

Into His Presence

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Into His Presence

Bible Study – Session One

Finding Your LoveStory

Ephesians 3:17-18

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

If you are reading this, you have either experienced a *Jesus Loves Me Conference* or you have read *Unmending the Veil*. Either way, I'm so glad you are choosing to step Into His Presence with others from across the nation as you join this Bible study. This is a self-paced study, so don't feel as if you need to rush through the material. Some areas will require time to think it through.

Here you are, at the beginning of the greatest adventure of your life. You are in pursuit of your love story with Jesus, which actually began with His pursuit of your entire heart. All along the way He has wooed and pursued you, most likely in ways you have overlooked in the past. Paul prayed that we might grasp the depth, width, length, and height of Christ's love for us. That's His deep, penetrating, and transformational love for you. Your story is there, waiting to be discovered.

If you ever wonder: Is this all there really is to the Christian life? Then I can assure you, you haven't yet grasped His love as you should. Through all the years I followed and served Him, I somehow missed the main thing – the love. Yes, I had a mental understanding that He loved me, but I had never received that truth into my belief system. Be certain, we act out of what we believe. I acted anything but loved! This study was born out of my personal journey, those years I set out as a pilgrim in pursuit of the sense of *more* that I knew was out there. I smile as I look back on those days, my intentions set on loving Him. In hindsight I now see that the pursuit was His all along. Yes, I needed to learn to love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind, but even more importantly, I needed to grasp God's love for me. Now, I am living out my sacred romance with Jesus, a life full of purpose and fulfillment. That's what I want for you. That's what Jesus wants for you. There is more!

For those who have attended a Jesus Loves Me Conference, you should have already begun collecting your Stones of Remembrance – tangible ways of remembering how big God is and all He has accomplished in your life.

For those who have read *Unmending the Veil*, you will walk out Robin's journey of removing the stitches that prevented her from knowing Jesus for who He is: loving, faithful, trustworthy, and ever sovereign in the lives of mankind.

Blessings on your journey! Now go and discover your very own love story with Jesus.

Much love,

Lisa

Day One—Loving God

In today's lesson, you will cover *the* most crucial topic in all of Christianity. Beyond salvation, there is only one thing required: loving God. Jesus Himself calls it the first and greatest commandment, and to Martha He said only one thing is needed. *See the verse in the margin.*

Why is loving God *the* most important thing? Because everything in your Christian life will be an overflow of that love or lack thereof. If you love Him, your life will work, plain and simple. If you don't love Him, you may work and serve and do and do and do, but still your life will be unfulfilled. You will often wonder, *Is this really all there is?*

I believe this disconnect from God, this distance of heart that many Christians experience, is one of the most detrimental secrets in the Body of Christ. Because of embarrassment or guilt, those who feel this distance never admit it before God or man.

If possible, write Matthew 22:37-38 from memory on the following lines. Then check what you have with what God's Word says. It is the first and greatest commandment.

As you look at the verse above, ask yourself, "Who am I in light of what God's Word says?" There are three types of people who will hear this message: Dos, Don'ts, and Okays. Into which category do you fall?

_____ I'm a do – I love Jesus with all I have in me. There is passion of heart, submission of soul, and focus of mind. There may be areas where I am still growing in that love for Him, but consistently, I am seeking after Him with my whole heart. I have come to a place of complete trust in Him and have grasped the love He has for me.

_____ I am okay with where I am. I cannot honestly say that I love Him passionately, but for now, I am comfortable in my relationship with God. People who make a big deal about *passionately* loving Jesus make me a bit uncomfortable. (You know who you are.)

_____ I realize that I don't love Him in the way He calls me to in Matthew 22. Maybe that *first love* has faded, or maybe I never fully found passionate love to begin with, but now I'm ready to begin the journey to know Him, love Him, and trust Him.

*In order to begin this journey from a place of honesty,
you must know what is going on inside.*

“...you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:41-42

Look up Hosea 4:6 and fill in the blanks.

“My people are destroyed from _____ of _____.”

This verse is a clear warning: when we lack knowledge, destruction comes. I firmly believe that if we refuse to look at ourselves in light of what God’s Word says, we are headed for our own destruction. Not wrath and punishment by God, but rather what we are supposed to be and do will never become reality.

Belief– Write Hebrews 3:19 on the lines below.

We can equate God’s presence, the place where we get to know Him intimately, as our Promised Land here on this side of heaven. In that case it would be wise to consider what may be hindering us from reaching our Promised Land. Just as it was for the Israelites in our verse above, unbelief can and does prevent us from entering into the deep and intimate relationship that Jesus wants to have with us. Secretly, many believe that what they are experiencing is really all there is. They don’t believe there is more since they have never experienced it, so they never make the effort to find more. If you aren’t or never have personally experienced this heart-pounding kind of love as expressed in Matthew 22, then you are missing out on something life-altering.

Hebrews 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

I want to narrow in on the final part of the verse above, “he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” First, you have to *believe* He will reward your effort with His presence. He is our very great reward! If you *believe* He will transform your life, you will allow nothing to hinder you. Second, notice the word “earnestly.” Decide to go “all in” during these next weeks as you complete this study. Compare the verse from Hebrews with the inserted verse from Jeremiah. Notice, the two terms, “earnestly seek” and “seek me with all your heart.” Both require faith forward movement on your part.

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 29:13:14

For you Don’ts and Okays– This is the time to have a “come to Jesus” meeting. Sit with Him and be honest about where you stand with Him regarding this love business. Prior to this meeting, ask yourself the following questions:

Do I even know what it means to be in His presence?

Is His presence something I experience on a daily basis? Does He speak to me?

Have I earnestly sought Him beyond the moment of my salvation? Do I read His Word and spend quiet time with Him regularly?

Do I believe I can really know God intimately? Do I now?

Am I settling for less than what He offers me? Do others seem to have a meaningful relationship with Jesus that has somehow escaped me?

Am I able to say I love Him with all my heart, soul, and mind?

When you come to some solid conclusions, meet with Him in a quiet place and begin. Tell Him how you feel deep down inside. Admit to Him things you would never admit to another living soul. Simply give Him an invitation to begin working inside of you, to show you who He really is and how much He loves you.

For you Dos – You may have loved the Lord with more passion in the early days after your salvation, but maybe that love has diminished a bit. In that case your conversation may be a little different. You may simply need to give Him the invitation to help you love Him as you did at first. We can all use that nudge closer to the Savior.

God knows you through and through anyway, but there is something about this invitation that will allow a new level of communication between you to begin. He will help you see things about your own heart that you never even knew was there.

Do not continue on through the next day's material until you have met with Him and gotten real before Him. This is the first step, getting real.

God was not first in my life; He wasn't even a close second. First things come first for a reason. As our Creator, He knows what we need. If you don't have this kind of deep, intimate love for God, nothing else will be right – ever! Without loving Him first, you cannot possibly be the wife, mother, friend, or disciple He intends for you to be. You will never fulfill your purpose here on earth and in this generation. Life will feel meaningless and unfulfilled. That was my life, meaningless and unfulfilled.

You cannot imagine what God has in store for you once you begin this journey. What you will discover is His endless pursuit, His determination to



“Search me, O
God, and know
my heart; test
me and know
my anxious
thoughts.”
Psalm 139:23



woo you until you finally begin to receive the love He has for you. The only way I can describe it is that it was like the opening up of heaven and Him pouring His love upon me like soaking rain. In hindsight, it was the pouring out of His love upon me that caused me to fall so helplessly in love with Jesus. That was what I had missed all along: His love for me. I needed my very own love story.

*“We love
because he first
loved us.”
1 John 4:19*

It finally made sense – why I failed to love Him – I had never received His love for me. I acknowledged that He so loved the world, but that personal, *God so loves Lisa in particular*, love had never fully settled into my belief system. I had yet to grasp it as my very own. Once I received His love individually, I easily loved Him in return.

If you are even close to where I was, feeling some distance from God that others don't seem to experience, then be prepared for Him to step in at your invitation. James 4:8 says we can come near to God, and He will come near to us.

Assignment: Meet with God in a quiet place and discuss how you feel in the deepest, most secret place of your heart. Is your love for Him passionate? Does it cause you to offer yourself to Him fully and without restraint? Is He your every thought and focus? Be honest about where you currently are and invite Him to take you deeper with Him. This will be the beginning of the journey of a lifetime.

Focal Passage: *Matthew 22: 37-38 tells us to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and mind.*

Question: *Who am I in light of this command? Do I love Him passionately?*

Process Summary: *Draw near to God*

Get to know Him by experience

You can do nothing but fall in love Him

Day Two – Set Apart

“They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven.” Psalm 107:30

As you begin day two of your study, you may have had an eye-opening and maybe even uncomfortable look within yourself. If you followed through with your assignment from day one, then you have invited the Lord in to take you to a new place with Him. As we begin this journey, I would like to share an uplifting verse with you. Inserted in the side margin is a favorite verse of mine. It assures me that He will indeed get me to where I need to be. Even if you currently feel far away, you can be certain His plan is to bring you near to Him – into His presence. This topic of being in God’s presence should not be confused with God’s ability to be all places at all times. He does say He will never leave nor forsake you. So never am I suggesting that God has left your side. Instead, my suggestion is that you may have allowed things in your life and in your heart to interfere with His intimate presence, that place where you talk openly to Him and where He speaks to you, that quiet place with Him where you are transformed into Christ’s likeness.

Yesterday, we used an Old Testament concept as the picture of what we, as New Testament believers, can possess. Today, let’s take a look at how He brought His people, Israel, into the Promised Land.

Set yourself apart – Prior to going into the Promised Land:

“Joshua told the people, ‘ _____ yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do _____ things among you.’” Joshua 3:5

Consecrate (sometimes translated as sanctify) is to set apart as dedicated to God.

Are you hoping to see an amazing thing? Are you hoping to hear from God? Then set yourself apart. What are you setting yourself apart from? The world. The world, those influences outside of the realm of the Kingdom of God, are attempting to destroy those in the church, you included!

Below are a few ways in which you can greatly reduce the impact the world has on you:

- **Commit to a daily quiet time with the Lord. Read your Bible regularly.** Begin a “no excuses” mentality. Allow nothing to come between you and this time. You will likely discover, if you don’t begin your day this way, it is easy to allow the day to end without having spent quiet time with Him at all.

“In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.” Psalm 5:3

Did you notice how David mentioned “in the morning” twice? He was clearly on to something. When you begin your day in God’s Word, it has a supernatural way of meeting the needs of the day to come. The more time you spend with Him and in His Word, the more what you read will guide and direct you.

He will begin to speak into your spirit. He will begin to show up in your day in ways you can't even imagine. You have to have faith to believe this when you first begin. It might not be something you experience right away, so keep at it.

As you read, don't just "hunt and peck," as my granny would have said. Be intentional. Have a plan when you read. Where you leave off one day, begin at that same place the next morning. Here are a few suggestions:

- Maintain a normal flow of reading.
 - Begin at the beginning. Decide to read the Bible through.
 - Add this: No matter where else you read, each day, read one chapter of Proverbs. For example, on the 15th of the month, read Proverbs 15, on the next day Proverbs 16 and so on. The wisdom contained in this book will slowly seep into your belief system, and before you know it, you are making better choices based on what God says is wise living, not what the world says.
 - Read through the Psalms.
 - Start in Matthew and read through the New Testament.
 - Try "red letter" reading. Slowly go through all the words of Jesus in the New Testament. Even when the stories seem familiar, reading Jesus' words specifically can take on a new dimension and speak to you in an entirely new way. Rather than your mind defaulting to the assumption that His words are directed toward others, you can feel them focused on you. Be advised, you may need to back up a sentence or two to gain context, but just as it sounds, you will pretty much stick to the red letters. Sometimes, as I read in this way, the realization washes over me – Jesus Himself is speaking to me, teaching me through the Holy Spirit. It's Supernatural!
 - Journal things you learn, things that stand out to you. Simply keep a spiral notebook near your Bible. When something really speaks to you, make a note of it. As you do this, you will begin to see common threads that the Lord is weaving into your heart. I promise, years later you will look back and see your spiritual growth and your deepening relationship with Jesus blossoming.
 - Write favorite verses on index cards and keep them handy (Thanks, Beth!). I have stacks of verses that have meant so much to me during specific seasons.

The goal is to always have a place to begin each morning. You will be surprised how He will speak to you as you read this way. Just read, even on those days when you "feel" as if you are not getting anything out of it. Commit to read. Seeds are being planted. Remember, this is a marathon, not a sprint. Read small enough portions that you can study on it and allow the Spirit to speak. If you read more than a few chapters, you will not likely retain anything.

Some days, after a verse or two, I can't seem to move forward, which tells me that He has something for me to learn in those few verses. So I try to ponder and study on what I read, making sure I understand it, or what He is trying to show me about Himself through it. Other days, I may take in several chapters. Sometimes even, I may not fully understand what

*Remember,
this is a
marathon not
a sprint.*

I am reading at all or how it applies to me. In those times, I have to believe that what I am reading is simply not for me in my current season. Then, years later, when the time is right, understanding comes as I read those same verses. The way He leads and teaches each of us may look different. For us all, though, there is one common denominator, we all have the need to meet with Him each day through His Word.

In addition to reading God's Word, there are other ways in which to be set apart. Here are a few ideas:

- Watch less TV or at least consider carefully what shows you are watching.
- Reduce your intake of social media in all forms.
- Listen to Christian radio rather than secular. These lyrics seep into your mind and spirit, drawing you into God's presence. Recently, a radio station that I listen to issued a thirty-day challenge to listen to nothing but Christian music. There have been countless callers who shared their stories of how families and marriages have been transformed – all because they changed what they were allowing into their minds and homes.
- Intentionally set up a time when you can meet with a godly friend to tell her what the Lord is doing in your life and about this new journey you are on. Ask for accountability if you are prone to fall off course.
- Read books that will help you mature and grow in your faith
- Steer clear of energy-draining or negative friends.
- Don't dwell on negative thoughts. What we think is a choice. While negative thoughts can simply pop into our minds, we get to decide whether to entertain them or ask them to leave. I know of no better means of escorting a negative thought out than to invite positive ones in. Gratitude is one positive state of mind that won't allow negative thoughts to remain. When fighting against negative forces, begin to make a mental list of all the things you are grateful for. As blessed as we are in this nation, we can begin with gratitude for clean, available water. No matter our circumstances, we all have something to be thankful for.
- Stay away from gossip and gossipers.
- Attend church.
- Serve at church.

These are just a few ways you can begin the process of renewing your mind.

*The more time you spend with Him and in His Word, the more
what you read will guide and direct you.*

Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the _____ . Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” NIV

Since your mind is like a computer, what you put in determines what will drive you. The more of the world you allow in, the more negative forces will drive your thoughts and behavior. Conversely, the more of the things of God you put in, the more your thoughts and actions are transformed, and you begin to produce good fruit. The renewing of your mind comes through God’s Word as you apply it to your life. Basically, it is taking in less of the world and more of the way He thinks. This is how you set yourself apart as dedicated to the Lord.

What commitment will you make during your weeks of our study? Of the two categories, what we put in and what we choose to keep out, in what specific ways are you willing to “set yourself apart”?

This is between you and the Lord. Whatever you decide, remember, the sole purpose is to begin to get His thoughts into your head and to maintain some distance between yourself and the world, not to create rigid rules that can cause you to become discouraged.

Focal Passage: *Joshua 3:5 tells us to consecrate ourselves, set ourselves apart, for the Lord will do amazing things among us.*

Question: *What am I willing to do differently to have more of God and less of the world?*

Something to look forward to: *Consider what is promised – the amazing thing. The life lived out near to God is quite an amazing thing.*

Day Three – God Plus

Determine where you will set your face. Today is a shorter lesson, but one that is vitally important to our journey into God’s intimate presence. If we don’t comprehend this one simple fact, we may never fully draw near to Him. Only He can meet our deepest needs. No matter what you believe, it is fact!

*Jeremiah 2:27b
says, “They have
turned their
_____ to me
and not their
_____ yet
when they are in
trouble, they say,
‘Come and save
us.’”*

Complete the verse in the margin. Now imagine God sitting on His throne looking out at His bride (you), and what He sees is your back and not your face. Many, if not most women spend their entire Christian walk looking at the world to fill them rather than to God. I know I did. There is a simple reason for this – they don’t believe God is *enough*. Few would ever dare admit such a thing, but the truth is that most of us regularly have our eyes gazing toward the world and what it offers. Sure, we want God, but we want God plus: God + our man. God + our family. God + the perfect life. God + a successful career. God + more of _____. Only you can fill in this blank. You know what your + is.

If you had only God, would that be enough? That’s a frightening question. Don’t you secretly fear that if you say He’s *enough* then He might make you prove it? When He truly becomes *enough*, even that question will not have the power over you it once did.

It stands to reason that a face can only be pointing in one direction at one time. You are either looking at God or at the world. If you are looking back and forth, that will only serve to make you dizzy. No wonder the world is filled with confused Christians. It is the rare woman who can say with certainty, “I look to God always.” That is who God intends for you to be, that rare woman. Do you believe that is a possibility? _____ Do you desire to become one of those rare women?

Since getting into His presence is our goal during this study, you will have to honestly determine where you are looking now. Only you can answer that question.

To what or whom do you look to get your needs met?

Husband	Children	Home	Career	Social Media
Your Looks	Education	Parents	Money	Perfectionism
Friends	Work/Serving	Other: _____		

While this list is by no means exhaustive, it may serve to get your thoughts going. Here are a few applications of this principle: If your children behave well or are successful in school, you feel people will see you as a good mother (Good enough). If you have countless “friends” or “followers” on social media outlets, you feel liked (Good enough). If you do things perfectly,

everyone will see you as someone who has it all together (Oops, good enough again). If you look thin/beautiful, once again, that makes you feel good enough.

Notice a theme? For women, ours is rarely a pursuit of power. Ours is typically a striving for acceptance and worth. We want to feel valuable. Instead of receiving our value from our position in Christ, which is fully accepted in the Beloved (Eph. 1:6 NKJV), we hope that somehow, someday, the things of this world will make us feel what we desperately need to feel, which is good enough or of value.

? To whom do you turn when things go wrong/right?

? Do your feelings rise and fall based on the opinion of others?

? If you had more money or possessions, do you think that would make you happier?

? Do you constantly long for what you don't have? When you get it, are you fulfilled?

Write your thoughts about any of the above questions here:

The main question you need to ask is this: Is Jesus enough, or am I looking to other things or people to fulfill me? Spend time today pondering this question. If you need to, take a few days. Pray and ask Him to show you what you look to for fulfillment and happiness.

Focal Passage: *Jeremiah 2:27 Sadly, we as modern day Christians are as guilty as the Israelites who first heard this message. Just as the unbelieving world does, we look at the things of this world to fulfill us.*

Question: *When God looks at me, does He see my back or my face?*

Summary: *Naturally, we want our needs met, but it is only Jesus who can truly meet them. Everything else gives us false hope and eventually disappoints.*

Day Four - Symptomatic

When we don't love God as He calls us to in Matthew 22, we are lovesick – spiritually sick due to lack of love. Along with lovesickness comes a variety of symptoms. Symptoms of lovesickness are expressed through behaviors and attitudes. Many spend their entire Christian walk simply trying to treat symptoms, but that will never make them well. The only treatment for lovesickness is receiving God's love and falling in love with Jesus in return.

Today's work is not as much of an assignment as it is an assessment. Sometimes we have a symptom that is not quite so bothersome, so it really never captures our attention. It may be easy to overlook. Maybe if you pray about some of the following things, you will find the Lord will show you that you were overdue for a check-up. Before you even begin, remember – this is not a cause for condemnation, but rather you should use this information to help you determine if you are indeed ailing. If you find your name highlighted in several places on this page, you are only going to use that knowledge for the purpose of diagnosis, to see that you need Jesus to step in and be your Healer.

As counter-intuitive as this may seem, these are not things we will be working toward treating. When you begin to draw nearer to God, He will let you know when you need to deal with these issues. His primary concern is to treat your *lovesickness*. Once you are so totally in love with Him that you can hardly contain yourself and you experience His love for you beyond anything you have ever known, you will see that many, if not most, of your symptoms have gone away quietly and without much of a fuss. From the very moment you begin to seek God and ask Him to help you love Him as He longs for you to, He immediately begins to tinker around inside of you. Sometimes you sense Him working. Other times, He just does God stuff without you even looking. He's like that. Please trust me on this.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”
Ezekiel 36:26

Behaviors/attitudes of concern: Please note: some symptoms may present themselves as good things.

I am:

Overly Insecure

Harsh with Words

A Gossip

Obsessed w/Children

Unkind

Lacking in Faith

Controlling

Idle/Spiritually Lazy

Easily Offended

Fearful/Anxious

Slow to Forgive

Discontent

Full of Shame

Greedy

Gluttonous

Envious

Holding on to Guilt

Judgmental of Others

Proud/Boastful

Selfish

Dishonest

Ungrateful

I struggle with:

Impure Thoughts

Addictions

Low Integrity

Craving Romantic Love

First, I want to admit to you, my name is totally smeared all around this page. Some I have struggled with in the past, some I still do. I truly believe I reside in the Promised Land with God. I do walk with Him daily. Still, some things arise out of my flesh and take me by surprise. When that happens, I know there is something off-balance going on in my spiritual life. If discontentment rears its ugly head, then I know I am seeking fulfillment from something the world offers. In that case, I go straight to God with it. I ask Him straight out, "What is going on inside of me, making me feel this way?" Always, He provides the answers I need. Not once has He let me down.

For most of us, many of the symptoms listed above could describe us at one time or another. When dealing with any of the symptoms listed, the questions you have to ask are these: Does it prevent me from knowing the freedom that Christ offers? Does it hinder my walk with the Lord? Does it keep me from God? Do I hurt others with this behavior?

Turn to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. This is a familiar verse to most. So let's do something a little different. On the lines below, write what *love is/does* vs. what *love isn't/doesn't*.

Love is/does: _____

Love isn't/doesn't: _____

As you read through this list of is and isn'ts, does and doesn'ts, you see most of the items listed as symptoms are opposite to what God's Word says love *is*, and most fall right in line with what love *isn't*. In that case, if you are riddled with symptoms, you are lacking in love. Rather than find verses to prove a few items on our list are indicative of being out of step with God, the Lord led me to this verse in 1 Corinthians, which sums up the point fairly precisely. It is an all-encompassing verse that speaks to most symptoms.

Since we have decided that we are seeking treatment for the illness of lovesickness rather than the symptoms, then why are we spending so much time on them? For some, looking at the list of symptoms may be the only way they will figure out they are lovesick. Remember our verse from day one? Hosea 4:6 tells us we are destroyed from lack of knowledge, which in turn would mean we are "saved" by knowledge – saved from ourselves, saved from living in a self-imposed exile away from God when He has every desire to draw us near.

The point I am trying to make is this: Do any of these things dominate your life? Do you use the excuse, "That's just the way I am." or maybe even, "I will always be this way"? If so, you have a symptom that shouldn't be ignored. I will go on to say a few difficult things:

- You cannot be walking closely with God and still be consistently nasty to others – including your husband and children. If you tear your husband to shreds one minute and then say a friendly "hi" to sister-so-and-so the next, you have a symptom.

- You cannot put your children above all things without realizing they have become your idol. They are a gift and a tremendous responsibility, but never has God said put them before Him or your husband. There is a reason for this: children leave. Ask any empty-nester. If you build your world around your children, your world will collapse in their absence. If you build your world around God, He remains forever. As for the hubby, he'll be around long after the children leave. God intends for you to build your marriage relationship and make it strong and impenetrable.
- You cannot live with constant fear and anxiety and know God's love intimately. When you truly get to know Him, up close and personal, you realize, He's got this! – whatever *this* is. There is nothing He can't handle on your behalf. There is no battle He can't win.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” 1 John 4:18 (NKJV)

Once you know He loves you absolutely and completely, fear is removed, because you know He will allow nothing into your life that was not first filtered through His love for you. This knowledge brings with it a sigh of relief and the ability to trust His plan for you. Remind yourself, *perfect love casts out fear*. It is a verse I repeat in my heart when fear comes against me.

- You cannot have experiential knowledge of Him and still have weak faith, the kind where you are tossed back and forth based on your circumstances. If the consistency of your Christian walk and your faithfulness depend on what is going on in your life, you may not have drawn near enough to Him to get a true glimpse. Maybe you haven't seen Him be BIG in your life. The faith model of one who has seen God would be: When times are good, they are near to Jesus; when times are bad, they are near to Jesus. Consistency, or lack thereof, can be a strong indicator of your overall level of faith.

We all experience these symptoms at times, but what you should ask yourself is:

When these symptoms arise in my life, am I immediately convicted and determined to ask the Lord to work with me to remove them? _____

On day five, your final assignment of the week, you will be asked to list a few of the symptoms, ones that you feel you may struggle with. For now, on the following page write out a prayer asking God to help you see *you* for who *you* really are. First, though, see what Scripture says. He knows you through and through. Let Him illuminate your heart. Allow Him to shine His light in your darkest places.

“You have _____, Lord, and you _____.” Psalm 139:1

In every way, the Holy Spirit knows your deepest thoughts and motives. He knows your silent struggles. This is the season to allow Him full access.

My Prayer:

Focal Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:4-7- *What love is/isn't...*

Question: *Are there symptoms hindering my closeness with God?*

Conclusion: *Only God's love can rid us of our symptoms.*

Day Five – Suppression

John 16:13

“However, when He, the _____ of _____, has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

Was yesterday difficult? It is never easy looking within, especially when you uncover some things that make you squirm. Be assured, though, the time you invest now in deciding who you are in light of what God’s Word says will allow you to proceed in the spirit of truth. Hiding from the ugliest part of our own nature will never last long. Eventually, the truth of who we are will catch up with us, if only in our own hearts. For me, it was because I knew who I really was deep down inside, that, for a season, I fell away. I couldn’t stand the feeling of being a faker.

As you looked at the list, you may have found yourself rather discouraged because you tend to demonstrate many of the symptoms of lovesickness. Honestly, I displayed most of them at one time during a particular season of my life. Now, I am free from most of them. And trust me, that is not bragging! If not for the transformation in me through God’s Word and through this intimate relationship with Him, I would still be a hot mess today. He did it all, every single solitary bit of it. I simply began to draw near to Him. Even now, when I look back, I am reminded that was my only role in the transformation – my willingness to draw near and to allow Him total access.

Another reminder: We are not looking at this list with the idea that we now have to fix all that ails us. So do not let your hearts be troubled (Jesus said that.). We are simply taking an honest appraisal of what is going on inside. We will, however, try to come up with a means of lessening the severity of our symptoms.

Think of it this way, if you have an infection, and with it a severe cough, the doctor will not say, “Just take cough medicine.” His first priority will be to give you an antibiotic to treat the infection, but still, he may give you a cough suppressant to make you rest easier, knowing that the antibiotic will eventually make the cough go away. In our case, as we draw near to God, He will treat our lovesickness and eventually our symptoms will begin to fade. In the meantime the suppressant may be little things like:

- **Acknowledging the problem** – In Romans 12:3, Paul advises us to think of ourselves with sober judgement. Not being sensitive to our own behaviors and attitudes is a recipe for disaster. This may be the most critical step in suppressing the behavior. Example: If you are harsh and critical, admit it to yourself and to God. Stop with the defense, “Well, if people weren’t so stupid.” No matter if our criticism seems deserved or warranted, we are called as Christians to be kind and gentle. Just to avoid any level of hypocrisy on my part, I admit that naturally, I have

a critical spirit, and I lean toward perfectionism, in my flesh that is. So I struggle every day with having expectations of others that are unrealistic, so my default is to criticize. My prayer is very often for a gentler spirit.

