

STAYING FREE



THE UNCHAINED SERIES
WITH NICK VUJICIC

Born without limbs, Nick Vujicic has had to persevere through a maze of life circumstances that to most would seem nearly insurmountable, yet he's emerged from these adversities not only triumphant, but with the desire to share the tremendous insights he has learned about God's hope and love. His distinct and motivational message of hope has touched millions of hearts around the world and today we are praying his testimony impacts yours.

"If I fail, I try again, and again, and again. If YOU fail, are you going to try again? The human spirit can handle much worse than we realize. It matters HOW you are going to FINISH. Are you going to finish strong?"

Nick Vujicic

STAYING FREE

The Journey from Hopelessness to Hope



LIFEWITHOUTLIMBS
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This information is provided by Life Without Limbs (LWL), and each person involved has come to this training voluntarily. Pastor Jay Harvey is the LWL Prison Ministry Director. Through our easy-to-use *Unchained Series* curriculum, believers in Jesus Christ are empowered and equipped.

Dear Friends,

Now you may still have lots of questions about what it means to follow Christ, to live like a Christian and what that's supposed to look like in your own personal life. Well, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come and live inside us to teach us truth and love, to guide our decisions, to comfort us, to help us understand who God is, and to show us what His plan is for our lives!

God also wrote a letter. It's called the Bible. Read it and study it daily! It's the truest and best spiritual guidebook we will ever have. These topics contained here are selected for us to apply what God says by connecting words and actions. Prayer is both listening to God's words and talking to God about everything.

Your knowledge will increase as a way to transform into application so that you will be encouraged and encourage others!

For His Glory,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. W. ...' with a stylized flourish.

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OVERVIEW

How to Get the Most from *Staying Free*

Staying Free was developed out of the need for a study that examines real-life issues and God's promises or "answers" for those issues.

There are 5 sections that include "Questions for Further Discussion."

Each section is a "dual topic" lesson of viewpoints and is best absorbed over a two-session approach.

- If meeting weekly, allow two weeks for each section and the discussion questions.
- If meeting daily, allow two days for each section and the discussion questions.

The material is designed to promote discussion and testimony. Active listening and allowance for "discovery" or "self-revelation" is important.

God desires to meet you in these conversations; therefore, take your times and never rush into or out of a topic.

Take notes and always pray before and after each session!

Each session is flexible for either a presenter or an individual to share personal stories and examples. The *best* way to facilitate these lessons is to be familiar with the material and impart your own personality and experiences. Plan for 45 minutes for each session. Take time to connect with others and their stories if they choose.

Each topic can be taught as a single lesson or as one of a series. Include anecdotes or personal experience at the beginning as a backdrop to the material. There will be times for reflection, interaction, and questions and answers (Q&A).

If the session is on “Fear vs Courage,” there are relevant examples of when to take action and when courage means no action. If the session is on “My Will vs God’s Will,” discussion questions will help to clarify the concepts for specific applications.

If the curriculum is to be taught in a two-day session, use relevant examples that can carry the *entire* teaching as a teaching aid to show the connections and themes of following through by an action plan.

What We Need to Grow in Our Faith

To stay free as we grow in our faith, these tools are essential. Bring a Bible and a willing heart. NewLife Recovery Bibles are being given out freely to prison inmates. Call 1-800-Help4Me for more information and support.

Writing and drawing help us to get “it” out of our head and onto paper. Feel free to write, draw pictures and diagrams, and list details to clarify concepts. Circle, highlight, and underline.

Structure of Lessons

- Start with the definition so that everyone is on the same page since preconceived ideas and previous frame of reference may interfere in processing the content.
- Content may be king but connection is super-king! We don't grow in isolation. Allow time to process, linking people with people, previous lessons with the current lessons, and stories of progress and reflection.
- Take time for reflection and application to help others process the new information towards real and practical transformation.
- Use any blank space to encourage action steps for accountability.

FEAR vs COURAGE

Objectives

- Define *fear*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Define *courage*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How is *courage* different than *fear*?
- Build in time for personal reflection and prayer.
- Application: Learning how to understand fear and apply courage in our daily lives. In this session you will examine healthy and unhealthy fears while apply courage God's way for the purpose of spiritual growth. situations.

Introduction

If I am on a camping trip and I encounter a raccoon, I probably won't run away in fear, but if there is a bear standing behind the raccoon...all bets are off. My fear will move my feet to jump in the car and lock the doors!

The same power that fear uses to inform you of potential danger is often hijacked by the enemy of your soul and used to paralyze you and prevent you from being free in your faith.

I'm sure you have heard someone quote Scripture and say, "Don't be afraid..." but sometimes more is needed to defeat the fear in our minds. It's time to lose the fear and replace it with something else...COURAGE!

Healthy Fear vs Bad Fear

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge...."

Proverbs 1:7

Fear of God is healthy because it puts everything else in proper perspective. Basically, God is the Creator and is Sovereign. You are created in God's image. Therefore, it is healthy to show respect and reverence. God is not asking for

you to be afraid, but to understand His power, His providence, and His authority over all creation.

