



BREAKTHROUGHS

FINDING FREEDOM AND TRUE
FULFILLMENT IN JESUS

SUSAN SOWELL

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By Susan Sowell

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INTRODUCTION

Breakthroughs are defined as 1) important discoveries 2) the removal of barriers to progress and 3) the penetration of enemy lines.

A Breakthrough happens when we discover life-changing truths from God's Word.

A Breakthrough happens when we allow God to set us free from lies that we believe about Him, ourselves and others.

A Breakthrough happens when our pain and darkness are invaded by Jesus.

A Breakthrough happens when we can finally believe who we are in Christ.

A Breakthrough happens when we are set free from shame and condemnation.

A Breakthrough happens when the anger in our home is replaced with God's peace.

A Breakthrough happens when we give up control of our lives and admit we need God's help.

A Breakthrough happens when we forgive ourselves.

A Breakthrough happens when we accept God's forgiveness.

A Breakthrough happens when we stop caring so much about what others think of us and accept that God is pleased with us.

The Breakthroughs class certainly does not have the power to give us these types of "breakthroughs." Jesus Christ is the only One with the power to heal our hearts, set us free and change our lives for His glory. However, the Lord works in a variety of ways to lead us to Himself. Breakthroughs is a class that hopefully leads us to seek Jesus and find true fulfillment in Him.

A Note from the Author

Breakthroughs is a path to freedom and true fulfillment in Jesus Christ. You may be wondering what freedom means and why you need it. I believe the answers to these questions will become very clear to you in Breakthroughs. The short answer is that we all have pain and brokenness in our lives. We are not perfect people. We also have an enemy who seeks to lead us away from Jesus and the life we were created to live. Only Jesus has the power to heal us, set us free and change our lives.

It is my prayer that this workbook helps you experience freedom in Christ. The way that I hope to help you is by telling you the truth about who God is and who God says that you are through His Word. I also hope to help you look at some of the pain in your life in a way that leads to healing and freedom.

One of the most important steps to freedom is learning to identify and choose truth over deception. When we don't know the truth, we are vulnerable to the enemy's lies. The enemy distorts truth, blinds us to truth and keeps us from receiving truth so that we don't experience freedom. The enemy is the author of deception and his intent is to destroy us with his lies.

One of the most destructive lies is the one that tells us that things are never going to change. Think about it. How many times have you told yourself it's too hard to change, or no matter what you do, things don't get better, or it's easier to keep things as they are and change is too much work? All of these messages tell us the same lie. We can't change. The lie that we can't change produces in us a feeling and belief that no matter what we do, it won't change our lives. We may have had some great attempts at making changes in our lives, but we give in to these lies and are defeated once again.

Over the past 25 years, I've spoken with and prayed with individuals who were struggling with depression, fear, anxiety, addictions, co-dependency, grief, and relationship issues, and there is one thing that is common to every person I've counseled. Lies... They believed lies about themselves, their lives, other people and God. Most of them did not recognize that

what they believed were lies, because the lies felt like they were true. As we uncovered the lies, and began to take steps towards truth, something happened in their lives. These individuals experienced change. The truth they encountered changed their lives.

This workbook contains steps that will lead you from believing lies to believing truth. This begs the question, "What is truth?" Jesus tells us in John 14:6 that, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." He also tells us in John 8:32 that, "when we know the truth, we will be set free."

I know what it feels like to be in bondage and I know what it feels like to be set free. I've felt the heavy yokes of: depression, addiction, shame, fear and loneliness grip my soul. I know what it's like to be in bondage and exactly what chains are meant to do to a person's life. And if it were not for Jesus, I would not know what it means to be set free. I would still be living in darkness filled with lies and chains.

It has been an honor to hear people's stories of pain and also their journeys to freedom and healing. Hearing the story of how God works in someone's life can give us great encouragement in our own journey. To help you begin your journey in Breakthroughs, I'd like to share part of my own personal story and pray it gives you hope in what Jesus can do in your life.

My Story

Who would have known that the playground for 6th graders could be such painful turf?

There was no air-conditioning in the Junior High Schools in Lafayette, Louisiana back in my day. When it came time for lunch, the students took their lunches out onto the playground and ate their lunches with their friends. All across the playground were students sitting in small groups of 3-10 people eating their lunch and talking about 6th grade stuff.