- **Admitting it to a trusted friend** – Having an accountability partner can be a great way to begin to suppress an unhealthy behavior or attitude. For many of the symptoms above, openly discussing them with a friend can help you see it in its true light. There is something about bringing hidden things into the light that offers freedom. Obviously, the key to this is finding that trustworthy friend. Keep in mind that if you have a friend who has shared private things with you about others, you better believe she will share your private matters with other friends. She has her own symptoms to acknowledge. So be wary in this matter. If your issue is beyond what you can openly share with any human, the Lord Jesus sits each and every day, waiting for you to talk to Him. You can be more honest with Him than with any ordinary friend. He is an extraordinary Friend.
- **Search the Scriptures for verses that speak to your particular symptom** – Begin to replace the lie you believe with the truth of God’s Word. Feelings of insecurity and shame can be fought with the knowledge of what God says about you. Even while you may not *feel* different at first, when you memorize Scripture you are beginning the process of transforming your mind. I know for me personally, one such verse comes to mind. See the verse in the margin.
- There is something about these words that penetrated my heart. I remember looking at them, and the word *precious* rang over and over in my mind and still does. When something is precious to any of us, don’t we treat it with great care? Don’t we watch over it at all cost? Knowing I was precious to God made me feel tremendously valuable, which in turn altered what I felt about myself. What you need are your own “precious” verses. You need ones that speak into your need.
- **Not being around people who cause you to display these behaviors** – (gossip, addictions, sexual sin, negative friends, etc . . .). As obvious as this seems, we still tend to migrate toward those friends who are the least healthy for us, ones who either encourage or tolerate our symptoms. We feel guilty about letting go of a friendship that has a foundation so old that it pre-dates our new life in Christ. Or sometimes it’s other believers who are the negative influence, and sadly, family members whom we can’t disconnect from. In that case your only option is to take care when you are with the ones who bring out the worst in you. Pray specifically prior to a family gathering. And if the one who brings out your worst happens to sleep next to you each night, pray before you ever climb out of that shared bed. Prayer works!
- When you want this or that, stop and **give thanks** for specific things in your life. It really is a deterrent to discontentment. I have found that when I want more of anything, it is truly a spiritual issue rather than a physical or mental one. I have all I need and more, in the physical realm; but in the spiritual there are times when I simply need more of Jesus. My spiritual need tends to manifest itself through physical longing. Now, after understanding this principle, when I



“Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you...”
Isaiah 43:4



have the “I wants,” I turn to God and ask for more of Him. Yes, I understand the concept that when I received the Holy Spirit at the time of my salvation I received all of who Jesus is, but still, there are times when *He* wants to expand my capacity to know Him on a deeper level. In those times the Spirit within me is crying out for more. Because of my selfish flesh, I assume this discontentment I feel is something tangible, something physical in nature, so I begin looking around at what might satisfy me – a new house, new clothes, a fresher haircut, remodel whichever room seems most tired. The longer I walk with God, the quicker I see the connection between discontentment and spiritual longing. Each and every time, I simply need more Jesus. We all do.

- Gluttony? Begin to **focus on good health**. That may sound overly simplistic, but the truth is, you only get one body. When it’s worn out, game over. Just like your mind, what you put in is what you can expect to get out of it. The energy you have to serve the Lord in the years to come will be based on the way you take care of your body today. Good health boils down to these basic truths: Eat more of what God provides and less processed foods. Fast from excess (in the spiritual sense of the word “fast”) – eat only how much your body needs, no matter how good it tastes. Move a little – walk, bike, jog, clean house, just do something to move your body.

Keep in mind, if you have symptoms – help is on the way to treat the illness. Be patient with yourself as you begin this journey. You have only one responsibility in this - be willing to draw near and to allow Him total access. That’s it!

Now, the time has come. Which symptoms do you see exhibited in your life?

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Based on our strategy to suppress our symptoms while we wait for the Healer to heal us, in what ways might you be willing to suppress your symptom? Since the strategies we covered may not fit your particular need, what other ways might you find to suppress your symptoms?

Today was not only text heavy, it was a day that could bring us heaviness of heart. We can’t allow the enemy to discourage us with those whispers, “You are never going to get it right.” “This is just the way you are.” “You can never change.” “You’re not as good as others.”

What does a liar do but lie? Our enemy has one goal, to keep us as far away from God as he possibly can. So if he can convince you that you will never change, or even that you really don't need to change these behaviors, he will succeed at his goal. Are you gonna let him win?

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *Do I love the Lord with all my heart, soul, and mind?*

Day Two: *How will I set myself apart for this season?*

Day Three: *What am I looking to in order to meet my needs?*

Day Four: *Check-up – Am I symptomatic?*

Day Five: *Suppressing the symptoms while Help is on the way.*

Into His Presence

Bible Study – Session Two

Day One – The Mended Veil

The final assignment of Session One was an assessment to help identify symptoms of lovesickness. It is our determination to not dwell on the symptoms/sins, but rather to focus on getting ourselves to the place of being in God's presence and getting to know Him more intimately. Once you know Him and grasp His love for you, you will easily come to love Him in return. When you love Him fully, many of your symptoms will fade away. When you understand how vital His presence is, you conclude that whatever is hindering your nearness to Him must be removed. That will be the focus of our week.

The mended veil is simply a metaphor. You may have once felt near to God but now you feel far away. The true veil cannot be mended. The term, *mended veil*, simply refers to the self-imposed barrier we place between ourselves and God. Our stitches come from things that have been done to us and sometimes from things we've done. Still, it is self-imposed. Even when the stitch is the aftermath of what another has done to you, you get to choose whether or not to allow it to remain. Going forward, as you begin the process of unmending the veil, God desires to remove all your stitches, but are you willing to allow Him?

Galatians 5:1 says, "It is for _____ that Christ has set us _____. Stand firm, then, and do not _____ yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

**"But whenever
anyone turns to
the Lord, the
veil is taken
away."
2 Corinthians
3:16**

Anything that binds and hinders us is purely by our own choice. Notice the word "let" in our Scripture reference above? We choose to hold on to what hurts us and encumbers us for many reasons. Sometimes, it's all we know. If you have always felt unworthy, no matter the reason you feel that way, then your heart will try to tell you that it is part of who you are. But the heart is deceitful above all things. (Jer. 17:9) If Jesus is your Savior, then He can break any bondage, remove all doubt, and unmend the veil – in order that you may see Him for who He really is and live in His intimate presence.

The following list is by no means exhaustive. You will notice as you read through them, some overlap and are considered symptoms as well. Bear in mind, a symptom (from last weeks' study) is an outward behavior or inward attitude that indicates our distance from God. The stitch is what keeps us from God.

Ask yourself, “Does/Do _____ prevent my closeness with God.”

Discontentment	Unworthiness	Self-Pity	Divorce
Sexual Abuse	A Judgmental Attitude	Shame	Idols
A Great Daddy	A Bad Daddy	My Spouse	My Children
Health Issues	Painful Childhood	Spiritual Laziness	Loss
Self-Reliance	Unforgiveness	A Past Abortion	Grief
Bitterness	Addictions	Pride/Control	Self
An Ordinary Life	Disappointment	Unbelief	Work

From the list above, do any of these stitches hinder your relationship with God?

Yes No

If you answered no to the question above, then you are one amazing woman! If you said yes, you are just like the rest of us. Glancing at the list myself, I see a few stitches that I still allow to block my view of Him on a regular basis; others show up on occasion. I believe as long as I live I will struggle with one or more of them. It is difficult to watch HGTV and not find discontentment creeping up on you. Can I get a witness?

Most stitches can be separated into a few categories

- ***Inflicted***– Stitches can result from painful experiences in life, hurts and hardships that have taken up residence inside of us and settled into our way of thinking and belief system. Physical or sexual abuse, loss, and divorce are but a few examples of things inflicted upon us that can cause us to maintain distance from God. Because of them, we might be angry that God would allow such things.
- ***Idolatry*** – We can put others or even ourselves on the throne of our lives. Our husbands and children can easily become what our world revolves around. In that case, what seems to be a good thing, devotion to your family, can instead be what keeps you from drawing near to God. Your needs are being met, or at least it seems, by your role in your family.
- ***Self***– We can be so wrapped up in ourselves, that we can hardly see God at all. Or, we can be so self-sufficient that we don’t feel as if we need Him.
- ***Bitterness and Unforgiveness***– These two are cancers that will eat a believer alive. Because God chooses to forgive us, and because forgiveness is so close to His heart, holding on to unforgiveness will directly impact our nearness to God.
- ***Shame***– Guilt and a sense of unworthiness can overtake those with past experiences they can’t forget. Abortion, infidelity, divorce, addictions, and other poor choices render many

believers so full of shame they can hardly believe that a holy God could love them. So their shame becomes a stitch.

- *Ease*— Some stitches may result from never having had tremendous need for God, such as in the case of an “ordinary life,” having parents, especially a daddy who met your needs. This is more commonly found in church kids. God has always been part of their family but not truly a part of their life.
- *Unbelief and Doubt*— The ultimate hindrance is when we don’t believe closeness with God is even a possibility. In that case, we never truly try to draw near Him.

No matter their origin, the one thing all stitches have in common is this:

They prevent us from seeing God for who He really is and from drawing near to Him.

Can you think of any other stitches, things not listed here, that may hinder your closeness with God? Personalize this. It could be an abusive relationship, multiple marriages, an affair, anything that is personal to you. Along with what the stitch is, decide how it might hinder you from seeing God. Maybe you blame God. You may wonder if He could love you after what you’ve done. Or maybe you wonder if God really loves you based on what He has allowed into your life. Give this plenty of thought. As you think through this, be honest with yourself and with God. If you feel angry, tell Him so. If you feel unworthy, tell Him. Be real. Be yourself. Remember, the truth will set you free. (John 8:32)

Focal Passage: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

Question: Have I built a self-imposed wall between myself and God?

Something to consider: “Good” things can be a stitch in the veil of how I see God.

Day Two – Real Deal People

Do you ever find it difficult to reconcile what you read of the God of the Bible with what you experience in your everyday life? For all of us, when we see something the Bible says is ours, yet we don't experience it in our lives, it's easy to become discouraged, disappointed even. If the Bible says you should experience peace, but all you feel is anxiety, you may eventually come to believe peace is not possible – ever. That would be a stitch. Before you know it, anxiety and fear is in control of you. How does that hinder your sight of God? Fear tells you God is not big enough. Anxiety tells you that He won't show up. Fear causes you to react in ways and make decisions that are not in your best interest.

Do I possess what the Word says is mine?

“But you will receive _____ when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Do you feel this power in your life?

“_____ I leave with you; my _____ I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
John 14:27

Do you feel this peace?

If God says through His Word that these things are yours and yet you are not experiencing them in your life, it's easy to get frustrated, a building up of disappointment. When what we read in the Bible doesn't seem to line up with what we experience, it affects our belief system. We come to believe that we will never experience them, so we stop trying. Next thing you know, you are simply going through the religious motions of Christianity but not really living the Christian life you were intended to live.

“Do you know any “real deal” people in your life? People who live out their Christian walk with authenticity?”

In Galatians 5:22, we are given a list of the fruits of the Spirit. Of course you know them, most Christians do. Still, have you ever heard a believer say, “I have no self-control” or, “I have no patience”? Sure. Most

likely you have said it. I've said both. The fact is, though, when the Holy Spirit came to reside in you, He brought all the fruit...the whole fruit bowl.

List the fruit here:

For most of us, because we don't experience the fruit, we think it isn't present. Make no mistake, if you are "in Christ" then Christ is "in you," so it's there. The fruit goes where He goes. The farther away you *feel* from God, the less likely you are to experience this fruit in your life. Once again, like a broken record, I say – you have to get near to God. You have to know Him so intimately that He not only speaks softly to you, but He also is allowed to manifest His fruit in you and through you. It is not the fruit of Lisa, or the fruit of (insert name here), it is the fruit of the Spirit. It is what you *allow* Him to be in you. If you refuse Him full access because of your stitches or sin, of course you won't experience the fruit.

Here are some examples of hindrances:

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your _____ in _____ give good gifts to those who ask him!" Matthew 7:11

You feel a lack of peace. In this case you most likely don't trust Him. If you don't trust Him, it's because you don't believe He has your best interest at heart in all things that happen to you and to those you love. If you don't think He has your best interest at heart, then you don't even get the concept of a loving Father. Complete the verse in the margin.

This is an area where you need to know Him for who He really is, God the Father.

Are you following the process? With each stitch, there is a trail you must follow. Lack of peace comes because you don't trust Him. You don't trust Him because you do not know who He really is. The simple solution? Get to know Him better – not *about* Him but to *know Him*.

Patience is not your virtue. If you struggle with lack of patience, you can pretty much be certain it is either a trust issue or a "self" issue. In the case of lack of trust, you do not trust God's timing for the things you desire in your life, whether they be longer term or even shorter term desires.

For matters that are more instantaneous, like extreme frustration when waiting in line or at a restaurant, this is more of a me, myself, and I issue – *self*. In either case,

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."
Ephesians 4:2

these are stitches preventing you from the closeness you need with God. Remember, it is walking closely with Him that allows Him to manifest the fruit of the Spirit in your daily life.

Consider the people that you see as the “real deal”. Now that you have a little more time to think about it, what attributes do you see in them that you would like to experience in your own life?

Would you be willing to talk with at least one of these people and ask some probing questions?

Questions like:

- ? Have you always walked with the Lord as you do now?
- ? Whatever the attribute is that you admire, ask if it is something that came easily for them, or was it a process to claim?
- ? Were there times they struggled with doubt and insecurity?
- ? Do they still struggle in certain areas?

Doing this will, for one, give you an idea of how the person you admire has gotten to where they are. You will likely find that, at some point, they chose to pursue God with all they had. Godliness does not happen casually or by chance. Godliness is a choice you make. Also, this may give you a road map to follow. For me, I told you that I came to that point where I got real before God. I was willing. Maybe they can share insights and specific steps they took that will help you along your journey.

“Thus, by their
fruit you will

_____.”

Matthew 7:20

Focal Passage: “Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” Matthew 7:20

Question: Do I possess what the Word says is mine?

Truth: Godliness is a choice you make.

Day Three – Stitches in Review

Review your stitches list again from the list on Day One. Of the stitches you may have in your life, how might each hinder your perception of God? Personal Example: Because my dad wasn't in my life regularly, my perception of God was one of distance and disconnection. That was a huge hurdle for me. It took years of walking more closely with God before I felt that "child of God" feeling. I could hardly see Him as my heavenly Father because I had a skewed perspective of what a father was. Or, death/loss may cause you to see God as unwilling to help or save. You may need to pray, asking God to reveal to you how a particular issue hinders how you see Him. If you don't see Him for who He really is, because of a skewed perspective, you will never long to draw near to Him.

<i>Stitch</i>	<i>How it hinders my view of God</i>
_____	_____

_____	_____

_____	_____

We covered how some of the stitches hinder our nearness to God within the categories list, but here are a few more brief explanations to get your thought process going.

Work— Church work can be a great hindrance to our nearness to God by becoming our focus, our end goal. Rather than fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, (Heb. 12:2) we fix our eyes on the work we do. Even if you are working in humility and not to be noticed, you can still miss the One you really serve. Planning, serving, and working can never take the place of a relationship, and it will never give you the relationship with Him that you need in order to feel fulfilled. Work and service should be by-products of our relationship with God. The relationship must come first.

Discontentment— This is one I will cover in terms of personal experience throughout the study. Be certain, any time you feel a constant need for more of anything, it's a strong indication that you are not getting your needs met within the bounds of your relationship with Jesus. If other things of this world constantly entice you, falsely convincing you that they will satisfy, then you haven't found Him to be *enough*.

Spiritual Laziness— If you blindly go through religious motions and never seek God beyond what you currently know of Him, then you can hardly expect to draw near to Him. Your relationship with God requires effort on your part. Investing your time and energy in Him is necessary. This stitch is closely linked with unbelief. Again I stress, when you don't believe more is available to you, you aren't likely to pursue more. If you could only envision what He has planned for you, the deeply satisfying closeness that is open to you, you would pursue Him with all you have in you.

Write 1 Corinthians 2:9 on the lines below.

Pride— I know of no other wide-spread, more dangerous issue than pride. We are warned in Proverbs 16 that pride comes before a fall. I believe most of us can attest to that. Pride is the setting up of ourselves in the place of God. Was that not Lucifer's sin that got him cast out of heaven? Sad to say, if you suffer from pride, you most likely don't even see it in yourself. That's what makes it so dangerous. Our pride often comes out, as far as we can see, as good things such as perfectionism and control. My hand is raised here!!

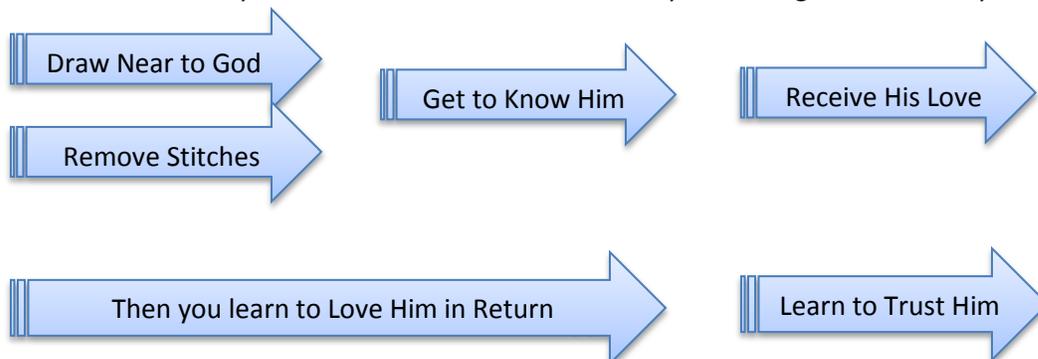
As you think through the exercise at the beginning of Day Three, I hope you will really pray and look within to try and discover how past and present wounds and issues can hinder your view of God. Sometimes, as I have had to do, you will have to take an uncomfortable look at yourself. (That sober judgement that Paul advises.) Even when you don't like what you see, being honest and getting real is the first step in removing those hindrances.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that _____ and the sin that so easily entangles.” Hebrews 12:1

Complete the verse in the margin.

If you allow these stitches to continue to hinder your view of God, then you can never fully grasp the extent of His love for you. If you don't know and experience His love for you, then you can't truly love Him in return. If you don't know His love, you can't trust Him. If you don't trust Him, you will never know peace. If you don't trust Him, you can never possibly become the person He intends for you to be.

Do you see this interconnection? I feel as if I am talking in circles, but there are indeed interwoven truths that cannot be separated from one another. Here is the order of our journey toward a more intimate relationship with God. Notice the chain begins with parallel steps. As you choose to pursue and draw near to God, many of the stitches that once hindered you will begin to fade away.



And now, the complexity and simplicity of removing stitches. If it were only as easy as saying, “Do these three or four things and you’ve got it licked.” These stitches are interwoven into the fabric of your life, some, so much so that you wonder if you’ll ever be rid of them. Since many have taken a lifetime to create, they may take a long season with God to untangle. Others will simply slip away, unnoticed for the most part.

Here is how I’ve seen this work in my own life. Please forgive me for being overly simplistic, but that’s how I learn best. I’m a bottom-line, keep-it-simple kind of girl.

- 1) *I chose to draw near.* I say *chose*, when, in all actuality, God was drawing me back toward Him. The fact that you are working through this study is proof that God is drawing you nearer.
- 2) *I began to catch glimpses of Him.* Even though I had tons of “stitches” keeping me from Him, He honored my small step toward Him by beginning to speak to me through His Word. He started showing up in my daily life in ways that so totally captivated me, I could hardly wait for the next encounter. That was what got me out of bed each morning, that anticipation of hearing from God or somehow experiencing His touch. This was the beginning of a sacred romance.
- 3) *The stitches began to unravel.* This is what we will discuss in greater detail in tomorrow’s study material.

The process of removing stitches is how you get to know Him, and yet getting to know Him is what causes the stitches to unravel. Read that last part again. It is nearly a paradox – one that’s difficult to reason through.

We can use the example of shame. When a woman is filled with shame, she has likely convinced herself that God is rejecting her and doesn’t want to have an intimate relationship with her. So when she takes that tiny step of faith and begins to draw near, she will find Him accepting of her. How does this happen? Through His Word, by His Spirit, He will speak into her heart. Verses of grace, mercy, and acceptance will leap off of the page and into her heart. As this happens, the stitch of shame begins to fade, while at the same time she is getting to know something vital about God: He is full of grace and mercy. He accepts her as she is.

This is where faith comes in. You have to believe that He will work all this out in you and for you, no matter what stitch you are personally dealing with. All you have to do is be willing, draw near in a quiet place, read His Word, and lessen the amount of the world you allow in during this season. Give Him room to work, and He will absolutely transform you, mind and spirit.

Focal Passage: “...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.” Hebrews 12:1

Question: Am I willing to walk by faith, believing that God will work all this out in me?

Summary: The paradox is: You have to draw near to remove your stitches ~ yet stitches are what keep us from Him.

Day Four – Pullin’ Weeds

We begin today by mixing our metaphors. For this assignment, we will identify our *stitches* by the term *weeds*. If you know anything at all about gardening, you know that weeds can sneak up on you and ruin a lawn or flowerbed. Without constant attention to weeds, you can be assured that they’ll eventually take over, choking out even the healthiest grass or hardy flowers.



Read Matthew 13:24-30



“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed _____ in his field. But while everyone was _____, his enemy came and sowed _____ among the wheat and went away.” (vs. 24-25)

Our intentions are good, well at least for the majority of us. We go to church and try to live out this Christian life to the best of our ability. We read a little. Listen to preachers and teachers. We allow good seed in. Isn’t that enough? In a word...no! There’s an enemy who wants to prevent you from producing a healthy crop. He sneaks in and sows weeds among your good seed. The verse above says, “while everyone was sleeping.” That intrigues me. While who is sleeping? Us, you and me. When we are not diligently watching over our hearts and minds, he, the enemy, sows negativity and doubt into our lives. He whispers, causing us to question if we will ever get it right. He tempts us with the desire for more. Watch TV one evening and you’ll likely be tempted by something, whatever your weakness is. The season you are about to embark on is one of pulling weeds, and, simultaneously, planting good seed.

Understanding the source of weeds can be helpful. What is expressed as the weed of insecurity today may have roots leading back to childhood. Something that causes you to become angry today may have a root that can be traced back to a moment when you felt mistreated. The weed of being manipulative or demanding may draw its energy from the root of feeling a lack of control in your present season or even as far back as childhood. The point is, what you are experiencing today as something that hinders your relationship with God may have its source in something that happened to you long ago. You have to track from the weed to the root.

Here is how it began for me:

Pullin’ Weeds

Soon after moving into our previous house, we had a pool installed in the back yard. Once the concrete was poured and the dirt back-filled, we set out to grow grass. The dirt we were using was rich, dark pig dirt. You can only imagine how it smelled. Because it was so well fertilized and we planted good seed, we had every reason to believe it would grow healthy, thick grass. When the

grass started coming in, however, these satanic weeds began to pop up all over. Obviously, they came in with the pig dirt. Not only did they outgrow the tender shoots of grass by leaps and bounds, they had these wicked, and I couldn't even make this part up, red thorns that would require you to wear heavy gloves to touch them. I'm telling you, they were satanic. Little did the enemy know, this would become one of the most spiritually productive seasons of my life.

I was angry and disappointed. I had always wanted a pool, and because I was getting my needs met by the things of this world at that time, the hundreds, maybe even thousands of weeds that attacked my yard devastated me. You know that feeling when you think you are finally getting something you've longed for but then things fall apart? How you say things like, "I can't have anything nice." Or, "Why does everything bad happen to me?" Okay, that seems overly dramatic, but for whatever reason, my high hopes were dashed, and devastated is not an overstatement of my feelings at the time.

One morning I was out pulling the weeds. Furiously, I was snapping them off and tossing them aside when I very clearly heard this voice inside of me say, "If you keep snapping them off, they will only grow back. You have to dig down to the root."

Hesitating, I considered what I heard. Immediately, I knew it was God. At that point in my journey, I don't know if I had ever heard Him speak to me so clearly. But since I was convinced it was Him, I went to get my weeding tool. From that moment on, I began to dig down to the root of each weed. At one point, overwhelmed and discouraged, I looked at all the weeds before me and said in my heart, "There's so many," to which He replied, "Just pull one at a time."

As I pulled weeds that day, I acknowledged before God that my life was just as full of weeds. The weeds became a metaphor for my terribly messy life at the time. From the "stitches" listed, I had over a dozen of them. I was truly a mess. My symptoms were obvious to anyone looking at me, and my stitches were thick and heavy. (Only I didn't have that terminology back then. To me, they were simply wicked, red thorned weeds.)

My weeding tool became my Bible. I began to call Him my Gardner.

He met me each and every day in the garden. And one by one, we pulled weeds – literally and spiritually speaking.

When this process of pulling spiritual weeds commenced, my number one question for God was where to begin? He showed me that bitterness and anger was, at that time, my greatest hindrance to drawing near to Him. There was something about the bitterness I was experiencing that was like a cancer to me. I could make no progress in many other areas until that one weed was pulled.

Through much prayer, reading Scripture, going to Bible studies at my church (and working through the homework), I began to let go of some serious anger and bitterness. Even hatred for someone significant in my life shook loose from the soil of my heart. From there I would simply ask Him what was next.

How He showed me: I wish there were a clearer answer, something I could tell you to specifically watch for, but just as we are uniquely designed, so too will our journeys in weed pullin' differ. Here is what the process looked like for me. I asked, "Where will we begin?" And then I watched and waited. Most often, there would be a thread of revelation He would weave through the fabric of my life that became His answer. A particular topic would come up in Sunday school, then soon after, I would read something similar in Scripture or other faith based reading. It may have been a passing comment that a friend would say or a sermon I would hear. Whatever it was, say bitterness or anger issues, it was

plastered all over the billboard of my life. I just *knew*. And you will too. You will *know* deep down inside where to begin.

Today's Assignment:

From your list of stitches (page 22) , simply go to Him and ask, "Lord, where do we begin?" From there faithfully meet with Him each and every morning (or night for you night owls). Read His Word. Don't miss a Sunday service (you never know where His direction will come from). Watch for a common theme to arise. Give this time. Watch and wait for where He leads. It may be subtle, or He may very clearly show you, "This is it!" and you will have no doubt.

Still, after digging around in my garden for years now, I have plenty of weeds that still pop up. Surprisingly, that's become an exciting part of the journey with Him. There is always something interesting He shows me, something He shows me about what's deep down in my heart. Please don't misunderstand this. It's not as if He's some overly critical parent, constantly looking over my shoulder saying, "And here's another thing you are doing wrong!" It's never that way. If you sense that, you can believe that is the harsh and condemning voice of the enemy. When the Lord has something that we need to work on, it most often arises as a subtle, or not so subtle, theme of our lives. Example: Maybe I keep blowing my top over little things. Because I do walk with Him, I feel that nudge of conviction in my spirit. It will become a stronger nudge in several ways. Say I'm reading Scripture, you can believe that every verse will somehow relate to gentleness or anger. The next Sunday, the sermon will be about the tongue. Worst of all, I'll see that same trait in someone else, maybe they blast me for instance. The minute I carry my hurt feelings to the Lord, He gives me a gentle reminder of how I acted the same way recently with someone else. Do you see what I mean, this theme? I call it a thread of revelation. He reveals things to me by weaving them throughout the fabric of my everyday life. Not once has He texted or emailed. I'd prefer that, but for whatever reason, He seems to enjoy subtlety and slow exposure.