Renew Your Mind

Use the following exercise as a way to further understand a “healthy” fear of God.

Name something that requires a healthy fear but that you also need in your life.

Example- Everyone should fear the destructive force of a fire. However, we also need heat and fire to cook, to heat our homes, to provide energy etc.

Try to name 3 other examples. Then discuss how this exercise has helped your perspective of the “Fear of the LORD.”

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

One way to show our love and the respect God deserves is in the way we live our lives. For example, being grateful

and treating our neighbors the way God desires is the same as showing respect to God.

God is pleased to give wisdom to those who show reverence. He desires to bless us and not to harm us.

*The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all
He has made.* *Psalm 145:9*

*“I have come that they may have life and have it to
the full.”* John 10:10b

The enemy, however, does not want you to have a moment’s peace and uses fear as a tactic to cause you to second guess yourself and doubt God.

*“The thief comes only to steal and kill and
destroy....”*

John 10:10a

John 10:10 reveals the truth about Jesus and the truth about the enemy. When things are going well, it’s easy to believe Jesus is with us. When suffering and struggles appear, the enemy pounces on us and plants fear and doubt in our head. When this happens, it is time to replace fear with courage!

Courage from Truth

The type of courage that can overcome fear is the courage obtained from knowing the truth. When the enemy tries to plant false fear in your thoughts, knowing the truth will give you the courage to overcome.

When the enemy says:

God says:

“You’re not good enough.”

In Christ, you are forgiven.

(Colossians 1:13-14)

“Nobody loves you.”

God created you and loves you,

(John. 3:16)

“You are worthless.”

You are created in God’s image.

(Psalm 139:14)

“God won’t provide.”

God promises to meet your needs.

(Matthew 6:33)

“You have no future.”

I know the plans I have for you.

(Jeremiah 29:11)

Discuss, or write down other lies from the enemy. Then see the truth by searching God's Word.

LIE: _____

TRUTH: _____

LIE: _____

TRUTH: _____

LIE: _____

TRUTH: _____

Meditating on the Truth

Fearful thoughts come at the worst times in our life. Other people say things that cause us to become fearful, or circumstances arise that are *out of our control* and fear is set in motion. Don't wait until fear comes to search out the truth. Meditate on God's truth daily as a way to renew your mind and remain strong.

By spending time each day reading, praying, and meditating on God's promises, fear can be reduced much easier.

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.”

2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

Let's examine this verse together! First, this verse makes it clear that God has given us a new identity in Christ. What God has given is not fear or doubt. So, if you are living as a believer and dealing with unhealthy fears or doubt, you can be sure it's not from God. If it's not from God it is from the world, others, or the enemy.

Next, recognize that unhealthy fears or worry, never produce the type of spiritual growth God desires for you. God has given you the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline. Tap into these gifts from God and grow!

Power: The *power* of the Truth. (God's Word) The *power* of the Holy Spirit. (God living in you). The *power* of prayer. The *power* of brothers and sisters in Christ for fellowship.

Love: God's love changes who we are from the inside out. Our fear can be diminished by remembering how much God loves us and gives us the strength to love others.

Self-Discipline: God gives us His Spirit so that we have the power to overcome temptations, bad thoughts, and the fear that haunts us. Self-discipline happens naturally as we follow Jesus and spend time with Him. Jesus is the one who transforms us and replaces fear with the courage to live life by the power of His Spirit living in and through us.

Remember

- Courage is not simply putting on a brave face. *Courage* is knowing the truth and trusting in what God says about you.
- Meditating on God’s promises and spending time in prayer will produce a courage that looks like peace, confidence, love, grace, compassion, and joy.
- When the enemy tries to plant a seed of fear, don’t let it take root. Remember the truth, and the truth will set you free!

Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of other Scriptures that talk about fear or courage and how they apply to your life?

2. Discuss how you will handle fear in the future and specifically, how you will meet fear with courage.

3. Discuss ways other than loving your neighbor, that you can show God that you love Him, and have reverence for Him.

4. Does being courageous have to be public? Or is it sometimes silent? Here's an example: If fear is challenging you to "act-out" or "speak-out," are there times when courage is displayed by remaining silent, trusting in God, and at peace?

5. How can you help others with their fears?

REGRETS vs HEALING

Objectives

- Define *regrets*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Build in time for personal reflection and prayer.
- Application: In this session you will examine why everyone has *regrets*, and the power that *healing* offers to transform our lives and use our *regrets* for God's glory.

Introduction

“Regrets; I’ve had a few…”

I’ve heard people use this phrase to explain the ups and downs of life. The problem is, some of my worst regrets come as a result of hurting the people I love, or myself. Those types of regrets have nothing to do with the ups and

downs of life. They are just a painful reminder of broken relationships, unforgiveness, and the wounds of hurtful words that we have either heard or spoken.