This scene sounds like a lot of fun and it probably was for many of those 6th graders. However, I was not one of them. I was the one who walked onto the playground pretending that I had somewhere to go and at the same time

discretely looking to see if there was an opening in any of the circles. As I made my way across the playground, I can distinctly remember doing my best to walk with dignity as I made my way to the girls bathroom. I would find my shelter in a closed bathroom stall where I would eat my lunch in silence and hope no one found out what I was doing.

Hiding in the bathroom came naturally to me because I had already learned the secret of hiding pain. Without going into the details of my childhood, I can safely say that hiding pain and keeping "bad" secrets was my life story. By the time I walked across the 6th grade playground, I was a pro at hiding my feelings and wearing a mask to cover the pain. I was also already a pro at people-pleasing, which is what got me out of hiding in the bathroom. I found my way into a circle by winning the leader over with 2 things; Candy and worship. The candy was an easy win. I would search for pennies each day and then ride my bicycle to the store and buy candy. The group leader loved my gifts to her each day and that became my invitation into her group. Once on the inside of her group, I used my acquired skills and studied her, knowing exactly what to say in order to please her and gain her approval. I worshipped her.

It's amazing how our mind and heart works. I still recall the desperation I felt the day that I didn't get a chance to find pennies and ride my bike to the store. I was terrified that I would lose my place in the group because I had nothing to offer the leader.

In 8th grade, I realized that I was not the only girl with pain and secrets. It was a relief to find that others had pain and that they knew how to deal with the pain. With great enthusiasm, I stepped into my new group of friends and began to worship their leader.....drugs and alcohol. Because it was already normal for me to be around alcohol and people who were intoxicated, it was natural for this to become my new refuge. I no longer had a bathroom to hide in and, with alcohol, I didn't need it. I could hide from the pain, keep the secrets hidden and wear a mask with nothing more than a bottle.

From 8th grade until I checked myself into rehab at age 22, my life was filled with self-destruction. The painful turf of a 6th grade playground was mild in comparison to the pain I created myself on my heart's turf. The choices that I made, the lies that I believed, and the doors to the enemy that I opened all collided with the childhood secrets and pain that I brought with me into the 6th grade bathroom stall. By age 22, I was living in the deepest, darkest pit of destruction and despair. My feet were bound with the enemy's chains. My mind was imprisoned to lies that I had been told as far back as I can remember. The line between deception and reality did not exist for me. I literally could not recognize truth if it were staring me in the face.

Grace.....God's grace.

"I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand" (Psalm 40:1-2 NIV).

I don't ever remember calling out to the LORD while seeking shelter in the bathroom stall, but He heard my cry. He heard my cry as a young child sleeping with the pillow over my head to drown out the noise. He heard my cry when my innocence was stolen from me as a little girl. He heard my cry underneath the mask of the fun party girl. He heard my cry when the enemy begged for me to end my life.

It is impossible for me to put into human words what the LORD has done for me over the past 32 years of my life. Thankfully, I don't have to; the LORD Himself has done that for me. We are told in God's Word all that the LORD has done for us and it makes it clear that He did it for ALL of us. None of us deserves to be rescued from our pits. None of us deserves to be set free from the bondage that we welcome into our lives as a result of the pain we endured. Yet, the LORD freely gives His salvation, His healing, His freedom, His forgiveness. It is God's grace that invites us out of the bathroom stalls, the pits of addiction, and any other slimy pits, and into freedom.

It is more than an honor to share with you what the LORD has taught me about His path to healing and freedom, it is an outright miracle. Who would have ever known that a 6th grade girl hiding in a bathroom stall would dare have enough courage to tell her story? Grace. God's grace.

For Him,

Susan Sowell

Lesson One: Darkness vs. Light

We begin our journey in Breakthroughs by distinguishing the difference between darkness and light. We will soon discover that walking in the light is where we experience the freedom our hearts crave. Darkness is defined as:

1. The state or quality of being dark.
2. Absence or deficiency of light.
3. Wickedness or evil.
4. Obscurity; concealment.
5. Lack of knowledge.

Based on the definition of darkness, how would you describe the life of someone who lives in darkness?

Light is defined as the natural agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible. Darkness and light are polar opposites. We can't see things that are in the dark and we can see things in the light. When we experience pain and loss in life, we also experience darkness. Darkness tries to surround us and cause us to give up hope. If we've made poor choices then we will try to hide in the darkness. We may also try to keep others from seeing our pain and struggles, so we are alone in the darkness. Hiding our pain, our struggles and our selves becomes a way of life.