Oh, and here's an interesting fact about weeds. Literally, when you are working in the garden or yard and you try to pull a weed from dry ground, it will break off and the root remains. If you water the weed first, it will slide right out, root and all because it's in loose, moist soil. This works almost every time.

In a spiritual sense, the same holds true. If you try to pluck a spiritual weed without watering it with the Word of God, Living Water, you may get rid of what's in sight, but you better believe it will come right back. Water! Water! Water! (Translated: Bible! Bible! Bible!)



"He sent forth His

_____ and

_____ them."

Psalm 107:20



Remember, Help is on the way.

There was a particular season when I looked at my life and saw nothing but weeds. When I was most discouraged, the Lord assured me we would simply pull one at a time. Now, when I look back, I realize I wasn't even the one to choose where we would begin. Because He knows me through and through, He knew where to begin, and from there, which to tackle next. Ask Him where to begin, work with Him in the area He chooses, and watch as He begins to transform your garden.

Focal Passage: Matthew 13:24-30 *"But while everyone was sleeping..."*

Question: Lord, where do we begin?

Conclusion: Weeds are sown when we least expect it.

Day Five – Intimate Prayer

“Come with me by yourselves to a _____
_____ and get some rest.” Mark 6:31

The quiet place

Where is your quiet place? Do you have one? _____

Do you have a time when you regularly meet with God? _____

Both in the physical realm and the spiritual, you need that quiet place to be alone with Jesus and simply get to know Him. Carve out a special place where you keep your Bible, journal, index cards, and whatever devotional material you use. This is for the *physical drawing near*.

You need to begin to pray in a new and intimate way.

- **You have full access to God.** Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Basically, God tells us, He is there when we need Him. His door is always open.
- **Talk to Him where you feel comfortable.** You may have that comfy chair, or you may walk in your neighborhood each morning. No matter where your place is, talk to Him.
- **Talk to Him openly, without holding back.** While we fear Him, in the sense that we revere and respect Him, we are not required to use Old English thee’s and thou’s as some sign of respect. Be who you are when you approach Him. Talk to Him as you would a father or your closest friend. Pour out all the things inside of you. Since He knows your deepest thoughts and hurts anyway, why not begin a dialogue about them? For instance, if you have determined that the stitch you need to work on is that your dad was distant, which causes you to see God as distant, then open up the conversation with, “Father, I’ve needed a dad all my life. I’m asking You to show Yourself to me as my Dad.” Then tell Him about the hurt and disappointment you have felt. What matters is that you begin to talk in open and honest ways.
- **Ask questions.** When I’m struggling with something painful, I ask all sorts of questions. “Lord, why do I feel this way? Why is something so seemingly insignificant affecting me so strongly.” Often, when I ask such probing questions, He will bring past memories to mind. I’m not suggesting that all weeds come from childhood. Maybe you felt embarrassed in a particular situation even as an adult, and without realizing it, since then, when in a similar situation, you immediately become uncomfortable. Truthfully, I have yet to figure out how knowing what the root of the problem is helps as much as it does, but it does. Once He shows me what is triggering present feelings or emotions, it’s as if I am then free to choose to hang on or let go of

whatever that old hurt is. If I let go, I'm set free of it being a reoccurring hindrance. If I choose to hold on, there seems to be an onslaught of similar situations. I'm not saying I have God figured out, but it seems as if He's determined to allow the thorn to poke me until I stop holding onto the thorn bush. Simply put, let it go, whatever *it* was. Choose to let go.

Here are some questions to ponder:

- ? What is your prayer life like? Is it open and honest communication, or do you say overly formal prayers and feel disconnected?

- ? Do you sense His presence with you as you speak to Him?

- ? Do you hear Him speak to you through His Word and His Spirit?

To draw near spiritually, you have to practice the ability of being before Him, in His presence. You may begin by picturing yourself before the throne. What would you say to Him there? Based on a devotion I once read in an Oswald Chambers book, *My Utmost for His Highest*, I began to practice being in God's presence when I pray. I started at the throne. For a season I knelt there to pray. I imagined myself, as much as my human mind would allow, kneeling there. Somehow, that changed everything. My prayers became more real is the only way I can explain it. I seemed to stay more focused. I found I was unable to babble out repetitive prayers, ones that weren't truly heart felt or specific. You know, the "Bless everyone in this place." Or, "Thank You for all You've done for me." While nothing is wrong with either prayer, I found that once I intentionally placed myself before Him, I became more real in my conversation. More like, "I pray You will be with Adam. Do whatever it takes to make him Yours." A downright frightening prayer for any mama to pray. And my thank You's changed to, "Thank you for my husband and how hard he works to provide for us. Thank You for steady work for him."

Eventually, though, we, the Lord and I, moved from the throne room. Does that sound somehow unbiblical or irreverent? He seems okay with it, considering He still meets with me each and every morning on the beach and we watch the ocean waves together. On occasion we move back to the throne room in the heavenlies, but mostly, I go to the beach and take my seat next to Him, where He holds my right hand and listens to me. It's where I have gotten to know Him best. It's there, too, where He has helped me to get to know myself. I'm open and honest. I just talk as I would to a close

"Yet I am always
with you; you hold
me by my right
hand."

Psalm 73:23

friend or to my husband. Besides the “bless them” and “thank You” prayers, we now talk about real stuff, my stuff. We discuss what He has planned for me, things I need to let go of, ways I can be more like Him, and best of all, He constantly reminds me of His love for me. Sometimes, He simply reminds me that I am His or that He is jealous for me, which sends shivers up and down my spine. Over the years, I’ve come to feel closer to Jesus than I could have ever imagined possible, closer than I feel to anyone else in the earthly realm, my husband included. I hold nothing back, and always, always, He is there. Now I realize the depth of my previous unbelief. I truly never believed that such a level of intimacy was possible. But it is. I’m proof that it is.

Since I’ve been praying in this new way, my life has so drastically altered that you would hardly know I’m that same mess of a woman, the one who was once so full of wicked, red-thorned weeds. At times I realize that in my excitement to share the way in which I pray, I tend to freak some people out. I start talking and talking, and soon I see arched eyebrows and immediately I can read their thoughts. “This girl’s done gone crazy!” (That was to be read with a Southern drawl.) Because my prayer life is so vibrant and real, and because I remember what disconnected prayers feel like, I am perfectly prepared to seem crazy or undignified. I can’t not tell! Even at the risk of being dismissed, I still tell what I know to be true. He truly is just a quiet place away. His presence is so real that I often open my eyes and expect Him to be sitting there.

Granted, some people would feel totally irreverent sitting on the beach with Jesus and spilling their guts to Him. Okay, then simply kneel before the throne. At least in practicing His presence, your prayers will become more narrow and specific, rather than general and vague. Simply start somewhere. It is vital that you begin to pray in the spirit of intimacy, in the quiet place alone with Him. As for your quiet place, meet with Him where you feel most comfortable.

Today, try to decide where your internal quiet place is. One lady walks with Him down a path. I know one who goes to the mountains to meet Him there. Wherever you go, just know that He will teach you all things there. It takes some practice, and some days my mind still drifts. For the most part, though, when I picture sitting there with Him on the beach or in the heavenlies, Him holding my right hand, (For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.” [Isaiah 41:13](#)) we simply talk. I do much of the talking much of the time. At times He speaks into my heart. Mostly, He talks to me when I am reading my Bible or speaks to me in visions. (Not the long-bearded-prophet kind of visions, more like showing me a scene of a past moment or an analogy of something.)

I’ve been asked if I see His face. No, I don’t. Sometimes I feel as if I catch a glimpse, but I never see His face. I see His hand holding mine. It’s so real and intimate that I have never felt alone again. When He says He will never leave me nor forsake me...I finally get it! No matter where I am, I can go to that quiet place and be with Him. Washing dishes, folding laundry, driving down the road, I go there. He is always waiting for me and has become more real in our quiet place than all the reality of the world that surrounds me.

Trust me, I do realize how strange this all sounds, but if you’ll give it a try, you will see the difference. Just sit somewhere, knowing He is sitting near you – even if you can’t picture Him – and begin to talk. Tell Him your hurts and your fears. Be totally honest with Him. We have covered this, but He knows what you feel anyway. When you open up the conversation on a matter, He will give you insight you

have never had, a perspective that only He can provide. Please hear me: I'm not talking about some kind of meditative state or trance. I am simply talking about getting your mind focused on Him and not what is going on around you.

I hope you're willing to try it. At least for a few weeks, settle into this quiet place and talk to Him. See if He doesn't show up in your life in a new and amazing way.

Okay, this was a long week of assignments. Some are ongoing, so please be diligent and keep working through them. All I have done is to show you what He has shown me. If He can do with me what He has, I can only imagine the better things He has in store for you.

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *Have I built a self-imposed wall between myself and God?*

Day Two: *Becoming that "real deal" person*

Day Three: *"...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles." Hebrews 12:1*

Day Four: *Lord, where do we begin?*

Day Five: *The quiet place – Where is mine?*

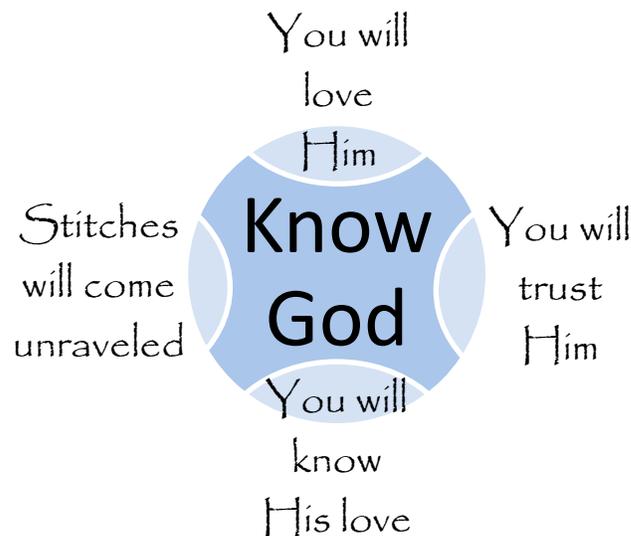
Into His Presence

Bible Study – Session Three

Day One – Circular Reasoning

Today, we will cover the concept of how knowing God is the intersection of all the roads we desire to travel. I call it Circular Reasoning because it seems that all things circle back around to one thing, knowing God. Remember, not knowing facts and such, but knowing Him, His love, and His voice. As believers, don't we all want to receive the abundance God offers us? For many Christians, however, they receive less than all, closer to little. Most every believer will say that they want to draw near to God, to know, love, and trust Him. But few do, not completely anyway, with that "all in" mentality. It seems, based on the results of many Christians' lives, they participate in godly activities, but they may have never truly invited God to be part of their everyday lives. They are saved in the eternal sense, believing that what they have is really all you get. Still, they are settling for less than what God offers. I spent many years with that "this must be all there is to it" mentality. I thought work and service at church was the extent of knowing God. Because I had it so wrong, I eventually gave up, at least for a terribly rocky season I did.

Circular Reasoning



For the four outer elements surrounding *Know God* on the diagram, over the next few days, we will view how knowing Him is critical in achieving each goal. Ultimately, in order to experience the abundant life Jesus offers, you must grasp His love, love Him in return, and know Him well enough that trust follows. Our stitches, those things that can prevent us from getting to know God, will become less of a hindrance the more we do know Him. Again, circular reasoning is the best term to explain it all.

Knowing His Love

As you get to know God through His Word, the one common theme throughout Scripture is God's love for His children. It is seen throughout the Old Testament and carries over into the New. He pursues us, woos us, is jealous for us, and as the verse in the margin assures, loves us with an everlasting love. His love cannot be compared to that of the human experience. It is in looking through the lens of human eyes that we underestimate His love for us. While He often uses father/child, husband/wife relationships in Scripture as a basis of comparison of His love for us, something most of us can identify with, we still can never seem "...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ..." Eph. 3:18.

In this season which way do you most relate to God, in the Father/child relationship or Husband/wife? _____

You have heard He loves the world. You have most likely even personalized John 3:16 and whispered, trying to convince yourself, "For God so loves me..." But still, if you haven't spent time getting to know Him intimately, you have not likely *experienced* that love to such an extent that it has altered your life. Because when you do begin to experience His love in your everyday life, nothing can ever be the same. It's this love, His love, which infiltrates our hearts and causes our other goals of loving and trusting Him to become reality. Simply put, until you take hold of this love and receive it deep into your belief system, you cannot love Him fully, and you certainly won't trust Him, even barely. Knowing and receiving are such different things. I *knew* but I had never fully received.

In what ways have you experienced God's love in your normal, everyday life?

How has He pursued you? What evidence have you seen?

Above, I used the word *experience* twice. It's experiential love that transforms you – not head knowledge. It's seeing Him show up day after day. It's finding Him merciful when you blow it in the worst ways that assures you of His unconditional love. It's His whispers through His Word that stops you in your tracks. It ultimately becomes this staggering realization that God, the Almighty God that the Bible reveals, has shown up and is sitting next to you, giving you strength to face the day and peace to overcome the chaos. That's love! The One who is there, always, no matter if you woke up on the wrong side of the bed or if you are so weak and worn out you can hardly take another step forward. He's there. He is pursuing you.



"The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying, 'I have loved you with an _____; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.'"

Jeremiah 31:3



I'm not exaggerating when I say: I could fill an entire book on the love of God. It was the "game changer" for me. Little things He did for me, little things He showed me, those signs of affection from Him crept into my heart, softening it toward Him, causing me to dare to believe that such love could actually exist. I can hardly remember the time specifically when the floodgates actually opened and my heart was filled. I remember it seemed sudden, like I went from this woman who desperately needed love to a loved woman. I felt complete in a way I had never known before.

Let's finish out our verse from Ephesians. Continuing, it says, "...and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." 3:19 This love that surpasses knowledge that the verse expresses – we can be certain of this – His love for each of us is so vast and beyond human perception that, once we even catch a glimpse of it, there comes with it an immense filling of what is said to be the fullness of God. That is when we finally feel complete.

Do you ever feel an emptiness of heart and wonder if you will ever feel full or complete?
In what ways have you tried to fill your empty heart?

Contrary to what your deceptive heart tries to convince you, what you have always wanted and needed can only be found in the Person of Jesus Christ, in intimate relationship with Him. As early as childhood we become convinced that our deepest need for love and worth can be found within the bounds of a human relationship, specifically with the opposite sex. We have accepted the world's view that ultimate love is human love. Not so! Ultimate, completing, fulfilling, and unconditional love can only be found in Jesus.

Loving God

We _____
because he
first

us."

1 John 4:19

Experiencing the love that I described in the previous section is the *cause* of us loving God. The scripture in the margin is so familiar, you will not likely have to look it up. Actually, I believe I have already quoted it before, but bottom line, that sums it up. Once you see and experience God's love for you, you can't help but love Him more than you ever dreamed possible. Remember, I'm not talking about that head knowledge that He loves you. I'm talking about the "in the middle of your business" kind of love that He demonstrates where He's there for you every moment of every day. There is nothing more natural than loving Him in response to His love for you. Actually, you will find that the more He pours His love into you, the greater your love for Him will become. There comes a point where you are certain you will explode with love. It's that overflow of love that spills over into love for others.

That is why the second commandment comes second. Our love for others is a by-product of our love for Him – the first commandment.

Trusting God

Just as with our ability to love God, our ability to trust Him is just as dependent upon experiencing His love for us. Until we receive and believe this love He has for us, we can hardly trust. Sure, we say we trust, but deep down inside, we wonder what He might do to us if we really trust Him. What if He takes a child? Isn't that the kind of terrifying thoughts we pretend doesn't cross our mind? What if I trust Him and He makes me prove that trust? What if He sends me to Africa to deal with the AIDS crisis? All sorts of worries plague us when we begin to dabble with the frightening concept of trusting God. It becomes a question of control. Who will control my life, and if I hand over control to God, can I trust what He'll do with it? As if we have control – that's just a figment of our imagination. For me, trust came last, well after love. Now, as I'm working through this journey of publishing a book and writing study material, I see it is the most critical element in becoming who He has created me to be. In order to take my place in the Kingdom, I have to trust that where He leads is safe to follow. There is a tremendous amount of rejection that comes along with the publishing process. So, very often I have to say, "I don't see it yet, but if You say so, I'll trust You." I chose to trust and take another step, knowing I'll not be put to shame. Let me assure you, you can love Him without trusting Him. I loved Him without question. Trust comes, at least for me, as you walk with Him closely and on a daily basis. It comes when you know Him more intimately. It comes slowly for some, especially for those of us who have lived a life that has caused severe disillusionment with people. For us, we have to see Him work on our behalf time and again before even the slightest bit of trust emerges.

"... and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 1 Peter 2:6

Where are you right now? How would you gauge your level of trust? On the line below, mark where you see your level of trust.

Weak and Waning

Strong and Growing



Let's take a look at two verses regarding trusting God. Look up Romans 15:13 and write it in the space below.

What are you filled with as you trust Him? _____ and _____

Based on what I have experienced, joy and peace do come along with trusting Him. Without trust, of the two, peace especially is practically impossible. When you do trust Him, peace is prevalent. Peace becomes your new normal.

Do you currently know peace in your everyday life? *Yes or No*

When trouble comes does peace prevail? *Yes or No*

If not, how do you react in times of crisis or conflict?

I used the verse from Romans as a warm and fuzzy example. Sure, we all want joy and peace. Isn't that why you go to church? For most people it is. I would be remiss, however, if I didn't use the following verse:

Write Matthew 27:43 on the following lines.

In context, in this passage Jesus is hanging on the cross. The accusation, "He trusts in God" is meant as an insult. It is hurled at Him as if to say, "Bet You don't trust Him now." What do you think Jesus felt at that point? He knew the cross was the only way to redeem the world He loves. He knew what the Kingdom plan required of Him, and He knew He was the only One who could satisfy the penalty. He was obedient, trusting in the ultimate Kingdom plan. Did He hurt? Without question.

Now, let's revisit our questions from before. "What if I trust Him and He allows this or that?" Honestly, He may. Whatever your fill-in-the-blank was, He just may. I can't say for sure He will or won't and neither can you. I have struggled with the "What if He takes my child?" questions. Now, I can only be certain, if He does, I still know He's good. I still know that His heart is filled with love for me. I know He will carry me through the "what ifs". These days, in this new place of ultimate trust in Him, even attached to such a question as *what if He takes my child*, there is peace within me. I couldn't have said that a handful of years ago.

Many of you are thinking you could never be okay with that. You could never let go of someone you love and live or that you could never take such a step of faith. That's a lie. The fact is, with trust comes joy and peace. His Word assures us it does. It is supernatural, something beyond our human ability to explain.

Stitches Unravel

Finally, unraveling our stitches. Funny, since this entire week is supposed to be about loosening our stitches, it should have come up long before now. Actually, considering what we have discovered in this section of our study, not much needs to be said. In fact, once you work through knowing and receiving God's love, learning to love Him in the process, and coming to trust Him, most of your stitches have silently disappeared. It is *in* the process of getting to know God that those stitches are being worked out of the veil.

Even though I said in earlier sessions that your stitches prevent you from drawing near, the fact is, drawing near is what causes them to disappear. So technically, they don't prevent you from drawing near, as in ability, but rather they prevent you from drawing near, as in desire. Many of the stitches we have discussed prevent you from drawing near because they make you believe it's not worth it, or possible, or even necessary, when in fact, there is nothing more necessary for a believer than to draw closer to God. No matter how close you are presently, there is always room to draw closer still. As close as I thought I was last year, I feel tremendously closer to the Lord today. Next year at this time, I should be able to say the very same thing. If not, then my growth has been somehow stunted. Complete the verse in the margin.

“And we all, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with
_____ - _____
glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”
2 Corinthians 3:18

Compared to where you were this time last year, where are you in your walk with the Lord? Do you feel closer to Him, about the same, or farther away? Indicate below and explain your answer. What proof do you see?

With this new information you have about knowing, loving, and trusting God, how might your own stitches be loosened by growing in the true knowledge of Him? Give examples.

Focal Passage: *Ephesians 3:18 “...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Reminder: *We love because He first loved us.*

Something to consider: *Knowing about and receiving God's love are two entirely different things.*

Day Two – Getting to Know God

I apologize in advance for the length of today's reading. Because it is such a text heavy day, I'm providing you with the verses you will need. However, as you read a verse supplied, if it's something that touches your heart, open your Bible and underline it or circle it. Do something to make note of its importance to you.

In getting to know God, there are no shortcuts!

In order to draw near, and subsequently get to know God, you have to read His Word and then apply what it says to your life. Do you believe that to be true? _____

If you are going on a long trip with someone you don't know well, you would spend that time getting to know them and allowing them to get to know you. For most of us, we have a desire to be known. I don't mean *famous* known, but rather, we want someone to understand us, to know what makes us tick. At the same time, and rather ironically, we fear people knowing what is at the deepest level of our souls, but still, we long to be known and understood.

“Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”
1 Corinthians 13:12

Prior to proving my point in Scripture, which will be the end of the matter, I can prove the human desire to be known with three little words: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We know way too much about way too many things in our friends' lives. Hello! Don't care what you're eating for dinner unless you are inviting me over to eat. Now that, you can post.

For real proof, though, I return to a passage we looked at during our study of the *Love Is* traits. At the end of the passage it says, “I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” There will come a time when we will come face to face with Jesus, and at that time we will truly know Him. He will reveal Himself to us in a way we can't possibly know Him here on this earth. But what stands out to me is that it ends with, “even as I am fully known.” The thought struck me as I began to write this, since God tells us in Genesis that we were made in His image, is this desire we have to be known merely an illustration of us being made in His image? Does our desire to be known reflect His desire to be known? We know that God has

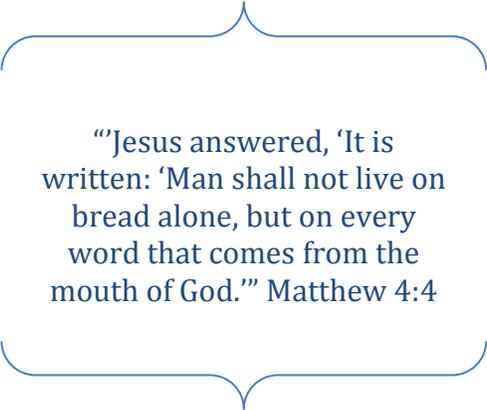
gone to great lengths to make Himself known and to reveal Himself through His Word and through His Spirit. The fact that He gives us a heads up that we will someday be fully known, as if that might be a comfort to us, may indicate that He placed that desire within us. Why would that matter? To me, it's actually quite thrilling to know that this desire to be known is merely a trait of His.

He already knows us inside and out, so that's not what the verse means. In an eternal sense what might that mean, “even as I am fully known”? Maybe it has more to do with us finding out who we really are, who He created us to be, the us without earthly baggage and sin and flaws. Just conjecture on my part. Another verse to consider is: “But the man who loves God is known by God.”
1 Corinthians 8:3

So, what does this have to do with getting to know God? First, we have to conclude, just as it is important to us to be known, it is not only important to Him that you know Him, but it is vital to you that you do. I sincerely believe He doesn't hide himself away, playing some cat and mouse game with you.

Now that we have agreed that getting to know Him is what He wants for us, how then do we go about it? If getting to know Him → leads us to know His love → which leads us to love Him → which allows us to trust Him, then it's safe to say we have to figure this thing out.

Ways in which we get to know God:



“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4

His Word

This is never the answer a believer wants to hear. They've heard it and have yet to see it work. Still, I'll say it. You have to get to know God through His Word. There are no substitutes. It must be you and Him and His Word – and also the Spirit who is present within you. We will discuss this further on Day Five. For now, settle the matter in your head – you must get to know God through His Word. No matter what you have experienced in the past, something new awaits you as you read His Word and begin to get to know Him through it. Consider the verse in the margin.

Through Relationships

Second only to the way I have gotten to know God through His Word, is how I have gotten to know Him through the relationships in my life. Through my relationship with my husband and children especially, God has helped me to get to know Him. Before I give you examples, please know, if you don't currently have a husband or children, He will likely speak through other relationships in your life, such as your relationship with your parents, siblings, friends, nieces and nephews, and coworkers. So don't discount what I am about to tell you, since the principles are similar even when the relationships differ.

Through my husband – Even as I begin to type, I'm eager to see what the Lord will lead me to write. I suppose you should know first that during our early marriage, we were on the verge of divorce for most of it. Sadly, that's no exaggeration. We were two broken people who came together to form a very broken union. On top of that I brought a young, troubled child into the marriage. Exhausting is one of the first adjectives that comes to mind when I consider the first years of our marriage. Now, the first word that comes to mind is friendship. We have become tremendous friends. Both of us agree; we would rather hang out with each other than any other person on the planet. There is great comfort in that.

What changed? I did. After a time of separation and coming back together, that is when I began seeking God. I mean truly seeking Him. Early on, in prayer, I would tattle on Kelly, the hubs. Every time he did something I thought was wrong, rather than argue with him, I would take it to God. Most always, I had a strong case, but never did He smite Kelly as I thought he should be smitten. Instead, the Lord would shine the light on me. Questions would come, “How can you react better?” “Why do you think you reacted the way you did?” What I discovered during this process was secret

stuff about me. My motives were exposed. My lack of trust in God was exposed. This was the season God weeded me of bitterness and anger.

Read John 21:20-22 and fill in the blanks below.

“Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, _____
_____? _____ must follow me.’” v 22

You can’t possibly imagine what this verse meant to me during that time. It was one of the clearest ways in which God spoke to me through His Word early on. As I read it, He made it very clear; I needed to stop tattling on Kelly. I needed to stop fretting over the things he did and said, and I needed to focus solely on myself and my relationship to God. It was the “*you*” must follow me that was finally seared into my heart. No matter what others around you are doing, it is your sole responsibility to determine who you will be before God. We will all stand before Him as individuals. We can’t say, “But he made me...” It’s all on us.

Ultimately, as I said, I changed, and I did so without changing Kelly. All those years I thought that change in him was what would fix *us*. It was never just him. The amazing part is this, as God was changing me, He was also making changes in Kelly. Quietness in me resulted in a bit less argument in Kelly. Kindness in me brought out more kindness in my husband. Peace in me ushered in peace in our home in general.

What followed became a biblical marriage, one of respect and honor, of submission and compassion. We are light years beyond the *in love* feeling of newlyweds – and I mean that in a good way. That early love is still plagued with self, where later love becomes about the other. Basically, we went from he and me to we. Nothing, even our children are not allowed in between us.

Before I move on, let me tell you, the above paragraphs were the result of a few years’ worth of effort. I never said it was easy or fast, but I will guarantee it was worth it. Kelly would readily agree. Let me also assure you, it was not an effort apart from the Word of God.

So, how does this apply to getting to know God? Through the marriage relationship God taught me about submission to my Bridegroom. He taught me about the protective nature of a Husband. He taught me how to follow my Leader. Many of the analogies that God uses in the Bible to demonstrate His relationship with His Church, with us, His bride, He used within my marriage to help me see Him and know Him better. Without taking pages of space to be specific and give you examples, I can only give you this abridged version of Him showing Himself to me through my relationship with Kelly.

“In that day,” declares the Lord, ‘you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’”
Hosea 2:16

Through my kids – Raising an ADHD child who turned out to be a bi-polar teen and now young man, you can believe God has had ample opportunity to show up through my relationship with my son. Adam’s last years at home were some of the most difficult I have ever experienced, but during that time, I caught glimpses of God in a way I never had before. It was that season that was the beginning point of what I feel is now a vibrant relationship with God the Father.

