

FREEDOM



GOD'S DESIGN FOR ABUNDANT LIFE

by **BLAKE HUDSPETH**

FREEDOM THAT LASTS

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A Word about Mental Health

Depression, anxiety, and other disorders are physical and medical realities. Yet, because we are body, soul, and spirit, they are also spiritual realities (1 Thess. 5:23). Therefore, while the medicinal treatment of mental health can be helpful at times, addressing the spiritual foundation of your life is the most important step when dealing with such things. If you are currently being treated for mental health, it is advised that you continue treatment while doing this study.

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Preface **WHY STAY HERE?**

It's curious how many well-meaning Christians have said something along these lines: "Be careful what you ask God to do. He just might do it!"

What's even stranger are the prayers to which they're referring. Ones like, "Use me however You will," or, "Teach me _____ (humility, to walk in freedom, etc.)." But why are these prayers considered, in any way, "dangerous?"

God is not out to ruin your life plans, but to redeem them.

Believing anything else will paralyze your ability to move forward. It fuels more excuses to stay put. At times, we would almost prefer being stuck than have God meddle in certain parts of our heart. Asking Him to do so would be "dangerous."

But praying for the Holy Spirit to move and work in your life is the safest prayer possible. God's will is to conform you into the image of Jesus (Romans 8:28-30). That's not dangerous. It's the one thing that brings us life and joy! (John 10:10; John 15:11)

So, as you go on this journey, don't be afraid of your prayers. God is a fortress and refuge (Psalm 18:2; 25:8-10; 46:1-3; 91:2; Deuteronomy 33:27; Proverbs 14:26; Matthew 7:24-27).

Those are pretty safe places to live.

Instead, learn to pray as the sons of Korah did:

"Let me hear what the LORD will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, to His saints; but let them not turn back to folly." Psalm 85:8

Will He ask you to step out in faith at times? Yes. Will you be stretched in moments or face trials? Of course. But never apart from the comfort and peace of the Refuge.

So, why stay here when lasting freedom is waiting? Embrace what God wants to do over the coming weeks. It's anything but dangerous.

THE JOURNEY | DAY 1

God never created slaves, but He frees them every day. It's the very reason Jesus came into the world.

**Luke 4:16-20**

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and He stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And he began to say to them, **"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"**.

Since that fateful moment in the Garden of Eden, when we exchanged the truth of God for a lie and began worshipping the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:24-25), sin has enslaved the human race. The chains, however, go unnoticed by us most of the time.

Jesus addressed this with a group of people who believed He was the Messiah. These men and women seemed to know the Bible pretty well. Christ, however, explained something crucial to them (and their pushback was immediate).

**John 8:31-36**

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered Him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

God created us to have fullness of joy (John 15:11), abundant life (John 10:10) and fellowship with Him (1 John 1:1-4). But our sin became chains. The lust of our flesh, the lust of our eyes, and our boastful pride alienates us from a Holy God. We were slaves to them. They kept us from being fully alive.

So the Son came to set us free.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. What are you most excited about with this study?

2. As you look at the content of the coming weeks, are there any that you are worried about or even dread a little? If so, why do you think that is?

DAY 2

“You will never become what you cannot define.” ROBERT LEWIS

Freedom is the ability to live the way we were designed; fully alive. Some Christians, however, do not feel fully alive. Their eternity may be secure in Christ, but “abundant joy” is a far cry from describing their present state. They are not abiding in the words of Christ. Perhaps that describes you as well. God, however, has a greater plan for your life and it starts by going on a journey.

FILL IN THE BLANK:

If I didn't always struggle with _____, I'd be free.
I'd be able to live fully alive.

Your blank might be filled with any number of things:

Food • Fear of Suffering • Pornography • Self-Image • Unforgiveness • Anger • Guilt • Shame • Jealousy • Comparison • The Approval of Certain People • Money • Anxiousness • Unbelief • Fear of Failure • Addiction

Nothing on your list is too great for Christ. Who the Son sets free is free indeed.

Each week is designed to address pressure points in your life where sin can easily entangle. We will confront those pressure points using the acrostic AIRR. This will help give you a grid for lasting freedom. Whenever slavery begins to resurface in your heart, you will be able to:

ADMIT YOUR NEED

Jesus told us that we can't be free if we don't see our slavery. The first step in freedom that lasts is admitting your need for it. This takes courageous honesty and humility.

IDENTIFY THE ROOT PROBLEM

You cannot be free if you don't recognize the area(s) in which you need freedom. Sin can be sneaky and hard to see. At the root of each sin is a lie, and identifying the lie takes an ax to it. Many times, this also means inviting others to help us look at our lives from different angles. Freedom that lasts becomes possible as we identify places that compete for our faith.

REPENT WHEN NECESSARY

“Repentance” will become a liberating word by the end of this study. Freedom that lasts requires a persistent rejection of what entangles you, and repentance is just that.

RECEIVE THE TRUTH

It's one thing to know the Gospel of Jesus Christ and another thing altogether to live as if it were true. Freedom that lasts happens when we receive what God has said into our hearts. Christ reversed Genesis 3. Now, we can exchange the lie of sin for the Truth that sets us free. It will enable you to live the way you were designed; fully alive. One way you will do this is by declaring Scripture out loud through prayer each week. This may seem strange to you at first, but you will find that there is something powerful about reciting aloud the promises of God over your life.

So, go on the journey. We all need freedom. I want to invite you to submit to the process and press deeper into Freedom over the coming weeks. Be fearless about it. Get courageously honest. And live fully alive.

▶ ANNE'S STORY

Freedom seemed mystical to me. Almost like a crown that was given to some but not others. I knew I was an "other," but I knew more than anything that I wanted to be free.

My past was ever lingering. I would wake up in the morning with anxiety and fear. The day would continue, and I would replay past abuse in my mind. I would lay in bed at night begging God for help. Some seasons were better, and others were crippling.

My main problem was I had two conflicting beliefs. I believed the truth of who God said I was, "... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Peter 2:9), but I also believed the lies of the enemy... "the world would be better off without me and I didn't deserve to live." It is crazy, I know, but I believed both of them completely. They both sat in my chest, the first like a warm live heart and the second like a cold stone surrounding it. Both were so real.

Two weeks before taking Freedom That Lasts, the Enemy was hard at work in my mind. I remember driving down the road thinking, "Maybe not today, and maybe not tomorrow, but one day... 15, 20, 30 years from now, these lies will finally win, and I'll take my life." Then I looked back and saw my son in the rear-view mirror. I knew it was time to get help again.

