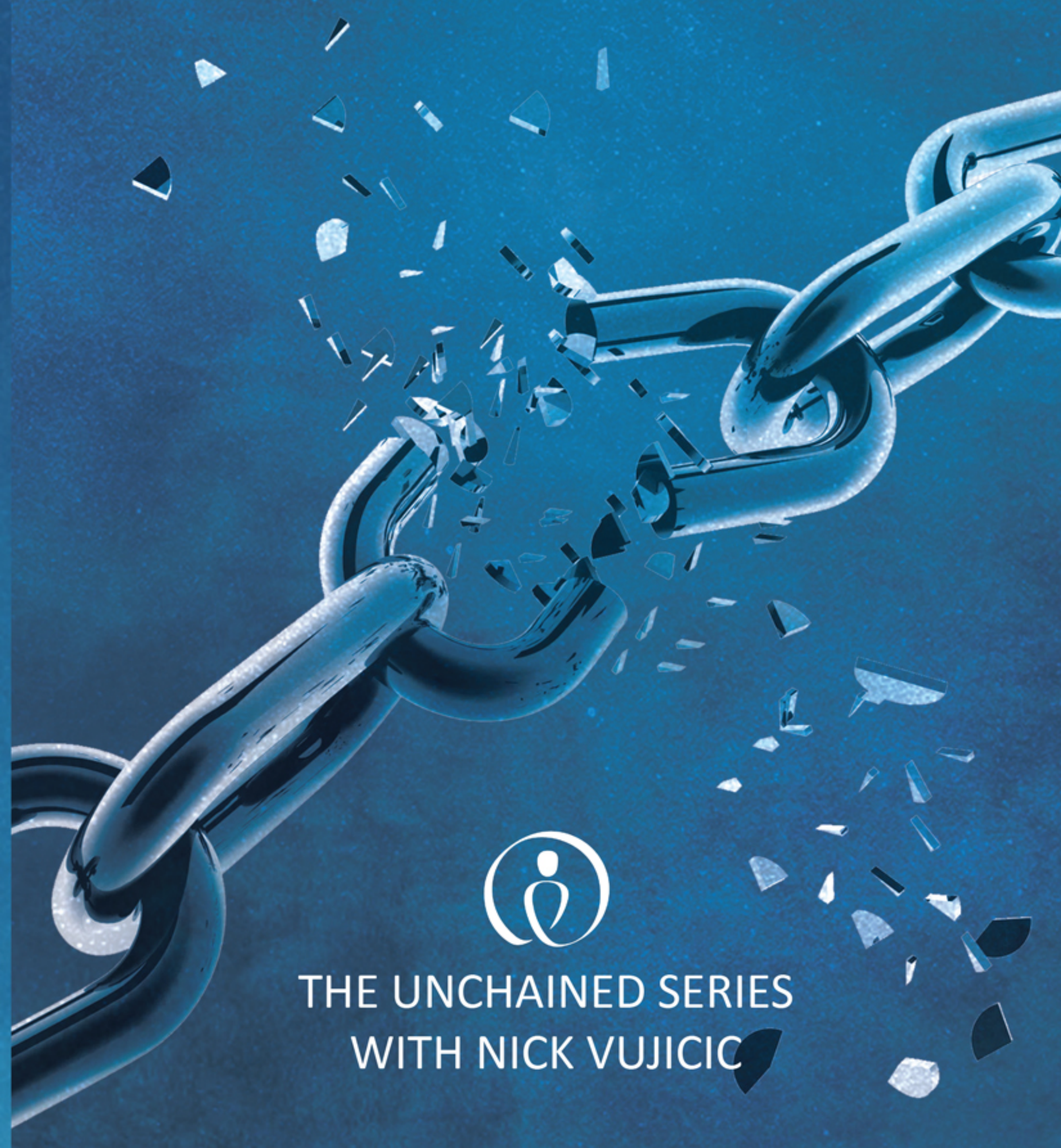


FREE IN MY FAITH



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 that 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

FREE IN MY FAITH

The Journey from Hopelessness to Hope



LIFEWITHOUTLIMBS
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Free in My Faith, Third Edition

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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!

The Holy Spirit also teaches us how to pray. Prayer is talking to God about everything. Prayer is an essential part in our relationship with God.

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.

Your knowledge will increase to transform into application, you will be encouraged, and you can encourage others!

For His Glory,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alvin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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OVERVIEW

Getting the Most from *Free in My Faith*

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, taking 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 as well as interaction and questions and answers (Q&A).

If the session is on *anger*, be willing to include a personal story about anger or a well-known story about anger. For example, “I’m sure there are some basketball fans here today...right? When you think of college basketball it doesn’t take long to think about some of the great teams in history. One of those teams is Indiana University. When you think of IU basketball, maybe you have heard of the

legendary coach of the Hoosiers, Bobby Knight, who seemed to have challenges controlling his angry outbursts. So, what is one of the first images that come to mind when you think about Coach Knight?—throwing the chair incident?”

If the session is on *grace*, an example might be, “Many of you may have heard of Nelson Mandela. Let me share with you some of the life experiences of this man and some of his greatest thoughts while being persecuted for his beliefs....”

If the curriculum is to be taught in a two-day session, use a backdrop that can carry the *entire* teaching as a teaching aid to show the connections and themes of following through by an action plan. Another option is to use the circumstances of Job or the story of Joseph as a foundation that provides a thread of consistency for you to refer to again and again. You may need to retell those stories. “Just like Job, who struggled to comprehend all that was happening to him, we must remain faithful just as he did. Often God simply wants us to stay faithful to Him, no matter what our circumstances. Job went through it all, but remained faithful. In the end God was glorified and was able to use Job as an example of faithfulness and trust.”

These sessions are deeply rooted in God’s character and the desire for His children to continually be growing in their

grace and knowledge. The emphasis should always point the listener back to the journey of living a life “in Christ” that is more focused on who we are becoming, rather than piling up good deeds.

What We Need to Grow in Our Faith

To be free in our faith 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.

H O P E

Objectives

Define *hope*.

- 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.

Apply *hope*. Because many people have misunderstood what *hope* is all about and how we apply it to our lives daily, this session will examine why we all need *hope*.

The power hope gives is to transform our lives and become more like Christ.

Introduction

We may tend to see hope as wishing for something instead of solidly grounded faith. The hope that is promised to the child of God is different; it is personal. Christ Jesus the Lord is our hope!

The emphasis of this session is to personify this hope in a way that it is not dependent upon having earned God's favor by trying to be perfect. The hope that is promised to those who have confessed Jesus as Lord is a hope that travels! Hope travels into tough circumstances, tough relationships, and tough seasons of life. The hope of Jesus is tangible and has the power to keep all people reminded of our true identity.

When Hope Was Born!

There is a gift we didn't deserve. One of the hardest things to accept from someone is a gift that is undeserved. Even a gift from someone who likes you and wants to make you happy can be difficult to accept when we don't have anything to give them in return. But still, the hardest gift to accept is one that we know we don't deserve and that we can never repay.

The gift God gives us in Jesus, when properly understood, is the ultimate undeserved gift. God chooses grace and mercy in dealing with his rebellious people and offers them a gift of salvation, which is a gift of hope. Hope for the future, and hope for today, is our hope in Jesus.

Worldly hope is depending on lucky circumstances where outside influences go our way. Hope in Jesus is

different. We depend instead on Jesus and His work on the cross, His unconditional love and acceptance, a future not based on “works” but by faith in Him.

Many people say the word *hope* and what they mean is “crossing their fingers” and wishing something to happen.

The hope we have in Jesus is different. We don’t have to cross our fingers...we just need to believe and trust with our hearts while we say with our mouth, “Jesus is Lord.”

“For a child is born to us, a Son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of His ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies will make this happen!”

Isaiah 9:6-7

“‘Don’t be afraid, Mary,’ the angel told her, ‘for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David.’” Luke 1:30-32

Both the Scripture from Isaiah and the Scripture found in Luke are speaking about what will happen. Isaiah was foretelling about Christ the Messiah some 750 years before Luke's account. It was a long wait but it finally came to pass.

Application

Name at least one person, event, or dream that you had put your hope in for a better future.

What was the result?

Did you feel let down or unfulfilled?

Name at least one person, or circumstance where you didn't fulfill someone's hope. (Or, in other words; have you ever let someone down who had their hope in you?)

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people.” Psalm 118:8

“Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.” Isaiah 26:4

“You will be rewarded for this; your hope will not be disappointed.” Proverbs 23:18

All of these Scriptures are pointing us in the direction of the only true hope: Jesus Christ. The birth of Jesus and His life, death, and resurrection is the hope that actually appeared. God was born in the flesh, coming as a servant to be the hope of mankind.

You and I live in a time after the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, we did not see him physically, but that does not mean he is not our hope. We are called to believe and trust in Him for salvation and our future. All other hope is foolish.

Let's Simplify

The hope of all people for eternal life is Jesus.

The hope of all people for peace is Jesus.

The hope of all people for a better future is Jesus.

The hope of all people for living life to the fullest is Jesus.

Staying Focused on the True Hope

The Bible often uses the metaphor of sheep when talking about us. Sheep are stubborn, needy, and need their shepherd each day to provide for them.

“So He explained it to them: ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before Me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them.’”

John 10:7-8

We all listen to other voices. Too often we follow the voices we think are leading us in the right direction and then find out they were leading us astray. Jesus tells us the world is filled with other paths to follow, but in the end, they rob us of life and take away our freedom.

Applying Hope by Being Free in My Faith

If Jesus is the hope of the world and promises us life to the fullest, what is stopping me from following Him?

Do I truly believe I'm forgiven? Why or why not?

Am I willing to persevere with Christ as my only true hope?

**Come to Jesus by faith
and confess Him as Lord of your life.**

You are free in Christ.

Now you have a hope that will never end.

Keep Your Eyes Fixed on Jesus

Start each day with these reminders from Jesus. Hope in Jesus is tangible, and that hope is what gives us strength, joy, and purpose! When we take the time each day to be thankful, prayerful, and mindful of the hope in Jesus, our lives becomes a magnet for peace.

Thankful: I am thankful for God's grace and mercy extended to each of us through Jesus' work on the cross.