When Adam would do something outrageous, something that would devastate me, something illegal, something to get kicked out of school, nearly every time, I would hear God ask me, "Do you still love him?" I would reply, "Of course I do." To which He would remind me, "That's the way I love you." On and on this season went. It was as if He allowed that season for the specific purpose of hammering His unconditional love into my heart. Nothing Adam did or does could ever change the fact that I love him unconditionally. I suppose I needed to know the same thing about my Heavenly Father. My past is horrendous. Ultimately, my problem all along had been that I could hardly believe that a Holy God could really love a dirty girl like me. During that time, however, He poured out His love in buckets, saturating me and making me clean. Now, I not only feel loved, I feel complete. I'm no longer that empty-hearted woman longing to be loved.

I hope this helps you see how a relationship between a parent and child can lead to such knowledge of God. It was what finally ushered me into His presence. Prior to that, I would have never attempted to enter His presence. I needed to know I was loved and accepted with all my flaws and past and mess. That was my heaviest stitch by far, but once it was removed, I drew closer and closer day by day.

The following is one of my favorite verses:

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me." Isaiah 49:15-17

For those who have seen a mother nursing a child, one could hardly imagine her forgetting that child. God says, that mother is more likely to forget that baby than He could forget you or me. The part that says, "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands," causes my heart to melt. I know when the Lord Jesus looks at the palms of His hands, He sees my name hammered permanently into His flesh. He remembers me. He remembers you. Now that's love!

From the relationships in your life, do you see how you can get to know God more intimately? Now, I want you to think of some of your own relationships. For any relationship that applies to you, how might you encounter God or His characteristics through it? Or how does God use these relationships to grow you?

Relationships with:

Your Husband: _____

Your Children: _____

Your Parents: _____

Siblings: _____

Nieces/Nephews: _____

Your Friends: _____

Your Coworkers: _____

Through Nature

As I was never a gardener prior to the weeds-around-the-pool season, I had no experience in gardening. By the obvious leading of the Spirit, I became an avid gardener. I say avid in the context that I did it a lot, not that I ever really got any good at it. I made such a mess early on in my back yard that I spent much time having to dig up overgrown things that were placed in the wrong spot. Every weekday during those early spring and summer seasons, I was out playing in the dirt. I weeded and watered and planted. God taught me so many things that I eventually began to keep a gardening journal. It was through nature that He spoke most to me early on, likely because I was willing to meet Him there.

When I say I got to know Him through nature, what I really mean is that I got to know His nature more. As I gardened and as I met with Him, I found Him faithful, tender, intense, determined, and I learned all sorts of things about His character and personality, if that word can be used for Spirit. He was a constant in my world for the first time during that season and has been ever since. While I rarely garden anymore, those lessons He taught me there will forever be planted within me.

“The heavens declare
the glory of God; the
skies proclaim the work
of his hands.”
Psalm 19:1

What are ways in which God has spoken to you through nature? Or what have you learned about Him by observing creation?

Through Listening

In addition to reading God's Word and spending quiet time with Him, listening to preachers and teachers can be a tremendous source of getting to know more about God. Notice I said, about God. They are telling you things *they* have read or things *they* have learned. You are hearing what *they* know about Him, which can help you as you are getting to know Him yourself. But never presume that what they are offering is intimate knowledge. Only we can grasp our personal, intimate knowledge of God. It's not

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.” Psalm 34:8

something we can give away. There is a quote by Oswald Chambers that says, “Remember that you can never give another person what you have found, but you can cause him to have a desire for it.” (My Utmost for His Highest) From this, I am reminded: others' passion can cause me to desire more of God, but I can't know God because of what someone tells me. I need to experience Him in my own life. Still, listening to those who are passionate can spur us on. Just don't ever allow your total “diet” to come from what another has experienced with God. You must have your own daily bread.

Focal Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:12 *“Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”*

Question: *What is my primary source of getting to know God?*

Conclusion: *In getting to know God, there are no shortcuts.*

Day Three – Wonderful Counselor

This season you are about to enter is one of private counseling sessions with Jesus.

“I will _____ you and _____ you in the way you should go; I will _____ you and watch over you.” Psalm 32:8

So finally, it's time to begin to work on your stitches. In most cases, God, your Bible, and your quiet place are all you need. For some past traumas, a qualified Christian counselor may be necessary. For the majority of what may be keeping you from experiencing God fully and knowing His love, that can be dealt with through time with Him. His Holy Spirit within you is your Wonderful Counselor. He knows you more intimately, inside and out, than you could ever possibly know yourself.

Who do you normally go to or call to discuss serious issues in your life?

For this season ask the Lord if He is calling you to share your burdens with Him only. Pray about this in the quiet place. Then wait for Him to reply.

Consider this verse:

As tempted as we are to continue to go to others for guidance and support, we need to remember that it is only God who can answer the deepest questions of our hearts.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28

As I faced this season, His instructions to me were clear. I was to go solely to Him with my questions and my hurts and desires. He met with me faithfully each and every morning, and one stitch at a time, He began the process of unminging the veil that prevented me from seeing Him. At the time I felt rather isolated, but in hindsight I now understand how vital it was that He became my Counselor and my only source from which to draw. The following verse is one that still makes my heart flutter a bit. It's the verse that I felt He used to call me into this time of private counseling with Him alone.

“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.” Hosea 2:14

I can think of no better way to describe that season with Him other than to restate the verse above. He did indeed speak tenderly to me. During those early months, it was as if I left the ordinary, everyday world and entered a private world within my spirit and heart. It's the place I still dwell with Him all these years later. Now, when I'm speaking to Him or listening to Him in prayer, it is as real as any conversation I have in the physical realm. It will be that way with you as well, given time.

“...to bestow on them
a crown of _____ instead
of _____...”
Isaiah 61:3

The most vital thing for you right now is to get to that place of comfort in speaking openly to Him, of opening up your heart, telling Him the good, the bad, and the ugly. Each of us has all of those things within. As the Lord counsels you, He will highlight the good and help you see your strengths and abilities. He will help you admit the bad, the things that deserve no place in your life, and as for the ugly, He will take what seems like ashes and give you beauty for them.

What area or stitches do you feel He is leading you to work through? (Page 22)

What ways have you felt that leading? Examples: while reading your Bible, during prayer time, things that others have said, or even a combination of several.

Now that you’ve determined what stitch you are to work through, begin each morning with Him and His Word, anticipating that He will dispel lies and replace them with truth. Keep this stitch ever before Him in prayer until you know that progress is being made. Allow Him to show you why you are choosing to hang onto this stitch (attitude, fear, sin, or unbelief).

What you are going through in your life, what season you’re walking through, will determine which of God’s attributes He will reveal to you. For now, as you work through these stitches, you may need Him as your:

- Counselor Help you overcome past hurts and current hindrances to experiencing Him fully.

God first met with me as my Counselor. Healing was beautiful and painful and undoubtedly worthwhile. The moments I spent with the Lord were similar to surgery at times, when there was a cutting away of what deserved no place in my heart, such as fear and unbelief. At others, it was comparable to sitting in soothing waters, warm and comforting, when He simply tended to my wounds.

Or, if you aren’t necessarily working through painful issues, you may need to know Him as your:

- Beloved To know His love and the sacred romance He offers you
- Protector See Him as Mighty to save in difficult times
- Shepherd To guide you along life’s treacherous path
- Father Gently loving you as His little girl
- Best Friend Be there when no one else understands
- King Finding your Kingdom purpose

From the list of characteristics of God above, which do you need to see Him as most in this season? Or if you can think of another characteristic, write that in.

Though you may seek Him first as your Counselor, it's likely you will encounter many of His other attributes as well. He will show His love for you as Father, Bridegroom, and Friend. As you are getting to know Him and as He shows you more about yourself, your stitches are coming unraveled. Without much conscious effort on your part, He is removing many of the wounds and scars you may have suffered from a life of heartbreak. Also, as you get to know Him, He begins to take away the chains that bind you, whether it's chains of addiction, worry and fear, a feeling of unworthiness or shame, He will release you. This process happens as you read the Bible, replacing the lies you have come to believe throughout your lifetime with His truth. Romans 12:2 (in the margin) says to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. We have covered this verse before, but it's one worth repeating. Until you replace your old thoughts with God's Word, you will continue to be bound. The more you read, the more He will supernaturally replace your thoughts with His.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”
Romans 12:2

Does He speak to you? Record below a time when you were certain God was speaking to you through:

His Word

During prayer

Through another believer

Through circumstances

Write Jeremiah 33:3 in the space below.

Do you believe He means what He says in this verse? _____

Some people spend their entire Christian life NOT believing that God will speak to them personally and intimately. That's why they read their Bible with a less than an enthusiastic attitude, if even at all. Over the next two days of study, we will focus our attention on the Word of God and your approach to it. For our final assignment today, let's end with the following prayer:

Father, I invite You into my life to be my Wonderful Counselor. I ask, as we meet together, show me those things which eclipse my view of who You really are. These sins and wounds are burdensome and Lord, I simply desire to rest in You. Now, beginning today, I'm willing to go away into that wilderness place alone with You. I ask that You speak tenderly to me as You offered Your people through the words of Hosea. More than anything, I want to hear You speak into my heart, into my life, and into my circumstances. As we go forward, I invite You to be in the middle of my business. I ask You to be big in my life and to help me to know You by experience. Mostly, though, I ask You to give me a heart to love You above and beyond all things. I know with a heart after Your own, all things will fall into place. In Jesus' name, Amen

Focal Passage: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go: I will counsel you and watch over you." Psalm 32:8

Question: Am I called into the wilderness for a season alone with God?

Anticipate: Throughout the process, He will show His love for you as His child, His bride, and His friend.

Day Four – Seasons

This day is called Seasons because that is the new way you should begin looking at or segmenting your life. This season is your season of counseling and healing. Or, maybe this is a season when you are learning some new concepts to help other wounded believers. Either way, you are entering a new season. Even for the most mature believer, I would have to guess that you have a stitch or two that God has brought to mind that must be removed in order to help you draw nearer to Him. As far as I've come over the years, I still find that I'm such a work in progress, I can hardly imagine the day when He'll be done with me. I suppose that will be the day He takes me home to be with Him in heaven.

I'll open up and tell you, while I am writing this study, many of my stitches seem to be trying to work their way back into my life. There has been such an onslaught of a feeling of unworthiness that has come over me, that at times, I'm sure I can't write another word. This all seems so much bigger than me, which it is, that I find unbelief surfacing. The other day, I was so panicked that I felt as if I were going over the edge. I'm not sure the edge of what, but since I had to have a friend talk me down from the ledge, I must have been on the edge of something. All I know is that I was texting her these crazy messages, when I received: "Be strong and courageous. The spirit of fear is not of God. Don't let the enemy discourage you." See what you get with a godly friend? Girls, find yourselves one or two godly friends, not ones who will feed the crazy.

My point in this admission is this: No matter how far you travel with God, you will still have seasons when you need Him to remove barriers the world places between you and Him and the barriers that your own fears and anxieties create. I was so full of fear, but my sweet friend's reminder caused me to pause and turn to Him and pray. After that, I was right back on track.

So now, let's turn our focus to reading God's Word.

If you truly believed God was going to talk to you specifically and individually through it, would you read your Bible daily?

Yes or No

If you are told that, if you persevere in reading, if you keep at it, God will begin to speak into your life and your circumstance, would you be willing to read and seek Him daily?

Yes or No

He does speak! He wants you to know Him. He wants you to know His will for your life. He loves you too much to give you the silent treatment. This is one of those times when you will have to *believe* and *act* on that belief. Faith forward movement. Even if you read for a week or two and still don't *feel* as if you are hearing, press on. Your spiritual ears need to become acclimated to the voice of God. Give it time. And too, if you are seeking God fully, it's important that you are careful what you are allowing into your mind. We allow so many competing voices into our lives that sometimes it's difficult to hear that gentle whisper. (1 Kings 19:12b)

Recently, even as I'm working on this study material, a month of injury and sickness came to visit our home. My husband injured his hand, requiring surgery, and then the flu arrived. It was a month of rare down time and TV watching. Finally, once I was back on my feet and trying to take some steps forward on this project, I found that I had allowed so many competing voices in my life, especially through hours of absorbing TV, that God seemed unusually quiet. He revealed to me during my quiet time with Him that His voice had been drowned out. Once you do hear Him daily, when you don't, you notice! When He revealed why, you can believe I adjusted my attention back toward Him and away from the onslaught of media and madness I had consumed. So you know, His revelation was not accusatory but rather observational. He simply showed me what had cluttered my mind and was blocking His voice. Remember, what you hear from God will always be gentle – sometimes stern but gentle. He will never be condemning but rather convicting. There is a clear difference. One says you are not good enough (condemnation) the other says you are missing the mark (conviction). When He speaks He will usually be leading you to your next place, the next step with Him. He never contradicts His Word. He often shows you something new about Himself or His character.

I used a phrase earlier, about God "being in the middle of your business." That's where I found Him, in the middle of every facet of my life. To know He cares enough to step into the little things only reinforces how much He loves me. If you haven't noticed, God is actively "in the middle of your business" right now. Through this study material He is drawing you closer to Him. He says you have been far away for far too long.

Think of other times when you have seen God right in the middle of your business.

Do you have that sense now, that He is actively pursuing you?

If yes, then how will you choose to proceed after the study ends? Are you willing to continue to walk with Him through this journey of removing your stitches?

As you begin to draw nearer to God, you will see sin and difficult attitudes in others merely as symptoms of lovesickness. You will understand that the stitches in their lives are preventing them from seeing God for who He really is. In that case, will you be willing to share your journey with others? *Yes or No*

As you grow closer to Jesus, He will burden your heart for those who are stuck where you once were. This dirty little secret in the church, our inability to grasp God's love and to truly love Him in return, is decimating the church. We are becoming weaker rather than stronger in such dark days. The enemy wants to keep us bound in this way. The only means of bringing light to this secret is to share it with

others. Because of embarrassment, it would be easy to keep this to yourself. If you haven't felt for God what you should have all along, it may be difficult to admit it to others. Going forward, for the sake of the Kingdom, you must share what you learn. Even if you wait until you are well on your way, commit to share your journey with someone. Who knows, the person you share with may need exactly what you are finding. In that case you can share the steps you are taking and this free online Bible study resource.

Removing your stitches, the things that prevent you from seeing God for who He is, will remain a lifelong process. To see God in all His glory and greatness would take many lifetimes. There will always be issues to arise, even if in the form of our "lesser" sins like worry and fear. So be prepared to do this for the long haul. Be ready to meet with Him each and every morning on His terms. He may want to work in an area

• • •
You have searched me,
Lord, and you

_____”
Psalm 139:1



where you don't think you're ready, but if He says it's time, then it's time. We work on His clock. You can believe, if He is calling you to work with Him in a particular area of your life, rest assured you will make no progress in other areas until this one is accomplished.

Example: I wasn't able to work on the difficulties in my marriage until bitterness and forgiveness were settled within me. There is a logical process, logical from His standpoint that is, one that must be done in the proper order. He is the God of order. Allow Him to set that order into motion, and then trust Him when He shows you the next area. Complete the verse in the margin. He knows what you need long before you do.

Who Am I to Him?

Besides taking you through seasons of who He is, God will take you through seasons of who you are. He knows you better than you even know yourself.

There is a question that can be applied to this season. Who am I in light of what God's Word says?

Example: We began the study with the verse that says you must love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. From there, the question of *Who am I in light of what God's Word says* is the introspective process you are traveling through. You are searching within to see if you have this kind of passionate, submissive, and focused kind of love for Him. Next you are asking, "If not, then how do I get there?"

Another example: God's Word says to be in the world but not of it. You were to ask yourself what needs of yours you are meeting by looking toward the world. So already, you are using this method of *Who am I in light of what God's Word says*. For the remainder of your life, as you continue to grow with God, these two questions perpetuate the growth process:

- ❖ Who is He?
- ❖ Who am I in light of what His Word says?

Never stop seeking answers to these two questions. When you read His Word with these questions propelling you forward, you will stop reading with the mindset of "this is about Bible characters and

stories.” Instead, it will become about Him and you. That’s it. You can ask, “What is He telling me about Himself in this passage?” And “Who am I in light of what I am reading?”

In our previous day’s study, we focused on Him taking you through seasons of who He is. You will come to know Him as Counselor, Father, Shepherd, Beloved, Friend, etc. As you get to know Him in these various ways, He will help you identify your stitches, the roots that caused them, and who you really are to Him.

This is the Supernatural part. He digs deep within to help you see why you cling to the things you cling to and why you feel the way you feel. During your quiet time with Him, He will show you things about yourself that even you never knew. He exposes motives, shows you why you have become who you are, and how to be who He intends for you to be. The cutting away of things that have no place is His job. You need only to be still and allow it. This is the surgery I said I experienced as He cut away things that had no place in me. He replaces the lies you believe with His truth...through His Word and His Spirit.

Seasons in Reading

Another area where you will face seasons with God is in your reading of His Word. You may find you read something in a chapter of the Bible that you don’t fully understand. If you feel as if you can keep moving on, it is most likely not something you need for the current season He has you in. If the verse stops you, if you feel as if you can’t go any further or that you can’t seem to get the verse off of your mind, you may need to pause and allow Him to explain it to you. Once, years ago, I was constantly wondering about a verse. It literally went on for years.

“What a person desires is unfailing love;
better to be poor than a liar.” Proverbs 19:22

This verse drove me crazy once a month. At the time I was reading through Proverbs one chapter per day all month long. I did this month after month (I gleaned great wisdom, btw.) Okay, look at this verse. Individually, these statements make perfect sense. But combined as they were, it didn’t make sense to me at all. That little “;” there in the middle was what threw me off. That symbol usually means that these two thoughts are so connected that they should not be two separate sentences. But why would they go together? It wasn’t so long ago, a couple of years maybe, that I was drying my hair. He revealed what it meant to me and why He had caused me to ponder it for so many years.

I, Lisa, needed unconditional love, a love that would never fail me. (We all do.) Only He is capable of loving me unconditionally. Next statement: Finally, after years of being a pretender, I admitted my poverty of love for Him and stopped being a liar. I admitted I wanted to love Him, and without knowing it at the time, invited Him to show me unconditional love.

That may not make a bit of sense to you, but that’s how He spoke to me personally through it. He will do the same with you by using various verses, but remember, not every verse is for every season. Keep reading, and He will begin to speak into your heart, life, and circumstance.

Can you think of a verse that has spoken directly to you, one in which you knew God was clearly speaking to you through His Word?

As great of an influence as it is to listen to pastors, Bible teachers, friends, and even to read faith based books, none are a substitute for reading God's Word. He has a word specifically for *you*, one that He will not often give to another for you. When you listen to others, remember, what you are hearing is what God said to them. Listening to others may confirm what He has already said to you, which is that thread of revelation we covered in an earlier session, but you need a fresh word of your own, directly from Him. Be nose-y; find out what God has to say specifically to you.

The verse in the margin could not describe me any better. I'm simple – minded anyway. I would imagine my husband would describe me as ultra-complicated, but when it comes to living out this life the way God intends, I am simple minded. I need clear direction. I need to know His path. Just as the verse above says, His Word unfolds slowly and deliberately, giving just enough light for me to take the next step or two. I like that about the way God leads. He doesn't overwhelm me with vast steps to take, just a small one here and another small one there. It unfolds just as I need it. Don't allow what seems to be the complexities of God's Word and the debates that people have over it cause you to shy away. Read and listen. He will speak to your heart and into your life just as you need it.

"The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple."
Psalm 119:130

Focal Passage: "You have searched me, Lord, and you know me." Psalm 139:1

Question: Am I reading God's Word, actively listening for Him to speak?

Conclusion: As God takes you through seasons of who He is, He will also show you who you are to Him.

Day Five – Anticipation

During the Session One material I listed several ways to maintain a normal flow of reading. I hope you have chosen one of them.

In what way do you read your Bible every day? Which chapter are you currently reading?

Remember, you need a daily plan. No hunting and pecking.

In my own quiet time, I try to keep a normal flow of reading. If I have life and relationship questions, I have learned that looking for the answer by topic can lead to frustration. It's too precarious to find a verse that seems to be the answer to a question or concern I face and then try to apply it to my circumstance. Instead, I find that if I simply place my question or care before the Lord in prayer, then read in my usual manner, the answer will come. While it may not be that day or even within several days, an answer always comes. It's the anticipation, the excitement that keeps me reading and studying His Word daily. He always shows up, and to me, that was one of the first real and significant truths I learned about the character of God. He is faithful.

Below, mark all that apply to you.

- I rarely look at my Bible at all, but I have one
- My Bible is read in times of trouble but not regularly
- I take my Bible back and forth to church, but that is the only time I pick it up
- When I do read, I just open to whatever and read a few chapters
- I lay the Bible on the coffee table or next to the bed as a reminder to read but rarely get around to it
- I have a set place where my Bible is read regularly

The importance you place on your Bible is in direct relation to your nearness to God. It is also the one link to true transformation in your life. During our session on “real deal” people, we considered the fact that some people don't *feel* as if they experience what the Bible promises, which leads them to doubt that they ever will, which leads to giving up. Deep inside, I'm convinced that every believer wants that *something* to happen, that moment when they see God show up or when He speaks directly to them. When that doesn't happen, they stop looking. There comes a time, when secretly, they become apathetic toward the Word of God. Sure, they are still convinced that the dos and don'ts are correct. There is, however, no anticipation or excitement over reading it.

When faced with a concern or question in your life, aren't you told to pray about it? Sure. Once you pray, though, how do you hear the answer? I mean, if I ask, "Should I take this job offer." How can I hear God's response?

I may hear Him in my Spirit. What I mean by that is that I feel this sense of peace of His answer, true peace, not the leaning one way or the other because it's what I *want*. When I say peace, I absolutely *know* it is what God wants for me. Without that, I keep seeking the answer.

How I hear Him through the Word is just as I described before. I just read as usual. I don't go looking up *job choice* in the concordance. For one thing I'd probably be directed to Job and his choice to curse God and die or to live in faith. Sorry, a little Bible humor there. So then, if I pray, "Lord, do I take this job?" How can He possibly answer through a book whose writers wrote thousands of years ago?

*Those who
are receptive,
the ones who
want and
expect to hear
God, do hear.*

In this case all I can say is supernaturally. He does it to me all the time. When I say all the time, I really do mean all the time. You should be hearing from Him that way too. Does that surprise you? Think only preachers and teachers hear from God on a daily basis? Think God only has a word for the spiritual elite? If that's true it's only because those who consider themselves to be less spiritual don't hear because they think they shouldn't or won't hear. I believe it boils down to one word, receptivity. Those who are receptive, the ones who want and expect to hear God, do hear. When I ask direction of Him, He answers. Often, He speaks when I don't ask. Honestly, through His Word, He has given me direction I really didn't care to hear, but I knew He spoke. Because He spoke I listened and obeyed; admittedly sometimes dragging my feet, but I did obey.

When I ask a question or raise a concern, I don't necessarily watch for Him to answer. If I did that, I might easily make what I'm reading mean what I want it to mean. Did that make sense? That's the precariousness of watching for the answer. I am so good with words that I can easily distort God's Word and make a verse imply what I want to happen.

For example: Say I want to buy a new house,
and I read the inserted verse:

I can think, *Wow, the Lord knows my heart and that I want a new house. He wants me to be settled.* I use this one as an example because I've done this exact thing with this exact verse. Come to find out, what He really meant was that He would settle me into the home I was living in at the time. I finally got the message. Eventually, I did get the new house, but it was in His timing.

**"I will settle them in
their homes, declares
the LORD."
Hosea 11:11**

Having learned that I can't *watch* for the answer, as in making things mean what I want, I instead simply ask and then go on about the business of meeting with God. I read what I normally read. Whether it's my devotionals or my homework for whatever class I'm taking at the time or through that normal flow

of reading I keep harping on, I just read. Eventually, He answers clearly and in a way I know that I *know* it is His answer.

When I say that I *know*, I have come to find that certainty comes with God's answer. It is such a deep level of certainty that even if things don't go the way I had hoped they would based on what I believed to be God's answer, I still know it was His answer. I then have to hold on to the knowledge that I acted on my firm belief and what I truly saw as God's answer. There is blessing in obedience.

God Almighty, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has something to say to you. How can you not approach reading the Word of God with anticipation and excitement when you *know* He will speak to you? The only way you can read the Word of God without this kind of enthusiasm is if you have never heard Him speak. No matter what you have experienced in the past, He does speak. He will speak to you. You must acclimate your ears to hear Him.

I approach the Word of God with anticipation and excitement because I know He will speak to me and that He has crucial things to reveal to me.

Here is one of my favorite ways to share how God once spoke to me. While He speaks to me in very clear ways, sometimes what is clear to me may not be as clear to you. He speaks to us individually. This one is so blatant, however, there's no way you won't see His absolute direction to me.

One Saturday, I had nothing to do and was skiing stations. I stopped on a show called Madmen. I had seen the previews for it but had never viewed the show. I stopped and watched the remainder of the episode. It was a good show. Set back in the sixties, the men were sophisticated in their suits, and the women feminine in their dresses. It is a well written show to say the least. So captivated was I by it, that I went to the On Demand feature of my cable and watched back episodes. The ones I watched were all good shows, and compared to shows set in current times, seemed very clean. Yes, there was a storyline where a man was having an affair, but from what I watched, it wasn't being glamorized, rather, it was showing the destruction it caused a family.

(Obviously, this is the long version of the story.)

Anyway, on occasion I would catch the show On Demand. Once, though, something happened, a scene in which something terribly graphic was implied but not actually shown. Well, with my writer's mind all I needed was the implication. My mind was filled with graphic images off and on the remainder of the night. When I woke the next morning, those images happened along pretty quickly. So during my quiet time, I said, "Lord, I don't know if I should watch that show (Madmen) anymore." Notice I didn't say, "Lord, I *will not* watch that show anymore." As a matter of fact, I would have most likely talked myself into watching again with the assurance that nothing like "that" usually happened, and after all, the show is well written – and clean from what I had seen so far. That was until the Lord spoke!

Now I am able to use the term again, “normal flow of reading” since that was exactly what I was doing. I began that morning reading in Jeremiah, exactly where I left off the day before. I began in Jeremiah 48 and quickly I came to verse 2, which states: “You too, O Madmen, will be silenced...” I nearly threw my Bible – no kidding. I had just said maybe I shouldn’t watch Madmen and the Lord tells me that Madmen will be silenced. And notice, it was capitalized, just as the show is. It happens to be a Moabite town which sounds like the Hebrew for *be silenced*. If that wasn’t God speaking then He doesn’t! That was God! That was my Father in heaven telling me that particular show is not His best for me. Ask me if I have ever watched it again. Nope, never! And I won’t. Now ask me if I want to. Yes, honestly I do, but I won’t. I still see commercials and wonder what’s going on. Guess I’ll never know.

Do you see that He spoke? Out of over seven hundred thousand words in the NIV translation of the Bible, God used seven words to tell me not to watch a TV show. Is that a coincidence? I wish I knew how to type the sound for that motor boat noise you make with your lips, so insert that here. No way is it a coincidence! If you have ever wondered how God can speak to current day circumstances through men who wrote thousands of years ago, I say, “Pretty clearly.”

If that were my only example, then I wouldn’t be so quick to tell you that you should be hearing from Him all the time. It is far from my only example. I tell you such a drawn out story to share my excitement and passion over the Word of God. Please believe me, He does speak and He wants to speak to you.

Going back to our verse from Day Three, try to fill in the blanks from memory.

“I will _____ you and _____ you in the way you should go; I will _____ you and watch over you.” Psalm 32:8

Do you believe that God can teach you His Word without you constantly asking or depending on others to tell you what His Word means?