"Come join our Freedom class," Blake said from the stage of our church on a cold Sunday morning.

I sat for a moment and thought to myself, "What the heck does freedom even mean?"

Then the Holy Spirit so sweetly spoke, "Anne, if you don't know what it is to be free, then you are probably not free."

In that moment I knew more than anything that I wanted to be free. If the Word of God was true (and I believed it was), then it said, as a daughter of God, I can be free.

Hebrews 4:15-16 says "This High Priest of ours [Jesus Christ] understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."

I needed mercy and grace. "God, I want to be free," I prayed.

The Freedom class was a first step for me. He took me on an amazing journey over eight months. He led me to different verses, books, friends, and songs on the radio. I ugly, double chin cried more times than I can count. I processed what he was teaching me. I continued weekly, daily, and sometimes hourly to cry, "God, I want to be free," and he always met me with something loving and sweet and convicting. He is a good shepherd.

After eight months of seeking freedom, the lies that had defined me for twelve years had melted away. The perpetual fear and anxiety had dwindled. I fully believed that I am who God says I am.

The journey towards knowing God more fully and finding who I am in him continues. But now my steps are lighter and my time with God is sweeter. My purpose is clearer, and my future seems peaceful and exciting.

It has now been several years since that first class, and I've realized there are many things I need freedom from. My first experience was like removing a boulder. Since then, God has led me through freedom from lies in all different shapes and sizes. Some are like pebbles in my pocket whereas others are like heavy jackets. But all of them keep me from Him and He wants to remove them all.

He is The Redeemer and His desire is to redeem all things. Victory is already His and, as His children, it is ours for the taking.

“Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.” Psalm 118:5.

Heavenly Father,

With open hands, I invite You to work in me. By Your Holy Spirit, reveal things in my life that I need to lay at the cross. Although I am a little afraid of what You might uncover, I trust You. Shine Your good light into every part of my heart. I want to be fully alive in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Read and meditate on MATTHEW 7:7-27 each day.

DAY 3

1. Do you believe that God answers your prayers? Why or why not?

2. What are you asking Him for in this season of your life?

3. Looking back at the last two weeks, what sort of “fruit” (see Matthew 7:15-20) has your life produced?

DAYS 4 - 6

4. What does this passage tell us about God?

5. What does this passage tell us about sin?

6. What does this passage tell us about freedom?

THE TALE OF TWO HOUSES | DAY 1

When significant cracks begin to show up on the walls of a house, it is a symptom of foundation problems, and homeowners have two options:

1. Patch and paint over the wall so you can't temporarily see them.
2. Spend time and resources repairing the foundation.

The first option is certainly the easiest (and most tempting). It fails, however, to stop the cracks from coming back. The truest solution requires pouring a sound foundation.

Like a house, your heart shows cracks as well. "Why is _____ consistently a problem in my life?" you may ask. Perhaps it is because you have slapped on a patch rather than addressed the foundation.

It's easier to convince ourselves that heart issues are due to busy schedules or anxious seasons of life. We attempt to paint over it with time-management strategies or simply wait for the season to change when, in reality, the foundation is off. Read the words of Jesus,

**Matthew 7:24-27**

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. If our life is built on sand, when the storms get strong enough, the walls will crash down around us. It can happen to anyone.

▶ SHAWN'S STORY

I spent a chunk of my life believing that God was less of a loving Father, and more of a mean football coach who only cared about winning. As long as I ran the play right, He'd keep me in the game. But if I messed up...

Most moments in my life were motivated by fear of the mean football coach. The fears droned on each day:

"Don't sin, he'll hurt you and leave." "If you're happy, God isn't."

"God likes it when you suffer."

These were not the thoughts of a cynic or atheist. I was a pastor with a master's degree from a world-class seminary. In other words, I knew better. And that was the rub. I still believed things about God that simply were not true.

The lies kept me from experiencing true freedom. Then the night came. It was a toss-and-turn night. One where you begin to doubt every square inch of your faith. As I flopped on the couch, there was no more pretending. I was scared and mad at God. Denial just made it worse. That's when a gentle reminder came by way of Hebrews 4:15-16,

“For we do not have a high priest [Jesus Christ] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

I took it as a personal challenge. My thoughts exploded on a journal. They weren't polished or theologically sound. They wouldn't have landed me an “A” on a midterm, but they lurked in my heart and needed to be exposed.

After an hour of sketching those sentences, there he was. The Mean Football Coach god – staring at me from those pages. It was there the whole time. I just didn't see it. The “God” I was afraid of was not the GOD of the Bible. And, because He wasn't the God of the Bible, He didn't exist. He was a lie. A phantom planted in my heart and nurtured by the Enemy. My mind then turned to Scripture.

I had memorized verses like Romans 8:31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” and said it for years, yet struggled to believe it. And, until I got desperately honest and inspected my heart, I was simply living in denial. The next day I spent time in prayer with two close friends asking the Lord to forgive my unbelief and restore my soul.

For months after that, I experienced grace upon grace as I remembered the True, Living God of Scripture. I remembered how He loved me before I loved Him. He was for me before I was for Him. He was a close Father who hurt when I hurt and worked all things (even hard things) together for my good. He wasn't a mean football coach.

DO AN INSPECTION

Like Shawn, sometimes it takes looking honestly at your heart to realize what's keeping you from living fully alive. The following short exercise will help you look carefully at your life's foundation. Take some time to answer the following:

(Circle which choice best describes you)

As I do this exercise, my mind is focused on...

1. Being courageously honest no matter what it reveals about my life.
2. What someone will think if they read my answers.

What brings me a greater sense of self-worth?

1. Being loved by God.
2. Being known as an expert at what I do.

When it comes to rest,

1. I find that disconnecting from weekly pressures and expectations comes easily.
2. I find it nearly impossible to not think about work or to-do lists all the time.

When someone is better than me at something,

1. I can celebrate them.
2. I feel threatened or insecure.

I feel like my daily choices are motivated by...

1. Power, love and self-control.
2. Fear and selfishness.

When I read Scripture,

1. I am refreshed and inspired.
2. I feel like more things get added to my spiritual “to-do” list.

I obey God...

1. Because I love Him.
2. So He won't hurt or punish me.

There is one specific area of sin in my life that I continually fall into, and I do not believe I will ever have lasting victory in it.