Prayerful: I am in a personal relationship with Jesus not only as my Savior, but as my Lord.

Mindful: In the way I think about my life being held in the hands of Christ, I am humble, willing to seek Jesus in all things. He is my only hope.

“He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.” Ephesians 1:7

“We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”

Hebrews 12:2

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” John 3:16-17

“Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in Me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me will never ever die. Do you believe this?’”

John 11:25-26

“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.”

Colossians 2:13-14

The hope we have in Jesus Christ is different than the hope that the world offers. Let's take time each day to remind ourselves of where our true hope is found—in Christ! When we find ourselves searching or feeling anxious about life, we need to stop and be reminded that Jesus is alive, and He knows each of our names. He loves us and promises to never leave us. His hope will never end.

“For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave His life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us His very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds.”

Titus 2:11-14

Further Study and Discussion

What other Scriptures can you find that speak about the hope in Christ? _____

Do you have a favorite? If so, use the space below to write in your own words why this Scripture speaks to you.

Find a Scripture about hope that you can memorize. When you feel like you are losing strength, recite the Scripture a few times and thank God for His Word.

How does the hope of Christ differ from other hopes?

Think of 3 things that always seem to challenge your hope. (Examples: relationships, fear of the future, not getting something you wanted, etc.). Now, compare those things to the promise of God and the hope of Jesus. How does the truth of Jesus and the hope found in him change your mindset?

LOVE

Objectives

Define *love*.

- 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.

Apply *love*. Because many people have misunderstood what *love* is all about and how we apply it to our lives daily, this study will examine why we all need love, and the power it offers to transform our lives and become more like Christ.

Introduction

How important is love in living the Christian life? It is very difficult for those who feel defeated, have been looked down upon, and have no self-worth. How can we love others as ourselves if we have no self-respect, self-compassion, and

continue to beat ourselves up with an inner self-condemning voice? Often, this is because we have not yet fully received God's love and the freedom in our faith that comes with His love.

Self-compassion is the starting point and that means practicing forgiveness for ourselves to be free in our faith. Like a growing plant, it will not grow if we are continually cutting it down with negative self-talk. This lesson is a two-step process of accepting God's unconditional love and then sharing this same love towards others.

Accepting God's Love

To accept God's love in the way He desires is to first undo some misconceptions. We can be "born again" and not fully understand and operate out of God's love for us. Many of us know of our need for salvation, and we have a belief and trust in the work of Jesus Christ on the cross for our forgiveness.

If we are to be free in our faith, God wants us to learn to love ourselves as He loves us. Since we can't give what we first don't have, we practice capturing every negative, self-condemning thought and call that lie what it is—a lie!

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” Romans 8:1

Instead, focus here.

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31

But we also walk around as if we need to continue to earn this FREE GIFT. If I won the Lottery and was handed 10 million dollars, I would be very happy. But if I thought I had to pick the winning numbers each and every day of my life so I could keep the 10 million, then what kind of life would that be? I would never enjoy the money, and I would never spend it in fear of the day I picked wrong, and I would have to give it back! Yet this is what many of us do!

“We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”

Yet God, in His grace, freely makes us right in His sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins.” Romans 3:22-24

“God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

Ephesians 2:8-9

God loves us with *agape* love that is unconditional. God chooses to love, not based on who we are or what we do. God loves us because He created us. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more than He did when He created us. We cannot lose God’s love.

What God desires is for us to accept this love deeply into our hearts so that He can transform us into someone who loves God and others in the same way that we are loved. The Psalms help us know and comprehend how God loves us. *Psalms* mean “songs.”

Psalm 18 is the daily psalm to keep our love growing.

Psalm 23 is the daily psalm to keep our minds on God.

Psalm 103 is the daily psalm to keep our praises sharp.
Psalm 139 is the daily psalm to keep our hearts secure.
See Appendix.

Living in the Assurance of God's Love Every Day

The daily journey of following Jesus can become a burden if we are not reminded that there is no end to God's love and no limit to God's *grace* (undeserved favor) while in this life.

Let's examine 1 John 4:7-21 together and cling to the promise of God's love that can transform us into the likeness of Christ.

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much He loved us by sending His one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and

His love is brought to full expression in us. And God has given us His Spirit as proof that we live in Him and He in us.

Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in His love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the Day of Judgment, but we can face Him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love. We love each other because He loved us first.

If someone says, 'I love God,' but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers."

1 John 4:7-21

In light of this Scripture we just examined together, let's check the characteristics of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

“If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when the time of

perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.”

I Corinthians 13

Love Does...

Love is patient.

Love is kind.

Love does not envy.

Love does not boast.

Love is not proud or rude.

Love does not keep a record of wrongs. (God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west.)

Love protects.

Love trusts.

Love hopes.

Love perseveres.

Love never fails. God never fails. God never fails because God is Love (1 John 4:8).

Applying Love Personally

Get back together and read this list inserting *God* as the first word. For example, “*God* is patient. *God* is kind.”

Next, read this list inserting *your own name*. For example, “*Jay* is kind. *Jay* does not envy.”

If you are in Christ, this is how God sees you! Accept it, grow, and ask for the Holy Spirit’s help in becoming more and more loving in all your relationships!

Everything is possible for those who believe!!!

Further Study and Discussion

What other Scriptures can you find that talk about love?

Do you have a favorite? If so, use the space below to write in your own words why this Scripture is important to you.

What prevents you from receiving God's unconditional love for you? (Examples: past failures, the lies you have believed about yourself, feelings of unworthiness, etc.).

Now, memorize a Scripture that says you are loved by God and use it every time the lie comes. _____

Write down three ways you can begin to accept love and love others the way God desires. (Example: I can thank God each morning for his unconditional love and try to love others without expecting anything in return.) _____

G R A C E

Objectives

Define *grace*.

- 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.

Apply *grace*. Because many people have misunderstood what *grace* is all about and how we apply it to our lives daily, this session will examine why we all need *grace*, and the power it offers to transform our lives and become more like Christ.

Introduction

Jesus is the tangible representation of God in the flesh as well as God's gift of grace to mankind. For the believer in Christ, grace can actually increase during our faith journey and become the characteristic of our lives that everyone sees

and wants for themselves. It is hard to accept and is hard to give. Most people don't understand what to do with it.

God's grace was born out of His decision to save us by sending Jesus to the cross. Grace is the opportunity we all have to confess our sins and, by faith, accept the work at the cross as payment for what we owe.

Grace is God's choice. Here is the unbelievable part about God's grace: God chose grace for us through Jesus Christ even when He knew we would turn our backs on Him. So, God's grace is much more than just being nice or trying not to judge someone. Grace is the most powerful decision we can make each day as we pray and interact with others. They don't deserve it. We don't deserve it. God loves us just because we are human beings created by Him. Our worth and their worth does not depend on behavior. Living the lifestyle of grace is knowing that others are going to offend us and mock us, but we have already decided to show mercy.

Grace is God's choice by Jesus taking our place.

“He is so rich in kindness and grace that He purchased our freedom with the blood of His Son and forgave our sins. He has showered His kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.”

Ephesians 1:7-8

God lavished us with His grace. The word *lavish* means “to give or to fill up to the point of overflowing.” God decided to pour His love out through Christ and allow us to be overwhelmed by His grace.

Stop and Think

In the next few moments decide which is harder for you: Accepting God’s grace to show self-compassion? Or extending grace to someone else?

As believers, we must decide each day to ask God to see us as He sees us and to guard our hearts. Let us all begin the practice of fixing our eyes upon Jesus, who is grace personified.

“Praise the Lord; praise God our Savior! For each day He carries us in His arms. Our God is a God who saves! The Sovereign LORD rescues us from death.”

Psalm 68:19-20

A Lifestyle of Grace

Understanding the power of grace and living a lifestyle that is covered by grace is one of the keys to transformation. If we only use grace in situations that seem to offend us or we mistake God’s grace for good manners, our growth as a Christian stops.

God uses grace to interact with us because Jesus has paved the way for our sins to be forgiven. But God doesn't just want to save us and leave us in our brokenness. The Lord wants to help us move beyond broken to a place of wholeness and maturity.

“But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by His grace.

1Corinthians 15:10

When grace is understood it immediately gives us a sense of gratefulness. When we live in a state of thanksgiving, we have the right motivation to serve God and others.

The Apostle Paul makes it clear in the Scripture that it was grace that made him what he is, and that same grace had an effect on him. The effect was that he was compelled to work for the Lord. But even when Paul says he worked harder than anyone, he is also quick to note it really wasn't him working, but the grace of God that was in him and with him.

Applying Grace

Am I spending more time trying to understand who deserves grace or simply being grateful for God's grace?

Do I think grace is all about "being nice" or "having good manners"? _____

If I knew that living a "lifestyle of grace" would truly help me grow closer to God, how would I apply self-compassion?

Steps to Being Free in Our Faith by Grace

1. **Let's pray** the Lord's Prayer. What a tangible way to remind ourselves that each day is a gift from God and we are grateful! You, God, are all I need.

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name. [God is holy and all powerful.] Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, [Your way is right; Your purpose is right.] on earth as it is in

heaven. [Your power can help me become more like Christ.]

Give us this day our daily bread. [All I need is what You give me for today.] *Forgive us our debts,* [Thank you for your grace in Jesus Christ to forgive us.] *as we also have forgiven our debtors.* [There is nothing I hold against others.] *And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*” [I will follow you.]

Matthew 6:9-13

2. **Let’s memorize** these verses.

“For it is by grace 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

3. **Let’s prepare** our hearts each day by asking God in personal and private prayer to give us the strength to see what He sees and to remember we are all broken people—broken but on our way to being put back together! God uses broken people.

Look at that next verse where God calls us His masterpiece! He has a plan for our lives as a result of the gift of salvation that we do not work for.

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10

Further Study and Discussion

What other Scriptures can you find that speak about grace?

Do you have a favorite? If so, use the space below to write in your own words why this Scripture is important to you.

Write down or talk about the differences between grace and tolerance.

Grace doesn’t mean we get to do whatever we want without consequences, but it does give us the room to make mistakes.