Yes or No

He has spoken to me through His Word in other extraordinary ways, some, if I were to share them, they wouldn’t make sense to you. Because He speaks to us individually, based on where we are at the time, what may make perfect sense to me on a matter would not register the same with you. The more you read, the more you get His thoughts into your mind, the more clearly you begin to understand when He speaks. I believe He is speaking to us all along, but because our minds are cluttered with the things of this world, we are unable to hear.

How does He speak?

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, _____; walk in it.” Isaiah 30:21

This is where it takes getting to know the sound of His voice. Once you know it, He will guide you every step along the way. You never have to guess again. He wants you to know the way and is willing to lead you. Since this is a process, just like getting to know someone in the physical realm, it takes time and communication. The key, though, is repetition. Meet with Him every morning. Read His Word daily and pray. This investment in your relationship with Him will pay dividends in ways you can never anticipate.

Can you imagine being able to ask God direction in a matter and Him actually answer? Do you realize that is what He has wanted for you all along? Never has He intended for you to wander through this world stumbling along not knowing your way. Because our world is so loud and busy, our spiritual ears have become deafened to that still small voice. If you will allow Him, God will help you to hear Him.

What does He sound like?

“And after the fire came a gentle whisper.” 1 Kings 19:12b (This would be a great story to read if it’s not familiar to you.)

In my experience:

- His voice is always gentle – can be firm but still gentle
- Never condemning - you have to understand the difference between conviction vs. condemnation
- Often, it will be leading you to the next place with Him
- He never contradicts His Word
- Often, He shows you something new about Himself or who you are to Him.

Getting to know the sound of His voice simply takes time.

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *We love because He first loved us.*

Day Two: *In getting to know God, there are no shortcuts.*

Day Three: *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go: I will counsel you and watch over you.” Psalm 32:8*

Day Four: *As God takes you through seasons of who He is, He will also show you who you are to Him.*

Day Five: *The importance you place on your Bible is in direct relation to your nearness to God.*

Into His Presence

Bible Study – Session Four

Day One – Called to Forgive

This is one of the more thrilling weeks for me. Honestly, teaching on forgiveness is not typically exciting, considering it usually brings up many painful memories in people. In this case, having witnessed God so clearly step into this study and redirect my intended direction as I wrote it, I know this is from Him.

As I began to write the foundational material for the pilot study, which was at the time linked to the novel, *Unmending the Veil*, I sketched out the topics. Session Four, in my earliest thoughts, was to be about purpose, a truly exciting topic for all of us. When the time came and I sat down to write it, however, I was stumped. Since I was writing each session the week before our class met, I didn't have much time to work through each week's material. I admit, when nothing came, I was disturbed. Most often, when I sit down to write it just *comes*. It's the Holy Spirit to be sure. That week nothing came. Having walked with God long enough to know when He was redirecting me, I prayed and asked Him to show me the way. I decided not to panic but simply walked away from my computer until I received His direction.

In the small group I was leading for this study, we would each write out a specific prayer request, and each person would take one of the slips of paper home to pray for that person during the week. That week, and I am ashamed to admit this, I had tucked my sheet with the prayer request in my Bible and forgotten to pull it out during my morning quiet time. Our class was on Tuesdays, and it was Friday morning before I read the prayer request. It was from my sweet friend Ruth who simply asked for prayer that she could forgive others.

That was it! Forgiveness! Of course there should be an entire session on forgiveness. After I wrote the session and as I prepared for the next week, the Lord showed me something extraordinary. The topic of forgiveness touches us all. It's the topic closest to the Savior's heart and hands and feet. He died so that we could know forgiveness.

Also, the idea of relational forgiveness is just as critical. It's a thread woven throughout the fabric of each and every one of our stories. So let's begin with why? Why do we need to forgive all things?

Matthew 18:3 says, "And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

I take Jesus' words in the above verse quite literally. I believe the innocence and teachability of a child is partly what the Lord has in mind for us to model when He spoke these words. One primary method a child uses to learn is their propensity to ask questions. Can't we all recall a time when we have had a



"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

_____ as the Lord _____
you"

Colossians 3:13



child ask us nearly every question under the sun? Questions lead to answers; answers lead to knowledge. This is how they grow and develop – they ask questions, same with us as God’s children.

Hold nothing back. Ask the tough questions.

God can handle any question you throw His way. He won’t consider you irreverent for asking real questions. As a matter of fact, digging deeper into the why questions are often how He shows you something about His character, or at least it’s been so in my case.

Since I am such a why person, I had to ask: Why does God call us to forgive? Without forgiveness you will never fully make it into God’s intimate presence. Not only is that our defined goal throughout this study, to find our way into His presence, but it’s also His goal for you. He wants to make you His. He wants you to be near. What does that tell you about Him? He loves you. It really is that simple. He knows that if you hold on to that grudge, if you refuse to forgive, it will remain a stitch between you and Him. Again, He wants you near, so the stitch has to go. You must forgive.

Consider the following verses.

- ❖ Luke 6:37 “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”
- ❖ Matthew 6:14-15 “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

I’m by no means a Bible scholar, but I am a reader, and the verse in Matthew is pretty clear. I would not dare to try and get all technical about the meaning of this verse as I have heard others do. I’m a simple girl. This is red letter reading here. Jesus Himself says if we don’t forgive, we will not be forgiven. Just for the sin of unforgiveness? I don’t know. I do know that since unforgiveness is a sin (since He tells us *to* forgive), when we don’t forgive, that is active, current sin in our lives. Active sin separates us from God, not positionally, meaning we are still saved and heaven bound, but relationally it hinders us in our closeness with Him. There is a barrier created, which robs us of peace with Him. No matter what we choose to believe, forgiveness is not optional, so when we refuse to do so, we are, in essence, taking a step away from God.

When we look at the character of God, it’s easy to see that His insistence for us to forgive is for our benefit. Just as He offered us forgiveness to bridge the gap between a Holy God and sinful man, His intention is the same when He calls us to forgive. When we hold on to unforgiveness, a bitter root grows up. (Hebrews 12:15) That’s the beginning of a stitch, something that prevents of from being near to God. Remember, our entire goal throughout this series is to draw near to Him so that we may know Him. His presence is our Promised Land. It’s only when we know Him that we can grasp His love and love Him in return.

Time to do some digging.

On the following lines, write the name or initials of the person or people whom you have not forgiven.

For each person give a brief reason why you feel they don't deserve forgiveness. Maybe they have never asked for forgiveness or even acknowledged they have done anything wrong. Whatever the case, why do you feel they do not deserve to be forgiven?

Now, think of three sins you have committed in your life. If you are brave enough, think of the worst offenses. On the following lines, write why you deserve to be forgiven by God.

In your case, whatever you came up with is not a good enough reason. Truthfully, God forgave you because Jesus died on the cross to pay for each and every sin you committed. It wasn't because of what you deserved; it was because of who He is. When that payment was made, He redeemed you, which ultimately means He bought you.

Write 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 on the following lines.

Now, complete the verse found in Isaiah 49:16.

"See, I have _____ you on the _____ of my _____."

You should remember this verse from our time discussing how we get to know God through relationships. I use it in a different context today. In 1 Corinthians where it says that we are not our own, we were bought at a price, I have to believe that this engraving on the palms of Jesus' hands is proof of His payment. Once we accept Him as Savior, we are giving up our right to ourselves, and He has proof of His ownership of us right there on the palms of His hands. If you acknowledge that you are not your own and you use His name, Lord, when you pray, then the bottom line is this: you must forgive, if for no other reason, than because He calls you to. He is in charge. He is our Adonai, our Master. As a matter of obedience, we are called to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Sure, you know all this. Most likely, you have known this for as long as you have been holding a grudge. So why then is it so difficult to allow ourselves to forgive? What is holding you back?

Acknowledging what holds us back gives us a place to begin with God. You may have to work through that part first. For example, if the person you refuse to forgive has never asked for forgiveness, then that may be your hold up. Realize this – they may never ask. In that case do you understand the power you continue to allow them to have over you? If nothing else, get mad enough about it to say, “no more!” Whatever is holding you back, acknowledge it before God and allow Him to speak His truth in the situation. Unforgiveness is a yoke of slavery around *your* neck. Complete the verse in the margin.

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not _____ yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”
Galatians 5:1*

Focal Passage: *“Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13*

Reminder: *Unforgiveness is active unforgiven sin.*

Call to Action: *Acknowledge what holds you back.*

Day Two – Forgiveness Frees Us



“She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her _____.” Luke 8:44



God calls us to forgive because He knows that holding on to unforgiveness causes us to hemorrhage on the inside. It’s like a constant bleeding that weakens our faith and ultimately destroys us. I have shared how bitterness and unforgiveness was a tremendous stitch in the veil that prevented me from drawing near to God. I can think of no better term for it than it was a hemorrhaging on the inside of me. From the outside I looked perfectly fine. No one would have guessed the bitterness I felt toward my husband. The verse above is one of the earliest verses God used to speak directly into my heart. He showed me how it took only one touch from Him for the bleeding to stop.

Read the remainder of Jesus’ encounter with this desperate woman in verses 44-48.

The account of this woman became intensely personal to me. Even now, when I read it, I remember with great tenderness the healing I’ve known. I remember the power of the touch of Jesus and how free I immediately felt when I no longer was hemorrhaging bitterness and unforgiveness. There is a new found freedom I now experience that I never want to lose. I know, in order to maintain this freedom, I have to forgive in each and every circumstance and relationship as it arises – I let no bitter root grow up.

Hebrews 12:15 says, “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

Certainly, unforgiveness grows into bitterness, and as we read in the verse above, we see that a bitter root causes trouble and defiles. (Defile = polluted or stained) Consider the phrase in the verse above, “See to it that...” This clearly indicates that this is a choice, our choice. If we are told not to allow it, then it must be within our power to prevent, or at least with the power of the Holy Spirit. So no matter what you need to forgive, you must proactively choose to forgive in order to be free from the tangled mess that is bitterness.

Who benefits when we forgive? Just as we’ve needed to be forgiven to be free of sin’s hold on us, we need to forgive to live in freedom. When God is adamant through His Word that we forgive, maybe it’s because He alone knows the detriment to a person when they hold on to unforgiveness. His Word says He came to set the prisoners free, so it would stand to reason that He would instruct us on how to live free.

While you may not realize it now, when you hold on to unforgiveness, you are bound and held hostage. You are anything but free.

List common reasons people give as their refusal to forgive.

What do we fear when we forgive? We fear:

- ❖ It will mean that what the person did was okay
- ❖ They might do the same thing again
- ❖ That we will let them “off the hook”

Holding on to unforgiveness gives us a false sense of control when we feel a lack of control. So to forgive might mean the person has control over us. We all have within us a sense of justice, so when we are wronged, it seems contrary to what is just to simply forgive and let them go unpunished. Our thoughts regarding justice go something like this:

How could they?

That’s just not fair.

They should be punished.

Do you realize that while you’re sitting around, hemorrhaging on the inside, the person you refuse to forgive is going on about life? Most likely, they don’t even know you are still angry. Or if they do, in many cases, they simply don’t care. So there they are living in complete freedom while you are bound. How does that make you feel? They are free; you are chained.

This may seem like a left-turn, but just bear with it.
Read the verse in the margin.

Marah means bitter. When Moses cried out to the LORD, the LORD showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink. What this wood represented was the cross. When brought to the cross, even what is most bitter, like past wounds, can become sweet again. It can become bearable.

Also, the cross here can represent the cross you have been asked to take up. Sometimes forgiving can mean dying to self, dying to our feelings, dying to our sense of justice.

“When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.)”
Exodus 15:23

Supernatural

Recently, I read something to this effect: The cross is where the natural dies and the supernatural begins.

Because we are Called to Forgive and Forgiveness Sets Us Free, by faith, we can *decide* to trust what God’s Word says about forgiveness, but it’s only through the Spirit within that we are *able* to forgive. That’s the supernatural part.

Common misconceptions that hinder our forgiveness

- *Once you forgive, you will forget.*

Well, unless you have a lobotomy, you won't simply forget. The memories will come. The key is what you do with the memories when they do come. It's a process that may take much time, but ultimately, it's worth it. The freedom you feel when you forgive is like lifting a heavy load from your shoulders. Life becomes lighter when you're free. Is that not what you want? A lightened load? So what do you do with your burdens? Lay them at the feet of Jesus. Allow Him to carry the load.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I
will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28
His offer stands. He will carry the load if only
you will give it to Him.

- *Forgiveness says that what they did is okay.*

Clearly, that's not the case. The act of forgiveness is one of shifting your burden onto Jesus. It means you are letting go of the offense with confidence that God will seek justice. Only the Lord knows the heart of the one you are to forgive. You have to trust that He will discipline the person, even if you don't ever see proof of it. We may have to die to what we think should have been and to our sense of justice. We may have to trust that God will seek justice on our behalf, even if we never see it.

If you were able to forgive, what might that look like in your life? What would be different about you? Maybe you would sleep better. Certainly you would feel less agitated. Think for a moment of all the time and energy you waste by holding on to unforgiveness.

*By faith, we can decide to trust what God's Word says about forgiveness.
Then, it is the Spirit within who enables us to forgive.*

You truly may *feel* as if you can never forgive. You may have tried over the years and have come to the conclusion that the wound simply runs too deep. In this case you believe a lie. As you read above, it's the Spirit who will enable you to forgive. All you have to do is allow Him to work this out inside of you.

Focal Passage: *"She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped." Luke 8:44*

Consider: *Unforgiveness is like a hemorrhaging within us.*

Solution: *My only option is to lay this burden at the feet of Jesus.*

Day Three – The Process

On days one and two of this week, we concluded that God calls us to forgive and that forgiveness frees us. Once we allow those two truths to sift into our belief system, what's next? In this session, you will walk through this process and then apply it to your own situations where forgiveness is necessary but doesn't come easily.

In my case:

It took longer than necessary to forgive, simply because I didn't know how. For me, when I finally got to a point where I could empathize with the person I was so angry with, that was a first step. I tried to put myself in his position, what he was feeling and had experienced in life and that broke my heart for him. Then I started praying for him – regularly. Something about that gave me tremendous freedom. From there it became a choice to forgive him. I chose it. So when an ugly memory would surface, instead of allowing anger to control me, I chose to recall those things I empathized with, I prayed for him, and then I reminded myself that I forgave him. After some time, it became part of how I dealt with bad memories. I did this over and over until eventually it became so automatic that I didn't have to even think through it. I went from ugly memory to automatically recalling I had forgiven."



Empathize with the person Put yourself in their place. Try to feel what they may be feeling.

This may be especially difficult when someone has hurt you deeply.

- Consider their past wounds
- Remember that hurting people hurt people
- Lost people act lost
- Consider their current insecurities or afflictions

Begin to pray for them

Pray good things:

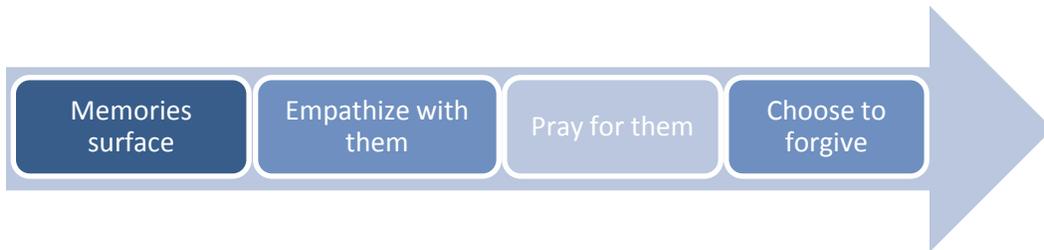
- That they would grow close to God or to know God at all
- That their wounds would be healed
- That their eyes would be opened

Prayer can help you develop God's heart toward that person. In His heart all are loved and valued, even those who may have wounded us. You can continue to pray for this person until your heart catches up with the choice your mind has made to forgive.

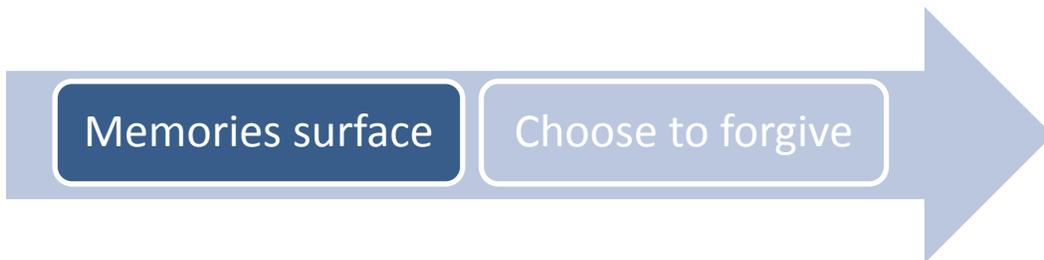
Forgiveness is a choice

- Does not mean what they did is okay
- Does not mean you will forget

When the memories surface, repeat the process over and over.



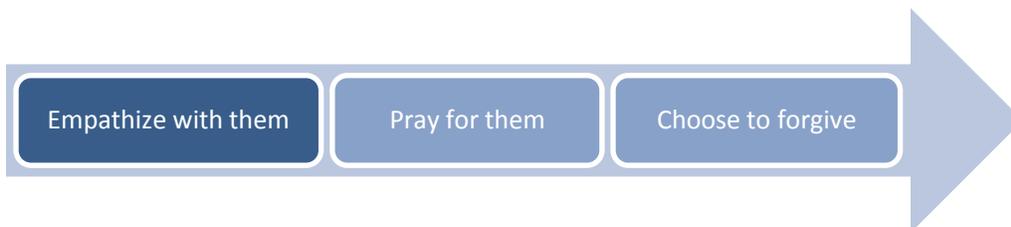
Remember, when done over a period of time, it will become so automatic that you will go from bad memory to remembering that you've chosen to forgive.



Empathy

Remember, empathizing with the person who has hurt you doesn't mean that what they did was okay. These points of empathy are not excuses; instead, they are a way of looking at the person with God's perspective and His heart.

It's time to begin the process for yourself. For each person that you listed whom you have not forgiven, you will follow the process on the flow chart. This may take days or weeks or even months, but if you stick with it, you will find that, before you know it, you go from ugly memory to choosing to forgive rather quickly. Eventually, you will be able to say with certainty that you have forgiven.



In the section below write the name or initial of the person you are called to forgive. Then pray about how you might find a way to empathize with them. By putting yourself in their place, you may find your heart is able to soften toward that person. This may take some time, so don't work on this lesson today only. Keep it handy for a while as you work through this.

In some cases if you know the person well enough that you have information about difficulties in their childhood, it may give you insight over how to empathize with them. They might possibly be living out the same patterns they were raised with. Or maybe you are aware of some traumatic event they have experienced. So often, hurting people hurt people. After you find a way to empathize, or even before if you are having a difficult time finding that one thing that will soften your heart, pray. Through prayer, the Lord will certainly prepare your heart to forgive.

Name:

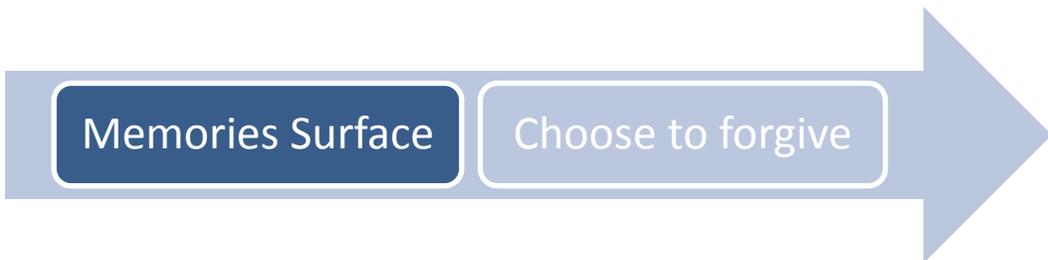
How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person. _____

Remember, this is a process not a one day assignment. If you journal, it may help to transfer this information over to your journal so that you will remember to continue to lift this person up in prayer.

Also, this process will work in areas where you may need to forgive yourself. Each of us have things in our past that can haunt us, condemn us even if we allow it – divorce, abortion, wrong choices, withholding love when we should have given it, giving love when we should have withheld it – as in cases of intimacy. One of these spaces may need to be reserved for you.

The memories will come! When they do, follow the pattern below again and again, until eventually, you go from ugly memory to reminding yourself that you have chosen to forgive.



Name:

How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person. _____

Name:

How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person. _____

Name:

How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person: _____

Ways you might pray:

“Father, I lift _____ up to You in prayer, knowing you are the Righteous Judge. I leave them in Your capable hands.”

“Lord, I know that _____ is wounded. That’s why they hurt me the way they did. I pray that you will heal them. Thank You for forgiving me so that I might, in turn, forgive.”

“Father, today I choose to forgive _____. I know you chose to forgive me when I didn’t deserve it. I want to be more like You, so I make the same choice as You. I choose to forgive.”

“Lord, I pray for _____, that they will come to know You and Your love. If they have You in their lives, all things will be new.”

You might personalize your prayer based on the way you have come to empathize with the person. In that case you can ask for their healing in more specific terms. There is something incredibly freeing that occurs when you pray for the person you were once determined to hate. Malice fades and the Spirit will allow you to supernaturally love that person. Based on the circumstances of how you were hurt, you may never find reconciliation of the relationship. Our goal in this exercise is not restoration of your relationship with them, rather to restore your closeness with God through forgiving others as He has forgiven you. This is a lesson in obedience to what the Word of God says, much less about the other person and all about you.

Day Four – Receiving Forgiveness

Feeling forgiven for our own sin may prove difficult to achieve for some. Our minds, like a computer, have recorded every wrong thing we've done and often the playback of events is debilitating. Choices made can't be undone, and consequences follow as a reminder. Shame and condemnation can follow a person who doesn't understand the completeness of God's forgiveness. As I said in our previous day's study, the process we are using to work through forgiving others is the same process we can use to forgive ourselves. It must begin with acknowledging that your sins are forgiven. Complete the verse in the margin. The meaning here is that the forgiven sin is removed so far from us, it can never revisit us. But it does, doesn't it? It revisits in our memory. Sometimes it revisits because others remind us of our past sins.

"...as far as the _____
is from the _____, so
far has he removed our
transgressions from us. As a
father has compassion on his
children, so the LORD has
compassion on those who
fear him; for he knows how
we are formed, he
remembers that we are dust."
Psalm 103:12-14

As we learned in our Session Two material, sometimes stitches are inflicted upon us. For the most part those are the things that we need to forgive others for, those things they did which left emotional scars, which in turn became spiritual scars. The act of choosing forgiveness is so vital, God calls us to do it. It's His command that we do.

Some stitches, however, are a result of our own choices and sin. In that case God's call to forgive is the same. At times we must look inward? The person we must chose to forgive is ourselves.

I've been in numerous women's Bible studies over the years, and I can't count the times I have heard a woman say, that because of what His Word says she believes God has forgiven her, yet she can't forgive herself. I have struggled with that same issue in years past. I believe it's something I'm free from now, and it is my hope that you will find that same freedom. My freedom truly came when I came to the conclusion, if God can forgive me, can I not forgive myself? Am I better than God? Am I so much more holy that my standards are higher than His? Of course not. But wasn't that, in essence, what I was saying in my refusal to forgive myself for something God long sense forgave?

There is a distinct difference between living with regret over our actions, or even having to suffer the consequences of our decisions and forgiving ourselves. The truth is, regret and consequence are part of missing the mark of God's standard and they sting, but forgiveness is a different issue entirely. Forgiveness is removing the penalty of sin, or at least shifting that penalty over to Jesus. The penalty you faced was separation from God, but when He forgave you and became your Savior, the price was paid. When you refuse to forgive yourself, you are holding on to that penalty, which is separation from God. How so? When you maintain unforgiveness over your past sins, shame is the result. If you recall, shame was on our list of stitches. Shame causes us to believe the lie that we are not worthy to be in God's presence, so we don't draw near.

“Christ is the end of
the law so that
there may be

for everyone who
believes.”
Romans 10:4

Complete the verse in the margin. I guess we could debate our worthiness of being in God’s presence, or we could simply accept the fact that because of what Jesus did, if we have accepted Him as our Savior, then He has made us right (righteous) before God. Worthy or not, we have a right to be there, to go boldly before the throne of grace. (Hebrews 4:16)

Read 1 Corinthians 2:11 and rephrase the first sentence in your own words.

I hope you mentioned or considered the word motive. Each of us knows our own motives, even when we don’t admit them to others. Only you know the deepest motive of your heart. You know your areas of pride and where you constantly strive for perfection in order to maintain others’ approval. If you struggle with pride or hidden motives and agendas that prompt your actions, you should offer these to God in prayer.

The topic of forgiving myself is something I’ve had to struggle through repeatedly. I told you that I was once a great pretender and because of that, I made some terrible mistakes. No matter what it takes, no matter the cost, you must become real. You must settle in near to God and learn to dwell daily in His presence. If not, you will live a life full of regrets and consequences. It’s inevitable.

With God’s strength and wisdom, you will live out your life entirely differently than you would on your own. You will raise your children entirely differently. Take it from someone who knows that last truth so personally and deeply that I often pray for the Lord to redeem what I did wrong with my children while I was so far away from Him, trying to do life on my own power and strength, yet failing miserably. This is an area where I struggled with forgiving myself greatly. I had so many *if onlys*. My oldest son has served time in prison. How can I not wonder and regret? Still, forgiving myself was vital in drawing near to God. I had to allow Him to show me His perspective. He helped me to empathize with the mother who did the best she could with what she had at the time. It was a process. And don’t think accusations don’t arise from the enemy and sometimes from others. I still have to remind myself that I have chosen to forgive myself for all the ways I have failed.

What are your greatest regrets in parenting? If this doesn't apply, then in other relationships?

First, you have to believe that you are forgiven for your failures. Next, you need to work through the process of forgiving yourself. Then, the place you need to camp for the remainder of your life is in God's presence, getting His way of thinking into your mind and heart through His Word. Once that happens, you will make the better choices. It is never too late to begin.

What are areas you struggle with from your past, things you have trouble letting go of?

Now that the number of divorces is equal in the church to those outside of it, this may be something you have struggled with. Me too. Have you noticed that I have every problem you do? Now ask yourself, was I lying when I said I was a hot mess?

“Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have _____? ”

2 Samuel 7:18

You can't imagine how many times I have asked the same question as David. I have so much sin in my past that it totally makes no sense that God would use me in any way. Thankfully, we don't have God figured out. True, to us, He often makes no sense. But for whatever reason, He forgave me and then restored me, even though I was this sinful, divorced, immoral woman. My story may sound familiar.

Read Luke 7:44-50 Record your insights.

This is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture. It's my story. "Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – for she loved much." (v.47) After I received His forgiveness, and once I chose to forgive myself, something life altering came along with it, love. I accepted His love and loved Him even

more in return because of the unimaginable extent of His willingness to forgiveness me. If He saw something redeemable in me, surely there was. He helped me find the good that can come of it. He will most certainly do the same with you

Focal Passage: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Psalm 103:12

Believe: No matter what it takes, no matter the cost, you must become real.

Conclusion: God can redeem even the ugliest of pasts.

Day Five – Admitting the Need

This week on forgiveness is tough. Dredging up old memories is never pleasant, but healing over those hurts and wounds is worth the pain of reliving them for a season. Today's lesson is as tough – maybe tougher than Days One-Four. Stick with it, however, and you will come out on the other end feeling lighter of heart after dealing with some of the most difficult issues.