1. Agree
2. Disagree

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

In Shawn's story, he described seeing God as a “mean football coach who only cared about winning.” However, after getting honest, he realized that this was not the God of the Bible. How would you describe the ways you imagine God today? Do you think that's consistent with how Scripture describes God?

DAY 2 | THE TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE

Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, were created in the image of God. They had fellowship with God and walked according to His ways. Their house had no cracks. However, Adam and Eve decided to listen to the lie of a serpent, whom they had been given dominion over, instead of God. In order to “become like God,” they ate fruit of the one tree from which God commanded them not to eat (see Genesis 3). As a result, sin entered the world and corrupted mankind. Every person born of man from then on would receive the same sin nature.

This means that sin has corrupted us from birth. In Genesis 8:21, God declared, “the intentions of man's heart is evil from his youth.” The Apostle Paul also told the church, “we were, by nature, children of wrath.” (Ephesians 2:3) This is due to our wickedness. “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Sin separated mankind from God. It is the very definition of slavery. But this is not the end of the story. It could not be called The Gospel (meaning “good news”) if it were. Romans 5 tells the rest:



Romans 5:12, 15-17 (New Living Translation)

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. — But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 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.

Jesus has come to redeem mankind and restore our relationship with God. The image, once broken in us by sin, is being put back together to reflect Christ. This process, called “sanctification,” will take the rest of our lives.

It means that every desire, attitude, and thought will change as it is daily brought under the authority of a loving God. And this isn't some sort of moral straight-jacket or suppressive way of living, but a reality that brings us joy. "These things I have spoken to you," Christ announced, "that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11) This is a what it means to be fully alive.

Knowing the Truth means knowing a Person, not just knowing the facts. The Apostle Paul, for example, was a pretty impressive guy. When it came to theological education, he had the equivalent of at least one PhD and was highly networked. Then he encountered the risen Christ face-to-face and his value system transformed. This is how Paul describes it:



Philippians 3:7-8 (English Standard Version)

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Paul was not saying that knowing the right things was bad, but it was useless compared to knowing Christ. Anything that society deemed "successful" was counted by him as loss when placed beside the worth of knowing Jesus.

Ask yourself, "How well do I know Jesus?"

Don't ask, "What all do I know about Jesus?" or, "Do I know how Christians are supposed to live?" But, instead, "How well do I actually know the risen Son of God?" Do you open His Word and listen as it reshapes you? Do you pray and ask The Holy Spirit to work in your life? Do you walk in abiding joy and holiness? Do you know the Truth that sets you free?

ADMIT YOUR NEED

"What must I do to be saved?"

This was the question the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas after the Lord had miraculously broken their prison chains. He saw God set men free, and wanted to be a part of it. Here was their response,



Acts 16:31-34

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.

The scandal of the cross was that Jesus absorbed every ounce of God's wrath for you. There is no work or list of accomplishments to complete in order to be reconciled to God. It was all done for you by Jesus. If you believe that, then you will know the Truth that sets you free.

There is no magic prayer that saves people. If you would like to give your life to Christ today, simply confess that desire to God. You may even say something along these lines:

Father God, Have mercy on me, a sinner. I believe that Jesus is Your Son, and that He died in my place so I can be reconciled to You. I believe that He rose from the dead because He is victorious over sin and death. And today, I'm giving my life to following Jesus. I receive Your forgiveness and grace. I receive Your Holy Spirit to empower, equip, and sustain every moment of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

For those who have received Christ, there's hope that your life can be further built on His sustaining work. Today, simply admit in prayer that you need freedom.

Father God,

There are places in my life that need to be reshaped by the work of Your Spirit. One, in particular, is _____ . I am enslaved to things in ways You never intended. In the coming days, would You help me experience true and lasting freedom? Holy Spirit, I invite you to work in my heart. Help me to identify the places in my life that need healing and change. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

DAY 3

IDENTIFY THE ROOT PROBLEM

Look back at the Inspection exercise you did on Day 1 this week, what were some cracks you discovered in your heart's foundation?

It may be hard to dig to the root of your problems this early in the journey. Don't worry. The following weeks will help unearth many layers in your heart so that you can identify it more easily.

Fill in the blank: If _____ were not an issue in my life, I would feel free and able to live differently.

Do you believe God can set you free in this area(s)? Yes / No

Why or why not?

REPENT WHEN NECESSARY

Many times, our areas of weakness stem from lack of faith. Repentance is a dual-motion activity: turn away from sin and towards Christ. The example of the father in Mark 9:24 serves us well. In a moment of doubt, he turned toward Jesus and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Turn to the Lord right now and ask Him to fill you with faith in the truths of His Word (even in the midst of doubts or uncertainty). Remember, freedom is always possible. Whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

RECEIVE THE TRUTH



John 10:10

The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.

What sort of life did Christ promise to bring to us?

Do you feel that abundant life describes you right now? Yes / No

Why or why not?

Read John 15:4-11 and check the boxes that most describe you:

	This is true of me	This is not true of me
1. Abiding in Christ is a daily pattern in life.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I am bearing fruit that looks like Jesus.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I believe God loves me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. God's Word brings me joy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. My joy is full right now.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A PRAYER OF DECLARATION

Proverbs 18:21 says, "Life and death are in the power of the tongue." Our words matter. When we affirm the truths of God's Word, they settle deeper into our hearts and change us. One of the best ways of doing this is through prayer. Although it might feel strange at first, consider praying out loud (even if in a whisper).

Father God,

I believe you have come to bring me abundant life through Jesus Christ. Today, I'm choosing to believe that Your Words can and will bring me fullness of joy no matter what circumstances surround me.

Thank You, Jesus, for loving me as the Father has loved You. Help me to abide in Your love. I do not want to build my house on the sand, but on the Rock. Amen.

DAYS 4 – 6

Read and meditate on JOHN 15 each day.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. What does this passage tell us about God?

2. What does this passage tell us about sin?

3. What does this passage tell us about freedom?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols
Brad Bigney

The Search for Significance: Building Your Self-Worth
on the Truths of God's Word
Robert McGee

WHO DO YOU TRUST? | DAY 1

We value what we trust. It's what makes us sign for a loan on the word of a house inspector who says, "The foundation and structure is sound." We value something or someone because they've shown themselves trustworthy. Trust is the door to living in freedom, and the key is surrender.

Although the word "surrender" makes us shudder a little, it may be different than you think. Surrender does not look like the oil paintings in history books. Freedom won't ever be seen with his head hung low in defeat trudging back with a shell-shocked army.

Biblical surrender is not an admission of defeat, but an act of trust.