Think of someone in your life who always shows tremendous grace towards you. How does that make you feel? What can you do to make someone else feel the same way? _____

Write down or talk about some specific mistakes you have made while trying to follow Jesus and how God's grace brought you through! _____

RELATIONSHIPS

Objectives

Define relationships.

- 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.

Apply reconciliation (restoring friendly relationships).

Because many people have misunderstood what reconciliation in *relationships* is all about and how we apply connections to our lives daily, this session will examine why we all need *relationships*.

Introduction

Forgiveness only takes one person. Reconciliation takes two. Sometimes reconciliation with others is not possible. However, reconciliation and relationship with God is

possible. We can do our part through God's transforming power to become more like Christ.

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

What Is Christian About Reconciling Relationships?

“A Christian vision of reconciliation cannot be conceived or sustained without the particular life of the God whom Christians confess, the living God of Israel who raised the crucified Jesus from the dead.”

Chris Rice

God has made it known that reconciliation in Him is only possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We must die to ourselves so that Jesus is our new life. He is the way to reconcile with others.

There is a cost associated with reconciliation. God's desire to reconcile with us came at the cost of His Son. Our mandate from God to reconcile with our neighbor will cost us whatever internal walls we have built to protect us from

vulnerability. We are responsible for our part, but because reconciliation takes two, we cannot control another person's response. They may choose not to reconcile.

Biblical reconciliation, or having a right relationship with God, is much more than simply coexisting with others while practicing good manners. Reconciliation to God is essential. Biblical reconciliation is God-inspired, intentional, sacrificial, repentant, and has its foundation in love for others. The type of love that is only possible through Jesus Christ the Lord is a love that transforms us and everyone else we encounter for the cause of Christ.

There are three areas of reconciliation, first with God, second with our neighbor, and third with all races and cultures.

Reconciling with God

God's heart for reconciling goes back to the beginning. The basic mission of God is to redeem and reconcile what was lost during the fall of mankind.

“And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Genesis 3:15

God's plan from the beginning is to redeem and reconcile through the Messiah what was lost in Genesis. This plan is for all people groups and nations. Before God called Abraham, before God chose Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, and before God named His people the Israelites, God's plan was and is for all mankind and all nations to be reconciled to Him. Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

Let's read Romans 4, stopping after each paragraph and repeating, **“Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.”**

“Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of our Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God's way. For the Scriptures tell us, ‘Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.’

(vs.1-3)

Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working

for it: 'Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin.' (vs. 4-8)

Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised! (vs. 9-10)

Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

Circumcision was a sign that Abraham already had faith and that God had already accepted him and declared him to be righteous—even before he was circumcised. So Abraham is the spiritual father of those who have faith but have not been circumcised. They are counted as righteous because of their faith. And Abraham is also the spiritual father of those who have been circumcised, but only if they have the same kind of faith Abraham had before he was circumcised. (vs. 11-12)

Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

Clearly, God's promise to give the whole earth to Abraham and his descendants was based not on his obedience to God's law, but on a right relationship with God that comes by faith. If God's promise is only for those who obey the law, then faith is not necessary and the promise is pointless. For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)

(vs. 13-15)

Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, 'I have made you the father of many nations.' This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.'

(vs. 16-17)

Reconciling is God's idea, not ours.

Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, ‘That’s how many descendants you will have.’ And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb. Abraham never wavered in believing God’s promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God. He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises. And because of Abraham’s faith, God counted him as righteous. (vs. 18-22)

Reconciling is God’s idea, not ours.

And when God counted him as righteous, it wasn’t just for Abraham’s benefit. It was recorded for our benefit, too, assuring us that God will also count us as righteous if we believe in him, the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was handed over to die because of our sins, and He was raised to life to make us right with God.” (vs. 23-25)

Reconciling is God’s idea, not ours.

Made Right with God

This *Missio Dei* or “God Mission” is comprised of proclaiming the reign of God, sharing in the life of Jesus while we are being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Reconciling with God means having a “right” relationship. Believing that reconciliation is from God, what is the next step for individuals to be reconciled to God?

To make the conscious choice to accept the way God has offered to be reconciled by following Jesus.

To walk into the journey God has for us through this door of reconciliation without looking back.

To accept mercy, grace, and humility as the lens in which our new life will best operate.

**Keeping Jesus as the center
is the constant story of God’s reconciliation!**

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

“So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’” 2 Corinthians 5:20

“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.” Colossians 2:13

“But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13

Reconciliation is the mission of God and is offered to us individually through Jesus Christ.

Reconciling with Our Neighbors

In the words of Howard Thurman,

“Often there are things on the horizon that point logically to a transformation of society, especially for the underprivileged, but he cannot cooperate with them because he is spiritually and intellectually confused. He mistakes fear for caution and caution

for fear. Now, if his mind is free and his spirit unchained, he can work intelligently and courageously for a new day.”

When we as individuals have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ we are “new” and our citizenship has been changed.

“So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God’s holy people. You are members of God’s family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself.” Ephesians 2:19-20

Therefore, our mission becomes the same as God’s. We are to be witnesses to God’s desire to reconcile, or bring back together, all that is lost. The Great Commandment calls every Christian “to love God and love your neighbor as yourself.”

The next question is not “Who is my neighbor?” but rather “How do I love my neighbor?”

Parable of the Samaritan

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the teacher asked Jesus two questions: “What must I do...?” and “Who is my neighbor?” Let’s compare the two questions with our faith walk today. As we think about church, mission, possessions, sin, giving, relationships, behavior, and loving others, are we like the teacher asking, “What must I do?” and “Who is my neighbor?”

Let’s look at the story Jesus told.

“Jesus replied with a story: ‘A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he

handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, 'Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I'll pay you the next time I'm here.'

'Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?' Jesus asked.

The man replied, 'The one who showed him mercy.'

Then Jesus said, 'Yes, now go and do the same.'"

Luke 10:30-42

Does the parable help us understand what we must do? Or does it truly shed light on the only One who can love us the way we want to be loved?

Jesus is teaching us that neither nationality, the church, the government, nor any other social identifier can assure us of being loved and treated in a way that is right. There is no doctrine, or law, or program that can lead the way to a proper society that is filled with this *agape* type of love (unconditional) we all long for.

"Our body became your garment; Your Spirit became our robe," said Ephrem of Syria from centuries past. Howard Thurman also noted, *"Community cannot for long feed on itself; it can only flourish with the coming of others from beyond, their unknown and undiscovered brothers."*

Jesus is the only way. Jesus is illustrating that when He is in us, we are capable of loving others in a way that suits heaven and the Father above.

If we are still trying to figure out the correct way to love people, or where the limits are, then STOP. Let's simply ask Jesus to lead us and teach us how to move forward in being reconciled to our neighbor. *Neighbor* means "all people."

Where Are We?

No matter our race, gender, or dominant cultural background, if we are Christians, then we belong to the Body of Christ. So why all the hatred between political parties? Why all the hate and racism in the world? Why is there still genocide happening in places that have churches and Christian people who should be shining the Light of the Gospel?

Reconciliation is not the same as tolerating others. God the Father gave us the model in which to learn. He wants a personal relationship with us.

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

“But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

Romans 5:8

How to Move Forward

The first step in moving forward is to *relinquish* (“let go of expectations; give up”) what we think we already know.

The second step is prayer. When individuals within the Body of Christ begin to pray, lament, and cry out for understanding, then and only then are we in the correct posture to move forward.

The journey of reconciliation will always lead us toward a deeper relationship with all people.

“For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” Ephesians 2:14

Let’s examine the walls we have put up in our hearts and lives. What are some dividing walls that prevent reconciliation?

Is it pride?...jealousy?...fear?...hate...unforgiveness?

Let's ask Jesus to come in fresh and new and tear down the walls that divide our hearts and lives. He is the Truth. The Truth will set us free!

“For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26-28

Further Study and Discussion

What other Scriptures can you find that speak about the importance of relationships in God's Kingdom?

What relationships are you in currently that need to be repaired or reconciled? _____

List 2-3 things that prevent you from seeking to repair those relationships. _____

Now, pray and ask God to soften your heart and give you the strength and wisdom to know how to move forward in mending those relationships. Then...do it! Make a call, write a letter, or say it face to face. You will be BLESSED! I will...

Write down 3 healthy habits you can take from the Bible to make sure your relationships stay strong and have proper boundaries. (Examples: I will not gossip. I will not judge, etc.) _____

Study the Scriptures in reference to the Body of Christ. (Romans; Corinthians). Discuss or write down in your own words the importance of working together and being part of something bigger than yourself and how everyone has a role.

A N G E R

Objectives

Define *anger*.

- 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.

Apply how to process of *anger*. Because many people have misunderstood what anger is all about, we want to get to the root. This session will examine why we all need to think about how to respond rather than react to *anger*. We will learn how to handle it in our daily lives. We start by accessing the power of the Holy Spirit within us who transforms our lives so that we become more like Christ.

Introduction

We all deal with anger throughout the course of our lives. We may not understand the “root” causes of anger. Anger is a signal that something needs to change and that we have experienced loss of something important to us, whether that was a real or unrealistic expectation.

By taking a “big picture” approach in understanding where anger comes from we have a better chance to prepare, pray, and point ourselves back in the right direction.

Where Does Anger Come From?

As we read in the Genesis story about God creating all things and then creating man in His own image, we have the picture of God’s original idea for His relationship with us. God also created woman to be the man’s partner to help him subdue the earth and take care of all God created. There were no problems at this point. Adam and Eve enjoyed their relationship with God, and God enjoyed His relationship with all of His creation.

Genesis 3 tells us that the serpent simply asked Eve a question; “*Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?*” This question caused Adam and Eve to wonder if God had been holding something back from

them. They decided to partake of the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and immediately humans lost their perfect relationship with God.

Once they realized they had turned away from God, Adam and Eve were in a great deal of distress. They hid from God, which is something they had never done before. They began to feel emotions they had never felt before such as shame, guilt, and fear. As a result of the fall, human beings would now forever have to deal with the consequences of evil and all the emotions like anger that are attached.

The fall was a result of the false belief that God couldn't be trusted. Adam and Eve were tricked into believing they could have more power and be more like God. The real problem is that the serpent tricked them into thinking they were entitled to this knowledge.