Just this morning as I was doing my homework for the Beth Moore study of *The Patriarchs*, I read this, “Redemption is when the pain is treated and turned around so thoroughly that it not only loses power to do you harm but also gains the power to do some good.” It was so meaningful at the time that I even copied it over onto an index card, not knowing at the time that I would use it today. Such is the sovereignty of God. He knew.

Even though God forgives, when we hold on to shame, it maintains some sort of control over us. But once given to Him fully, and allowing Him to help you work through the hurt and heartache, it will lose control and ultimately do some good. While you may never feel a call to publicly share your past history, the Lord will invariably lead you into relationships where you may more privately share your own story of healing, which may promote healing in a wounded and grieving sister.

Today, we will cover two areas where many women miss the mark, yet because of society's viewpoint over each topic, the woman who has committed these sins has yet to acknowledge their actions as sin.

The decision to be intimate with a man prior to marriage is now so common, those who don't are depicted as weird. As I write fiction with the intent of keeping this godly model, I find my own self skeptical over a young woman who decides to wait. I have to come up with a good backstory as to why, because that's the exception and rarely the rule. How jaded has the world made me? Maybe it's my own history that has sculpted my mindset. Along with many, I share the regret of intimacy prior to marriage. There are countless things I would do differently in my life if given the chance, and this one is among my top five. I can hardly imagine the beauty of beginning my married life without the baggage of my sordid history. My husband feels the same about his past. We both brought this regret into our marriage, and we both try our best to convey the sadness of it to our younger son. This is one of those cases where we preach, “Don't do what we did; do what we say.” We did learn the hard way.

Have you had an open dialog about intimacy before marriage with your young adult children or nieces or nephews? If so, how well was the message received?

Today's culture hardly allows for such a position as waiting until marriage. It will require living out a truly godly walk to influence your children in this area. You can't have a "cultural Christian home," professing Christ while living just like the world, and expect your children to be any different than you really are. They will become what you model. No matter your history, if your belief system has truly changed, as ours has in our home, you can share your new, godly belief without being perceived as a hypocrite. Isn't that what most parents fear, seeming hypocritical?

In the previous lesson, when you were given the opportunity to begin to forgive others, you were invited to use some of the spaces for forgiving yourself. I had to do that in this area. In empathizing with that girl who chose intimate relationships prior to marriage, I had to consider early childhood abuse. Since the statistics show that one in four women have suffered sexual abuse, the likelihood of this being the cause of many poor intimacy decisions is staggering. Twenty-five percent of those who read this have suffered such abuse. If you are among those, in your case, begin by empathizing with the little girl who was inflicted with a wrong sense of sexuality. I was a textbook example of promiscuity in my young adult years, and as God has tended to me in these areas, He has shown me the root of the sin and behavior stemmed from such abuse. Remember our root analogy? He took me to the root and then firmly removed it from the soil of my heart. God takes such matters seriously and has the greatest desire to heal you of the shame that accompanies childhood sexual abuse, as well as the aftermath of what it does to a young woman's heart.

In the verse in the margin, God assures us that He deals severely with those who wreak such havoc on the young. I will go on to share this. God has given me such healing in this area and such forgiveness toward my victimizer that I have prayed for him to be forgiven. I have pled for his forgiveness even if he never had the presence of mind to ask for himself. I have let go of the hatred I once had for him. How did it begin? I was able to empathize with him over his lost condition. I prayed for him, and I chose to forgive him. That set me free!

I don't want to end without addressing those who were not abused, yet chose intimacy outside of marriage. Where might your source of empathy come from? Your root may be insecurity. It's more likely a desperate need for God's love, yet you chose a lesser human love. Every woman who seeks unhealthy love and acceptance from a man is in actuality seeking God's love. Sadly, though, the empty human heart often distorts the desire for God's love into a desire for romantic love. I suppose this is the perfect opportunity to cover something that's been rattling around in my head for days now. The empty-hearted woman, she comes in all shapes, sizes, situations, and circumstance. This is the woman who has such a need for romantic love that she will often seek unhealthy ways of temporarily filling the void. We have covered intimacy outside of marriage as much as we need to for our purpose. This next observation, however, may really sting. So pray now for the ability to be honest with yourself.

● ● ●
"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Matthew 18:6
● ● ●

We are talking about the empty-hearted woman who seeks to fill the void through fantasy, no matter its form. It may be through books you read or movies you watch, or it may even be an over active imagination, whichever, it's an escape from where you are into where you want to be. Often, that place of escape is into a world where you are loved and desired unconditionally. You are the heroin of your own love story. Books and movies simply help you to develop new and exciting plots. You may do this just a little or to a great extent, live within this fantasy world with whichever leading man was in the last movie you watched.

Some of you have no clue what I'm talking about, so just bear with me. But many, if not most know exactly what I'm referring to. This is so critical to work through. I'm desperate for you to understand this. What you desire is not human love. Can I repeat that? What you desire is not human love. What is happening is that your spirit is longing for more of Jesus. I shared a verse with you on Day Four of last week, "What a person desires is unfailing love..." Proverbs 19:22 Even God's Word confirms that we all desire unfailing love. What we can't seem to grasp is the simple truth that, only God can love us that way. Only He has unconditional love to offer. So for any woman who has this deep need for romantic love, if she can turn her hope and expectation toward God and receive that complete love from Him, her life will be transformed. If there were any way I could open up your heart and mind and deposit this one truth in, I would do it.

I know this may seem like an odd direction we are taking since we are flowing out of a section on needing to forgive ourselves and currently into a section called, Admitting the Need, but what I have done is to take you the gentle way toward a possibly new concept. If you are trying to fill your empty-heart with the things of this world, including the human love of a man, real or imaginary, then you are committing the sin of idolatry, and you need to admit your need for repentance. While it may seem harmless to fantasize, it's anything but harmless.

"Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." James 1:15

Jonah 2:8

"Those who cling to
worthless idols
_____ the grace
that could be theirs."

Your thought life can easily become your actions. Even if you don't believe the degree of danger you are placing yourself in, at least know you are placing yourself in a permanent place of lack. As long as you try to meet this deep need you have with anything other than God's love, you will lack what could be yours. Complete the verse in the margin. God's Word makes clear, when we hold on to counterfeits we will never know the real thing.

I think this topic is so vital to women, I sense I will someday get the opportunity to go into much greater detail on the subject. It was a stronghold for me, this desire for human love. Having a romantic heart and vivid imagination, I was easily able to create a world that counterfeited what I truly desired, which was an intimate and passionate relationship with Jesus. Now that I have the Real Thing, I find every other relationship lacking by comparison.

Now, to more narrowly focus on our actual topic of Admitting the Need (for forgiveness), we will really get personal. This section deals with unrepentant sin. While some have difficulty receiving forgiveness or forgiving themselves, others have the opposite problem. They refuse to admit the need for forgiveness.

Besides intimacy outside of marriage that we have already touched on, we will take a brief look at abortion. Both are delicate topics to examine without question as both are easy to excuse and become defensive about because of our current cultural climate. The problem with going along with society's viewpoint is that neither are considered sin, so there's no repentance required, which means turning from the sin or admission of guilt. Without admission and repentance, we hinder our closeness with God.

Both are sin, no matter the reason for the choice and no matter society's position on either. Even with my childhood victimization and the outcome being promiscuity, I can't use victimization as an excuse for the later behavior. As I said earlier, God showed me that victimization was the root, but promiscuity is still sin, no matter what led me to it. I had a choice to continue in the hurtful behavior. I chose it.

In other cases when there is no victimization as the root, some women still justify the behavior. For many reasons they defend their position, but ultimately, God has designed sex to be within the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman. Just as He has done for me, He offers restoration when we admit we missed the mark. Holding on to any defense only hurts you and prevents you from receiving the freedom giving power of forgiveness and restoration of the intimate relationship.

To cover one of the most difficult topics, abortion, I will begin with those who sit in defense of it. While some women are traumatized over such a choice and live with lifelong regret, others defend the choice as their right. The truth is, every human life is valuable, created in God's image, and only He has the right to end that life. Rather than add statistics about how many lives are lost each year, I feel for our purpose it would be more productive to focus on the women's lives that are destroyed by it.

Studies show that instances of alcohol, drug abuse, and depression are higher in women post-abortion. Abortion is detrimental to women and destroys lives and futures. The enemy has no greater desire than to keep them bound by such destructive patterns and emotional scarring. In order to do that, he perpetuates the lie that abortion is not a sin. Because in doing so, he knows that healing will never come. The reason is, with admission and repentance come forgiveness and restoration. With restoration of the close relationship between the woman and God comes healing. With healing comes ultimate freedom. Remember, though, it all began with calling abortion what it is, sin. Until then, healing from its destruction to the heart of the woman will never be achieved.

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of _____ may come from the Lord...”
Acts 3:19

Some of our topics have been difficult and all of them were not given the time they deserve. The complexities are so numerous that such a small study can hardly do them justice. At the very least I hope we have a beginning point for those affected. Many preachers steer clear of the topic of abortion. Because there are so many wounded women in our churches, preachers have become convinced that addressing it would do harm to those who have had an abortion. But the contrary is true. There are two types of women who have suffered the severe consequences of abortion, those who can hardly continue on in life due to regret and shame and those still in defense or denial. In each case the only way for healing to come is to seek the Healer with a repentant heart. So if you are either, you must know that beginning an open dialog with God is the first step.

End today with writing out a prayer in the space below. If you have or know of anyone who has suffered the long term consequences of abortion, pray for them. Pray for their healing and restoration. If this is not a topic that hits close to home for you, you might be surprised at how many Christian women you know have this in their past and are suffering still. Pray for those who still defend their actions. Pray for their eyes to be opened to the truth. It is only the truth that will set them free.

Finally, so much time was spent on such deeply intimate topics there seems little time for what we might consider the “lesser sins.” It is to the devil’s delight that we consider them so. As I conclude today’s writing, I simply can’t get past some of the more obvious needs for admission of guilt. The greedy, the unkind, cheaters, liars, hypocrites, the unwilling, gossips, haters, the selfish, those who lust, thieves, etc... I think maybe I covered all of us to some extent in this list.

We can all use a good dose of Psalm 26:2-3. Write it in the space below.

It’s easy to minimize the severity of our own sins when compared to the sins of others. God’s Word is clear, though. His expectation for us is high. How can He expect so much from mere humans? Because He has given us the Spirit of His very own Son to reside within us. 2 Peter 1:3 says, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his glory and goodness.” We are left without excuse. Our need to turn from those sins that seem lesser or minor is just as vital as for the ones we are eager to condemn.

I will end today's lesson with a verse that sums up this entire session. See the verse in the margin. Notice that twice in this passage the phrase is used, "If we claim," as if the Apostle John was anticipating that people would claim that their actions were not sinful. Of course he anticipated it. It's our human nature to defend our own actions while condemning others for theirs.

Read the verse from Psalm 26 again and be brave enough to sit with the Lord and ask Him to test you and try you. Ask for a thorough heart examination. Whatever is unearthed, admit your need for forgiveness, repent of the sin, and turn from it. It will serve to bring you into a closer walk with your Savior.

1 John 1:8-10

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives."

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *We are called to forgive as we have been forgiven.*

Day Two: *Forgiveness frees the forgiver.*

Day Three: *Walking through the process of forgiving others.*

Day Four: *"...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12*

Day Five: *For freedom's sake, you must admit your own need for forgiveness.*

Into His Presence

Bible Study – Session Five

Day One – Your New Normal

Session Six will be a more in depth review of our journey, but for today's purpose, we need a small reminder.

1. First, the question was posed, "Do I really love God, full on, passionately, and with all I have in me? We checked for symptoms – outward behaviors and inward attitudes that may indicate we don't fully love and trust God.
2. We identified our stitches – those internal things that keep us at a distance from God, and we set out to become "real deal" people.
3. The process began in learning how to remove stitches, with primary attention given to getting closer to God by getting to know Him through His Word.
4. Focus on forgiveness, realizing its essential role in drawing near to God.

Hopefully, in the areas above you are making progress toward your goal, which is drawing near to God, getting to know Him more intimately, and loving Him passionately. As you have begun to travel along this path, something new should be emerging. You should be experiencing a new level of peace. When you walk closely with God, peace should be your normal, natural state of being. No matter what circumstances are going on around you, when you spend time with God every day and allow Him to begin to change your mind and heart, a sense of peace fills your life.

Complete the verse in the margin.

Peace is a Fruit of the Spirit. As we discussed during our "Real Deal" assignment, the fruit is already within each believer, but when we aren't walking closely with God, allowing the Spirit to be our motivator and guide, peace feels absent.

Chaos and torment are the absence of peace. The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God. Though we can never really be out of His presence, as He assures us He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), we can, however, step away from God's intimate presence. When we do, peace seems lost and a sense of inner turmoil takes its place.

When you begin to love Jesus and walk with Him daily, peace will become your new normal. So if you suddenly begin to feel a sense of chaos and torment, this is an indication that something is wrong.

In what areas of your life do you most often feel at peace?

In what areas do you feel less at peace?

*"_____ I
leave with you;
my _____ I
give you."
John 14:27*

In the areas where you feel less at peace, would you categorize the situations as chaotic or tormenting? Things that cause you to lose sleep, fret, or worry? *Yes or No*

If we have concluded that being near to God allows us to experience peace, then any area of your life where you feel chaos and torment must be scrutinized. Since the scenarios can vary so broadly, you will have to be your own investigator. I feel less than able to ask adequate questions to get you started, but since the Holy Spirit resides in you and is your Teacher and Counselor, you can be certain He will help you to look within and discover the source of any inner conflict you may be experiencing. With the following questions, I will try to get your brain churning. When I have chaos going on, these are the types of questions I ask myself and the Lord. Some will not apply to your situation, but you may need them someday.

Is this situation within my control? Is there something I have done to create the problem?

If the situation is conflict driven with another, do I need to apologize?

Am I holding a grudge? Do I need to forgive?

Is my situation attached to fear? Am I scared to step out in faith in an area?

Do I doubt God on a matter?

Have I been grumbling?

I have found that a sure way to experience that “far away” feeling from God is by having a critical spirit and being a complainer. Praise and thankfulness are the only cures I know for this syndrome.

As far as I know, am I being obedient in all areas of my life? (I know deep down when I’m not.)

Am I serving where I need to be serving?

Am I giving of myself and resources as I feel led?

Am I in a season of selfishness? Or do I put others first?

Am I allowing more of the world into my mind through TV, social media, or other avenues?

Am I trying to fill a place of emptiness in my heart with the things of this world rather than turning to God? Is my face pointing toward God or the world?

Have I been unkind in any of my dealings with others? Or have I been talking unkindly about someone behind their back?

*“...would not
God have
discovered it,
since he
_____ the
_____ of the
_____?”
Psalm 44:21*

As you see, this line of questioning could go on for quite some time more. At least you have an idea of the probing questions you can ask yourself and God when you have a sense of inner conflict. What is important to know is that the only way to resolve the conflict within is through interaction with God. Even when you can't determine what the source might be, He will show you. Just as I described in an earlier session, when we were trying to determine which stitch we begin with, God will help you see the source of your chaos in a similar way. He will show you through His Word, through something that someone might say to you, through a preacher or Sunday school lesson – basically, He will make the answer clear through any number of ways. If you take anything away from this session, it should be this: Peace should be your new normal. If you lack peace, you have somehow stepped away from that intimate place with God.

Focal Passage: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.” John 14:27*

Consider: *The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God.*

Anticipate: *Peace should be your new normal.*

Day Two – Obedience

Obey – that four-letter word!

I intentionally began this week’s lesson with the questions you read through yesterday. Did you notice a theme? Most questions led to matters of obedience. Whether we like to admit it or not, our disobedience is what most often hinders our intimacy with God. Complete the verse in the margin.

This does NOT mean – if you love Me, prove it by obeying. For years, that was how I interpreted this verse. I thought I just needed to obey better in order to love Him. How backwards was that thinking? Instead, it’s a simple statement of truth. This is more of a thermometer to check for lovesickness. If you have a problem with obeying what the Word of God says, then you have a love issue.

“If anyone
_____ me, he
will _____ my
_____.”
John 14:23

When you don’t love God, disobedience comes rather easily.

In our first session we discussed lovesickness and symptoms. I purposefully didn’t use this verse then because I wanted to focus much more on love rather than obedience. Why? I have learned through personal experience that once you love Him, obedience comes naturally *because you do love Him*. Why work on things that will eventually work themselves out?

When you do love Him and you are walking near to Him, ignoring His leading causes conflict within, a war between the Spirit and the flesh. (Gal. 5:17) You become unsettled. When that sense comes, you better start looking for how you might have stepped away from Him or how you may be ignoring something He is saying to you. As you truly come to love God and feel His presence in your life every day, you develop a much more sensitive spirit. When you begin to veer off course, you sense it and can easily make the course correction.

If, for example, you treat someone harshly, immediately after you will feel conviction of the Spirit. An apology will likely be necessary, and you will feel the prompting of the Spirit to do so.

Once you feel that prompting of the Spirit, you have a choice to make. You follow Him and do what He says, or you ignore the prompting, in which case you are taking a step away from Him.

On the following lines, write out Isaiah 30:21.

Your Father in heaven wants you to hear Him. He wants you to know the way. Because of that, He instructs you clearly through prayer, quiet time reading His Word, and through the Spirit within you. He often speaks, but we all too often ignore.

In what areas are you now choosing to ignore the instruction of God?

Obedience comes in many forms, so it stands to reason that ignoring God's leading too can take many forms. Ignoring God can be something such as:

- Refusing to be kind to others or a specific other.

“Be _____ and _____ to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

Are you kind? How do you react when you wait in lines or when your order is wrong at a restaurant? How do you treat others when they make a mess of things and those things just happen to affect you? Are you kind to others? Even to those within your own home? Just as we learned to do with forgiveness, practicing empathy can go a long way in remaining kind even when you're frustrated. Consider that the server at your restaurant works long hours on her feet or that the grocery store clerk may have just left a sick child.

Ask yourself if your cross is showing! Do you have one looped around your neck? If so, you better be representing your Lord well. If you react out of frustration while wearing your cross around your neck and driving around with your fish bumper sticker, you are not representing Jesus well. If you are prone to angry outbursts, I'm asking you as a sister to skip the Christian paraphernalia. I'm not trying to be funny. I truly would rather see you bare necked than giving our Lord a bad reputation. And don't think I am not holding myself up to this same standard. I'm the worst when it comes to frustration at bad service, but I also know I am Jesus to my little community.

- In your heart, you refuse to submit to your husband. (I know the hairs on the back of your neck just bristled when you read that.) You may submit outwardly, but inside you have no true respect for him.

“Wives, _____ to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is Savior.” Ephesians 5:22-23

Notice in this verse it says, “as to the Lord,” meaning that when you submit to your husband, you are actually submitting to the Lord. You can trust God to take care of those things where you may not trust a decision your husband is making. As a matter of fact, when a man is given the opportunity to lead his family, often something new rises up within him. He begins to take the responsibility more seriously, especially if you have voiced your trust in his leadership. At that point God will step in and guide your husband. So what if your husband refuses to listen to God? God can still make all things work out for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose – which means you. He will take care of the misstep if your husband makes one. Obviously, you will not follow a husband who leads you toward sin or immoral behavior. Since

we read above that submitting to your husband is in essence submitting to the Lord, the Lord will never lead you toward sinfulness.

- You are withholding forgiveness still.

“ _____ us our debts, as we also have _____
our debtors.” *Matthew 6:12*

Since we spent an entire session on forgiveness, I think we can say, “enough said.”

- You do what it takes to get by but never more than required.

“Whatever you do, work at it with _____,
as working for the Lord, not for men.” *Colossians 3:23*

Do you give yourself fully to what is required of you? Are you faithful in the small things? The monotony of life wears us down – another load of wash, another sink full of dishes – it’s easy to begin to doubt why it matters. So why does it matter? Mostly, because others are watching you. Just like wearing your cross while blessing someone out in a restaurant, doing things half-hearted and half-way will be noticed. Your kids, grandkids, friends, and neighbors see you at work, even at the small stuff. Also, we are told that “Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.” *Luke 16:10*

Since we are concluding our series with purpose, doesn’t it stand to reason that if we want God to lead us toward our Kingdom purpose, we first need to be found faithful in the monotony of life, the daily act of living?

- Dying to self and putting others first.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”
Matthew 16:24

Putting our wants, desires, and needs behind the needs of others can be difficult. We dig our feet in the sand and hold on to our rights, our rights to ourselves, our rights to do things our way, our rights to have what we want. Self is the greatest deterrent to living a productive Christian life. There is only one way to stop this pattern of self – self-appreciation, self-reliance, self-aggrandizement, self-sufficiency, self-love, self-self and that is to “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.” *Galatians 5:16*

Walking closely with God means you are allowing the Spirit to lead you. The Spirit in control is the only remedy for our “self” affliction. Knowing God, realizing He will fight for you and that you don’t have to fight for yourself, is the means of letting go of self. One of the most powerful questions you can ask yourself is, “Do I want to be right, or do I want to be like Jesus?”

Now that we have covered some of the areas above, do you need to re-visit or add to the list of areas where you might be ignoring the voice of God? Remember, chaos and turmoil are indicators that you have stepped away from God. Do you have any areas where chaos and turmoil reign?

Our Nevers

Nevers, we all have them. Public speaking was mine. Now, I do it easily when I'm called to. First, though, He made me ready. If I would have remained far from Him, I could have never – in the literal sense. What are your nevers? What are the things you say you either can't or won't do? Is it forgiving someone? That's a common one. Is it that you believe you will never be on a deeper spiritual level as you see others are? Are you sure you will never be "all in" in your Christian walk? Is where you are okay with you? Think back to some things you may have sensed God calling you to: working with children or youth, singing in the praise team, teaching a Sunday school class, or even beginning a Women's Ministry in your church.

Have you felt a stirring but believed you could never... What is your never?

We make decisions and say "never" based on what we feel rather than what God says.

Blessing follows obedience. Can you think of a time when blessing followed your obedience in a matter?

Now, when I speak in front of any group, I feel tremendously blessed that I am able to share what God has done in me over these past years. My "never" became my blessing. Every time I speak, when I walk away, I feel as if I'm walking in the clouds, unable to believe He would choose to use me. I've never once heard anyone say, "I regret following where God led," especially with the privilege of hindsight. Maybe as they were following they felt unclear as to what He was doing, but most anyone you ask will confirm that following God was the right choice.

Off Course

When God gives you direction, no matter what you decide to do, He keeps walking in His intended direction. If you choose *not* to walk where He walks, you have stepped away from Him and are guaranteed to have chaos and turmoil in your life. That is His way of gently inviting you back with Him.

Also, if you continue walking away from His path, you might miss your purpose. Don't we all want to know what that is?

We all have this innate sense that we were created for something more. We want to believe that what we have experienced has meaning. There is tremendous comfort in knowing that God has a plan for each and every one of us. Sadly, most Christians either don't believe God has a purpose for them or they've given up trying to figure out what it is. That's where we will spend the remainder of our week together.

“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

Finally, today, I hope you are serious about reviewing where you stand on matters of obedience. I've heard some Christians say that such thinking is legalistic. Not so. Jesus Himself gave us a gauge relative to love and obedience in our opening verse. If He considers matters of obedience important, then so do I. Now, though, I simply better understand His way of thinking about it. He sees my obedience as an expression of my love for Him not a means of proving my love. See the difference?

The verse above is a familiar and favorite verse to most. What comes to mind when you read this verse? Do you believe God truly has a plan for you?

What are your final thoughts about today's lesson on obedience?

Focal Passage: “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” John 14:23

Consider: Your “nevers” may possibly be what God uses mightily in your life.

Ask Yourself: Do I want to be right, or do I want to be like Jesus?

Anticipate: Blessing follows obedience.

Day Three – Acknowledging His Call

Finally, back to the fun stuff! Discussing obedience is never fun, but it's important to know where our heart stands on the matter. Remember, it's a thermometer of your love condition. Once you're walking closely with God – you know Him, you love Him, you trust Him, you obey Him, then, you are finally in prime position to be what He desires for you to be, a fruitful vineyard. He wants you to bear fruit that will last. Only a healthy tree bears healthy fruit. Throughout this entire study, we have been building toward this one point. We have been seeking closeness with our Lord and health within our hearts. Why draw near? So we can become.

*“Therefore go and _____
_____ of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the
Father and of the Son and of the
Holy Spirit, _____ teaching them
to obey everything I have
commanded you.”
Matthew 28:19-20*

Complete the verse in the margin.

God has placed a call on the life of every believer. In the Great Commission He directs us to make disciples of all nations *and* to teach them to obey everything He commanded. Often, we think that getting people “saved” is the only step. I intentionally had you fill in the blank for *and* in the verse in the margin to remind you that this is a broader task than getting people saved and putting them to work. That mentality breeds many Christian babies but doesn't create disciples. A disciple is a follower, one who imitates the One whom they profess to follow.

Those studying this material will fall under one of the three categories below. Which are you?

- *New in my Christian walk*, learning, eager to grow, and desiring to become a true disciple.
- *Have been at this for years*, but still I feel I don't know enough about Jesus and the Bible to articulate my beliefs. My faith is still weak.
- *I am a true disciple*. Though I will always have room to grow, I have come far from that entry point of faith. I passionately love and trust Jesus, and I consistently obey the teachings of Scripture.

One of these statements may not represent you exactly, but most likely one will be what describes you best. If you feel that one of the first two is where you currently are, then it's my truest hope that this study is helping you to draw nearer to God. That's the point of all I do in writing. It's my calling, to take women deeper and nearer to God. My calling addresses the second part of the Great Commission as we read above, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” I believe this has been the call on my life for quite a long time. The problem was, I wasn't ready or able to answer the call. The Lord has spent years preparing me for what He had planned for me all along. Much of that time, I drug my

feet, in a spiritual sense, causing the process to drag on and on and on. I pray for a speedier journey for you, but that's entirely up to you.

If the third category most accurately portrays where you currently are, then you have indeed come far. You can identify with David in the following prayer. If you are in the first two categories, this prayer should give you motivating hope. You can be certain that when you seek God with your whole heart, He will bring you just as far.

Write 2 Samuel 7:18 on the following lines. This is a verse that should be familiar from Session Four.

No matter which category you fall into, you may wonder what the calling on your life is. In tomorrow's assignment, you will look within and try to determine where you fit in the Kingdom. Today, though, let's try to comprehend the big picture "what" prior to the individual "what" of your calling.

Glorify God

We are all called to glorify God. First, read in the margin, Jesus' definition of glorifying God. That seems pretty clear-cut. We glorify God when we complete the work He gives us to do. We will spend the latter part of this week discussing that.

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do."
John 17:4

Another way we glorify God is to represent Him well to others.

We can show God to an unbelieving world and sometimes to the believing world who has erected a barrier between themselves and Him. We can be His hands and feet. We can be light in dark places. We can use our testimony of what God has done in our lives to help others desire what we have.

"They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor." Isaiah 61:3

Please turn to Isaiah 61:-3. This is a prophecy regarding the coming of Jesus Christ.

As you read through this text, you can see it is a progressive journey, Jesus coming alongside you, offering salvation, healing you, and setting you free. What is His ultimate goal of this journey? The last part of our passage is provided in the margin.

As you draw nearer to Him, He will heal you and free you in ways you never believed you would know freedom. He removes your stitches so that you may know Him fully. Then, He makes you who He always planned for you to be, long before the foundation of the world. He has much bigger plans than simply making you a "good" Christian, one who can do the dos and don'ts. You were created with His specific purpose in mind. The big picture is bigger than you can comprehend, and your part in the big picture is more significant than you believe.

A Fruitful Vineyard

Complete the verse in the margin.