It takes the hand of a Savior who looks at us and says, "Follow Me, and I will give you life." But too many people won't take His hand. They don't value His words because they don't trust the Voice speaking to them. We value what we trust. So, people choose bondage and never live fully alive. Nevertheless, trust can be learned. Here's why:



Psalm 119:40

└ "Your promise is well tried, and your servant loves it."

The Psalmist doesn't value God's promises out of obligation or because someone a long time ago told him it was what you were supposed to do. He valued God's words because he trusted them, and he trusted them because he tried them. The Hebrew word pictures it as gold that's been refined by fire.

It becomes easier to trust something that's been personally tried and proven.

Most of those people staring blankly at God's open hand are the ones who have never given His promises a shot. It's the only real angle Satan has in this fight, and he's used it from the beginning. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve rebelled against God and spiraled humanity because they believed a lie that began with "Has God really said...?" **The lineage of every sin can be traced back to that question. It's a question of trust.**

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

What is an area(s) of your life that you find it difficult to trust God?

What is it about God that you don't trust?

DAY 2



I John 2:15-17

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.**”

Desire finds its pulse in the human heart, and the heart is not easily changed. But hope is not lost. Those who are in Christ have been given a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27) and can walk with new desires (Ephesians 4:22-24). When we truly trust in the Lord, our desires turn towards Him rather than to lesser gods.

“The problem is not that God created the material things of the world. The problem is that people have made these things into idols.” DANNY AKIN

We value what we trust, and, if we trust that the desires of the world will bring joy or life or peace, then we are setting ourselves up for disappointment. “The world is passing away,” John reminds us, “along with its desires.” There is no amount of recognition or sex or salary that will be enough to fulfill your desire. Ever. It’s not their purpose. These things were not created by God to bring you lasting joy.

“The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up your self, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.” CS LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*

ADMIT YOUR NEED

If you feel like a certain sin has a hook in your life, perhaps it is not your lack of discipline or knowledge, but your lack of trust. Romans 14:23 tells us, “Anything that is not of faith is sin.” Another way then to see sin is a type of “surrender” to temptation. When you sin, you are surrendering to something other than God’s Word to base your joy or pleasure or hope.

Everyone has places in their lives where they experience temptation (and sometimes surrender to it). What are they for you? **(circle ones that apply to you)**

Self-reliance

(Not trusting God’s ability to do what’s best)

The need to please others

(Not trusting God’s opinion of me)

Looking for my self-worth in a career

(Not trusting the value of God’s Kingdom)

Pornography

(Not trusting God’s view of sex)

Nagging fear of tragedy or suffering

(Not trusting God with my future)

Being jealous of what other people have

(Not trusting God for my contentment)

Insecurity

(Not trusting God’s ability to empower)

Abuse of alcohol or drugs

(Not trusting God’s ability to sustain)

Outbursts of anger

(Not trusting God’s longsuffering)

Resentment that won’t go away

(Not trusting God’s redemption and forgiveness)

Sexual immorality

(Not trusting that God’s plan for sex is best)

Lustful thinking

(Not trusting that intimacy with God is better than sex)

There are many more that could be listed. It says, in Galatians 5:19, that the works of the flesh are evident. You probably know them well in your life already.

Instead of shrinking back in shame because of your sin, boldly approach the throne of grace with confidence and find help in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16). God already knows what is going on in your heart, and why you don't always surrender to His will. So, ask Him to lead you to the places where you don't trust Him – right now.

Father God,

I want to confess that I wrongly desire _____ in my life, and believe that it will bring me more peace or satisfaction or joy than surrendering to You. Please help me right now to see lies that I'm believing as well as the truth of who You are and why I can trust you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 3

IDENTIFY THE ROOT PROBLEM

Take your time and be courageously honest while answering the following:

What temptation(s) do you find yourself surrendering to most often?

What about this is tempting in your life?

Since we value what we trust, what are you trusting to find in this area?

Do you believe God can fulfill that desire instead of sin? If yes, how so?

Based on how you answered the questions above, can you identify any lies that are not true of God's Word? Are there places where you have begun to think, "has God really said...?" If so, try to put the lie into words:

I believe the lie that _____

(or)

I struggle to believe God is _____

REPENT WHEN NECESSARY

Your Heavenly Father already knows every struggle and sin that is in your heart. So, don't be afraid to boldly confess them in prayer. "If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Use these lines to write a prayer of confession and repentance to God for places in your life where the desires of this world have replaced your desire for Him.

RECEIVE THE TRUTH

Read these passages of Scripture slowly, and meditate on them for your life:



1 John 1:9

If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make straight your paths.

Psalm 147:11

The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

A PRAYER OF DECLARATION

When we affirm the truths of God's Word, they settle deeper into our hearts and change us. One of the best ways of doing this is through prayer. Although it might feel strange, consider praying out loud (even if in a whisper):

Father God,

As I have confessed my sin to You, I believe You have forgiven and cleansed me from ALL unrighteousness through Jesus Christ. Today, I am trusting in You with all of my heart. There are places that I have leaned only on my understanding, but I cast those things on You and acknowledge that Your ways are good, holy, beautiful and true. I put my hope in Your steadfast loving kindness towards me and my future. You have made known to me the paths of life and empowered me to walk that path through Your Holy Spirit. So, I reject the desires of this world: the lust of my flesh, the lust of my eyes, and the pride in my life. They will not bring me lasting pleasure; only Your presence in my life can. I invite you, Holy Spirit, to unite my heart to fear Your name and find joy in Your ways. In Christ I pray, Amen.

DAYS 4 – 6

Read and meditate on PSALM 25 each day.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. What does this passage tell us about God?

2. What does this passage tell us about sin?

3. What does this passage tell us about freedom?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy
John Piper

Knowing God
J.I. Packer

WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF? | DAY 1

Defective little adages can get passed around like a cold, and they tend to stick around for a while. This one infects us quick:

“You’re either in a storm (difficult circumstance), coming out of a storm, or about to go through one.”

For too long, I let that statement be the filter for life. It wasn’t until much later that I figured out its two biggest problems:

1. That can be said about anything. (You’re either in a van, getting out of a van, or about to get in one). It’s almost like announcing, “You’re either breathing or you’re... not breathing.”
2. The focus, then, becomes whatever “it” is. In this case, one’s life is centered around storms.