Practicing the Processing of Anger

Remind yourself daily that everyone deals with anger and other emotions. Prepare yourself through prayer by asking God to help you with your reactions to pain and fear.

Then practice boundaries on your responses in advance if you think there is a chance to lose your temper. Some responses might be, "Let me pray about this." or "Can I have some time to think about what you have said?" or "I don't

want to react just on my emotions, so I need some time alone.”

When God Isn't Enough

Oftentimes we get angry or allow our emotions to take over our lives when we believe we have been wronged. It's unjust. Being angry when someone wrongs us or hurts us is a natural reaction. God doesn't expect us to never be angry or jealous, or envious, but He does offer help to control these emotions. Instead of reacting to people or circumstances, **respond to God.**

The most common reason anger surfaces is out of the frustration of our lives. The frustration begins because, at some point, we all fall for the false belief that God isn't enough.

We then begin to act out when we choose to believe God and His ways are not enough to sustain us. By removing God from the picture, we are forced to look to our own strength, our own way, and our own definition of right and wrong. This ultimately leads to anger and frustration because our definition of right and wrong differs from the perception of others.

Reflection on How to Be Free in Our Faith

How much of our anger is caused by the stress we feel from not being in control of our lives? When we think of different times in our lives we have dealt with anger, we need to ask God to show us what triggered the anger. Was the anger justified? Was it a result of not trusting God to resolve the situation? Let's begin to pray and ask God to help us see things in a new light.

*“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.
My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”*

John 10:10

In each and every situation where our emotions could move to anger, ask, “Will my anger rob me of something?” How do you feel when you are hiding from God because of your choices? Does being angry help or hurt your relationship with God and others? Could it be both? Do you want to give yourself and your anger to God for healing but aren't sure how?

Then look for the words of Jesus to bring comfort in tough situations and repeat this: *“Jesus has come that we may have life, and have it in abundance.”* We know that He

knows this situation, and we don't want to disappoint our Lord by reacting in anger.

God's strength and support is more than enough for us to get through this!

How to Handle Anger

Anger is often lurking as a secondary reaction to primary feelings of pain and fear. However, anger is not by itself sinful. Jesus was angry but did not sin.

“Scripture exhorts us, ‘Be angry and do not sin.’ How is this possible, and what sort of things should we become angry about? Not only does the Scripture say, ‘Be angry and do not sin,’ it also says, ‘Be slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.’ And the Bible says, ‘Put away anger and malice.’ And it says that Jesus—at one point when he was in the synagogue and they were bent out of shape because he was healing someone on the Sabbath—it says he looked around upon them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.

Now, maybe that's a clue as to how to be angry and not sin. Because Jesus didn't sin. He never sinned. The Bible says clearly, ‘He was without sin,’ in Hebrews 4, for example.”

John Piper

**THANKS BE TO GOD THAT WE HAVE
HOPE IN JESUS CHRIST THE LORD!!!**

Anger can lead to murder. In Genesis 4 Cain killed his brother Abel. “*Cain became very angry.*” Instead of surrendering to God’s standards of the sacrifice of an innocent lamb, Cain chose his own good works. By refusing God’s provision, he became proud, jealous, and greedy. He wanted to earn his way to heaven and refused the gift of what God had promised as the way to please Him.

By killing Abel, did Cain solve the problem? No. The consequences of his actions were not what he expected. Since the root of anger reflects unmet expectations, pain, and fear, the next time the enemy suggests reacting in an unhealthy way, recall the following Scriptures:

“Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.”

Proverbs 29:11

“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”

James 1:19-20

Anger is a very real emotion that everyone struggles to control. God understands anger and is willing to help us at any given moment. God is full of mercy and grace. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, He is our Advocate and Defender to help us in times of weakness.

God even tells us in the Bible what to do when we become angry!

“So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And don’t sin by letting anger control you. Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.” Ephesians 4:25-27

People are not our enemies. *“We war not against flesh and blood....”* (Ephesians 6). Anger is not the primary root that threatens to damage our relationships. Get to the root by processing the core emotions of pain, grief, sadness and fear. Facing the primary emotions at the core releases the secondary emotion of anger that lingers beneath the surface.

The best way to keep ourselves under control is to give control to God. It is ok to let go of the pain, grief, sadness, and fear.

How Our Surrender Helps Us Process Angry Feelings

First, pray on all occasions and ask God to help us become aware of our weaknesses.

Let's tell ourselves the truth.

Don't listen to the suggestions of the devil to act out. Instead, feel the anger and at the same time be controlled by God's Spirit within to stop anger in its tracks.

Don't let too much time pass. Acknowledge the anger by naming it and giving that anger over to God.

The healthy response is to feel the emotion and let it go. Otherwise, this emotion can cause "acting out" in overt ways or "acting in" with resentment and bitterness.

"Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness. So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Pause, Pray, and Prepare

1. **Pause**: Step back. Take a moment to stop and think about the emotions that got triggered. Don't try to deny them. Let's pause and think about what is going on inside our heads and hearts.

2. **Pray**: Let's pray and simply thank God for the opportunity to come to Him and ask Him for help in dealing with what we are facing. (Remember: God is more than enough!)
3. **Prepare**: Let's prepare ourselves in the way we will talk to others, and stay in control. Know that the enemy is trying to rob you of something. Prepare for the battle and know the importance of allowing God to have control. (God will not fail you!)

Summary Reminders

It is a fact: We all deal with anger. It doesn't help anything or anyone to pretend that anger is not a part of our emotions. Going all the way back to the story in Genesis we learned that anger entered our world. First, the serpent planted a question in Adam and Eve's mind. "Did God really say...?" Then Adam and Eve falsely believed that God wasn't enough.

The same two problems surface in different forms and in different ways in our world today. At some point in the next 24 hours you will be faced with, "Did God really say, '*Pray for your enemies?*'... '*Forgive your enemies?*'... '*Get rid of anger?*'"

Is God enough to help me in my time of trouble?

The answer is YES!

“God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it.... The LORD of Heaven’s Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress. Come, see the glorious works of the LORD: See how He brings destruction upon the world. He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; He burns the shields with fire. Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation.”

Psalm 46

Further Study and Discussion

What else does the Bible say about anger and its consequences? _____

Think of times that you have been the angriest. What is the root of your anger? (Examples: someone mistreating you; someone mistreating others; someone judging you; not getting what you think you deserve; etc.) Discuss how you can take those moments and submit them to God's control.

When you do get angry and need to vent, how might you vent up to God instead of outward towards others? (Some ways are prayer, being real with God, talking to God out loud, and learning how to process anger in a healthy way to accept reality.)

Anger is a human emotion. Don't beat yourself up for getting angry. Work through your anger and when the dust settles, name three things you are thankful for because you did not allow your anger to control you. _____

GUILT AND SHAME

Objectives

Define *guilt* and *shame*.

- 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.

Apply ways to process *guilt* and *shame*. Because many people have misunderstood the sources and motivations from *guilt* and *shame* and how we erroneously apply those thoughts to our lives daily, this session will examine why we all need to recognize the impact *guilt* and *shame* have on our behavior. Overcoming the *guilt* and *shame* that binds us, we can choose to become more like Christ by surrendering to the power of God to transform our lives.

Introduction

Guilt separates us from God. *Shame* separates us from everyone. Jesus sets us free from the “guilty verdict” of our sin. The seal of the Holy Spirit guarantees us a family forever!

The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

Guilt and *shame* are often combined when discussing negative feelings or emotions that we deal with as a result of our behavior. They are actually very different, and we need to better understand our true identity in Christ so that we are able to deal with each separately.

For example, if I get pulled over for speeding while driving with someone, I have two problems: First, I have a ticket to pay because I am guilty of breaking a traffic law. Second, I am ashamed that I disappointed my friend.

What is worse? Well, once I pay the ticket and restore my license, the DMV and courts just see me as a driver in good standing. In other words, I am free and clear.

On the other hand, every time I drive with my friend, I could be reminded of what an awful person I am because I am ashamed of my previous behavior. That is *shame*. *Shame*

is what gives us the feeling that we have lost part of our community, family, or friends.

From a biblical perspective the word *guilt* has many variations, but with regard to our relationship with God, it has a very narrow meaning.

“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”
Romans 3:23

The sin problem has separated us from God because we are all guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments, or in a sense, are rebelling against a Holy God. We are guilty. It is very simple. We need a good lawyer, and thanks be to God, we have Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for our sins in order that our guilty verdict could be expunged, or overturned. So, the guilty verdict no longer applies to those who are in Christ.

“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.”

Colossians 2:13-14

“Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to You and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.” And You forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Therefore, let all the godly pray to You while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.”

Psalm 32:1-6

GOD FORGAVE THE GUILT OF MY SIN.

We are determined by the courts of Heaven to be NOT GUILTY!

“So Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don’t get tied up again in slavery to the law.”

Galatians 5:1

We can easily fall back into the trap of believing we have to “make up for” or pay for the bad things we have done. That mindset leads to more guilt! Don’t go there.... Let’s

forgive ourselves of our mistakes and move forward with Jesus.

From a biblical perspective *shame* has more to do with our feelings of unworthiness as a result of our thinking, deeds, and trying to live up to other's expectations. *Shame* is very destructive because it produces feelings of isolation and unworthiness. When shame begins to become overwhelming, we often choose something to numb our pain, but that only makes things worse. So, the cycle continues and we get stuck in our shame.

The Woman at the Well

Let's examine what God says about shame and the isolation and disconnect that results from living a life of shame by reading the story of "The Woman at the Well" in John 4:1-42.

"Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that He was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but His disciples. So He left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now He had to go through Samaria. So He came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and

Jesus, tired as He was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, 'Will you give Me a drink?' (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

The Samaritan woman said to Him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked Him and He would have given you living water.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can You get this living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?'

Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'

The woman said to Him, 'Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.'

He told her, 'Go, call your husband and come back.'

'I have no husband,' she replied.

Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'

'Sir,' the woman said, 'I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.'

'Woman,' Jesus replied, 'believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.'

The woman said, 'I know that Messiah' (called Christ) is coming. When He comes, He will explain everything to us.'