Yes, everyone has regrets, but there's a big difference between regretting the fact that you met your favorite actor but forgot to get a "selfie" and the greater regret over the way you spoke to one of your children.

One regret is a good story to tell, the other haunts you each time it comes up.

So, what do we do with the regrets that cause us pain?

The Path to Healing Starts with Lament

Perhaps the most important part of the healing process is taking that first step and choosing to wade into the suffering of regret. Many people try to avoid "feeling" the pain of regret, by moving too quickly in the quest to "feel" relief or acceptance.

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me."

Lamentations 3: 19-20

Many of us have been taught all our lives not to show emotion because it makes us appear weak. When it comes to

the pain and regret of our past, however, it is necessary to cry out to God and acknowledge our inability to deal with our own suffering. This is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of faith and a desire to heal.

Discussion-Exercise

Name three ways you normally deal with the pain of regret or past mistakes. For example, when I see someone that I've disappointed or regret hurting, I avoid them because I don't want to deal with the emotions.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found;

surely when mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.” Psalm 32:3-7

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” I John 1:9

Based on these two Scriptures, discuss other ways to deal with the pain of regret. Hopefully through this exercise, it is becoming clear just how important it is to cry out to God and begin the healing process.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Awareness Leads to Transformation

One of the hardest parts of working through regret and past hurts is our inability to communicate our true feelings to others and even be honest with ourselves.

It is an important aspect on the path to healing to ask God for revelation and awareness of “self.”

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you.” Ephesians 1:17-18a

What an incredible verse!!!!

The promise in Scripture is that when you ask for wisdom and revelation, God will graciously give it to you for the purposes of growth and becoming more spiritually aware of our “self” and others.

The awareness that is gifted through God’s wisdom is for the purposes of having the right perspective. When your perspective changes, transformation begins.

Characteristics of Godly Transformation

List some characteristics of transformation, for example, *patience, empathy...*

Transformation Leads to Hope

The mustard seed of “faith” is *put into action* when we ask for God’s grace, forgiveness, and wisdom. That faith leads to a change of heart. This is the beginning of transformation. That seed grows not by our trying harder but by the slightest change in our heart’s perspective. The Holy Spirit brings forth “Hope” as our perspective continues to change.

When hope is unlocked by God, and our hearts begin to see as God sees, then healing comes our way. Remember the verse in Lamentations describing regret, depression, and brokenness?

“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.”

Lamentations 3:19-20

Let’s continue reading based on God’s promise of hope for those who have trusted Him.

“Yet I call this to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.”

Lamentations 3:21-23

The journey from regret, hurt, and unforgiveness of “self” starts with lamenting to God and being real, and then the Holy Spirit transforms your lament to healing; and from healing to transformation. God’s transformative healing is unavoidable when going through this process:

Cry out

Lament.

Trust and Wait

God will begin to restore your brokenness with a new heart and fresh wisdom.

Allow Transformation

Allow the Holy Spirit to begin working in your life. Praise God each day for the newness in your life and the ways He is changing you.

Healing& Hope

Keep your hope and faith in Christ. Claim your healing by giving your regrets, pain, and mistakes to Him each day. Be joyful! God’s mercies are new each day.

Group Discussion

Spend some time discussing with a small group of others about the choice to surrender that results in transformation of who God created you to be—like His Son. Search other Scriptures that might be helpful and write them down together.

Application

It's now time to put what you have learned into practice. This will take some time, but you won't "REGRET" it!

Think and pray about an issue, a relationship, or a memory that brings regret. It doesn't need to be a major regret or painful memory but one that bothers you when it comes to mind. It is better to start slow as you learn to trust God with your pain and work up to the big issues.

Use what you have learned from this chapter and work through the steps.

1. Allow God to hear your true heart and your true pain.
2. Ask God to lead you to Scriptures and wisdom that will open the eyes of your heart where the Holy Spirit will guide you to begin to transform your mind.
3. Claim your healing.
4. Praise God for the work that Jesus has done on the cross.
5. Begin to live in the healing of redeemed pain as your love grows for God and the world around you.

He set us free!

This may take a week, a month, or even longer. Don't rush the process. ***Trust the process!***

When you are ready to tackle other regrets, you will already have deepened your relationship with Christ and you will know that you can trust the process. You will be on your way to living in healing and freedom, which are characteristics of spiritual maturity.

God will soon be using you to draw others closer to God and surrender their regrets also!

MY WILL vs GOD'S WILL

Objectives

- Define *God's will*.
 - What do those words mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Build in time for personal reflection and prayer.
- Application: *My Will vs. God's Will*. Many people have misunderstood what *God's will* is all about and how to apply it in our daily lives. This session examines the need to approach *God's Will* with a mindset of God being is for us, not against us.

Introduction

The number one question asked by Christians trying to live out their faith is, “What is God’s will for my life?” That is a loaded question.

It is easy to figure out our own will. Most of us would like our life to be meaningful, filled with good things, do what we want, when we want, maybe be famous, and be rich! Am I right?