My life was the perfect host for that lingering cold. At five, my parents were divorced. A few years later, as soon as I felt like things were getting normal, an X-Ray revealed what was causing my excruciating headaches. Tumors had filled my sinuses and eyes. I was ten, and spent the next six years going through nine surgeries and many rounds of chemotherapy. Just moving from one storm to another, right?

“That’s how life works,” I’d remind myself.

The worst part was not the fear of tumors moving into my brain or the side effects of chemotherapy, but the kids who were battling life-threatening cancers in the Oncology clinic. Every Wednesday we would sit together waiting for our blood work to come back. I knew their names. We played Donkey Kong. And each week the same thought rolled over and over as we waited: “Your storm is bad, Blake. But theirs is worse.”

That was what crushed me. Knowing it could be worse. Knowing, as awful as this was, more suffering might await. Fear rose as I wondered what other storms were boiling ahead. By eighteen, my disease was in remission, and the calm made me nervous.

Three months later, I walked passed the coroner at our front door. Mom said what I had already figured out on the drive home, “Dale died.” He was my stepdad, and I loved him very much. My world stopped for a while. Another storm. But I knew it could be worse. It can always be worse. That was my life – the storms.

This way of thinking is a virus. A cold that will kill you. It stole my joy for nearly 20 years. Perhaps you have one or more of the symptoms as well:

1. A fear of the calm (because it’s only a matter of time before the storm comes).
2. An identity that’s tied to hardship. Your life matters only when you are going through something (therefore, you always seem to be “going through something”).
3. Your decisions, both big and small, are driven by trying to avoid things you fear (i.e. sickness, travel, career moves, rejection, failure, guilt, etc.)

Now, watch what Jesus did.



Luke 8:23-25

So they set out, and as they sailed he [Jesus] fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?”

Turbulent water represented chaos to everyone in the ancient world. So, by calming the waves, Jesus was doing much more than trying to get back to His nap. Christ was showing that He had authority over the chaos. The storm bowed its knee to Him. Even the winds and water obey.

Jesus Christ brings peace in the midst of your storm. He can look into the raging waters of your fear and pain and despair, stands to His feet, and say, “Be still.” That’s what He did for me.

Of course there were more storms – miscarriages, nights in ICU with our son and so on. Jesus never promised we wouldn’t have moments that were hard. Instead, He showed that He was in control (and why that was a good thing). The storms always bow their knee.



2 Timothy 1:7

For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

KATIE'S STORY

The journey of walking in freedom means taking one step of obedience at a time.

As a child, I collected some deep emotional wounds. I wasn’t really aware of these wounds until high school when a woman in my church started mentoring me. She asked questions every week that challenged me to process what I experienced growing up. That was over fifteen years ago. Since that time, every moment has required faith to take steps of obedience.

One moment in my journey meant taking a step towards forgiveness; an uncomfortable and overwhelming step. But God was so good to help with such a hard task. After forgiving someone dear to me, I thought I was done processing my past, but there were more steps of obedience ahead.

A few years ago, I started experiencing anxiety for the first time. It happened right after my husband and I adopted our second son. I was overwhelmed as a new mom. I asked God to identify lies and started claiming scripture out loud.

Less than a week later, God began revealing the lies. I remember sitting on my couch in the heat of an anxiety attack, and a thought rolling over and over in my mind. “You have a family member who has been hospitalized for anxiety. It’s just who you are.”

I almost believed it, but the Spirit of God inside of me was screaming, “That is a lie! That is not who you are.”

Around the same time, I went on a beach retreat with some friends. We were led in a prayer moment of sitting at our Heavenly Father’s feet. I could hear a friend having a beautiful, intimate moment with the Lord next to me. I looked up at the lady leading the retreat, pointed to my friend and said, “I want that.” She graciously prayed with me and encouraged me to take one step at a time.

On the morning we left the retreat to go home, I woke up in a full sweat and started having an anxiety attack. I sat up and thought, "I'm not leaving this place until I know what's going on. This is done."

In my brokenness and desperation, I heard the Heavenly Father tell me what I was holding onto. I had not let go of the wounds from my childhood and received healing from the great Healer. And, because I had been stuffing the hurt down for so long, anxiety was surfacing. I was delivered and received supernatural healing that very morning. Since then, I've had many more encounters sitting at my Heavenly Father's feet and taking one step of obedience at a time.

By the grace of God, anxiety no longer controls my life. Though I have had moments of being anxious when hard seasons happen, I have the tools now to live fully in freedom. I have joy and am not paralyzed by anxiety. Praise the Lord!

DAY 2

ADMIT YOUR NEED

Everyone has places in their lives where they experience fear. What matters is that you recognize what they are in your own life and invite the Holy Spirit to move those fears to places of faith. What are they for you?

(circle ones that apply to you)

- I say "yes" too much because I do not want to let others down (fear of rejection).
- I lose sleep over things happening in my career field (fear of failure).
- During a conversation with someone, I tend to say things in a way that will gain approval in their eyes (fear of opinion).
- I worry a lot about hypothetical situations (fear of the future).
- Many times, I plan my day too much around not exposing myself or family to germs (fear of sickness).
- I'm afraid people will see the "real me" one day and realize that I'm not as great or Godly as they once thought (fear of failure and rejection).
- I obey God so that He will not hurt me (fear of punishment).

There are as many fears as there are people. Admit yours to God. Invite Him into whatever parts of your heart that is driven by anxiety.

Father God,

I want to confess that I am afraid of _____, and I want to learn how to cast that fear onto you. Holy Spirit, I invite you today to expose the root of those fears and drive them out of my life. I believe. Help my unbelief. In Jesus' name, Amen.

IDENTIFY THE ROOT PROBLEM

Take your time and be courageously honest while answering the following:

What are you afraid of?

Why does it frighten you?

How is this connected to your trust in God?

Based on how you answered the questions above, can you identify any lies that are not true of God's Word? Are there places where you have begun to think, "has God really said...?" If so, try to put the lie into words:

I believe the lie that

(or)

I struggle to believe God is

Read and meditate on Luke 8:23-25 and 2 Timothy 1:7 again today.

DAY 3

REPENT WHEN NECESSARY

Fear and anxiety create a weary soul. This is what Jesus says to the physically, emotionally and spiritually depleted:



Matthew 11:28-30

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The Christian life is not about what you can do, but what Christ has already done. And it brings rest. No matter what. We work from a place of rest.



2 Corinthians 4:8-10

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

In other words, even though everything around us is falling apart, we are at peace. Though we carry affliction, we have rest in our souls because the life of Jesus is manifested in us.