Then Jesus declared, 'I, the one speaking to you, I am He.'

Just then His disciples returned and were surprised to find Him talking with a woman. But no one asked, 'What do you want?' or 'Why are you talking with her?'

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?' They came out of the town and made their way toward Him.

Meanwhile His disciples urged Him, 'Rabbi, eat something.'

But He said to them, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about.'

Then His disciples said to each other, 'Could someone have brought Him food?'

'My food,' said Jesus, 'is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work. 'Don't you have a saying, It's still four months until harvest?' I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying, one sows and another reaps is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.'

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers.

They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'" John 4:1-42

Shame forces us to think we need to be isolated.

Why did she come alone? The woman had been married several times and now was living with someone else, so she came to the well alone. Perhaps she came at a time when she knew there would be no one else at the well.

She jumped at the chance for something new that would last: "Living water."

Shame wants us to believe we have no hope and no chance of redemption.

The woman at the well realized Jesus knew her past, but yet she did not feel condemned. She began to embrace a new hope and a new type of family, the family of God.

Shame tells us we don't belong. Jesus proves we do.

“But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ. For Christ Himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. . . . So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.” Ephesians 2:13-14, 19

Further Study and Discussion

Read through Psalm 32. Describe in your own words how guilt and shame affect you and your relationships. (For example, in Psalm 32 the writer says he feels sapped, like in the heat of summer.) _____

Now discuss what happens when the writer of Psalm 32 confesses his faults to God.

As we continue to walk with Jesus, how important is it to spend time with him daily and be honest with ourselves? Why? (Hint: to avoid building up guilt and shame in our heart.) _____

Jesus paid for our sins on the cross, which removed our guilty status. Who is making us feel ashamed? Discuss how the enemy uses other people and our faults to make us feel unworthy. What are some Scriptures that will help you overcome your feelings of shame? Write them down.

Romans 12 tells us how important it is to allow God to transform our minds. We have to know who we are in Christ. Transforming our minds doesn't happen automatically. List three things you can do each day so the Holy Spirit can begin the process of transforming your mind! _____

Shame is a belief or feeling of condemnation. What Scripture tells us that we are no longer condemned if we are in Christ? Write it down! Memorize it! _____

L O N E L I N E S S

Objectives

Define loneliness.

- 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.

Apply remedies to *loneliness*. Because many people have misunderstood what *loneliness* is all about and how loneliness can make us feel disconnected from everyone, this study will examine how *loneliness* often leads to bitterness and isolation. Overcoming *loneliness* starts by the power of God to transform our lives. We can choose to become more like Christ.

Introduction

The key to overcoming loneliness is to build new habits of thinking and remember no matter how alone we may feel,

we are not alone. The Psalms comfort us when we feel lonely. David wrote many of these words. He went through many trials and times of being alone. His songs, or psalms, give us hope! Jesus felt all alone in His struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane even though His disciples were with him. What personal stories about loneliness do you have?

Loneliness is not something talked about very much in our society. Men hardly ever talk about it because it makes them sound weak or vulnerable.

Loneliness is not something talked about in the church, but it should be. The reason is simple. We can be surrounded by hundreds of people including good friends and still be lonely. We might be busy working on projects or being a part of something good but still feel lonely. Each and every one of us is in danger of becoming lonely no matter where we are, how old we are, and what we do with our time.

But are we really alone? No, we are never alone. This is a mindset we must choose to embrace and believe just as much as we believe in the Lord Jesus for our redemption.

Defining Emotions

Often when we feel alone or invisible, we could automatically assume God may be using it as a way of punishment. The truth is that God needs to get us alone

sometimes to remind us that He is always there, and also that He is the most important relationship we have.

“Jerusalem, once so full of people, is now deserted. She who was once great among the nations now sits alone like a widow. Once the queen of all the earth, she is now a slave.” Lamentations 1:1

Wow!! What a powerful verse. Lamentations comes from the word *lament*, describing an emotion that causes one “to cry out in desperation.” To *lament* is to understand that something has been lost or broken and we are coming undone because of it. Remember, it is ok to cry—that lets the pain out.

Lamentations describes the plight of the city and how God has allowed it to become overtaken. The city is now on its death bed and the only thing the author knows how to do is cry out in lament. How alone we might feel in this situation!

If we examine the first verse of the opening chapter we see the author paints a picture of despair and loneliness. There are different circumstances that can lead to feelings of loneliness or being all alone. Let’s unpack them together.

“...once so full of people is now deserted.”

The obvious reason we might feel alone is the absence of people. If I went to an NFL game and walked into the stadium but I was the only one there, I would feel alone. It would be a strange sensation to be in a place that is supposed to be full of people, yet it's empty!

When something in the normal course of our lives is suddenly, radically different, it causes us to feel isolated and alone. We must remember even when environments change, God is still with us.

“...once great among the nations now sits alone like a widow.”

A widow in this sense is a metaphor for something lost. Sometimes when we lose our spouse, or even our status or job—something that gave us identity—we become lonely like a widow. Suddenly, we become dependent on others, and we feel a sense of isolation.

When other people or society look at us differently because of something we have done, or we have lost some of our identity, we can become defensive and then feel alone. We can lose a spouse, a job, or even our freedom and immediately people start to treat us differently. This is the most important time to claim our true identity found in

Christ. We must always allow Jesus to lead us back to our true self, and as we follow Him, He will define who we are.

“Once the queen of all the earth, she is now a slave.”

We can also feel alone as we begin to realize our lives now are in the hands and control of others. A loss of freedom is certainly a reason to feel isolated and alone. We can easily feel invisible to those around us when we don't have control of our own freedom and life. When we lose status and freedom, the hope in Christ is elevated and we must rely on the promises of God's Word.

This part of the verse also indicates that we might be surrounded by many people, but because our circumstances have changed, we still feel all alone.

Reflecting How Loneliness Affects Being Free in Our Faith

The absence of people or familiar comforts can trigger feelings of loneliness. When we lose something that has been a part of life for a long time, we feel empty, isolated, and lonely. We can be surrounded by people, but if we do not connect with them, we still feel alone. We do not grow in isolation.

Have you had feelings of loneliness in the last month?

Can you identify one or two main reasons why you have feelings of loneliness? _____

How do you get over these feelings? _____

What do you do to make yourself feel better? _____

Do you have a strong sense of your identity in Christ, or do you sometimes think God has forgotten about you?

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane

At one of the most vulnerable times in the life of the Lord Jesus, he felt alone. Jesus took His trusted disciples with Him for comfort and support.

“Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and He said, ‘Sit here while I go over there to pray.’ He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, James and John, and He became anguished and distressed. He told them, ‘My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’ He went on a little farther and bowed with His face to the ground, praying, ‘My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want Your will to be done, not Mine.’ Then He returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, ‘Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!’”

Matthew 26:36-41

He told them to pray because He was so troubled and was feeling overwhelmed. After Jesus went to pray by Himself, He returned to find His prayer warriors fast asleep.

Jesus had His disciples near and also was in deep prayer to the Father. Still, this was a moment for Jesus where He was all alone. His disciples could not have understood what Jesus was truly wrestling with, and they showed it by falling asleep. Sometimes we must understand that even when we have our closest friends or family around, they may not understand our feelings of despair and or loneliness. This is when we must stand on God's promises that tell us we are never alone.

“Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:20

God's Promises

“O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD. You go before me and follow me. You place Your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from Your presence! If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I go down to the grave, You are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there Your hand will guide me, and Your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night.”

Psalm 139:1-11

Let's look more closely at this encouragement.

“O Lord, You have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do.”

God knows us inside and out. This is not meant to scare us but to bring us comfort. Our Creator knows us and desires to make His presence known to us so we can be comforted in times of loneliness. I love the way this Scripture says God is familiar with all our ways. Like an old friend who knows us so well that they are very familiar with all our quirks, habits, pet peeves, likes and dislikes, God is right there with us in all of it.

“You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD.”

Before we even speak, we should be thankful that God is standing behind us and in front of us as our Protector. His hand is upon us to guide us. We are never alone.

“You go before me and follow me. You place Your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!”

The psalmist is glad about this relationship because it is wonderful to know our God is for us and not against us. His continual presence is not to monitor our behavior but to guide us into our purpose. Wherever we find ourselves, God is there and can use us.

“I can never escape from Your Spirit! I can never get away from Your presence! If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I go down to the grave, You are there.”

There is nowhere on earth we can hide from God. Even when we think God doesn't want to be with us, He knows where we are and what is going on in our lives. God is our Creator and cares for us.

“If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there Your hand will guide me, and Your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night.”

When we feel alone or become isolated in our surroundings, it is important to pray and ask God to reassure us of His presence in our lives. Then give thanks when He does walk alongside us, working in and through us!

Further Study and Discussion

Times of loneliness affect people in different ways. How does it affect you? _____

Does loneliness make you sad or depressed? Explain.

Does loneliness make you angry or defensive? Explain.

Lamentations 1:1 describes loneliness as something that has been lost and a status that has been removed. Name two or three ways that loneliness is connected to your current situation. _____

Believing God is always with you, memorize this verse and say it out loud when you are feeling lonely. Write it down.

“And remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20

Can you find another Scripture that promises God will never leave you? (Write it down and memorize.)

Discuss or write down some things Jesus did to give Him strength to face his tough times including loneliness.

FORGIVENESS

Objectives

Define forgiveness.

- 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.

Apply *forgiveness*. Because many people have misunderstood what *forgiveness* is all about and how we apply it to our lives daily, this session will examine why we all need *forgiveness* and the power it offers to transform our lives to become more like Christ.

Introduction

Jesus reveals how to forgive others. Much of this session will focus on the detrimental effects of living in a state of unforgiveness towards others. Through Scriptures and real-life experiences, we begin to understand the weight of

holding grudges and not being able to forgive someone. Those who won't forgive are held captive by their own set of standards and live a life as a prisoner of their own hearts. God's desire is for us to be set free from all bondage. This includes the bondage that we have made for ourselves by not forgiving others.

What Is God's Definition of Forgiveness?

To understand what God's definition of forgiveness is, we must start by looking at what that means for you and me.