When the question becomes, “What does God want for my life, everyone gets confused and a little bit scared. If you are like me, you start having conversations in your head like, “What if God wants me to move to China and be a missionary? Dang! I don’t even like Chinese food.”

- What if I told you that God’s will is not meant to be a “Divine” scavenger hunt or like finding a needle in a haystack?
- What if God wanted to share His will with you in a loving and exciting way that made sense?
- What if you couldn’t mess up God’s will for your life as long as you simply trusted Him each day? I’d sign up for that deal! How about you?

“I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

Psalm 40:8

The Battle of Wills

The best way to approach this topic is to start by creating a thought picture. A thought picture often helps to make a big topic more manageable.

When trying to understand God's will for our life and sort out my own will and desires in the process, it's kind of like a game of tic-tac-toe.

“If I put an X there...maybe I'll be on the right track. But wait, God put an O in the place I wanted to put an X. That means I'm forced to put an X in a different spot. Okay, this seems right. I think I'm on the right track. What?!! Really God? You put an O right where I wanted to put my X again!

After a few days or months or even years of this way of trying to figure out God's will and yours, you finally get tired of the game. “I give up! I can never win no matter what!”

EXACTLY!

You can't win because you are playing the wrong game. In fact, it's not a game at all. God is simply nudging you and shaping you into the person, place, and season of your life in order to equip you to accomplish HIS will.

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10

God has always had a plan. You are a part of the plan. When Jesus becomes your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit begins to re-shape you into the person God imagined before the beginning of time.

Therefore, finding God’s will for your life starts by inviting Christ into your life, and then allowing the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth.

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come.” John 16:13

If John 16:13 is true; then the question of God’s will for your life has just been answered. Trust in Christ, and he will tell the Holy Spirit how to guide you into all truth and help you along the way.

So, I guess God’s will is not a riddle for you to figure out on your own. Rather, it’s a journey with God who will make

sure you know what you need to know, when you need to know it.

What's your role in this whole process? TRUST.

Scripture-Application

Trusting is the key, but Scripture will help you when your trust needs a little boost.

The Scripture in Romans is an excellent way to “check-in” with God and make sure you are doing your part to remain available and ready to serve and fulfill your purpose.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:1-2

In view of God’s mercy: When you understand God’s mercy, you will be free to explore His will for your life with joy and excitement. God’s mercy is His willingness to give us space to work out our calling and purpose.

Don't conform to pattern of the world- The pattern of the world says, "Do this," and "Do that," and you will be in control of your own destiny. Success is dependent on how much "stuff" you possess or how well-known you are in the world. The pattern of the world is based on power, money, and status. God's kingdom is the exact opposite. Seek the kingdom first and God promises to supply all your needs.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The first thing that needs to be transformed is your mind. By reading Scriptures, gathering with other Christians, and praying, God will give you a new heart, and a new perspective. You will begin to see as He sees.

Discussion/Exercise

A great way to grow and gain wisdom is to talk about your journey.

Take some time and discuss or write down experiences that you can use as reminders about God's will always being worked out in your life. Here's an example: "I remember worrying about a decision one time, and everybody was trying to give me advice and tell me this or tell me that, and only when I prayed and began to look back on the situation did I realize God was in control the whole time." _____

What If I Get Off Track?

A common concern of many is what happens if you end up off track? How do you even know?

This is a great question and one that everyone should think about from time to time. It's not something to worry about every day but maybe think about once in a while.

I call it: "A Check Up from the Neck Up."

There are three triggers for believers to let them know it may be time to reassess and make sure our heart and head are working together to let God lead us to do His will.

1. A loss of peace - When an overall understanding of the peace that passes all understanding begins to fade it's time to stop and pray. If anxiety arises about decisions or uncertainty about activities you are involved in, it's time to slow down.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:6-7

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”
1 Peter 5:7

Read these verses until your peace returns. Search other Scriptures about peace. Study, pray, and go forward!

2. A lack of love - When love begins to fade in our relationship with God or others, it is time to get filled up again. There are certainly times when we just don't "feel" it, and those times often pass quickly. However, if you find yourself lacking in the area of caring for others, then it's probably time to slow down and reflect.

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”
1 John 4:10

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8

Take time to consider the love God poured out for you. Allow God's love to fill you up until over-flowing! Praise Him and thank Him! Search other Scriptures about God's love and love for others. Study, pray, and go forward!

3. Insecurity - In times of uncertainty or when the path forward is becoming blurry, we all can become insecure and make poor choices. If you sense insecurity because you don't want to look like you don't know what you are doing, stop and read the Scriptures here.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” Colossians 2:8

“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’” Romans 8:15

Remember who you are in Christ! You are more valuable than gold or silver. You are a child of God. Be secure in the knowledge that God has made you a citizen of *Heaven*. Be humble but also be secure in your true identity.