Is your soul weary today? Are you striving from fear? Turn from it. Use these lines to write a prayer of confession and repentance to God for places in your life where fear has replaced your faith in His authority over all storms (real or potential) in your life:

RECEIVE THE TRUTH

Read these passages of Scripture slowly, and meditate on them for your life:



1 John 4:18

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Philippians 4:6-8

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Psalm 127:1-2

Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

A PRAYER OF DECLARATION

When we affirm the truths of God's Word, they settle deeper into our hearts and change us. One of the best ways of doing this is through prayer. Although it might feel strange, consider praying out loud (even if in a whisper):

Father God,

I believe that Jesus Christ bore all the punishment and wrath that was reserved for me when He died on the cross. I receive Your perfect love as it casts out fear. Thank you for caring for me! Thank you for carrying the burden of my fears. Holy Spirit, please build my house on the rock of salvation. I trust you to watch over the cities in my life so that I do not have to labor or stay awake in vain. I believe that You are loving and sovereign and make all things work together for my good. Calm my heart today. Thank you for being able to quiet every storm. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAYS 4 – 6

Read and meditate on PSALM 23 each day.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. What does this passage tell us about God?

2. What does this passage tell us about sin?

3. What does this passage tell us about freedom?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Fear and Faith: Finding the Peace Your Heart Craves
Trillia J. Newbell

God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith
Bruce A. Ware

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LEAVE AT THE CROSS? | DAY 1

How you forgive others and receive forgiveness reveals almost everything you believe about God. Forgiveness found in Christ is what changed your entire destiny, and affects how you view current and past pain.

**2 Corinthians 5:21**

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

When God forgave us, He did so sacrificially and completely. He did not try to belittle our sin to make it more forgivable. Jesus, instead, stood in our place and held the weight of our bondage. It means that your sin - the things you did against God and against other people - are horrible. Horrible. And what people have done against you is horrible. Everyone should have to pay for what they did, but that's the scandal of grace.

Forgiveness isn't free. It cost Jesus everything.

There are most likely places in your life where you have been hurt and hurt others. This can cause bitterness, anger, frustration, and pain that manifests itself in every future relationship. We often forget the grace given to us at the cross, and hold other people's sin against them.

**Hebrews 12:15**

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.

“All bitterness is ultimately bitterness towards God.” BILL ELLIFF

BILL'S STORY

As a child, I assumed every home was like mine. We had no overwhelming difficulties nor great complications. Even in my early years of adulthood, when I attended seminary and began full time ministry, I often wondered why our family had been touched by so little pain.

But that soon changed.

My father, a godly pastor who led our home in strength and purpose, faced and failed the greatest test of his life. He fell into an immoral relationship. One day, upon returning home from an errand, my mother found a simple, sad note on the kitchen table. Dad was gone.

We all prayed, and fasted, and wept...and HURT.

During my parents' ordeal, I became bitter. I didn't recognize its entrance – I was numb. I didn't want

to read my Bible (Why should I listen to God’s counsel when it didn’t seem to be working?), or pray (Why should I talk to God when He didn’t seem to be listening?). I’m not proud of those thoughts, but that is honestly how I felt at the time. I was upset with God for allowing this massive hurt to come into my family’s life. My words and actions began to manifest sure signs of harbored hurt.

One night I went for a walk to try to clear my mind. For many years I had often prayed a simple, sincere prayer, “Lord, whatever You want to do to make me a man of God, that’s what I want.” That night as I walked, I stopped under a big cottonwood tree. In anger and frustration, and with my fists literally clenched toward heaven, I cried aloud, “Lord, if this is what it’s going to take to make me a godly man, I don’t think I want it!”

The instant those words left my lips I felt ashamed, but I also knew the boil in my heart had been lanced. The truth of how I felt had erupted from my soul.

Under that tree, my gracious Father did not chide me for my honesty, but simply ministered to my heart as only He can. God lovingly and gently reminded me that He was not the author of sin. The break-up of my parents’ home was not His plan, nor His fault. In fact, He reminded me, He was the only one who could take this horrible situation and “work it for good” if I would let Him. With God’s gentle guidance, I relaxed my hands and accepted the circumstance and its purposes for my life.

That night the sting of bitterness began to leave me. Years later I came to more fully understand that under the cottonwood tree I had begun to embrace God’s sovereign control over my life. He was big enough to bring purpose in the midst of pain. (Excerpt from *Forgiveness: Healing the Harbored Hurts of Your Heart* by Bill Elliff)

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. How are your “fists”? Still clenched or released?

2. Are you willing to believe that God is bigger than your problem and can work it out for your good and His glory? Why or why not?

DAY 2

Forgiveness means handing over hurt and sin to God, and letting Him be the Judge. If we are in Christ, then grace and justification will be found because of His work on the cross. For those who are not in Christ, the wrath of God remains on them (John 3:36). Either way, our command is to release that pain or confess that sin to a Just God who will always do what is right.



Psalm 103:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us.

Hebrews 8:12

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

The sight of Christ's scars gives our Heavenly Father divine amnesia. So, why do we choose to remember something that God has forgotten? What makes us shackled in guilt to the sin or hurt of our past?

It's the same reason we talk about our scars without mentioning His. We have not yet grasped the height and depth and breadth of God's love. Instead, we choose to replay our sin over and over again believing the guilt will make us more lovable in God's sight. But the cross was enough.

Know this. If you are paralyzed by your past, the cross was enough. If you feel defeated by sin, the cross was enough. If you feel like God could never forgive your lifetime of rebellion, the cross was enough. If you feel trapped in your struggle, the cross was enough. If the pain someone caused in the past is crushing you, the cross was enough. Christ on the cross was and will always be enough.

Nobody had to remind himself of this more than the Apostle Paul.

He spent his life hurting Christians, dragging them to prison, and holding people's coats as others crushed them with stones (Acts 22:20). Then Paul met Jesus. Everything changed after that. God used him to write the majority of the New Testament and bring the Gospel to untold numbers. He suffered intense persecution for the name of Christ. And yet, Paul probably dealt with more guilt than you ever will.

Think about all the memories he had swirling around at any given moment. The coats, the voices of children screaming as their parents were ripped away, they sat in his mind waiting to reappear in a quiet moment along the road or late at night. He had to preach the Gospel to himself more than others.

"Stop it Paul," he would say. "Leave it at the cross. The cross was enough. The cross was enough. The cross was enough. God makes all things work together for good for those that love Him and are called to His purpose. The cross was enough." His only hope was trusting in the God who is merciful toward our iniquities and remembers our sin no more. It kept him moving forward. He wrote,



Philippians 3:12-15

Not that I have obtained [completion] or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way..."