"You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for He forgave all our sins."
Colossians 2:13

"He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west."
Psalm 103:12

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus."
Romans 8:1-2

These are just a few of the Scriptures that tell what God's forgiveness means for you and me if we have accepted Jesus

as our Lord. As we grow in our relationship with Christ by reading His Word, we will uncover them all with great joy!

God's definition of forgiveness is to forgive by choice, not by emotion. In other words, God *chooses* to forgive and does not hold grudges or hold the past over our heads. In choosing Jesus to die for the sins of mankind, God chose to redeem us even when He knew we would continue to fall.

God's choice to forgive us is all inclusive. All we have ever said, done, and thought about in our broken state of sin is completely wiped away the moment we surrender to Jesus at the cross. But we cannot forget that God wants to lead us into this new free life of redemption, and if we are always battling forgiving ourselves of mistakes and forgiving others, we stay stuck!

Getting Unstuck

This story, or parable, told by Jesus was to help his disciples and others understand just how much we have been forgiven by God. Once we grasp how much God has forgiven us, it becomes difficult to hold grudges or not forgive others for far less of an offense. Let's allow it to sink into our hearts so that we can become unstuck from living with an unforgiving heart.

“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant” highlights God’s expectations of how often we are to forgive. Pause to apply key principles that are in bold print.

*“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘**Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?**’*

Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

*Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, **a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him.***

*‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ **The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.***

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

*His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ **But***

he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

‘This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’”

Matthew 18:21-35

Holding Grudges and Not Forgiving Is Bad for Our Health!

We may be aware that it takes energy and emotion to hold a grudge and not forgive. The memories that trigger us, reminding us why we won’t forgive, indicates we are still holding a grudge with *negative* memories. These negative memories begin to work on our mind and our physical body.

The way of the world says, “Don’t forgive someone who has hurt you. An eye for and eye!”

What are some of the results of holding grudges?

1. Increased stress levels sometimes affect internal organs.
2. Increased blood pressure is potentially developed.
3. Increases in anxiety, stress, and anger cause more of the same.
4. Loneliness leads to bitterness and isolation.

What God Says

“God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Matthew 5:7

We must first choose to ask Jesus to help in our struggle with loneliness. If not, we risk our hearts becoming hard, and eventually we lose the ability to feel compassion and mercy.

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Leviticus 19:18

Wherever we are at today in our walk with God, let's stop and ask Him to begin the process of softening our hearts so that we may learn to forgive our brothers and sisters and gain a new lease on life! It is time to break free from the chains of unforgiveness!

Prayer Time

There are two kinds of sin: Sin done *to* us and sin done *by* us. Let's think of two or three things that we have done to others or to hurt ourselves. If we truly have repented and surrendered our lives to Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, then we know we have been forgiven. Spend some time praising and thanking God for his mercy!!!

“Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name. Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things He does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.”

Psalm 103:1-3

Next, let's recall a person who has done something to us that we are having trouble forgiving. Ask, “Wouldn't it be better to release this negativity and simply let it go?” Just let it go and ask God to help us *stay free* while we begin to enjoy the benefits of being *set free* as a child of God.

Living the Lifestyle of Forgiveness

Let's be clear: Forgiveness can be very hard. Even when we have times of breakthrough and peace with God in how we have progressed in forgiving others and ourselves, the

enemy will try and rekindle the flames of our pride and cause us to stumble.

One way to combat the enemy is to avoid the “skirmishes” of life. We pray each day and ask God to help us through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit to stay above the fray with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

One of the best ways to live the lifestyle of forgiveness is to increase our love for God and others. If our love increases, then so does our capacity to forgive and reconcile with others.

“But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!” Galatians 5:22-23

We are not responsible for producing love; God is responsible as we surrender our roots to produce His fruit. Trying harder does not produce the fruit that God desires to see in us. Fruit is the result of surrendering to be led by God.

Reflecting on all God has done for us helps us to stay in the right frame of mind when it comes to forgiving others. The next time we feel those negative emotions coming and we are starting to put up walls again, stop and remember: We are loved by the Most High God. The person who is causing

us to feel this way is a broken human being, and God loves them also. Take a deep breath and remember our identity in Christ Jesus. No one can take that away from us!

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For He gives His sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.”

Matthew 5:43-45

“We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”

Hebrews 12:2

“So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.”

2 Corinthians 4:18

“This is real love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”

1 John 4:10

Forgiving Ourselves

To be real and free in our faith, we must understand that there is no way we can make up for our past. But it's okay. God doesn't want us to spend any more time trying to fix the past. He wants us focused on the present as a present, now, so that our future is changed. The past was over one second ago!

Again, let's think of some event or some person that we hurt or caused problems for us with our actions and reactions. Let's ask ourselves some simple questions:

Have I apologized?

Have I confessed my sinful actions to God?

Have I asked for forgiveness from the person and God?

If we can answer, “Yes,” then let's trust in God's promise that we are forgiven and move forward becoming the Christ-follower He wants us to become.

If any part is, “No,” then we need to acknowledge our mistakes and ask for forgiveness. Then we can move forward with Jesus.

Applying Forgiveness

Lie: We need to feel bad for a long time before God will forgive us of our sins and our mistakes.

Truth: We can’t forgive ourselves for sins or for our sinful nature. Jesus is the only One who can, and Jesus actually has paid the price for all of us with His death on the cross.

Lie: Until the other person we hurt forgives us, we are not truly forgiven by God.

Truth: Jesus’ resurrection means we have new life in Him, and our trust needs to be placed in Him. The Holy Spirit will lead and guide us into all truth as we follow Jesus. He transforms us and sets us free from sin and death.

**Forgiveness is something we choose to do for ourselves.
Forgiveness is something we live out every day for the
rest of our lives!**

Remember forgiveness takes only one. Reconciliation takes two. I can only control myself. I cannot control other people’s choices. I can let go and hand it over to God.

“Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”

Ephesians 4:32

“If you forgive those who sin against you, Your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, Your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Matthew 6:14-15

If you have asked for forgiveness from someone you have wronged and were sincere, that is all that is required of you. If that person doesn't respond the way you had hoped, that is not your problem. Allow God to handle it. If you want to forgive someone from your heart but don't have a way to let them know, then pray this prayer.

Dear Lord, I know I have allowed unforgiveness and bitterness to rule my heart towards this person. I am sorry that I not tried to forgive them. With your help, I ask that you search my heart and help me begin the process of letting go of my hatred towards the person and situation. Give me the strength and the desire to forgive them completely, and therefore, set my heart free once again. Fill my heart with your love again, so I can share that love with all. In Jesus name, Amen.

Further Study and Discussion

What other Scriptures can you find that talk about forgiveness? _____

Write down 3 reasons why it is hard to forgive someone who has hurt you or betrayed you. _____

Spend some time finding the Scriptures that match up with how you feel about forgiving others. _____

Read these and pray that you will begin to understand God's heart for forgiving others.

When you struggle with painful or stressful memories about forgiving others, or the need to be forgiven, how do you cope? _____

Take time and find one or two Scriptures that remind you about God's forgiveness and the love He has for all. (Memorize and recite them when you need to remind yourself!) _____

Take a moment and ask yourself if you truly have received God's forgiveness. _____

If you have received God's forgiveness, write down how His forgiveness makes you feel. _____

If you have trouble accepting God's forgiveness; write down why you are struggling to accept God's unconditional love.

Write a short prayer and ask God to help you fully accept His love and forgiveness. _____

P R A Y E R

Objectives

Define *prayer*.

- 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.

Apply *prayer*. This session will focus on the basics of our prayer life. Many people who are seeking a personal relationship with Christ are confused about prayer. Find a way to begin to practice this wonderful tool of the faith.

Introduction

Have you ever wondered what prayer is all about? Everyone has questions about prayer and how to pray, but what about prayer itself? Before worrying about how and when to pray, let's look at what prayer is all about.

Prayer is the way believers can draw close to God and God can draw close to them. Prayer is a way we can humble ourselves. It is a way we can ask God to show us what He wants us to see about ourselves, others, and our situations. Prayer is one way we can show and tell God we are dependent upon Him.

We read in Scripture that Jesus tells us to pray. This makes prayer just as important as baptism, giving, and loving each other. The great part about this is, we can do it alone, anywhere and at any time.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. 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 is*

in heaven. Give us today, our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one, for Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, Amen.”

Matthew 6:5-13

Applying Prayer

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men.”

Jesus is telling us to pray...and how *not* to do it! Obviously there were some in Jesus’ day who were praying one way but living their life in a different way. Hypocrites. Jesus certainly knows the human heart and how we all seek affirmation from others. He warned us not to get caught up in public displays of prayer and to seek an audience.

Jesus points us away from the public square and turns prayer back towards the sacred and intimate connection between us and our heavenly Father. We are to go to a place that allows us some sense of privacy. Jesus then makes the statement that most people miss...

“Pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

Jesus is so good to us in the way. He reminds us that when we pray it is by faith. We are praying to our Father who is unseen. Jesus is quick to remind us that even though we are praying by faith to our Father who is unseen, it doesn't mean that our Father doesn't see us. When we pray in the name of Jesus, God sees us, hears us, and answers us. The answer may be **Yes**, **No**, or **Wait!**

It doesn't matter what the answer is. Our reward is that the more we pray, the deeper our relationship is with God. A deepening relationship is how our faith grows. This is what leads us to the peace that passes understanding.

*“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as
it is in heaven.”*

Always acknowledge your heavenly Father and His holiness, goodness and power. He created all things and is above all things. He is hallowed or set apart, (not like us). He is holy. We must also acknowledge that we want God's will and not our own to be done.

We are basically saying, “God, I know I don't act like it sometimes, but I want what You want, and I want it in increasing measure here on earth just like it is heaven.”

“Give us today our daily bread.”

Thanking God for this day is a way to be grateful and to tell God we are not taking it for granted. It is also the way we confess our trust in Him for our daily needs that we will be content with the provisions for today.

“Forgive us our debts, (sins, trespasses,) as we forgive our debtors.”

You might be saying, “Wait! I thought I was already forgiven because of what Jesus did on the cross?” Yes! You are correct, but if we use this prayer as a model for our own prayer life, it helps us live a life of forgiveness for others. The reason we have the strength and desire to live a life of grace and forgiveness for others is because we have been forgiven through the blood of Christ.

