern truth from error, how do you filter significance from hyperbole? Isn't it just easier to delete the app, cancel the account, and hide? Yet it still leaks through.

While there is a legitimacy to fasting from the blathering of social media and 24/7 news, a “see no evil, hear no evil” strategy is short-sighted and challenging to execute. Perhaps the boat in the water metaphor may be helpful. A boat is designed to be in the water, but you don't want to get water into the boat. How can we live in this world, engage in its discussions, grapple with the issues yet not drown in the flood of information and opinion?

A couple of thoughts for you to consider, evaluate, and either embrace (hopefully) or discard. They are not exhaustive, just food for thought.

- 1 Don't confuse loud with true.
- 2 An anecdote is not a principle.
- 3 Try to prove yourself wrong, not right.
- 4 Silence isn't always golden.



CHAPTER ONE

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Don't Confuse  
LOUD  
with  
TRUE

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# Don't Confuse Loud with True

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## *Listen for the Whisper of Wisdom*



It's a familiar scene at any destination venue populated with tourists. The visitor, strapped with camera and fanny pack, leans toward the vendor selling bits and bobbles and asks, "do you speak English?" The puzzled expression on the listener's face should be a giveaway. Undaunted, the guest loudly exclaims, "DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?" as if shouting in a foreign tongue somehow contributes to clarity and comprehension.



Doing the same thing over-and-over again is the colloquial definition of insanity. Doing it louder only confirms the diagnosis.

Loud is the signature of aggressive argumentation and, as such, limits the dialogue, effectively undermining creativity, alternatives, and possibility. The use of argument as a method of problem-solving is restrictive, reductionistic, and by nature, one-sided. You may win the battle but risk losing the war.

The psychologist Greg Lester (one of my favorite teachers) explains that as human beings, we live in a conceptual world, which is significantly different from the physical world of animals. The physical world is a dog-eat-dog world. You want to have lunch, not be lunch. As such, it is a life and death battle for survival. The conceptual world of humans is different. It's not a battle of life and death; it is a battle of right and wrong. I don't kill you; I kill your idea. Sadly, when that doesn't work, some resort to the primitive impulse of violence to guarantee a win.

May I suggest the louder the voices, the less viable the position? The strategy of a narrative-based worldview promotes message over meaning, ideal over truth. Say it loud trumps say it true. Shouting may gain compliance, but seldom results in harmony. Repeating it over and over, louder and louder, may wear down the audience like the persistent nagging of an email marketer, but we are seldom happy with our forced choice. It is a purchase and a position we will soon discard.



*Consider the power of a whisper.* The sultry advertisement from years past hinted, “if you want to get his attention...whisper.” Somehow that strategy has been replaced by an in-your-face bombardment of provocative, attention-demanding email blasts, looping simplistic talking-points, rhetoric, and virtue signaling. It’s overwhelming and, in the end, numbing. A better approach may be found in the wisdom of the ancients who proposed dialogue (that’s two people talking, not just one), conversation (talking not telling), and communion.

Consider the insight of Mark Batterson, who states,

“

*“Aren't you grateful for a gentle God? The Almighty could intimidate us with His outside voice, but He woos us with a whisper. And His whisper is the breath of life.”*

Mark Batterson, *Whisper: How to Hear the Voice of God*

Perhaps we could model this gentle God?

Or the encouraging words of Shane Claiborne, who writes,



*"I found that the solemn recognition that our world is very fragile is universal. And yet attentive ears can hear the ancient whisper reminding us that another world is possible."*

Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical*

Why, if the voice of God is a whisper, would we scream it at others? The better world we seek cannot be built or sustained on violence – both physical and verbal. Don't confuse loud with true, listen with discernment, and, in particular, listen for the quiet voice of wisdom, and speak accordingly.

## Don't Confuse Loud with True

*Listen for the Whisper of Wisdom*



CHAPTER TWO

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An  
ANECDOTE  
Is Not A  
PRINCIPLE

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# An Anecdote is Not a Principle

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## *Be Skeptical, Pursue Truth*

Anecdotes enthrall and engage us. They weave a message in story form that is both convincing and convicting. But one story does not a truth make. A solitary anecdote may illustrate a principle, but it does not produce one. A series of consistent tales begin to suggest a pattern. The repetitious rhythm is seductive as each confirming story appears to add credence to the implied message.

Stories are, by nature, full of drama and caricature. They reduce detail for the sake of the message, often ignoring contradicting elements that might complicate or distract. Additionally, they are often used as “proof” rather than for illustration, application, or explanation. I’ll touch on that deception in the following section.



Complicating our grasp of reality is the prevalence of postmodern thinking, which asserts multiple “truths” as determined by the narrative. The race then is about controlling the narrative. You have your truth, and I have mine. Since there are absolutely no absolutes, the superior “truth” is determined by the dominant narrative.

Thus, yelling louder seems consistent with the end game of replacing the opposed narrative with one of our own creation. It’s not a debate over truth; in fact, distorting the truth is permissible if it supports the narrative. Why be fussy about details? Truths are all fabricated anyway. Are there multiple truths? There certainly are multiple opinions posturing as truth. How does one discern the difference? Is it even important? It’s no wonder we are confused. Perhaps well-intentioned, but supremely confused.

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As you engage with difficult concepts and positions, may I caution you to be discerning when it comes to anecdotes. I'm not suggesting they are all fabricated stories. They may, however, have an alternative explanation than the one being promoted. Stay discerning, be skeptical, and your pursuit of truth will greatly benefit.