Continuing the Discussion

1. What are other Scriptures you can find that talk about God's will and our will?

2. When someone else talks about doing God's will, does it make you feel guilty? Why?

3. What are some characteristics of people who seem to be doing God's will?

4. What are some characteristics of people who don't seem to be doing God's will?

5. If God desires to assist you in doing His will, what are some ways you can accept His assistance?

Final Thought

A desire to do God's will allows God to work in your life and accomplish His plan. Trust the process.

JUDGMENT & ACCEPTANCE

Objectives

- Define *judgment*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Define *acceptance*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Build in time for personal reflection and prayer.
- Application: *Judgment* and *Acceptance*. God is the “Judge” & He “Accepts” us through Jesus’s work on the Cross. This session examines how judgment and acceptance are used by God as two sides of the same coin to promote spiritual growth.

Introduction

How many times have you said or heard the phrase; “I’m not trying to judge, but....”

The most important word in that phrase is *but*. The moment you or I add the word *but*, it means that even though we may not be trying to judge, the fact is, that is exactly what we are doing. Here are a few more phrases to consider:

“It’s not my place to judge.”

“I never judge anyone because it’s none of my business.”

“Judge not lest you be judged.”

“Who am I to judge?”

“Who are you to judge?”

The simple fact is this: If you are a human being, you make judgments every day of your life about people, circumstances, relationships, the decisions of others, and your own decisions.

Why?

Because part of being human is the need for some level of acceptance, and to be accepted or to accept others, you will have to make some judgments!

Counter-Productive Judgment

Judgment can easily become self-righteousness if by your judgments you also believe you are better than others.

Ironically, this type of judgment reveals an insecurity and a desire to be accepted. You and I often judge others so we can accept ourselves and be accepted by people who agree with us.

Where did it all start?

“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it of it you will certainly die.”

Genesis 2:16-17

Most people are familiar with this story in Genesis but perhaps miss an important detail. In talking with people about this verse, they may refer to it as, “when Eve ate the apple,” or “when Adam and Eve sinned.” This is all true, but there’s an important detail in God’s command not to eat of this certain tree.

It was the tree of ***“the knowledge of good and evil.”***

You and I were never meant to have this knowledge. The moment when Adam and Eve took and ate, their eyes were

opened, and they immediately felt shame. Why? Because they now knew something was “wrong.”

Have you ever wondered how Adam and Eve suddenly knew they were naked and had done something wrong? The Bible tells us it is because the tree in which they had eaten was, indeed, the tree of the “knowledge of good and evil.”

Fast Forward to Today

If you struggle with judgment of others, or are wrongly being judged by others, then you must first understand that is a result of their original sin.

People who say they never judge anyone aren't being honest. We all do it.

People who say they don't need other's approval or acceptance aren't being honest. Desiring to be accepted doesn't make you needy; it makes you human.

The truth is, God created all of us in His image. God also created us to be in relationship with Him and others. In a perfect world, everyone would accept each other for who they are, and God would be the only Judge.

Obviously, the world is far from perfect and the only way to move forward in our faith—when it comes to judgment of others—is to dig into what Jesus says.

Discussion Exercise

1. Discuss how “knowledge” can be used in a negative way.

2. What is something that you believe is “right” but others believe is “wrong”?

3. How are your relationships affected when you learn someone may not share your same sense of right and wrong?

4. How does it make you feel when someone judges you for something when they don't know the whole story?

5. Have you ever changed what you believe about right and wrong just to be accepted by someone else or a group of people? How did that decision help or hurt you?

Judgment Is Dangerous

God's Word reveals that the struggle with judging others and being judged by others is rooted in what happened in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, it makes perfect sense to look for the remedy in God's Word and in Jesus.

Ultimately, there will come a day when Jesus returns and all struggles in this life will no longer exist, but until that day

comes, Jesus has some beautiful teachings on healthy judgment and healthy acceptance.

“Do not judge or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”

Matthew 7:1-5

This is a powerful and loving reminder from our Lord to be careful in how we see others and, more importantly, how we see ourselves. The first line of Matthew 7:1 is clear.

“Do not judge or you too will be judged.”

What does this really mean? The answer is revealed as we continue to read.

“For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged.”

Jesus plainly says that if you go around judging others, you are going to live a very frustrating and joyless life. When you judge others using your own standards, you will be judged by those same standards by everyone else...including God.

If I judge everyone else by my own definition of “honesty,” then God and others will judge me in the exact same way. Here’s an example.

If I look down upon someone for not being completely honest about an issue, and I tell them how disappointed I am and there’s no excuse at all for lying in any situation...then later, I find myself telling a “little white lie” about something that I believe is no big deal, then I have just become a hypocrite like Jesus described.

Exercise

Discuss a circumstance that you have been a part of when either you were judged by someone or you judged someone, and then the tables were turned. Be specific.

1. How did it make you feel?

2. Did you lose respect for the person who judged you?

3. Does judging someone ever solve any of the issues you are dealing with?

4. Has anyone ever admitted they made a mistake in judging you? Or have you admitted you made a mistake in judging someone else?