Breakthroughs is based on what God's Word (*the Bible*) teaches us about life and about Him. You may know very little about the Bible or perhaps you know quite a bit. Breakthroughs is not a Bible study, but we will have Bible verses in each of the lessons in our workbook. I am committed to presenting truth to you in this workbook that has the power to heal your heart and set you free from the darkness in your life. The truth that we will be using in each lesson is the only truth that has that kind of power to change your life. It is the truth of God's Word.

Lesson One: Darkness vs. Light

I pray that any negative thought or emotion that you may be experiencing at the mention of looking to God's Word will not keep you from approaching this workbook with an open heart and mind. I have talked to a lot of individuals who have been hurt by things said in the church or by Christians. I've had my share of misunderstandings about who God is and how He feels about me.

How about you? What thoughts and feelings do you have about looking to God's Word for the truth that can change your life?

If we look at the pain in the world and in our own lives, it can be overwhelming. There is darkness around us on any given day. Even a good day is not a perfectly good day. A perfectly good day no longer exists. It has not always been like this and it was not God's first choice for our lives. When God created the first man and woman, they did not have darkness in their lives. They walked with God and with one another with complete healing and freedom. It was a perfect day every day. Until they chose to believe a lie. The enemy of our souls approached them and they exchanged the truth for a lie. They chose to believe what the enemy was telling them instead of what God told them. When they made the decision to believe a lie, darkness entered their lives and put an end to their perfect days. They responded to the darkness by hiding. They chose to hide from God.

God could have abandoned them but instead He looked for them, called them out of their hiding place and helped them face their problems. He helped them recover from the pain and devastation that had entered their lives. This story is found in Genesis 3.

What are some of things that you need help with in your life?

What does the story in Genesis 3 tell you about God's desire to help you with your life?

Can you relate to hiding when you make a poor choice and do things you regret? If so, what are some ways you hide?

What about hiding from God? Do you think you try to hide from God at times in your life? If so, why do you think you hide?

Just as the first people God created (Adam and Eve) were given a choice to believe God or believe the enemy, we also are given choices. Obviously, some things in life happen that we have no control over, but we are faced with choices every day of our lives. We get to choose how we respond to the pain or losses in our lives. We get to choose how we respond to the good things in our lives as well. We also get to choose how we spend our time, who we spend our time with and even what kind of things we think about. We even get to choose how we respond to God. He doesn't grab us by the hand and force us to follow Him. God invites us to trust Him with our hearts and asks us to follow Him.

When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."
(John 8:12 NIV)

According to John 8:12, what will we experience if we follow Christ?

If we experience light when following Christ, then what can we expect to experience if we don't follow Christ?

God's plan for our lives is to follow Him. We follow Him by choosing to believe that He loves us and will help us with our lives. We stop hiding from Him and stop trying to change our lives with our own strength. This sounds simple, but it is not. Remember that we are bent on hiding, and we have an enemy that lies to us and we have darkness in our lives.

The lessons you hear taught each week in Breakthroughs and the work that you do in this workbook will help you learn how to follow God. The more that you follow God, the less darkness you will have in your life. You will know the difference between a lie and the truth and you will have His strength to help you change your life.

Does this give you hope? If not, then take a moment and write out a simple prayer to God. Ask God to help you believe Him and to have hope that He will help you begin to change your life.

Lesson One: Darkness vs. Light

NOTE: *If you need to take a break today in working through this lesson, then you can take a break.* Remember that we have one lesson per week to complete in the workbook. Work at a pace that is comfortable for you so that you have time to really think about and process what you are learning. If you prefer to complete an entire lesson at one time, then come back to review it during the week. Read the material again and your answers. You may have additional insight that you want to add to some of the questions that you answered.

It is easy for us to have black and white thinking when it comes to darkness and light. We can picture that we are either living in darkness or living in the light. However, most of us have some darkness in our life and some light in our life. This can be a bit confusing, so we need to know what God's Word teaches us about darkness and light. We are told in 1 Peter 2:9 that God called us "out of darkness and into His wonderful light." This leads to the question of how we can still have darkness in our lives if we have been called out of it and into God's light.

Recall that the darkness is without light, an inability to see clearly, and it is evil. We may love the beauty of night and enjoy sitting under the moon and stars. This is not what God's Word is referring to when it speaks of darkness. Darkness in God's Word is a spiritual darkness. It is where the enemy lives and where the enemy wants us to live. There is no hope in the dark. There is confusion, deception, fear, anxiety, depression, addiction, sadness and shame. Perhaps you feel like darkness has consumed you and your life, and you don't see any light around you. That is a very scary feeling and I want to say to you that God loves you and He is calling you out of that darkness. One step at a time is all you need to take. Ask Jesus to help you step out of the darkness. He will help you.