Note in the verse in the margin, this fruit is fruit that will last. Not fruit that is temporary or for this world. Often, what we focus on is the perishable things, like our homes, clothes, looks, body shape, and bank accounts. I have been and often am still guilty in each area. It's difficult to maintain balance between making a comfortable home for your family and making a showplace for your friends. Know what I mean? I love home decorating and paint and design, but I often have to remind myself that enough is enough. And what I have is more than enough. Balance, Lisa, balance!

Back to the fruit that will last. *Reaching the lost* and *teaching the found* are the things that last. Beyond those two things, what else matters when viewed through the scope of eternity? Since this sums up the Great Commission, I can think of nothing more vital. Somewhere contained within those two statements is your calling. You either have a passion for reaching the lost or helping in the teaching of the found – or maybe a mixture of both. Now before you spout off that you are not a teacher, let me remind you that rocking babies while parents learn or making a building ready through a cleaning ministry is preparing the way for the body to be taught. Our parts in the teaching process simply look different. It takes much more than teachers to teach the found. As a matter of fact, without the supporting Body of Christ, the teacher has little ability or means to teach.

No matter what you feel capable of, God intends to cultivate you into a fruitful vineyard.

“In that day – ‘Sing about a fruitful vineyard: I the LORD watch over it; I water it continually. I guard it day and night so that no one may harm it.’” Isaiah 27:2-3

This verse has become a significant verse to me. As the Lord has worked within me, assuring me He will make me fruitful and productive in the Kingdom, He assures me of His provision for me and protection over me. The fruit I produce will be of His making, not mine. It won't be forced fruit – like forced greenhouse tomatoes – but I will yield good fruit, fruit that will last, fruit that can only come after a season of growth – of getting closer to God. He intends this same growth in you, and a life of fruitfulness will be the outcome.

Now read the verse above again and this time, personalize it with you as the fruitful vineyard. (The LORD watches over you. He waters you continually. He guards you day and night so that no harm may come to you.)

Shifting in our metaphor, we will become the vessel.

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” John 7:38

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear _____ – _____.”
John 15:16

We aren't called to sit and soak in the Living Water but to be vessels who carry that Living Water to others. Only once we are close to Him – only once we have been filled – will we be able to pour. At that time – it will come naturally from within us. In order to pour, you must first be filled.

Pouring from an empty pitcher

Have you ever tried to pour into the life of another when you felt empty yourself? I think of this concept in my own life. Years ago, before my time of falling away, I met this woman who desperately needed encouragement. I was sympathetic to her situation, as she had a son who was constantly in trouble as my oldest had been. Her son, a precious little boy in my younger son's kindergarten class, was so much like Adam, that I was drawn to him when the other room mothers steered clear of him. On field trips I asked that he be in my group. Honestly, I loved that child. One day at a school event, I told this mother how much I loved her son and that God had a great plan for him. Unexpectedly, she burst into tears. Like I was with Adam, she just needed to see there was hope for this wild-child of hers. She desperately needed to know that someone else saw in her son what she undoubtedly did. I gave her a bit of hope. From there, I tried and tried to pour into her, oblivious to how empty I was. She would call for advice on various matters, and I would try to help her. She was in the very early stages of her Christian walk and was insisting on living a lifestyle that wasn't honoring to God. Like many women, she thought that her answer was a man. Most often my words of advice fell on deaf ears. I can't remember what actually ended our communication, but eventually it did end.

Years later as the Lord began to prepare me to become fruitful, to begin this journey of reaching women through writing, this story became a turning point for me in trusting Him. I was reading a Beth Moore book and the question was asked, "To what are your fears attached?" She gave this amazing story of how God had spoken to her through another teacher. It was His assurance that He would not fail her. So I asked the Lord, "To what are my fears attached?" Later that same day, and by divine appointment, I saw that mother sitting in her car at a stop light. That wouldn't be so amazing other than I had not seen her in years. She lives in the next city from where I currently live. I just so happened to turn my head and look into a little car as I made a right turn. It was all too much to be coincidental. God placed her there so that I would see her.

Immediately upon seeing her, I remembered how I failed her. I remembered how I tried to reach her and how desperately she needed a hand up. I recalled how I was clueless as to how to help her and then eventually, I fell to pieces myself and never even wondered about her again. I found my answer. I sat in my driveway sobbing. With my head resting on the steering wheel, I kept reminding Him what a failure I was and how she needed me, and I failed her.

What was I afraid of? Failing Him. Failing everyone. I always had, and I likely always would. That was my real fear. As many times as I had tried to help others, I was too big of a mess to ever really be effective. So that was what was hindering me from my purpose. I was a failure.

It was over the next few days that the Lord reminded me of how empty I was back then and that I was trying to pour out of an empty pitcher. It was before I loved Him with my whole heart, so how could I be expected to pour out what I didn't even possess? I was just as empty inside as that poor mother. I just happened to "look" like the proper Christian mom. Inside, I was a melted, gooey mess. Do you see how I empathized with myself and forgave my failures?

From there, the Lord assured me, when the time was right, I would pour because He was pouring into me. That's why the Isaiah 27 verse is so meaningful. "I water it continually," He promises about His fruitful vineyard (me).

*He watches over me and
waters me and guards me.
How can I fail?*

You have Kingdom purpose in the journey of others. There is no way you can imagine the trickle-down effect of your touch in the lives of those around you.

Comfort

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

2 Corinthians 1:3b-4

The verse in the margin is quite the tongue twister. We are to comfort those with the comfort that God has comforted us with. In an earlier session I said, “We want to believe that what we have experienced has meaning.” What we have and are experiencing does matter. God uses those things to touch the lives of people who are hurting. The woman I told you of earlier, I could hardly comfort her since I had yet to receive comfort.

Here is a sweet side note: When I shared this story with a group of ladies, someone reminded me that, most likely, the few words I did speak to that mother, especially assuring her that God had a plan for her son, meant something significant to her. I didn’t fail her completely. God was certainly able to use those few words as a comfort to that desperate mama. I think sometimes we hold ourselves up to a much higher standard than God does. He knew I had little to offer, but He took what I did have and touched her life.

These days, He is using me to reach out to people who may not be near to Him, and they don’t even know it. That was me. That was the journey He took me on, so now, He is allowing me to help women along that same journey. All that matters to me now is that people know there is indeed something more! There really is intimacy and closeness

with Jesus. See, the comfort He gave me, I’m using to comfort others. There’s this phrase that often goes through my head, “If I don’t, the fire will consume me,” meaning, if I don’t share what He has shown me with others, I feel as if it’ll burn me alive. It’ll be the same with you. You will long to comfort others with the comfort you have been comforted with, whatever your situation is.

If you don’t feel that need to share and comfort others now, maybe you’re still in the stage of needing to be comforted. That’s okay. Just accept His comfort.

So as a brief summary, the following is God’s high-level, big-picture call on your life.

Glorify God – Completing the work He has given us and representing Him well to the lost world and to the found who have somehow missed the true image of God.

A Fruitful Vineyard – Bearing fruit that will last, reaching the lost and teaching the found.

Pouring out the Living Water – Taking the Living Water that He has poured out upon you, the comfort He comforted you with, and pouring into others.

Take your temperature in each area? In the space below, write your thoughts about where you currently are and what your goals are even after you complete this study.

Glorifying God

Becoming a Fruitful Vineyard

Pouring Living Water

Focal Passage: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Matthew 28:19-20

Consider: The big picture is bigger than you can comprehend, and your part in the big picture is more significant than you believe.

Outcome: We comfort with the comfort we have been comforted with.

Day Four – Becoming Who You Are

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.”

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

“Simply Become Who You Are!”

The above phrase has been following me around for years now. God has been trying to tell me and show me that who He created me to be and what He created me to do is a perfect fit for me. Same with you. He made no mistake with either of us. Our problem is that we spend way too much time trying to be like and do what others do. He created you uniquely to bear fruit and glorify Him in this exact time and in your generation. God filled you with gifts and passions that suit your purpose exactly. Often, though, we

spend so much time trying to cultivate gifts we don't possess that we tend to let our natural gifts and abilities sink into the background. If it comes easily or if we enjoy doing it, it must not be worthy enough. Right? Baloney!

I spent years trying to talk myself out of writing fiction. Especially because the stories in my head were all romantic in nature, I believed them to be insignificant. I kept telling myself that I should be writing deeply spiritual stuff. I was even embarrassed to admit I write romancey type books. Obviously, I got over it! What changed? I was reading a book called Redeeming Love. The story is a western times version of the Book of Hosea, which happens to be one of my favorite Old Testament books of the Bible. Now, I can hardly even remember what the book was all about, just the highlights, but I do know this, after I read it, Jesus used one word from the book to change my entire life. The word was “beloved.” After I finished the book, that one word echoed in my head for hours, days even. It was Jesus speaking to me, calling me, *Beloved*. All these years later, He still calls me that often.

Also, *Marah* was another word He used later on to heal me of my bitterness on a matter. The man in the book, Michael Hosea, called his wife *Marah*. When she asked why, he told her it meant bitterness. She was bitter. The Lord woke me up one morning with the word *Marah*, again I say, echoing around in my head. It was all I could hear. Even with normal life happening around me later in the day, the word was loud and clear in my head. Over and over it resounded.

From those two words, the Lord made such tremendous progress in my transformation that I can't possibly deny the significance of Christian fiction or how the Lord can use it. So now...I write. I write what I love. I love what I do. How many of us can say that?

In a book by Max Lucado, he says, “As the wind turns the weather vane, so God uses your passions to turn your life.”

I'm passionate about writing. I love writing stories and always have one or two tinkling around in my head. Lucado goes on to say, “God is too gracious to ask you to do something you hate.” (*Just Like Jesus*) Once you are near to God and living the life He always planned for you, expect your call or purpose to begin to surface. It won't likely be something from out of left field. It will more than likely be something that is already buried in your heart. Maybe you already have an inkling of what it is.

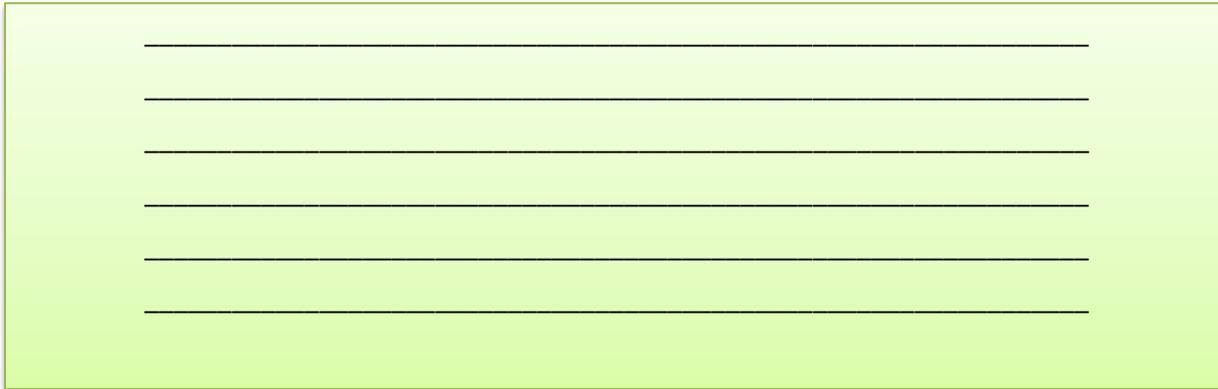
What passions drive you?

What keeps you up at night? What makes your heart burn within your chest? Is it reaching the lost, teaching the found, rocking little babies, providing meals, leading, serving, guiding, writing cards, making home visits? You have a natural inclination toward something, yet you likely underestimate its significance. Are you a natural hostess? Are you open and friendly? Do you realize with those gifts, you can greet a first time visitor at church and make them feel welcome? How can you undervalue that? What if, simply because you took time to say hello and make a little small-talk, that person returns? Then again. Then again. Then they are saved. Then their family is transformed because they know the Lord. Then their children are raised in church...This could go on and on.

Do you see the significance of being a door greeter? Do you see how your gift can touch a life, which in turn, will touch other lives? It is that trickledown of the Living Water that I mentioned before.

From this point forward, as you walk more closely with Jesus, ask childlike questions. "Lord, what did you create me to do and to be? What do You see in me that I'm unable to see in myself? How can I reach others for Your Kingdom? Once you ask these questions, be prepared for answers. He will send people to compliment you in certain areas. He will give you opportunities to use your abilities and in doing so will help you see what He sees.

Write out a few questions. Get creative. Ask specific questions.



This will be a lifelong process. It's doubtful that what you see now as your calling will always be so. Different seasons require different skills. If you are in a season of small children, then serving in children's ministry may be where you're called. With the arrival of the teenage years, you may gravitate toward youth. In the meantime you may always have a desire to reach out to neighbors and strangers with the Good News.

Or, you may be in your retirement years. You do realize, don't you; there is no retirement plan from the Kingdom of God? No one is too old to serve. No one has "done their time." Sure, you may have done your time with children or youth, but you are as valuable in your golden years as you were in your...what would that be called? Bronze years? Gold is the top level, not the dropping out level. It means you have earned wisdom and experience that the younger generation can benefit from. Lead a small group. Mentor a young mother. "Adopt" a family with no grandparents who live nearby. Be a prayer warrior. Write cards. Stuff envelopes at church. Just remain in active service. True retirement is when you officially retire from this earth, and even then, He says He has plans for us in heaven. Complete the verse in the margin.

**"They will still
in old age, they will
stay fresh and
green."
Psalm 92:14**

Older: For those of you who are older, God assures us that we can still bear fruit in our old age. If you back up to verse 12, you see that “the righteous” is who this is referring to, righteous, meaning in right relationship with God through salvation and through walking with Him in a close and intimate daily relationship.

Younger: For those who are younger, you aren’t off the hook. As a matter of fact, the word “still” in this verse indicates that you should already be bearing fruit prior to old age.

No matter your season, you can be sure your purpose goes beyond yourself and your family. What happens when we only look inward, into ourselves and families, is that we become of little use in the Kingdom.

This trickledown of Living Water is monumental. It’s the way God operates in this world. By giving us the Living Water we need, by filling our emptiness, He enables us to continually pour.

Are you pouring out or only drinking in? Do you live your life looking inward and backward or outside of yourself and your family?

Most of us can find a place of service, but often, it is our “least we can do” service. It’s something that fills a need but may not satisfy our passion. If you continue on with the least you can do, if you don’t attempt to discover what passions drive you, you’ll never be excited about Christian service. Also, if you keep working in areas where you aren’t really gifted, you do two things:

1. You prevent the right person from being where they are supposed to be.
2. You are too busy doing what you’re not supposed to be doing to do what you are supposed to do.

You will hurt yourself and others by not discovering what God has designed you to uniquely do.

Here are some examples:

- ❖ I taught Kindergarten Sunday school because I was asked. At the time I didn’t even know I could ask God if that was where He wanted me and then expect Him to answer. I loved the kids, still do, but for that entire year, I was miserable. I dreaded Saturday because Sunday would follow. It was never because of the kids but rather the planning that it took. There were crafts that would be needed. I’m not crafty or creative. I admit, I usually brought treats so that would kill some time. I just didn’t like it. The reason was, I’m not a typical teacher. Let me write a lesson and I’m thrilled. Just don’t ask me to show up week after week and teach it.
- ❖ More recently, I was asked to do a church newsletter. I prayed about it until I received a specific answer through God’s Word. Since the answer was “yes,” even though it was already a busy season of life for me, I agreed and it went well. Each month things would come together just as they needed to. Most months we had a twelve page newsletter. It came pretty easily because, for one, I’m gifted at working with computer programs. Two, because God gave me a yes. It mattered that I waited for His, “Yes.” I could have easily set myself up for a Kindergarten Sunday school kind of year.

- ❖ When asked to provide a meal, I panic. Of course I agree to do it, but then I literally panic. I don't have that gift. Immediately, I begin to worry about things like: How much do I take? What if they don't like this or that? How do I keep the hot food hot and the cold food cold? How do I cook dinner for my family at the same time? Doubling recipes stresses me out. Should I make something different for the kids? What about dessert? – Seriously, I really do stress over this when most of you would think, *no big deal, throw a little extra on and take it over*. It's the most complicated process for me. I overthink every aspect of it.

In my defense I will talk to anyone who will listen about drawing near to God. I will all but beg them to love Jesus. I spend hours on end trying to figure out how I can best get my message across. Just don't ask me to cook.

My point isn't to demonstrate how weird I am. My point is to stress that we are all unique. He created us to meet a variety of Kingdom needs. Mine look different, and that's okay. Now that I know better, when I'm asked to do something outside of my giftedness, especially if it's a longer term commitment, I pray long and hard about it. I wait for an answer. I do admit, though, something as short-term as preparing a dinner, I simply say yes. I can handle the stress of it. Actually, it probably helps me grow in some way.

What I want you to know is: *Simply become who you are*. He likes you and your gifts and your talents and even your quirks. If you don't know who you are, then get ready for the journey. He will begin right now to show you. He will make you a fruitful vineyard if you allow Him.

Now that you have had more time to think it through, and since I have given you a few more of my examples, reexamine your passions that you listed earlier in the assignment. Then begin to consider your gifts and talents. What are you currently doing with your gifts and talents? Do they match up with what you feel passionate about? Ask yourself the following questions:

The place(s) I am currently serving:

Am I serving in this or these areas because I'm passionate about it or because I'm filling an empty place at my church?

Does my current area of service utilize my gifts and talents? _____

Explain your answer.

Take a look at your history of service. I'm giving some examples, but please include other areas I haven't considered.

Areas Served	I did so because... (place a check mark in proper column)	
	I am passionate about it	I was filling a need
Served on a committee		
Greeter		
Office Volunteer		
Adult Sunday school		
Provide meals		
Women's Ministry		
Homebound visits		
Contacting visitors		
Intercessory prayer		
Praise Team		
Cleaning		
Youth Ministry		
Children's Ministry		
Nursery		
Preschool		
SS Teacher		
VBS		
Reaching out to the lost		

Once you have considered your current and previous areas of service, begin to ask yourself the following questions. These will assist you in finding what God uniquely designed you to do and where He has best suited you to serve.

While serving in areas I feel passionate about:	Yes	No
I am excited and energized by what I do.		
I find that time flies by.		
I am eager to serve.		
I often come up with new ideas of ways I can do things better.		
I am excited to share with others my area of ministry.		

Now, when you have served in areas simply to fill a need, ask the same questions.

While serving to fill the need:	Yes	No
I am excited and energized by what I do.		
I find that time flies by.		
I am eager to serve.		
I often come up with new ideas of ways I can do things better.		
I am excited to share with others my area of ministry.		

These are rather crude charts, but maybe they will get the wheels of your mind turning and allow you to openly and honestly dialog with God about how you are gifted and how you aren't. Your gifts, talents, and passions, or lack thereof, will come as no surprise to God. He created you that way. If you don't like working with children, He's okay with that! He knows. If you love cooking and feel excited about the prospect of preparing a meal and taking it to a family...bring my family dinner. That's not my gift, remember? Or, use your gift to provide a meal for a family who needs it. Simply *become* who you are. He will help you figure that out, and once He does, then simply *be* who you are. You don't have to look or cook like anyone else.

More than anything, I have covered areas of service within the church. There are dozens of areas where you may be using how God has gifted you to reach those outside of the church, so please don't limit yourself to my list above. You may be using your gifts to share with others in your neighborhood, your kid's school, your work place. Think this through, pray about it, and then watch and wait for God to help you see how He uniquely designed you.

Focal Passage: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit." 1 Cor. 12:4

Question: What passions drive me?

Conclusion: Simply become who you are.

Day Five – The Enemy of Purpose

The Enemy of Our Purpose

We have an enemy. I won't even waste ink to print his name, but you know who he is. He's been around pestering you long enough. His goal is first to hinder your closeness with God and to prevent you from loving Him. If he can do that, he's in for a pretty easy ride with your ineffective life. If you draw near to God, however, he becomes worried, and well he should.

The concept of the fruitful vineyard is dangerous to the dark world. If you become fruitful, you will reach out to others, others whom the enemy has in an ineffective place. Make no mistake; the enemy knows the danger of the trickle-down effect of Living Water.

1. Primarily his goal is to prevent you from reaching the Living Water (through salvation).
2. Once you are saved, his goals change. He simply needs to keep you from being filled by the Living Water (keep you distant from God).
3. When he fails there, too, his last ditch effort is to prevent you from pouring out the Living Water into the lives of others.

*"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water _____
_____."*
John 7:37-38

Guess what? Too late! Once you are close to God, filled by the Living Water, there is hardly any stopping you. The love you have becomes a burning fire, one that you must share or the fire will consume you. That's how I feel. That's how all the other loudmouthed teachers and speakers and preachers feel. So what are the enemy's tactics at this point? Whispers and temptations.

When the Whispers Come

The whispers come against me often. If you knew me and my past, you wouldn't have likely taken this journey with me. I sometimes remind God of who He is choosing to use here. He always reminds me that He knows me inside and out and approves anyway. Does He approve of who I was and the things I did? Hardly. He approves, though, of who He has made me to be. I am His, and because I am, He guides me. It's not like He's just turned me out in the world to do this on my own. What a mistake that would be, knowing me as He does. But He's filled me with Himself. He knows that I'll ask Him to lead me and He knows it's my greatest desire to follow Him. Do I always get it right? Well no. Do you? I'm still a work in progress. I figure as long as I'm on planet earth there will be more for Him to do in me. So when I get it wrong, we work through it and I get back on the path with Him.

What are your whispers? What are your nevers? You'll never be this or that. You can never do this or that. What does the enemy whisper from your past that you often listen to, the things that hinder you?

He is called the father of lies for a reason. These things you are hearing are lies. How do you combat a lie? By knowing the truth. Whatever the enemy says of you, you must find out what God says about you instead.

Here we go again with the questions. Ask God what He says about you in the areas where the liar lies to you. Ask Him to replace the lies with His truth.

Now, you will have to take the time to listen. Begin each day with such questions. Ask, "Lord, what do You see when you see me? Who do you say I am? What do you want me to know about myself?" All of these are questions He will answer through His Word, though others, and He will also whisper into your heart. Quiet time with Him daily matters. You need to learn to distinguish between the whispers of the enemy and the voice of God.

The Tactic of Temptation

"No temptation has seized you except what is _____ . And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

The enemy hopes to prevent your fruitfulness by keeping you bound by sin and selfishness. Most of my life, he was very effective. Temptations come at us all. God's Word says so, but it also says He provides a way out. We will not be tempted beyond what we can bear. There is a difference, though, of how we will react to temptation based on our nearness to God. How I reacted to temptation before was totally different than how I react now.

Far

If you are one of the millions of Christians who believe that walking out your Christian life can be accomplished without a real and intimate relationship with Jesus, temptation will overwhelm you and easily cause you to fall. Why? What about Him saying you will not be tempted beyond what you can bear? Oh, that promise stands. If you aren't near to Him, if you aren't allowing His Spirit to control your life, then you have, in some ways, forfeited His offer. If you aren't near to Him, you won't likely hear Him when He shows you the way out. Or, if it's not your natural inclination to follow Him, when He tries to lead you away from the temptation, you have no idea which way to go.

Near

If you are near to Him, when temptation comes, the Spirit causes warning bells to go off so loud and so clear, you are more easily able to identify the temptation and flee from it. (James 4:7) Read the verse in the margin.

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”
James 4:7

Two verbs here are our actions. Submit and Resist. What you are doing through the course of this study is learning to submit yourself to God. The more you draw near to Him, the more you will know temptation when it comes and the more strength you will have in resisting it. So maintain your new course. Meet with God daily. Read His Word faithfully and remain near to Him. If you do those things, the enemy can't possibly hinder you in your call and purpose.

During the time I've been working on this study, a variety of temptations have come against me, including the one I'm most susceptible to. Immediately I know they are temptations. I know they come because the enemy doesn't want you to draw near to God or to love Him. The enemy wants to shut me up. Ha! Has he met me? Do you want to know what I know? If I fall, I render this entire work void. If I fall, no one will listen. If I fall, it might take years to recover. So I don't plan on falling. Instead, I submit myself to the Lord daily.

When temptation comes, if you are near to God, you can do what Jesus did during the temptation in the wilderness. You can speak scripture over the situation, and you won't fall victim to it. Here's the deal, though, you have to have those scriptures in your head and heart in order to do this kind of battle. How do you get them there? By reading and studying the Scriptures daily. You must build up your arsenal of scriptures in order to do battle.

Please consider this – the good news – if you're hearing whispers and facing temptation, then you must be on to something! You are moving toward your Kingdom purpose. So keep moving. The enemy doesn't need to waste time on unfruitful believers. Keep bearing fruit!

On the lines below, note how it makes you feel to know you are moving toward your Kingdom purpose. Do you feel excited, nervous, unworthy? Maybe you feel a combination of many things.

I know I feel a variety of emotions at this very moment. I see His purpose in the fact that you are reading what He has compelled me to write. The other day as I was working on some final formatting of the UtV novel, wave after wave of fear came against me. No matter what, though, I kept standing firm and pressing on. (I call this Faith Forward Movement.) And that was by no means an indication of my own power or strength. Instead, it was His voice in my head calling, "This is the way, walk in it." Since I know

He has called me to do this, nothing, no whispers or temptations will cause me to believe anything other than the fact that He can be trusted to lead me. All I have to do is be faithful and follow.

Will you be faithful and follow? I can answer that for you. Yes, if you draw near enough to Him and learn to love Him passionately and trust Him completely. Knowing, loving, and trusting God will set you on fire for the Kingdom in a way that will totally transform your life, and as an overflow of the change in you, the lives of others around you will be impacted. You will become the trickle-down of Living Water. Our final verse below will become one that you can identify with.

“But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name’, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” Jeremiah 20:9

Weekly Recap:

Day One: *Your new normal should be peace.*

Day Two: *Obedience flows naturally out of love.*

Day Three: *The Great Commission calls us to reach the lost and teach the found.*

Day Four: *Simply become who you are.*

Day Five: *The enemy of our purpose uses whispers and temptations.*

Into His Presence

Bible Study – Session Six

Session Six – Stones of Remembrance

Having completed numerous Bible studies over the years, I have found one thing to be common at the end of each: I forget much of the journey. Things that are significant to me as I'm reading through the early weeks of homework get tucked away in the back of my mind and lose their impact. Maybe it's just me, but if you have ever felt that way, then this week should help you to take a few stones of remembrance along with you now that the main study sessions are finished.

I love that the term *stones of remembrance* came to mind when I was just writing the sentence above. It proves that the Lord is indeed part of this journey. During Session One, we determined that we would set ourselves apart based on a verse in Joshua 3. It says, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." (v.5) I hope over the course of weeks, you have begun to see an amazing thing happening in your life and in your relationship with God.

Complete the verse in the margin.

The connection between the term *stones of remembrance* and our earlier verse is this: These stones were set up to remember the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land. That's what you are doing now, crossing over into God's presence, your earthly Promised Land. Just as they were instructed to set up stones of remembrance, you would be wise to remember the key points of this journey you are on. This is your love story with Jesus. These stones of remembrance we are looking at this week are the things you've learned that you can hold onto and even share with others. Some of the principles we've covered are concepts that are lifetime disciplines, such as: meeting with God daily – reading His Word – continually monitoring your life to make sure you are not seeking fulfillment from the world rather than God – ensuring that you don't allow anything, sin, attitudes, or doubt to weave its way into your life and create a self-imposed barrier between yourself and Jesus. So take this time to run back through our lessons with fresh eyes. Answer the questions openly and honestly. This should give you a gauge of where you are and a reference point as to which direction you are to head in next. For each session I have listed the focal Scripture for each day. Remember, if it's a verse that seems to tug at your heart, open your own Bible and underline it. Years from now when you run across a verse that you have underlined in this season, it will be a reminder to you of just how far you've come.