5. How did you feel before admitting your mistake?

6. How did you feel after?

Acceptance Is the Key

Now that you have a better understanding that no one is equipped to correctly judge, or to be judged accurately by anyone else, it's time to talk about acceptance.

The first step is accepting the truth—the truth that Jesus is willing to accept you just as you are. This is a fundamental truth that will help remind you of the dangers of judging others.

It's easy to forget the incredible and life changing gift of Divine Mercy that God gives to us through Christ. As a way to remind us, Jesus asks an important question in Matthew 7.

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? Matthew 7:3-4

Jesus is asking why people are so quick to spot a flaw in someone else, when flaws in our own lives are in need of our attention.

Jesus reminds you and I to look in the mirror and come to terms with our pride and our flaws. Once our heart is right, Jesus says,

“You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:5

Wow! Did you catch that? By spending time looking at ourselves in the mirror and remembering how much we have been forgiven and accepted, then our hearts are ready to **help** our brothers and sisters, not to **judge** them.

Discussion

Take a few minutes to discuss why it is so easy to see flaws in others.

Seeing Clearly

Seeing ourselves clearly and honestly will always set a good foundation for healthy relationships that are free from rivalry, judgment, and division.

How can we keep our view of “self” clear? First things first. We need to practice keeping logs out of our own eyes. One reason people are so quick to judge others is because they are insecure. In fact, some of the loudest and boldest people are the most insecure, and therefore, they are the ones who judge others the most.

The best way to overcome insecurity is to spend time daily with the Lord so that you can be reminded of who you are, and that you are in Christ and that you are accepted!

Having a solid understanding
of your identity in Christ
will set you free
from the NEED
to judge others.

Here is a practical exercise to incorporate into your daily devotions. For the next 30 days begin each morning with these reminders from Ephesians.

“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

Ephesians 2:13

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.”

Ephesians 2:19

The truth is YOU ARE ACCEPTED!

Remember, our human nature falls into the trap of judging others and becoming defensive when being judged. Therefore, don’t beat yourself up too bad if you are struggling in this area.

The good news, however, is that Jesus loves you so much that He has given us everything needed to overcome and continue to become secure in our love for Him and others.

Enjoy the journey!

Questions for Further Discussions

1. What other Scriptures can you find that relate to judgment?

2. As you read the Scriptures, determine if the judgment is from man or God. Discuss what you believe to be the cause of these judgments.

3. What other Scriptures can you find that relate to acceptance?

4. Discuss how the love of God plays a crucial role in acceptance.

5. When you see someone that is not living up to your own moral code, what is your first response? (What are you thinking?) Why?

6. When you believe it's your job to judge and monitor others for God, does it eventually backfire? Why?

7. When you know you are accepted by someone, how does that help you?

8. If you know you are accepted by God through the sacrifice of Christ, how does it change your view of others? Are you more compassionate? Discuss.

9. Moving Forward: Discuss how you will gain all the acceptance you need from Jesus each day, before interacting with others.

KINGDOM vs WORLD

Objectives

- Define *kingdom*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Define *world*.
 - What does that word mean? (See the Dictionary at back.)
 - What does it mean to you?
 - How did you come to that conclusion?
- Build in time for personal reflection and prayer.
- Application: *Kingdom* vs. *World*. God's kingdom and the world's ways are always in competition with each other. This session examines the battle plan for living in the world but being all about God's kingdom.

Introduction

This lesson is designed to help you see God’s kingdom with more clarity. We will examine God’s viewpoint and human viewpoint to increase our discernment in making wise choices. As the kingdom becomes clearer, the world in which you and I live will also be put in proper perspective.

Jesus reveals in Scripture when He prays for His disciples and those who would believe. We are led by God’s Holy Spirit.

“They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.”

John 17:16 (NIV)

Jesus talked a lot about the kingdom. In Acts 1 the Bible says,

“He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” Acts 1:3b (NIV)

The fact that Jesus spoke about the kingdom many times throughout the gospels is not surprising. Jesus encouraged the disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come.” Jesus also taught us to “seek first the kingdom of God...”

The Scripture in Acts 1 is the most fascinating because it was *after* the resurrection.

The disciples were with Jesus a long time. They witnessed his miracles, his arrest, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. If anyone should have understood the “Kingdom” it would have been the disciples. Yet, it seems the disciples struggled to comprehend all that Jesus meant by the Kingdom.

There are a few things, however, that Jesus did not include in his descriptions of the Kingdom: no mention if baptism was dunking or sprinkling. No mention of denominations or how long “church services” were required to last. There was no talk about what color the carpet was in the church, or how to properly dedicate a child.

Jesus taught them many things about the KINGDOM because it connects us together, and God’s Kingdom continues to grow.

So, why don’t Christians focus on the kingdom as much as Jesus did? Perhaps it’s because God’s Kingdom is difficult to see, difficult to measure, and something you and I don’t control.