We have been forgiven of a debt that could never have been repaid. We must simply remind ourselves through our prayer life that this forgiveness should become a way of life for us as we extend forgiveness toward others.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one, for Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”

Our prayer life should always be asking God to protect us and guide us toward a path of truth, glorifying Him through our faith in Jesus. To be dependent on God for divine protection is the same as saying, “I don’t trust my own judgment and need Your wisdom and protection.”

The only true kingdom is Your kingdom Lord!

Action Steps

Tonight before you sleep, find a place, a space, or a “moment” where you can spend 1 minute in prayer. Small beginnings lead to great things!

“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed....”

Matthew 17:20

Even if you are sitting right next to someone, you can pray and say in your mind the key aspects of prayer. Be specific and write down details as God leads you. Start today and allow God to help you slow down and trust the process of prayer. He wants to spend time with you!

“God, You are God, and I am grateful and thankful.”

(Then listen.)

“I want what You want...help me to see what You see.”
(Then listen.)

“Thank you for meeting my needs today.” (Then listen.)

“Forgive me my sins as I forgive those who have sinned against me.” God may bring someone to mind that you need to forgive! Thank God for bringing that one to your attention. (Then forgive that person.)

“Lead me in the way I should go, away from temptations and evil.” (Then listen.)

“I know your Kingdom is the true Kingdom.”
(Then listen.)

“I thank You for Your Son, My Lord, Jesus and I pray in His name. Amen.” (Then listen.)

Further Study and Discussion

What other Scriptures can you find that speak about prayer?

When you think about praying, what causes you the most discomfort? (embarrassment; wondering if God hears; not knowing what to say; worrying about what others may be thinking, etc.)_____

Find one or two trusted friends who may share your concerns and discuss. Talking about our fears and worries always leads to growth. Name one or two that you trust._____

What is your favorite part of Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:5-13?_____

Why is it your favorite? _____

Developing a "prayer closet" and sacred time to privately pray to God is important for our personal relationship with Christ, so write down 3 things you can do to start the process!

KNOW GOD

If you have not already accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, or if you want to encourage and lead someone to Jesus, then visit LifeWithoutLimbs.org and click the link “Know God” to learn how.

No matter what you’ve done, no matter how bad you’ve blown it, God stands ready to accept and forgive you. He is waiting for you and His door is wide open.

Becoming a Christian is not about cleaning up your act and trying to become a good person. It’s not some crazy sin-management system. Actually, we can never be good enough to reach God’s standard of perfection. **Instead, we stand before God with a bunch of broken pieces in our hands. When you hand those pieces over to Him, He can change your life!**

God does all the work. **God puts all the pieces of our lives back together.** God is the One who makes us perfectly clean inside. **God is in the business of restoring broken lives, including yours.**

But in order to truly know God, you must say, “Yes,” to Jesus. If you are ready to begin a relationship with Him, now’s the time!

First, understand and accept that you are a sinner.

The definition of sin is simple. *Sin* is “breaking God’s law.” Even good natured people who do good things cannot please God or gain His approval. The standard in the Bible is impossibly high! None of us can reach perfection or even come close. No matter how hard you try, you can never be good enough. The Bible says,

“All of us have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”

Romans 3:23

Sin is the major roadblock between you and God. In fact, the Bible teaches that our sin is a death sentence!

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

Second, acknowledge Jesus Christ died on the cross for you.

God provided the ultimate solution to our sin. You must first recognize that God's Son gave His life on your behalf. This is the Good News!

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

Romans 5:8

Jesus Christ died in our place, even though we deserved death. He did this so that we can have true peace and enjoy a relationship with Him. He did this so that we can go to heaven.

Third, repent of your sin.

After you admit your sinful condition, and after you acknowledge the Good News of Jesus' death on your behalf, now's the time to say you're sorry. Confess that you have done wrong and repent of your sin. *Repent* means “to turn away, refuse to live in a pattern of your sinful ways and move toward God with your whole heart.”

“Repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.”

Acts 3:19

Fourth, accept Jesus Christ into your heart and life.

To be saved requires a step of belief. It requires a step of faith toward the only One who can save you. The Bible tells us,

“Salvation is found in no one else, because no other name was given under heaven by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:12

Jesus is not one way to God. He is the only way to God!

“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” John 14:6

Would you like Jesus to be Lord of your life? Are you ready to live your life in faith and obedience to Him? Then ask Jesus into your life right now. Jesus said,

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.”

Revelation 3:20

Are you ready? If you would like to begin your relationship with Christ, stop for a moment and pray.

You can use your own words when you talk to God. Express your thoughts in whatever ways feel natural to you. What's most important is that your conversation with God is completely heartfelt and follows this example in the Bible.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

Here is a simple example of the words you might use to pray.

“Jesus, I admit that I am a sinner. I am separated from You because of my sin. But now I understand that You came and died on my behalf to completely take care of my sin problem. I am ready to repent of my sin and turn around and move toward You. I confess with these words that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. Lord, I believe You were raised from the dead for me. Thank You for saving me. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer and meant it, Jesus Christ has now come into your life! Your decision to follow Him means God has forgiven you. You will spend eternity in heaven with Him.

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

And here’s another encouraging verse that says,

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us.”
Psalm 103:12

Your faith in Jesus has saved you, now go and live in peace.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”
Romans 15:13

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.”
Colossians 3:15

NEXT STEPS

The purpose of this section is to provide a flexible platform for the next steps for a vibrant, growing, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. These steps are designed for a structured approach with flexibility for anyone to explore and discuss with others.

Introduction

Congratulations! You have just journeyed through some very important topics in the Christian faith. Followers of Jesus are called to grow and think about topics such as the ones we have just studied. The topics presented by our Life Without Limbs (LWL) team are never meant to be mastered, but they are meant to be continually discussed and shared through the power of God's Spirit living in and through us. This means we must continue to journey individually and together as we learn more about our relationship with Christ.

These "Next Steps" are simply meant to be a guideline in how we approach our growth as individuals and as a group of believers. The more we all allow Jesus to help us grow in

all areas, the more we will be His true witnesses and allow His light to shine through us!

1: Make It Personal

No matter where we are in our walk with Jesus, we aim to make this a personal walk.

Beginner?

Start the day with at least 5 minutes of “personal-time” with Jesus. Ask God to open your mind and heart to His Word and then read the Bible. When you are done, thank God in the name of Jesus for the gift of His Word. If you have more time, then either read more, or pray more—either one is good! If you need a suggestion on where to start reading, you may ask a trusted friend, or take our suggestion and begin in the book of John.

The next suggestion would be to share something that you believe God is saying to you through His Word with a chaplain or trusted friend and fellow believer. You can also attend a group study and look for opportunities to share how God is speaking to you while at the same time listening how God is working in the lives of others as well. Writing it down is helpful. Continue to spend time with Jesus and see where He is leading you in your faith. Don’t let anything come

between you and this sacred personal time. If you are unable to have your personal time in the morning, find another time during the day that works and try to stick to it so it becomes part of your daily routine. God will meet you anywhere at any time because, believe it or not, He wants to spend time with you!

Not a Brand New Christian?

If you have been a believer for a while but have found yourself frustrated or needing some fresh fire from the Lord, then start by praying. This type of prayer is more about listening. Confessing to the Lord that you have become distracted is a sure way to have your heart filled again, and then be willing to listen. Allow God to flood your heart with His unconditional love again until you believe without a doubt that He is not mad at you. Just thank Him, accept His mercy and love and be ready to pick up wherever you left off from before. God loves you and has a purpose He wants to accomplish through you. Believe!!

Long-Time Christian?

If you have been a believer for a long time, then use these materials and topics to renew a bold responsibility to mentor or teach others. It will be important for you to be open and honest about how the topics affected you and what *you*

learned. Others who are wrestling with these tough issues, like forgiveness, will be looking for leaders who aren't afraid to share their mistakes but also hold themselves accountable. There is no more important calling than the one to teach and mentor others in the faith. Each of us influence others by our walk with God.

2: Make It a Lifestyle

Being a follower of Christ is a lifelong journey, not something we only do on Sundays. As you continue to read, pray, and study together, always remember that there is no finish line on earth! The only finish line is when you are called home by Jesus. Always approach your faith as something that is there for you in the form of hope, peace, and love. Don't get caught up in how much you *know*, or how much you *do* for Jesus. Focus on where you are in your walk and how you can learn from others, or how you can encourage someone else.

Sometimes, the best way to grow in your faith is to take your mind off yourself and help someone else. This is how we serve one another in the Body of Christ. Spending time volunteering to help others is one way to start. Reaching out to others brings joy to the heart of our Father in Heaven. As you serve, do so without any expectations in return. Just do

it! I promise if you have the right motivation, (which is to show God you love Him by loving others) then you will be rewarded.

3: Do The Hard Things...but Leave Room for Grace!

This study introduced biblical topics that many of us struggle with:

Receiving God's Love
Forgiving Others and Ourselves
Relationships
Anger
Hope
Loneliness
Guilt & Shame
Grace
Prayer

As you continue in your journey it will be necessary to find a group of people that you can talk with, pray with, and explore all the topics above and more.

This could be a Bible study, a DVD series, or even a Christian-based recovery group. The most important focus is that God's Word and the Holy Spirit are free to speak to you

about these concerns and challenge you to grow. God will *always* want to take you further in your growth and in your walk than you want to go.

When these times come, we all need a little push from our brothers and sisters in the faith. Let's avoid beating ourselves up. If you take a couple steps backwards... remember self-compassion by giving yourself the same grace that God shows us in Christ. We must also show this same grace to others who may be struggling.

There's a reason God wants us to be in fellowship with each other. This is the best way to learn about His Kingdom! As part of the Body of Christ, you are custom-designed to be functioning as you were created to become!

The Kingdom mindset is God's plan. It does not matter what our race, status, ethnic background, culture, economic class, or educational strengths are. In God's Kingdom we are all viewed as ONE! We have different gifts and different purposes that God wants to use, but we are ONE, and the Kingdom is all about unity.