Forgetting wasn't passive for Paul. It was something he chose to do, and it enabled him to press on. You, too, have a choice to make. Remember what lies behind and be paralyzed in guilt or bitterness. Or choose to believe that the cross was enough, and take the next step toward the goal.

ADMIT YOUR NEED

Don't remind yourself of something that Jesus has died to redeem and God the Father has forgotten. That's what Satan does (Revelation 12:10). Forgiveness is about releasing your sin to God. For those in Christ, that heinous sin crushed Jesus on the cross and freed the sinner. For those apart from Christ, the wrath of God remains on them and should push you to your knees praying that their eyes would be open to believe and trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

Ask Him today to lift the burden of your past.

Father God,

You know the sin in my heart that has affected others, and the sin of others that has affected me. Holy Spirit, give me the ability to leave all of it at the cross. I do not want a root of bitterness to destroy my heart and my loved ones. Thank you for the redemption I have because of Your sacrifice. Help me to further embrace the grace found in Christ so that I can extend that grace to others. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAY 3

IDENTIFY THE ROOT PROBLEM

Take your time and be courageously honest while answering the following:

Is there sin your past that you have not embraced forgiveness? If so, what is it?

Do you believe the cross was enough to heal and restore that sin? Why or why not?

Are you angry or bitter at someone for pain they caused in the past? If so, why?

Are you angry or bitter at God for pain you have experienced in the past? If so, why?

Do you need to ask anyone for forgiveness for a time where you caused pain? If so, who?

Based on how you answered the questions above, can you identify any lies that are not true of God's Word? Are there places where you have begun to think, "has God really said...?" If so, try to put the lie in to words:

I believe the lie that _____

(or)

I struggle to believe God is _____

REPENT WHEN NECESSARY

The weight of sin and pain can steal our joy and paralyze our growth. As Scripture reminds us, though, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Everyone needs grace, including you. Where in your life do you need to turn away from sin and back towards Christ? Use the following lines to write a prayer of your dependence on Jesus for salvation and redemption from sin and pain.

RECEIVE THE TRUTH

Read these passages of Scripture slowly, and meditate on them for your life:



Hebrews 8:12

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

Colossians 3:12-13

Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Romans 8:1-5

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

A PRAYER OF DECLARATION

When we affirm the truths of God's Word, they settle deeper into our hearts and change us. One of the best ways of doing this is through prayer. Although it might feel strange, consider praying out loud (even if in a whisper):

Father God,

You are holy and sovereign and just. You make all things work together for my good. Thank you for the cross! I receive the righteousness of Christ today because He became my sin. Today, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, I am putting on a compassionate heart with kindness, meekness, humility and patience. Help me to love others well and forgive as I have been forgiven. I choose, from this moment on, to actively leave the past at the cross and press on towards Your upward call for me in Christ Jesus. In His name I pray, Amen.

DAYS 4 – 6

Read and meditate on **ROMANS 8** each day.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. What does this passage tell us about God?

2. What does this passage tell us about sin?

3. What does this passage tell us about freedom?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Forgiveness: Healing the Harbored Hurts of Your Heart
Bill Elliff

HOW CAN I KEEP FROM GOING BACK? | DAY 1

When Christ came to set us free, it was not a one-time experience, but an everyday, moment-by-moment experience. The plan from the beginning was to send us His Holy Spirit to empower, equip and sustain our freedom.

**John 16:7**

But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

Galatians 3:2-3

This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

When you came to faith in Christ, you were given His Spirit. Your salvation was begun by the Spirit and it will be perfected by Him. In other words, Christ did not save you then leave you to fend for yourself.

**Hebrews 10:14**

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

The word “perfected” in this passage is the Greek word *tetelestai* – complete, finished. It was the last word Jesus uttered on the cross, “Tetelestai! (It is finished!)” Done. Paid for. Perfected for all time. The verb implies both past and future (it was complete and is still complete).

Lasting freedom starts by resting in the completed work of Christ for you.

If true rest alludes you, there is a good chance that you are leaning on something other than Christ’s completed work. When you try to go through the motions of Christianity out of obligation or guilt, then you miss the whole point. No joy or freedom or rest will be found there. In fact, it drains the life out of us.

The only way to become fully alive is by depending completely on the mercy God has already shown us through His Son. We throw ourselves completely into it and find rest.

**Matthew 11:28-30**

Come to Me [Jesus], all who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.

It is only in the completed work of Christ for you that you will find rest, and it’s only in resting in the finished work of Christ that you can do anything of value. Jesus didn’t tell us come to Him and take a nap, but to take on His light and easy yoke. He calls us to work, to create, to engage. But it starts by learning to rest in His completed work.

**Hebrews 10:14**

For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

The second half of this passage, on the other hand, is in the present tense. “Being sanctified” is something happening right now. It’s the journey where we look more and more like Christ each day.

“Sanctification is our identity in Christ becoming our reality in life.” *KYLE RENO*

It’s one thing to say our hope is found in God, but another altogether to let hope shape how you respond to current circumstances. That’s sanctification; the everyday surrender to the work of God in your life.

Lasting freedom is sustained by embracing the continuing work of Christ in you.

Rest in the finished work of Christ, and embrace the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. It’s that simple. When you are doing both of those things, you will be able to stand against the schemes of Satan, the Father of Lies. Think back to the Garden of Eden when he waged an all-out attack on us. We exchanged the truth of God for a lie and began to worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). It was the beginning of bondage.

But now, because of the work of Christ for us and the Holy Spirit in us, we exchange the lie of Satan for the Truth that sets us free (John 8:32, John 14:6). We stand against the powers of darkness by standing on the Rock of our Salvation.

“The Christian life means we have moved from a battle we could not win to a battle we cannot lose. But there is still a battle.” *TIM KELLER*

The future fight remains. Winds will still blow and try to knock your house over, but they will fail (Matthew 7:25). There are moments coming when the lies creep back in and try to take over. In those seasons, remember the finished work of Christ for you and embrace the power of the Holy Spirit in you.



2 Corinthians 10:3-5

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Learn to recognize thoughts in your life that are “raised up against the knowledge of God.” Take them captive. Push every other thought out of your mind other than what is true to God’s Word. The appendixes at the end of this study will help you pray and stand against the schemes of the Enemy.