Starting Point

The best way to start is to identify a working definition of both *kingdom* and *world* so that everyone can be on the same page.

These definitions are not exact but will serve as a good foundation.

The World

- “an age, or a period of time”
- “description of moral characteristics”
- “the created earth and humankind”
- “man-made systems and ideology”
- “the systems that produce coveting, greed, and lustful desires”

God’s Kingdom

- “sovereignty,” “royal power”
- “territory,” “the sphere of God’s rule”
- “dominion”
- “God’s system”

A common misunderstanding is that “Heaven” and “the Kingdom” are one in the same. In this lesson, *God’s Kingdom* represents “His dominion over all creation.” Heaven can still be referred to as a place where we will one day be *with* God, but His Kingdom is accessible NOW!

Images for Reflection

A great way to differentiate the world from God's Kingdom is to come up with an image in your mind that will help you remember. Here's one that I use.

Growing up, I was blessed with great parents. However, I wasn't always a good little Christian boy.

As I grew up and began to rebel more and more. I was young and still living with my parents. Therefore, I lived in the house but I wasn't the one with "dominion" over the house. I wanted to live in the house, but not respect the owner. It wasn't really about rules. It was about a lack of reverence.

I wanted to come and go and do as I please. I had desires and wants, and was trying to form my own identity. This was all normal of course, but at some point, there must be a recognition that the house, my life, and my desires were not the end all. It was all temporary.

My parents, however, had provided me with this place to live, and the necessities of life. They had even given me life!

I had yet to earn anything myself or even thought about how my parents had far more knowledge and wisdom than I did. They were the ones who had dominion over it all. They were there to help me grow into the understanding that there are more important things than "things."

This example always helps me remember that while we live in a real place and we all have desires, and want to be our own persons, there is a King that owns it all. The King has dominion over all and is trying to help us realize that everything here is temporary. God’s reign, however, will endure forever.

Discussion Exercise

Can you think of other examples or characteristics that compare the world with God’s Kingdom? Spend some time discussing and writing down others. Here’s one example: The world says, “I can have anything I want if I put my mind to it.” The Kingdom says, “Transform your mind, and you will know what it is that is valuable in this life.”

Jesus Spoke About the Kingdom

When Jesus came and began to teach, He spoke often about the “kingdom.” Many of His followers wanted Him to

set Himself up as king and dethrone their enemies, but Jesus always spoke about a different kind of “kingdom.”

The Lord’s Prayer is the embodiment of what Jesus meant when he spoke of the Kingdom of God.

“This then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’”

Matthew 6:9-13

Discussion

Praying that God’s Kingdom would come on earth is not asking for more rules but asking for Him to rule. Discuss the difference between “man-made” rules, and the “Kingdom Rule.”

Jesus tells us in John 6:33, *“For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”* When Jesus tells us to pray, *“Give us our daily bread,”* He is teaching us to ask for our daily dose of life from the Kingdom of God. Discuss the difference between the world’s bread, and the “Bread of Life.”

“Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the Bread of Life. He who believes in Me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”

John 6:35

Discuss how the proper view of God’s kingdom can help to keep the proper perspective towards the world.

Praying for God to forgive us our sins as we have forgiven others is also a plea for the kingdom way of living. It is a daily reminder that the kingdom operates on earth best when we forgive others because God has forgiven us.

Discuss ways to keep the proper perspective and understanding of forgiving others because you have been forgiven by God.

In the Process of Being Transformed

Understanding the kingdom and God’s ways is easy to talk about—but difficult to live out. It’s one thing to know what the Bible says, but it’s another thing to live it out day by day. This is why grace is so important.

Grace means “undeserved favor” of God and is the only way to be transformed. God works in and through us to do His will on earth.

We have been saved in the past from the penalty of sin. We are being saved in the present from the power of sin. We will be saved in the future heaven from the presence of sin.

Each of us can get up every morning and pray the Lord's Prayer and feel good about our understanding of God's Kingdom, but at some point, we have to interact with others and face the day—easier said than done!

Thought Picture

Imagine winning \$300,000,000, but having to live the same way you've been living for an unknown amount of time. You realize you have a great reward awaiting for you at some point, but for now you can only tell people about it and live a normal type of life.

I'm sure you'd be nicer to people. I'm sure you'd wonder how you could help them.

I'm sure you'd not let the ordinary things of life get you down. I'm sure you'd be more forgiving.

I wonder why most of us don't treat others this way knowing that God's Kingdom is coming and we are a part of it.

Jesus and the Kingdom Parables

Jesus spoke in parables often when describing His Kingdom. He illustrated the meaning of *kingdom* by using parables. *Parables* are defined as “stories designed to help others better understand a principle or concept.” The parable of the hidden treasure and another about pearls reveal what God values.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Matthew 13:44-46

First, when Jesus says, “kingdom of heaven,” that is the same as saying, “kingdom of God.” Therefore, Jesus is referring to the royal domain of His Father.

Notice how in both parables, the result of “seeing” the treasure became an urgency to possess that treasure.