The Kingdom of God is in each of us. When we let God work in these areas of our lives and help us live in constant peace with a tangible hope in Christ, we defeat the lies and overcome hopelessness!

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.

Anger

Bible says: unmet expectations

Dictionary.com: "strong feeling of displeasure"

Forgiveness

Bible says: pardon; to stop requiring payment

Dictionary.com: "grant pardon"

Grace

Bible says: undeserved favor

Dictionary.com: "simple elegance"

Guilt

Bible says: condition of sin, aware of failure

Dictionary.com: "fact of committing an offense"

Hope

Bible says: confidence in God's Word

Dictionary.com: “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen”

Loneliness

Bible says: feeling brought about by separation

Dictionary.com: “companionless”

Love

Bible says: God is love; commitment; unconditional.

Dictionary.com: “feeling, affection for another person”

Prayer

Bible says: communicating with God

Dictionary.com: “request for help”

Reconciliation

Bible says: reuniting; former enemies agree

Dictionary.com: “restoration of friendly relationship”

Relationship

Bible says: the key to growing up with God and others

Dictionary.com: “connection, association”

Repentance

Bible says: change your mind and turn from sin

Dictionary.com: “sincere regret or remorse”

Shame

Bible says: sin-driven and disgraced by past behavior

Dictionary.com: “a painful feeling of humiliation or distress caused by the consciousness of wrong or foolish behavior”

A P P E N D I X

Psalm 18 – The Daily Psalm to Keep Our Love Growing

¹I love you, LORD; you are my strength. ²The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my Savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety.

³I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and He saved me from my enemies. ⁴The ropes of death entangled me; floods of destruction swept over me. ⁵The grave wrapped its ropes around me; death laid a trap in my path.

⁶But in my distress I cried out to the LORD; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from His sanctuary; my cry to Him reached His ears.

⁷Then the earth quaked and trembled. The foundations of the mountains shook; they quaked because of his anger. ⁸Smoke poured from his nostrils; fierce flames leaped from his mouth.

Glowing coals blazed forth from him. ⁹He opened the heavens and came down; dark storm clouds were beneath his feet.

¹⁰Mounted on a mighty angelic being, He flew, soaring on the wings of the wind. ¹¹He shrouded himself in darkness, veiling His approach with dark rain clouds. ¹²Thick clouds shielded the brightness around Him and rained down hail and burning coals. ¹³The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded amid the hail and burning coals.

¹⁴He shot his arrows and scattered His enemies; great bolts of lightning flashed, and they were confused. ¹⁵Then at your command, O LORD, at the blast of your breath, the bottom of the sea could be seen, and the foundations of the earth were laid bare.

¹⁶He reached down from heaven and rescued me; He drew me out of deep waters. ¹⁷He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me. ¹⁸They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me. ¹⁹He led me to a place of safety; He rescued me because he delights in me.

²⁰The LORD rewarded me for doing right; He restored me because of my innocence. ²¹For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not turned from my God to follow evil. ²²I have followed all his regulations; I have never abandoned his decrees. ²³I am blameless before God; I have kept myself from sin.

²⁴The LORD rewarded me for doing right. He has seen my innocence. ²⁵To the faithful You show yourself faithful; to those with integrity You show integrity. ²⁶To the pure You show Yourself pure, but to the crooked You show Yourself shrewd. ²⁷You rescue the humble, but You humiliate the proud.

²⁸You light a lamp for me. The LORD, my God, lights up my darkness. ²⁹In your strength I can crush an army; with my God I can scale any wall. ³⁰God's way is perfect. All the LORD's promises prove true. He is a shield for all who look to Him for protection. ³¹For who is God except the LORD? Who but our God is a solid rock? ³²God arms me with strength, and He makes my way perfect. ³³He makes me as surefooted as a deer, enabling me to stand on mountain heights."

Psalm 23: The Daily Psalm to Keep Our Minds on God

*¹“The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need.
²He lets me rest in green meadows; He leads me beside peaceful streams. ³He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His name. ⁴Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me. Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me.*

⁵You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. ⁶Surely Your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.”

Psalm 103 – The Daily Psalm to Keep Our Praises Sharp

¹“Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name. ²Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things He does for me. ³He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. ⁴He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. ⁵He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!

⁶The LORD gives righteousness and justice to all who are treated unfairly. ⁷He revealed his character to Moses and his deeds to the people of Israel. ⁸The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. ⁹He will not constantly accuse us, nor remain angry forever. ¹⁰He does not punish us for all our sins; he does not deal harshly with us, as we deserve. ¹¹For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth.

¹²He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. ¹³The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear Him. ¹⁴For He knows how weak we are; He

remembers we are only dust. ¹⁵Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. ¹⁶The wind blows, and we are gone as though we had never been here.

¹⁷But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear Him. His salvation extends to the children's children ¹⁸of those who are faithful to His covenant, of those who obey His commandments!

¹⁹The LORD has made the heavens His throne; from there he rules over everything. ²⁰Praise the LORD, you angels, you mighty ones who carry out His plans, listening for each of His commands.

²¹Yes, praise the LORD, you armies of angels who serve him and do His will! ²²Praise the LORD, everything He has created, everything in all His kingdom. Let all that I am praise the LORD.”

Psalm 139 - The Daily Psalm to Keep Our Hearts Secure

1“O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. 2You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. 3You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. 4You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD.

5You go before me and follow me. You place Your hand of blessing on my head. 6Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! 7I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from Your presence!

8If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I go down to the grave, You are there. 9If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, 10even there Your hand will guide me, and Your strength will support me.

11I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night 12but even in darkness I cannot hide from You. To You the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to You.

¹³You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

¹⁵You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. ¹⁶You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

¹⁷How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! ¹⁸I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up you are still with me!"

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R E S P O N S E S

“Program was spot-on! To see Nick even on video was amazing. The speaker is one of the best I have ever heard and then to have Nick speak on the same topic was such a blessing. Don’t stop doing what you’re doing. It is very powerful. Please come back soon!”

“I really enjoyed the way in which the message was delivered as well as the Q&A sessions. You guys really touch home for me. I could listen to Nick all day long. What a humble man! Thank you for helping me grow in Christ.”

“Engagement and round table conversation were the highlight. The impact you had on this group, putting feet to what forgiveness, anger, relationships, and love look like, helps us understand who God is and how to look to Him.”

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.

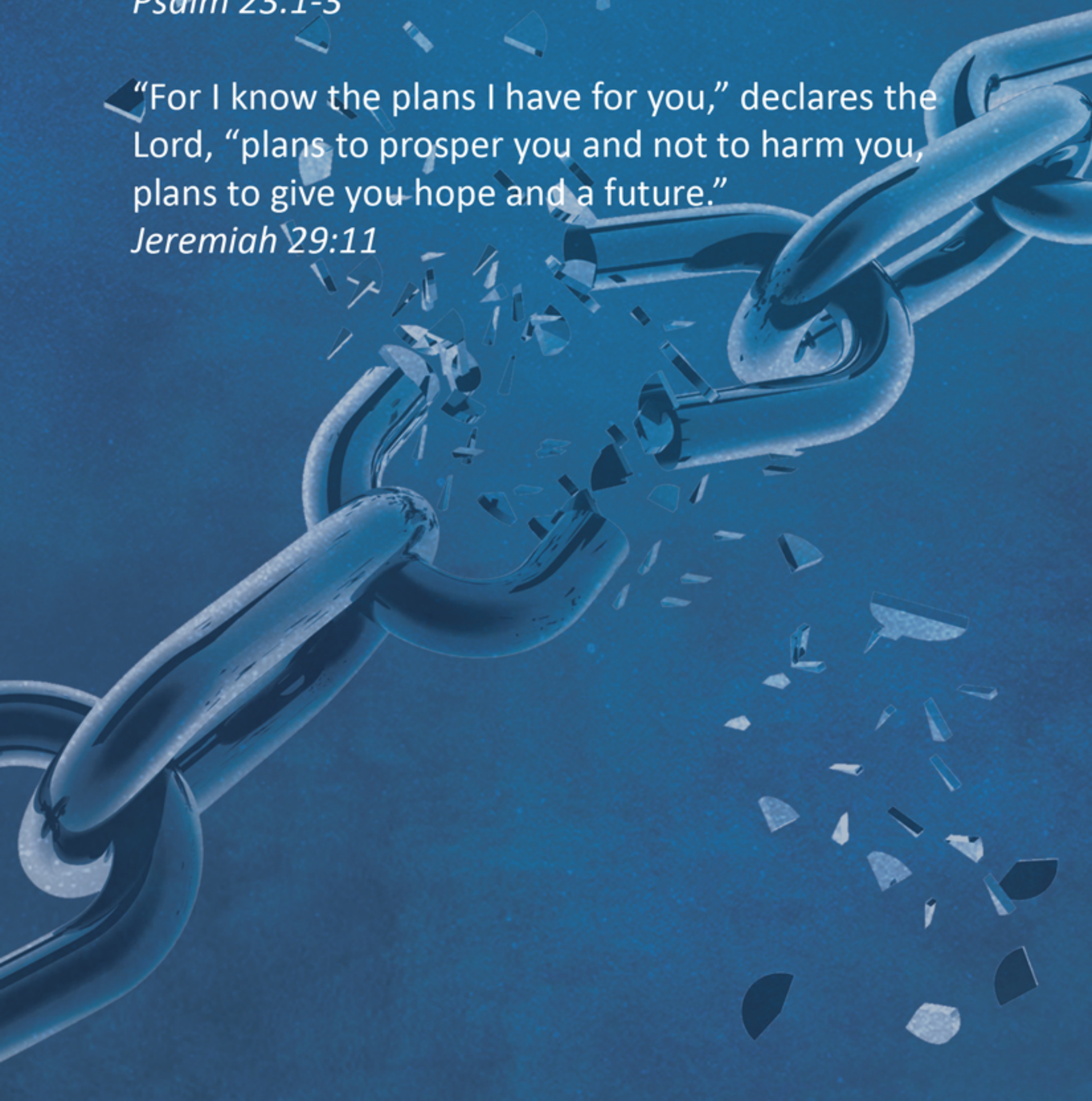
Isaiah 40:31

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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