2 Peter 1:2-3

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Rest in the finished work of Christ for you. Embrace the continuing work of Christ in you. And the power of God will bring you to completion.

DAY 2

ADMIT YOUR NEED

Perhaps you have been holding the Holy Spirit at arm's length. If so, you are withholding the ability to be free; fully alive. Invite His work in your life through this prayer:

Father God,

I invite you right now, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, to fill me fresh with faith. There are places in my heart that need to be liberated from lies, and I'm asking that You would shine light into the darkness. I trust You. Help my unbelief. I want to walk fully in freedom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

IDENTIFY THE ROOT PROBLEM

Take your time and be courageously honest while answering the following:

Is your heart at rest because of Christ's work on the cross? Why or why not?

Are you daily embracing the continuing work of the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

Based on how you answered the questions above, can you identify any lies that are not true of God's Word? Are there places where you have begun to think, "has God really said...?" If so, try to put the lie in to words:

I believe the lie that _____

(or)

I struggle to believe God is _____

REPENT WHEN NECESSARY

Use the following lines to write a prayer of your dependence on Jesus for salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring lasting freedom:

DAY 3

RECEIVE THE TRUTH

Read these passages of Scripture slowly, and meditate on them for your life:



John 8:36

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Galatians 5:1

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.

2 Timothy 1:7

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Romans 8:31

What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

John 10:10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

A PRAYER OF DECLARATION

When we affirm the truths of God’s Word, they settle deeper into our hearts and change us. One of the best ways of doing this is through prayer. Although it might feel strange, consider praying out loud (even if in a whisper):

Father God,

I love You because You loved me first. I am for You because You were for me first. You are the author and perfecter of my faith. My hope is in You today and forever. You have come to set me free. I am covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. So, I will boldly approach Your throne of grace with confidence - knowing I will find help in time of need. Holy Spirit, with open hands, I receive your good work in my life. Thank You for always being here with me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAYS 4 – 6

Read and meditate on GALATIANS 1-6.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER...

1. What does this passage tell us about God?

2. What does this passage tell us about sin?

3. What does this passage tell us about freedom?

WHAT NOW?

Next steps...



Galatians 5:1

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Walking in freedom does not mean you will never struggle with anxiety or fear or pride or lust again. It means that you will no longer be a slave to them. Picture two trees, large and full of leaves. One of them has disease on the inside (but nobody knows yet). The roots are brittle but, from the outside, it looks fine enough. The only way for you to know which tree is healthy is for a strong wind to blow. One tree will fall to the ground, and the other will stand firm.

In the Christian life, there will be seasons where your freedom will be seen clearest as you stand firm in the wind. However, in those seasons, it will be tempting to move back to a place of slavery. You will find it easier to slip into old ways of thinking, and live in sin rather than freedom.



Ephesians 4:20-24

But that is not the way you learned Christ! — assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

There is a clothing ritual of sorts that keeps us in a sustained pattern of Christian living:

1. “Put off your old self.” (Admit when you need help. Identify the lies you are believing.)
2. “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”. (Repent when necessary.)
3. “And put on your new self.” (Receive the truths of God’s Word.)

If you continue to practice these things, as you have over the last six weeks, you will find that walking in freedom, with the help of the Holy Spirit, is something that will last the rest of your life. As you continue this journey, here are a few other suggestions:

- Daily immerse yourself in a passage of Scripture. Meditate and memorize it. Receive the truths of God’s Word.
- Pray often, and use the “Prayers of Declaration” from the end of each week from time to time. These can be found in Appendix A or at the end of each chapter.
- Pick one of the Recommended Resources, and read it with a friend. These can be found in Appendix B or at the end of each chapter.
- After 10-12 weeks, take a few days to review this study again and make new notes of what you are learning.
- Help other people find freedom. Invite someone in our church to go through this study. Offer to be their accountability partner throughout the process.



1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.*

APPENDIX A | PRAYERS OF DECLARATION

Father God,

I believe you have come to bring me abundant life through Jesus Christ. Today, I'm choosing to believe that Your Words can and will bring me fullness of joy no matter what circumstances surround me. Thank You, Jesus, for loving me as the Father has loved You. Help me to abide in Your love. I do not want to build my house on the sand, but on the Rock. Amen.

Father God,

As I have confessed my sin to You, I believe You have forgiven and cleansed me from ALL unrighteousness through Jesus Christ. Today, I am trusting in You with all of my heart. There are places that I have leaned only on my understanding, but I cast those things on You and acknowledge that Your ways are good, holy, beautiful and true. I put my hope in Your steadfast loving kindness towards me and my future. You have made known to me the paths of life and empowered me to walk that path through Your Holy Spirit. So, I reject the desires of this world: the lust of my flesh, the lust of my eyes, and the pride in my life. They will not bring me lasting pleasure; only Your presence in my life can. I invite you, Holy Spirit, to unite my heart to fear Your name and find joy in Your ways. In Christ I pray, Amen.

Father God,

I believe that Jesus Christ bore all the punishment and wrath that was reserved for me when He died on the cross. I receive Your perfect love as it casts out fear. Thank you for caring for me! Thank you for carrying the burden of my fears. Holy Spirit, please build my house on the rock of salvation. I trust you to watch over the cities in my life so that I do not have to labor or stay awake in vain. I believe that You are loving and sovereign and make all things work together for my good. Calm my heart today. Thank you for being able to quiet every storm. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Father God,

You are holy and sovereign and just. You make all things work together for my good. Thank you for the cross! I receive the righteousness of Christ today because He became my sin. Today, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, I am putting on a compassionate heart with kindness, meekness, humility and patience. Help me to love others well and forgive as I have been forgiven. I choose, from this moment on, to actively leave the past at the cross and press on towards Your upward call for me in Christ Jesus. In His name I pray, Amen.

Father God,

I love You because You loved me first. I am for You because You were for me first. You are the author and perfecter of my faith. My hope is in You today and forever. You have come to set me free. I am covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. So, I will boldly approach Your throne of grace with confidence - knowing I will find help in time of need. Thank you for being here with me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

APPENDIX B | RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Gospel Treason: Betraying the Gospel with Hidden Idols

Brad Bigney

The Search for Significance: Building Your Self-Worth on the Truths of God's Word

Robert McGee

Fear and Faith: Finding the Peace Your Heart Craves

Trillia J. Newbell

God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith

Bruce A. Ware

Forgiveness: Healing the Harbored Hurts of Your Heart

Bill Elliff

Lined paper for notes