"And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, 'In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them, 'Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground.'

_____."

Joshua 4:20-22

"Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" 2 Samuel 7:18

Day One - Loving God

In our opening session, we looked deep into our own hearts to probe and ask, "Do I love God with all my heart, soul, and mind?"

This is not ordinary, human love; rather, this is heart-stopping, giddy kind of love. To love the Lord with all your heart demonstrates a passionate, crazy love. The kind people make fun of because they simply don't "get it."

For some, when they asked themselves this question, the answer was no. If that was the case with you, then you were warned not to allow this to become a point of condemnation but instead the beginning point of a new journey. You may have been lovesick all along, out of which your symptoms sins/stitches/weeds flow. This discovery will prompt us to sit with the Lord and admit our need to love Him more. We have to get real. From there, the journey begins.



The most critical stone we carry is this:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all our soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Matthew 22: 37-38

Has this stone settled into your hand? Do you now possess a deeper, more passionate love for Jesus at the conclusion of this study than you did at the beginning? Explain your answer. What do you see/feel that helps you to know this love?

The true journey, however, is that of His pursuit to shower you with His love, because ultimately, that was the actual disconnect. It wasn't simply that you didn't love Him. Your true lovesickness was that you had not fully grasped His love for you. Once that happens, once you truly see and feel and experience His love for you, you will love Him in return. You just can't help yourself. Your heart will fall helplessly in love with Jesus. If you still don't feel that kind of passionate love toward God, keep meeting with Him. Don't give up. Once you get to know Him more intimately, the love will come.

Ephesians 3:17-18

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Think back over the past few weeks of study. How might you see God differently than when you began? Do you feel as if you know His love for you a little better? If so, in what ways have you felt Him pour out His love upon you?

Day Two – Set Apart

I suggested that His presence is our Promised Land. It will and does require faith to cross over into it. It will require us to consecrate ourselves (to set ourselves apart) for this season as we seek Him. Maintaining care with what we allow into our minds during this time is critical. We want less of what the world offers and more of His Word – more of Him.

You were challenged to set yourself apart, to take in less of the world and more of the things of God. Is that something you have continued to do, and if so, in what practical ways have you chosen to do those things?

Less of the world:

More of God:

Joshua 3:5

“Joshua told the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you.’”

Day Three – God Plus

We considered how we often want God plus – God plus our husbands, families, careers, possessions...the list goes on and on. Basically, for many of us, God Himself is not enough. Although no one would ever admit it, many feel as if the things of the world are what leads to fulfillment. In this session you were asked to do some serious soul searching. Be prepared, this will be a lifetime effort. In our media driven society, counterfeits to what matters most will continually be offered to us. Truly, your deepest and least understood desire is that you need Jesus and only Jesus. All other things are icing on the cake of your life with God. But ultimately, Jesus is enough. If these three words, *Jesus is enough*, still doesn't ring true to you, you simply must have faith and keep pressing into Him. He will prove to you that He is indeed enough. Give this process some time.

*“They have turned their backs to me and not their faces;
yet when they are in trouble, they say,
‘Come and save us!’” Jeremiah 2:27*

Are you continually watching where you are watching? Are you giving constant care to where you are directing your face? Since learning this, has it been something you try to keep at the forefront of your mind?

Day Four – Symptomatic

We discussed symptoms of lovesickness. These are outward behaviors and attitudes that may indicate you need to draw nearer to God. While we all demonstrate some of the behaviors and attitudes at times, you were challenged to determine if this is more of a pattern of typical behavior, or is it something that arises only on occasion? You were instructed to review the list of symptoms and consider the following questions: Does it prevent me from knowing the freedom that Christ offers? Does it hinder my walk with the Lord? Does it keep me from God? Do I hurt others with this behavior?

Our Scripture reference is in the margin. Many if not most of the behaviors/attitudes on the list contradict what God’s Word says love is (toward others and Him).

As plain un-Christian as it may have sounded, we are choosing to overlook those areas where we might not be measuring up. I call it un-Christian because, let’s face it, aren’t we as Christians known as people who expect everyone to clean up their act?

Get saved, act good, and get to work is basically what we say to new believers. What happens, though, when we fail to grasp God’s love is that the acting “good” part might not come along so quickly or so easily. Sure, maybe on the outside we dust ourselves off and look a little better, but deep down on the inside, we feel very similar to what we felt as unsaved, which often leaves us turning to those old patterns and ways of meeting our needs or can even lead to questioning our salvation.

Day Five – Suppression

Although symptoms were not the focus of the study, we did consider some suppression strategies to help us out while we are in pursuit of our love story with Jesus. We looked at some of the symptoms that plague us and tried to come up with ways to lessen the grip of some of these sins/attitudes while we wait for help from God.

*“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.”
1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

John 16:13

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth has come, He will guide you into all truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

A quick overview of the list below may be exactly what you need. You will likely find that some of the things that once gave you (and others around you) fits no longer have such a stronghold over you.

Can you see progress in any of the area below? Write the symptom and the noted change.

I am:

Overly Insecure

Harsh with Words

A Gossip

Obsessed w/Children

Unkind

Lacking in Faith

Controlling

Idle/Spiritually Lazy

Easily Offended

Fearful/Anxious

Slow to Forgive

Discontent

Full of Shame

Greedy

Gluttonous

Envious

Holding on to Guilt

Judgmental of Others

Proud/Boastful

Selfish

Dishonest

Ungrateful

I struggle with:

Impure Thoughts

Addictions

Low Integrity

Craving Romantic Love

Final Take-Away – The First Commandment kind of love God requires of you involves passion and your complete surrender. It’s the kind of deep and wide and high and long love He offers you even before you chose to love Him in return.

Day One – The Mended Veil

While the true Temple veil can never be mended, the use of this term more accurately describes the self-imposed veil or barrier that we erect between ourselves and God – stitch by stitch. Stitches may take many forms: unbelief, childhood wounds, an unhealthy relationship with our earthly father, pride, self, our children, disappointment, grief, unforgiveness, and so on. Our stitches prevent us from seeing God for who He really is. Without seeing Him in truth, we will never trust Him, love Him in return, or obey His Word. Until we are walking closely with Jesus, we can never be truly free.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

Draw
Near

Our second stone of remembrance is that we must draw near to God. In order to do that, all things that prevent us from doing so must be removed. Being honest about those things that hinder us is the first step toward their removal.

The items on the following list are what we are calling “stitches in the veil.” These are the hurts/sins/idols from our past and present that can prevent us from seeing God for who He really is.

Discontentment	Unworthiness	Self-Pity	Divorce
Sexual Abuse	A Judgmental Attitude	Shame	Idols
A Great Daddy	A Bad Daddy	My Spouse	My Children
Health Issues	Painful Childhood	Spiritual Laziness	Loss
Self-Reliance	Unforgiveness	A Past Abortion	Grief
Bitterness	Addictions	Pride/Control	Self
An Ordinary Life	Disappointment	Unbelief	Work

On this day, we learned what stitches are and why they are so detrimental in our walk with God.

For any of the areas above, do you now see them in a different light?

Have you found that you struggle in areas where you once thought you were in “control”?

Have you come to recognize things in your life which seem like “good” things that are actually hindrances to your nearness to God?

Day Two – Real Deal People

For many Christians, it may be difficult to reconcile the God of the Bible with what we are experiencing. When God doesn’t seem active in a person’s everyday life, it’s easy to expect very little of Him. When we expect little of Him, mostly we see little, if anything, of Him. That is where religious routines begin. This is where the concept of “real deal” people came into focus. It’s vital that you find, surround yourself with, and ultimately become a real deal person.

Do you feel as if you are becoming any more “real” in your conversations with the Lord?

At this point in your journey, do you feel as if you are becoming a “real deal” person?

“Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.” Matthew 7:20

Day Three – Stitches in Review

In this session we looked at how stitches can hinder your closeness with God. Based on the stitches list, you were to determine how the stitches in your life can keep you from drawing near to God.

*“...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.”
Hebrews 12:1*

Do you feel as if you have identified how your particular stitches have kept you from God in the past? Is this an area where you feel as if you are making progress?

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.”

Matthew 13:24-25

Day Four – Pullin’ Weeds

On this day, though we totally mixed our metaphors, you finally began to seek God as to where you were to begin. Because He knows you better than you know yourself, only He can determine the course of your healing. Only He knows which weed (stitch) to begin with. I suggested you pray about where to begin and then wait for Him to show you. As cryptic as it may have sounded, I tried to help you get some idea of what His answer may look and sound like. Finally, I boiled it down to this, “He will plaster it on the billboard of your life,” meaning, He will show you the answer through the normal ins and outs of your day and your Bible reading. Friends or preachers may say something that resonates with what you are reading or currently learning about in a Bible study. It will

often come in multiples. For me, I often get His answers in three’s. The same verse or concept will arise at least three times and from various sources. This is simply a place where you will have to get your ears acclimated to how God deals with and speaks to you.

Since beginning with that first stitch, have you felt God guiding you toward the next place to begin working with Him?

Day Five – Intimate Prayer

“Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Mark 6:31

Unless you get into the habit of meeting with God in a quiet place and doing so regularly, you aren’t likely to hear from Him or ever feel close to Him. In that case the likelihood of you ever truly knowing Him well enough to love Him in return seems more than unlikely, more like impossible. How can you love the One you don’t know? How can you get to know the One you refuse to spend time with? Our world is busy, and the devil likes it that way. Your kids have crazy schedules. You may have to work outside of the home. When you are home, the demands of your family cause you to prioritize your day based on who screams loudest. Know what I mean? If you have crying babies, demanding teens, needy husbands, of course you will overlook the *gentle whisper* of the Lover who wants to spend quiet time alone with you.

While attending past Bible studies, besides my pattern of forgetfulness, here is another pattern that I have noticed. We begin the class with many more than we end with. Never fails. We may begin with 18-20 ladies, but by the last class we may have 6. And to add to the pattern, it’s usually the same 6. Here’s another fact; those 6 are almost always *real deal* women. That could tell us many things, but for our

purpose in this section, I can conclude, most women just get carried off by the business of life. Often, they get behind on their homework, if they ever do it at all. I believe it all becomes overwhelming. What they don't know is the airplane analogy. Know how when you fly, the flight attendant tells you that if you are traveling with a small child or someone else who may need your assistance that you should put *your* oxygen mask on first? Not theirs. Yours! Why? Because if you pass out you'll be of no help to the one who needs you. Same in the spiritual realm. If you don't attend to your spiritual needs, you will be less than the wife, mom, daughter, friend, sister, and disciple that you need to be. Unless you are filled with Living Water, you can only pour a polluted, self-kind of water into the lives of others. This quiet time with Jesus is *the* most critical element of your life. There is no extra half-hour of sleep, clean house, ballgame, or pile of laundry that trumps your need for it. It's where He will speak to you, where He will saturate you with Living Water, and where you will fall in love with Him. This is where your life will begin to make sense – living in the midst of your very own love story. I know this is a summary, but I could make this one topic another day's worth of study. I will summarize the summary by saying, YOU NEED THIS. Don't neglect it.

While things can and do arise to prevent us from our time in God's Word, will you take a firm stand that your quiet time with Him is not something that you will give up? Would you be willing to make a life-long commitment to meeting with God in the quiet place?

Final Take-Away – Uncover your stitches and where He leads you to begin. Because of the world we live in, this will be a lifelong process. You must always be on guard against “stitches” that try to hinder your view of God.



Our third stone of remembrance is that we must get to know God. Not *about* Him, but *know* Him.

Day One – Circular Reasoning

*“...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.
Ephesians 3:18*

Once you have discovered stitches that keep you from knowing God, it’s time to begin the process of removing them. In Session Two, you were to seek His guidance as to which stitch to begin with. It is important to understand, He doesn’t rip the veil apart, as it would cause further damage to you. He gently unstitches one at a time. At times the removal of one will naturally cause another to unravel effortlessly. An example would be: as He removes the stitch of self-sufficiency, creating within you a greater level of trust in His care for you, naturally your need to control others will lessen. There is a natural order to your relationship with God. You must first get to know Him and His love for you before you will ever be able to love and trust Him.

Do you feel as if you are getting to know Jesus better? Have you begun to get to know Him more experientially over the past weeks? If yes, give some details. How has He shown up? What new traits have you discovered about Him?

Day Two – Getting to Know God

We began this day by looking at our own desire to be known. Just as we long to be known, God does too. He doesn’t hide Himself, rather He is open about Who He is in His letter to us, the Bible. Next, you were to begin to listen for the gentle whisper that is the voice of God. He speaks to you through His Word, His Spirit, circumstances, other believers, and through nature. In my case and in the case of the godliest people I know, God speaks primarily through His Word. This is the channel through which you can expect Him to speak most clearly and consistently to you. The other ways we hear from God typically confirm what you are already

1 Corinthians 13:12

“Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

hearing through His Word. There are no shortcuts. You must read God’s Word for yourself.

Your goal during this session was to begin a regular pattern of reading and studying His Word. Never underestimate the power contained in the Word of God. That is the greatest deterrent to reading His Word, unbelief. If you really believe He will speak to you, you will read your Bible daily with excitement and enthusiasm. If you have no desire to read, somewhere you are struggling with belief. The Word of God is His exhale. You need only to inhale.

*In getting to know
God, there are no
shortcuts!*

What have you learned through the consistent reading of God’s Word? I don’t mean specifics; I mean what have you concluded about God talking to you through His Word? Have you begun to “hear” Him speak directly to you through His Word during this study?

Is this something new, or have you often heard from God in this way over the years?

In the past, have you tried to hear from God through other avenues than reading His Word? Like through pastors, teachers, and friends?

Why do some (maybe even you) doubt they will hear directly from God through the Bible? Has your opinion changed?

Day Three – Wonderful Counselor

As I needed Him, you may have found that you, too, need God to step into your life as your Wonderful Counselor. This is another area that will be a lifelong process. You will always need Him to guide you and teach you. For each and every one of us, we need Him in this way. This world is plain crazy and to navigate through it requires wise Counsel.

Psalm 32:8

*“I will instruct you
and teach you in the
way you should go: I
will counsel you and
watch over you.”*

Rather than seeking others to help you learn, grow, and heal, have you come to know the Lord as your Wonderful Counselor? If so, in what ways?

Have you learned to ask childlike questions and then simply wait for His response? If so, in what areas have you felt Him guide you and lead you toward healing?

Day Four - Seasons

He will become to you what you need in various seasons. From Counselor to Beloved, Father to Best Friend, He will be all of these to you at different times. As you get to know Him, He will reveal Himself to you in these and many more ways. He will be your Protector, your Provider, your Rock, your First Love, until eventually, you discover that He has become your Everything.

During this process of unminging, He will show you who you are to Him. Often, what keeps us from His presence is that we believe lies about ourselves. Shame from past mistakes, or even believing what others have said about you, can keep you from hearing that He calls you Beloved, Daughter, and Friend.

“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.” Psalm 139:1

Day Five - Anticipation

Sadly, most Christians don't approach reading the Word of God with excitement and anticipation. As discussed in a previous section, the reason for this is that they don't expect to actually hear from Him, but the truth is, once you learn to distinguish the voice of God through His Word, it will become more than an addiction. All it takes is that first time. After that you will eagerly await the next word. Before you know it His words to you come more frequently, until finally, you realize that you are hearing from Him each and every day. It's a rare day indeed when I don't hear from God in some way.

Those who are receptive, the ones who want and expect to hear, do hear.

“Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, this is the way; walk in it.” Isaiah 30:21

As you have been working through this study, have you come to hear the voice of God through Scripture? If so, what specifically have you heard Him say?

If not, please don't become frustrated and give up. If you do, then you will never hear. That's a certainty. You simply must keep pressing on until you do hear. If you have never heard the voice of God then you may be missing it even when He does speak. While you're reading your Bible, if you have a sense that you can't move on from a particular place you are reading, then stop and pray it through. He very well may be speaking to you. As you read familiar stories, remain open to something new He might be trying to show you. I said earlier and it bears repeating – you must acclimate your ears to how He speaks uniquely to you.

Take-Away – Your healing and closeness will come as you seek to know God through daily reading and studying His Word.

Day One – Called to Forgive

This entire session was based on forgiveness, others and ourselves. This is a lifelong process. Always, we will have the opportunity to forgive. We will make mistakes, and others will hurt us. It's the result of living in a fallen world. Forgiveness is so critical as to require a stand-alone session because it's a topic near and dear to our Savior's heart. His mission was the cross. He paid the penalty and suffered God's wrath so that we might be forgiven. How then might we dare *not* forgive?

Since this entire week covered one topic, we won't look at each day quite as in-depth in review.

Forgive

Stone of
Remembrance

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."
Colossians 3:13

As we are to approach the Lord as a child, we determined that it's okay to ask such a question as, "Why should we forgive?" On Day One we discovered the first and best answer. Because He calls us to forgive. If you remember nothing from this session, remember this. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 we are reminded, "You are not your own, you were bought with a price." We are His. He gets to be God of our lives. If He says forgive, then we must forgive.

Is this concept something you have difficulty with? Is the mere idea of forgiving simply because He tells you to something you struggle with? Be honest. Remember, God can handle anything you throw His way.

*"She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped."
Luke 8:44*

Day Two – Forgiveness Frees Us

If we would have stopped with Day One's conclusion, that we forgive because God calls us to forgive, that would have been enough. But the more you get to know God, the more you realize that He says to do and don't do based on His love for you. If He tells you to forgive, it's in your best interest that you do. Holding on to unforgiveness is like hemorrhaging within. You are the one who is hurt, much more so than the one you think you are punishing. Our final conclusion on this day was that when you hand your bitterness and unforgiveness over to the Lord, He will carry the burden for you, freeing you of the cumbersome load.

As you have had more time to process the concept of forgiveness, are you making progress? List the person(s) you listed originally during this day's study. (Initials are fine.) How are you doing so far? Do you feel as if you are making progress in this area? If so, explain. If not, why do think you are struggling?

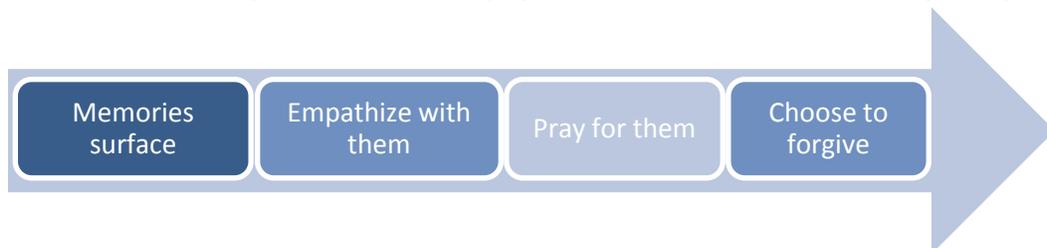
Day Three – The Process

Once you accept the first two concepts into your belief system (we are called to forgive – forgiveness frees us) what then? Forgiveness is easier said than done, right? As you walk out your journey with God and others, the processes contained in this session may help you as you choose to forgive. Empathize with them, pray for them, and choose to forgive. Rinse and repeat as often as necessary until your heart catches up with the choice your mind has made. Because without question, memories of what they did will come against you. Eventually, though, as you work through this process for some time, the memory will come, but you will immediately remember you chose to forgive. It will no longer have any hold over you. You will be free from the bitterness associated with the memory, as your heart has forgiven. This is a supernatural process, one that only the Holy Spirit can enable you to do.

The flow chart below is a simplistic way of looking at the process you can use when working through forgiveness.



Remember, forgiving someone for any offense doesn't mean that what they did was okay. It means that you are choosing to allow God to handle it. You are placing their actions in His hands. Also, forgiveness doesn't mean you will forget. We all know, the memories come, but what matters most is what you do with them when they do come. Your only option is to continue to work through the process.



Since you will likely be hurt, offended, wounded, and overlooked at least a hundred or more times before you die, you might as well get used to the idea of forgiveness, no matter the offense. Just do what God calls you to do and walk in freedom. He's God for a reason. He really does know what He is talking about.

On the final page for this session, I am including some of the blanks for your use in the future. You can make copies of it or many copies if you happen to have an inordinate amount of annoying people in your life. (Kidding) But please feel free to use it or share it if you would like.

Day Four – Receiving Forgiveness

We get it wrong! For many of us, we often get it wrong, and because we do, we are faced at times with the need to simply receive His forgiveness and forgive ourselves. Again, another thing that is easier said than done.

As you originally worked through this day's study, was the concept of receiving forgiveness something you struggled with?

If so, are you making progress in this area? Are you meeting with God, reading His Word, and allowing His truth, such as the verse included in the margin, to penetrate your belief system?

“...as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

Psalm 103:12-14

Day Five – Admitting the Need

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” Acts 3:19

For me, writing this day's study came as most difficult. While the words flowed easily, I felt concerned about trying to cover such difficult topics as sexual sin and abortion in a small amount of space. Plus, getting into people's basket of business is not what I enjoy, especially when it's in writing and my tone might be missed. I hope that I in no way seemed judgmental or as if I know it all. I so don't know it all! When I discuss these topics in person with wounded women, my greatest concern is for their healing and restoration with God. I know from personal experience that the order I laid out, you must admit the sin, repent of it (turn away from it), receive forgiveness, and then healing comes, is the path to restoration. As long as sin is defended, restoration and healing never come. This holds true for all sin, not just the ones we know are so devastating for the heart of a woman.

Besides the two above, toward the end of the day's study, I dropped some other “lesser” sins on you. The greedy, the unkind, cheaters, liars, hypocrites, the unwilling, gossips, haters, the selfish, those who lust, thieves, etc... Did I miss you on this list? Probably not. We all have sin in our lives. Even when we walk with the Lord daily, sin still rears its ugly head. Just this week, I have been unkind, greedy, and

1 John 1:8-10

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”

selfish. Oh, and I’m certainly unwilling at times too. But the difference in me now from that mess of a woman that I used to be is that I more quickly recognize these sins and choose to turn from them.

After looking at the list again, what most describes you?

Have you decided to acknowledge some of your lesser sins, or are you still trying to justify them?

Refresh your memory of our final verse (in the margin) from Session Four. Once we confess our sins, we are assured that He is faithful and just and will forgive. Why then, when we know forgiveness is so freely available, do we hold on to what is searing our hearts?

Session Take-Away – Forgive as you have been forgiven. The forgiveness you need to extend might just be for yourself. Empathize. Pray. Choose to forgive. Rinse and repeat.

Note to self: Forgiveness frees me.

Name:

How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person. _____

Name:

How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person. _____

Name:

How you might empathize:

Write out a prayer for this person. _____

Since you so recently completed this session study, there seems to be little need for an entire re-cap. So instead, I will touch quickly on a few of the main points for each day.

Stone of
Remembrance

Purpose

Day One – Your New Normal

The absence of peace means you have somehow stepped away from God’s intimate presence. As you have drawn nearer to God, as you have begun to love Him, peace becomes your new normal. When you begin to feel chaotic emotions and tormenting thoughts, this should serve as a warning. Begin to ask the Lord questions. Have you inadvertently taken a step away? Have you ignored His leading? Have you developed an attitude unbecoming your station? (as daughter of the King) Based on fear, are you saying no or never in an area where He is clearly leading?

“If anyone loves
me, he will obey
my teaching.”

John 14:23

Day Two – Obedience (Obey – that four-letter word!)

When you don’t love God, disobedience comes rather easily.

When you do love God, you develop a much more sensitive spirit, so disobedience brings with it immediate conflict within.

Our *nevers* are things we say we will never do, and often, they are the exact things God is calling us to do. In ministry or in other areas, typically it is fear that keeps us from obeying. Remember, disobedience leads us to that place of feeling far away from God.

Day Three – Acknowledge His Call

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19-20

In this session, we learned that there is a “big picture” call on the life of every believer. That call will be demonstrated by reaching the lost and/or teaching the found (or making their teaching possible). How that call translates in the life of the individual believer will be determined by what passions and gifts the Lord has uniquely given you. God’s goal is to make you a fruitful vineyard. (Isaiah 27:2-3) He chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit that will last. (John 15:16) We all have this innate

sense that we were created for something more...we are! To bring Him glory. To be a planting for His splendor. (Isaiah 61)

Another analogy we used during this session was the pouring out of Living Water into the lives of others. Without Him pouring into you, you will have little if anything to pour into others. Another thought: we are not called merely to sit and soak in the Living Water. He pours into us *so that* we can pour into others.

Day Four – Becoming Who You Are

Trying to cultivate gifts you don't possess leads only to frustration. Once you are near to God and living the life He always planned for you, expect your specific call or purpose to begin to surface. It won't likely be something from out of left field. It will more than likely be something that is already buried in your heart.

Note: There is no retirement plan from Kingdom service. Have you ever heard a senior adult say, "I've done my time."? No such thing. They may be tired but not retired. And if they are tired, it's very likely they were serving in an area where they weren't called. There is something supernatural about serving where you are gifted and called. Energy comes that never seems to be depleted. Sure, rest is needed from time to time, but passion for what you were created to do fills your reservoir again quickly. It's vital that you seek God without ceasing until you find your place. When you do, an existence that may have never made sense before will suddenly become so clear.

Once you draw near and He removes your stitches, allowing you to know Him, trust Him, and love Him, then your purpose will begin to unfold. All those things you have experienced in this life will suddenly have meaning.

Day Five – The Enemy of Purpose

When the whispers come...and boy do they ever come? What do you do? Are you armed with God's truth to filter out the negative voices that hit you hard, intending to make you unfruitful?

The enemy uses the tactic of temptation, blatant ones and subtle ones. The only way to combat temptations, which are common to us all (1 Cor. 10:13), is by staying near to God and in His Word. When you are near to Him, you hear warning bells sounding in your spirit. He is your Good Shepard and will not leave you unprotected. However, when you stray from your Shepard by not walking closely with Him, you are much less likely to hear His gentle warning. Trust me, when you are far, you are likely to fall for anything. I know I did.

Take-Away – Peace will be your new normal. Chaos and torment are a warning to get back on the path. You have purpose that will be revealed when you draw near.

At-a-Glance Study Review Questions

1. Have you grasped God's deep and wide and long and high love for you?
Do you love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind in return?
2. If not, are you moving in that direction? Have you sat with Him and asked Him to lead you in that direction?
Have you set yourself apart? Are you giving up on the world's ability to satisfy you? Have you finally concluded that only nearness to God can fill that void you feel?
3. Have you begun to identify your stitches? Are you placing those things before God, asking that He remove them? Are you spending time with Him in the quiet place?
4. Are you seeking healing through His Word? It is only through His Word that the stitches will unravel.
5. Are you continuing on with the process of forgiveness – others and yourself?
6. If you love Him, you will obey His teaching. Use this as thermometer to gauge your love level.
When you do love Him, obedience will come more naturally.
Seek your purpose. He created you to be His. Once you are fully surrendered to Him, He will make you a fruitful vineyard. You will produce fruit that will last.

Once you journey with God and allow Him to remove your stitches, those things that hinder your ability to see Him for who He really is, you will discover that it becomes He who begins to stitch. He will mend every broken heart. He will weave within you the promise of joy and contentment that can never be stolen away by circumstance. You will never again be shaken. In a world where no self-imposed veil remains, you can indeed live contentedly-ever-after. Isn't that what we all want?

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to share this study with you. This is a topic that I feel so passionately about that I'm sure the fire will consume me if I don't pursue teaching it. I have prayed for you along the way, and I hope that you have found something in this material that has helped you move Into His Presence

Much love to you,

Lisa

Contact me at lisa@lisaheatonbooks.com