## An Anecdote is Not a Principle

*Be Skeptical, Pursue Truth*



CHAPTER THREE

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Prove Yourself  
WRONG  
not  
RIGHT

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# Try to Prove Yourself Wrong

*Don't be BLINDED by BIAS*



Whether it's global warming or COVID-19, the admonition to "trust the science" comes with a caveat; science, by nature, is always disagreeing with itself. As a result, we often find dueling scientific claims which leave the observer confused at best, and at worse, tempted to embrace the "evidence" that supports a preferred position



## 22-24-26-??

### Bias

Give it your best guess. 22-24-26-? The most common answer is 28. And you would be right, but do you now know the rule? Most assume the rule is increasing even numbers by two. But how do you know for sure? A typical next guess would be 30, and since the answer would be correct, we assume we have "proven" the rule. But all we have done is confirmed our bias. In assuming the rule to be "increasing even numbers by two," we would offer 30 as our next proof. And we would be right, but still wrong.

$m_1 v_1 = m_1 v_1' + m_2 v_2'$   
 $\frac{1}{2} m_1 v_1^2 = \frac{1}{2} m_1 v_1'^2 + \frac{1}{2} m_2 v_2'^2$   
 $v_1' = \frac{m_1 - m_2}{m_1 + m_2} v_1$   
 $\pi \approx 3.14$   
 $E_k = \frac{1}{2} m v^2$   
 $y = kx^2 \quad k > 0$   
 $p = \frac{F}{A}$   
 $v = v_0 + at$   
 $C = 2\pi r$   
 $(x+y)^n =$   
 $p = \frac{m}{V}$   
 $y = \frac{k}{x}$   
 $w = mg$   
 $s = \left(\frac{v+v_0}{2}\right)t$   
 $v^2 = v_0^2 + 2as$   
 $\sin 45^\circ = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}$   
 $v_2' = \frac{2m_1}{m_1 + m_2} v_1$   
 $\sum \vec{F} = 0$

To test the rule we need to prove it wrong, not right. Sequential guesses of 32, 34, 36, and 38 serve only to support the assumption, not test it. The answers are correct; however, they do not test the rule. To thoroughly test the rule, we must prove it false. Offering the number 100 tests the assumption that the numbers increase by two. Proposing 27 after 26 challenges the assumption that the numbers are even. Or suggesting the number seven reveals whether it is indeed increasing numbers (*100 and 27 are correct, seven is not*). The rule is simply “increasing numbers.” Note how easy it is to “prove” our assumptions by finding evidence that supports it, rather than looking for evidence that contradicts it.

## **Don't underestimate the power of confirmation bias.**

Research shows that people tend to see evidence that confirms their original convictions to the neglect of evidence to the contrary. This bias is the exact opposite of scientific inquiry. Science seeks to prove itself wrong, not right. That is why there appear to be contradictions in science. It is science doing its job. If I believe something to be true, I will easily find evidence to confirm it. To consciously pursue and engage contrary positions is a more disciplined and challenging task. Try to prove yourself wrong, rather than right. You will be better for it.

## Try to Prove Yourself Wrong

*Don't be BLINDED by BIAS*



CHAPTER FOUR

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SILENCE  
Isn't Always  
GOLDEN

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# Silence Isn't Always Golden

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## *Stop Listening and Start Talking*



The noise of this world is a cacophony of soundbites and slogans, posturing and pontificating. And the volume seems stuck on high.

The sound of silence may be a welcome respite, but for many, silence serves only to conjure up the noise inside their heads. Is there any escape?

I am reminded of Martin Lloyd Jones insightful observation that...



*"most of our unhappiness in life is due to the fact that we are listening to ourselves, rather than talking to ourselves."*

Clearly, the most important conversation we have is the one we have with ourselves.

But what is the nature of that conversation? For some, it is the voice of a scolding parent, critical and judgmental. For others, it is the frantic calculations of a frightened child, panicking over the unshakable conviction that there is indeed a monster under the bed. Is your inner voice calming or critical, reassuring or rejecting?

The stoics argued that the way we think about the world ultimately determines our emotional response to it. Change your thinking to change your feelings; a simple, yet difficult to execute, principle. It is essentially the story we tell ourselves, the narrative, the interpretation, the self-talk, that is the cause of our distress, not our circumstances. The principle is liberating as it disconnects the direct link between circumstance and emotional consequence.

What is the story you are telling yourself about the multiple concerns you are facing? Is it a drama full of victims and villains or a clear, logical, fact-based observation that stirs a proportional emotional response? Note that speaking the truth to yourself does not eliminate uncomfortable and even painful emotion. Life is difficult, and with difficulty comes pain. The objective is not to erase emotion, rather it is to eliminate the unnecessary, disproportional emotions caused by biased and distorted thinking.

Grappling with the challenges of this life is an inside-out process. Actions are driven by attitudes, behavior flows out of beliefs. Before we tell others the truth, let's make sure we are telling ourselves the truth. We all have blind spots and they are often the source of impulsive, unchecked criticism of both self and others.

When it gets quiet, what do you hear; better yet, what do you say?

## Silence Isn't Always Golden

*Stop Listening and Start Talking*

In a noisy world, we desperately need to hear wisdom's whisper. While these suggestions I've offered are not exhaustive, I hope that they will encourage and challenge you.

- 1 Don't confuse loud with true. Listen for the whisper of wisdom.
- 2 An anecdote is not a principle. Be skeptical, pursue truth.
- 3 Try to prove yourself wrong, not right. Don't be blinded by bias.
- 4 Silence isn't always golden. Stop listening and start talking

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