One person stumbled upon the treasure, while the other was out actually looking for it. The end result is the same because both persons knew they had found something of

great value. Neither person thought twice about giving up everything else to possess this treasure.

Discussion/Exercise

Understand that “things” in this world aren’t bad. It’s rather how we look at them and treat them that is the root of worldliness. What can make things seem of less important?

Name some things you’d be willing to give up in order to obtain something priceless.

Discuss Jesus' sacrifice and the truth that you and I can possess the Kingdom for free.

1.

The Kingdom is all around us. Jesus revealed it to his followers and even to those who doubted him. There were always people around Jesus who wanted both the world and the kingdom, but Jesus tells us that is impossible!

“You cannot serve both God and money.”

Matthew 6:24b

Jesus was effectively saying, you can't have both as your treasure. God knows what you need on this earth, but He also knows your need of Christ's sacrifice so you can be a part of the Kingdom forever.

The more you let go of worldliness, the more of God's Kingdom you will begin to see! Trust HIM!

Questions for Further Discussion

1. What other Scriptures can you find that differentiate between God's Kingdom and the world?

2. Pick out one or two of Jesus' parables that begin, "The Kingdom is like..." and read and discuss.

3. What are Jesus' main points?

4. What are the main differences between the “kingdom” and the “world system”?

5. How did those listening to Jesus speak about the kingdom react? Why?

6. Discuss some of the difficulties of trying to see and live for the “kingdom” while living in a world that operates in a set way.

7. List out as many differences between the “Kingdom” and the world. Example: God’s kingdom gives everyone the same worth. The world still deals in status

8. The Bible says you are an ambassador for Christ and the Kingdom. How can you begin to live out that responsibility?

DICTIONARY

Defining a word is the foundation for building a frame of reference that increases communication, comprehension, and application. What differences do you see in God's perspective and human viewpoint that are not often the same? Bible definitions are a compilation.

Acceptance

- Bible says: always loved unconditionally by God
- Dictionary.com: “the act of taking or receiving something offered”

Courage

- Bible says: faith in God; trust in God's promises
- Dictionary.com: “the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain”

Fear

- Bible says: no trust in God; respect for God
- Dictionary.com: “a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the feeling or condition of being afraid.”

Healing

- Bible says: ultimate cure from sin sickness by the wounds of Christ
- Dictionary.com: “a means of restoring to health; remedy”

Holy Spirit

- Bible says: God’s Power Source; Comforter; Guide
- Dictionary.com: “the spirit of God”

God’s Will

- Bible says: a plan for you to become who you were designed to be
- Dictionary.com: “will – a legal document”

Judgment

- Bible says: rules made by God for right and wrong; individual accountability for our words and actions
- Dictionary.com: “the ability to judge, make a decision, or form an opinion objectively, authoritatively, and wisely, especially in matters affecting action; good sense; discretion”

Kingdom

- Bible says: Sovereignty of God; Heaven on earth reigning within you.
- Dictionary.com: “a state or government having a king or queen as its head”

Parable

- Bible says: a story often used by Jesus for a comparison to make the truth come alive
- Dictionary.com: “a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson”

Regrets

- Bible says: losing what God wants to give us (blessing)
- Dictionary.com: “to feel sorrow or remorse for”

Renew

- Bible says: receiving what God wants to give us (a new heart)
- Dictionary.com: “to begin again; recommence”

Transformation

- Bible says: becoming like Jesus Christ, conformed to His image by means of surrendering to God’s will, energized by His Spirit working in and through us
- Dictionary.com: “change in form, appearance, nature, or character”

Will

- Bible says: heart’s desire; motive; choices; WHY we do
- Dictionary.com: “the faculty of conscious and deliberate choice of action; volition”

World

- Bible says: one of three enemies of the soul that tempts Christ-followers (“the world, the flesh, and the devil”)
- Dictionary.com: “the class of persons devoted to the affairs, interests, or pursuits of this life”

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

"When you came in, I wasn't expecting much. But when you started to speak to us like real people, my spirit jumped inside me. I had been struggling deeply with a lack of hope. I was blown away that your entire program is geared towards affirming inmates as vessels for God and giving us hope. I'm forever grateful." - Former Latin King gang member

"I tried to commit suicide at age 5 because my parents had been murdered when I was 3 years old. Until you came and shared Nick's story of attempted suicide at age 10, I thought I was the only one. I'm forever grateful and now know there are others out there like me. I was truly blessed today." - Okaloosa Correctional Institute

"This ministry of planting churches inside correctional facilities is such a breath of fresh air. By affirming all of us as God's children and giving us resources to grow and evangelize is why you are different from every other ministry. I love Nick and I love this program. My hope has been restored because of your willingness to listen and see us as real people." - Lancaster Correctional Institute

Do you have a story or testimony that you want to share?
Please email support@lifewithoutlimbs.org.

But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40:31

◆ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake.

Psalms 23:1-3

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11



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