I would like to share a personal illustration that will help clarify how we can have both darkness and light in our lives. My heart has been divided over the years as a result of pain and sin in my life. At one point in my life I chose to give God a big part of my heart where pain resided as a result of sexual abuse. God helped me experience healing from the abuse and took away the shame and self-hatred that I felt as a result of the abuse. He helped me forgive the person who had abused me and He set me free from the darkness that entered my life when I was abused. However, I had another part of my heart where fear resided. I was afraid of what people thought of me, I was afraid of failure, afraid of the future and

afraid of the enemy. The wound of sexual abuse separated me from experiencing God's love. I stumbled around in the dark with a hidden wound.

God was calling me out of darkness, but I had to step out of it by reaching out to Him. He had reached out to me long before then, and was waiting for me to ask for His help. After trusting God with my abuse I needed Him to help me with my fears. I felt like I had one foot in the darkness and one foot in the light. I needed God to continue to rid my heart and life of the darkness. I knew that He called me out of the darkness, so I stepped out of the darkness once again.

You may or may not be able to relate to the kind of pain that I experienced in life. You may not have been abused or struggled with fear. You have your own story. You have your own pain and things that have caused darkness to enter your life.

Ask God to speak to you about your own life. Do you have areas of your life where you feel there is darkness? If so, what are those areas and what does it feel like to you?

Note: Writing down our thoughts and feelings is extremely helpful. If you've never done this before, then just give it a shot. It will become easier each time, and you will find that writing gives clarity to our thoughts and feelings. It also helps us process our emotions, which helps us deal with painful emotions.

Lesson One: Darkness vs. Light

To summarize what we've learned this week, please answer the following questions:

What is the difference between darkness and light?

How do we step out of darkness?

The last question is one that we will answer fully in next week's lesson. The short answer is that we step out of darkness by asking for God's help. It can be a very difficult step to take, but one He is passionate for you to take. Remember that He called you out of darkness so that you can walk with Him in the light of His presence. He loves you and wants to set you free from darkness.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

As we begin this week's lesson, I would like us to take a few minutes and consider this question, "Am I desperate for Jesus?"

Jesus tells us in Luke 4:18-19 (CSB), "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Who comes to mind as you read that Jesus came for the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed? Perhaps you think of a loved one living in bondage or a family living next door to you who does not know Jesus. Perhaps you remember a time in your own life when you felt overwhelmed with grief or felt far from God because of how you were living your life.

It's easier to admit that we are the poor, blind, captive and oppressed when we are going through a trial or suffering from a painful event in our lives. It feels a bit radical to think of ourselves as the poor, blind, captive and oppressed when life is manageable. We don't want to identify ourselves with such desperate and helpless people. Yet, this is exactly how Jesus calls us to live our lives with Him.

Jesus tells us in John 15:5 (CSB), "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me."

Philippians 4:13 (CSB) is a popular verse and tells us, "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Psalms 63:1 (CSB) tells us, "God you are my God, I eagerly seek you, I thirst for you; my body faints for you in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water." And in John 7:37, "On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, will have streams of living water flow from deep within him."

We could read numerous scriptures that tell us that we desperately need Jesus. We may know this but to what extent do we see ourselves desperate for Jesus on a daily basis? What would our lives be like if we actually admitted each day that we are desperate for Jesus and need Him to heal us and set us free?

You and I have a choice each day. We can believe the lie that we don't desperately need Jesus or we can see ourselves as ones who desperately need Jesus. Apart from Jesus, our hearts are poor, blind, captive and oppressed. The good news is Jesus came to bring us good news, the Gospel. Jesus came to give us sight, to heal our hearts and set us free.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

This week's lesson is titled "Exposing Darkness" and the purpose is for Jesus to reveal to us the places in our hearts and lives where darkness exists. I pray that as you work through the material in this week's lesson that you remember Jesus came for you and is with you. He is the one pursuing your heart to preach good news to you, to open your eyes, to set you free and to heal your heart.

We learned last week that darkness is defined as:

1. The state or quality of being dark.
2. Absence or deficiency of light.
3. Wickedness or evil.
4. Obscurity; concealment.
5. Lack of knowledge.

Which of the above descriptions of darkness can you relate to the most?

One of the problems we have with making changes is that we don't recognize how desperately we need to make those changes. We get used to our lives being a certain way and settle for living with pain, hiding from people, and struggling with things that hurt us and hurt the people we love. Not seeing things as they really are is called denial. When we tell ourselves that we are not in pain when we are hurting, then we are denying the truth. When we pretend that things we do don't hurt us and don't hurt others, then we are denying the truth. When we tell ourselves that we don't need help when we do need help, then we are denying the truth. Denying the truth is one of the ways we protect ourselves from facing things that we don't want to face.

Why do you think we try to protect ourselves from things we don't want to face?

Facing things we don't want to face is very difficult. It can feel scary to look at things that we've tried to hide from ourselves and from others. It can also be overwhelming to think of making changes in ourselves and in our lives. Giving up things that have given us comfort is

not easy. When we begin weighing the cost of facing what we've worked hard at hiding, then stepping back into darkness feels like a smarter step to take.

Consider your own life. Have you tried to face the pain and struggles in your life before now? If so, what did it feel like when you began to step out of denial?

We can wake up one day and feel motivated to begin to change ourselves and our lives. We can get a boost of emotional energy, and a dose of hope that encourages us to take a step out of the darkness in our lives. If that is where you are today, then take that as a gift. However, a boost of emotional energy and a dose of hope will not give us what we need to continue taking steps out of darkness. When we begin to face the pain in our lives, we will quickly run out of emotional energy. When the problems in our lives are no longer hidden by the veil of denial, we will quickly give up all hope for lasting change. The truth is that we are set up to fail because we don't have what it takes to change ourselves or our lives.

This is where the Truth steps in, the Truth that has the power to change your life. Please read what God's Word tells us about the darkness in our lives.

For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

(Colossians 1:13 NIV)

As you know, a Kingdom needs a King for it to be considered a Kingdom. The King is the one in charge and makes the decisions for the kingdom and there can only be one king on the throne at a time. If we want our lives to be changed we need to settle an important question. We need to ask ourselves, "Who is on the throne in my life?" Are we trying to run

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

our own lives? Are we allowing someone else to run our lives for us? Are we perhaps bowing to the enemy and allowing darkness to rule our lives?

On any given day and at any given moment someone is on the throne in our lives. Someone is calling the shots. This does not mean that we are helpless and have no say in the direction of our lives. What it means is that the one who is on the throne in our lives is the one who we are looking to for help and direction with our lives.

Who do you look to help you with your life?

Who do you look to help you with decisions you need to make in your life?

Who do you think sits on the throne the most in your life?

- yourself
- God
- Another person or people
- The enemy of our souls (Satan)

Stepping out of the darkness in your life may feel next to impossible. However, it is 100% possible because you are not alone. We are able to take this step out of darkness because God has already rescued us from the power of darkness in our lives. However, God has to be on the throne in our lives for us to be delivered from the power of darkness.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

We need to give up control of our lives to God and ask God to help us step out of darkness. We need God's help in our lives and we need Him to guide our steps.

Have you ever asked God to help you with your life? If so, what was that experience like for you? If not, it's okay.

God's Word tells us that there are two paths in life: one path has a wide gate and one path has a narrow gate. The path with the narrow gate requires help to enter but leads to life. The path with the wide gate does NOT require help but it leads to destruction.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13-14 ESV)

The narrow path is where God is King and the path leads to His Kingdom. The wide path is where God is not given the place of King in our lives, and this path leads to destruction. This may sound harsh, but consider that God goes to extreme measures to make this truth known to us. God wants for us to trust Him with our lives and keep our feet far from a destructive path.

Which of the following statements do you identify with most? Who is the King you are serving?

- 1) I have trusted God with my life, but at some point I quit following Him.
- 2) I have trusted God with my life, but I never learned how to follow Him.
- 3) I have never trusted God with my life.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

If you have never trusted God with your life and would like to make that decision today, you can read in Appendix 1 that is located in the back of this workbook, how to make that decision.

When you consider giving God control over your life, what kind of thoughts and feelings does that bring up for you?

Giving control of our lives to God is about surrender. It is about telling ourselves that we don't have what it takes to change ourselves or our lives. It is about admitting that we are weak and need help. This goes against what the world around us teaches. The world around us teaches that we need to be independent and do things with our own strength. This is the wide path that God's Word says leads to destruction. God created us to have a relationship with Him, and to have healthy relationships with other people. He did not create us to live apart from Him or hide from other people. God's plan is for us to trust Him, depend on Him and allow Him to direct our steps. This is the narrow path that is full of life.

What things do you think keep people from walking on the narrow path?

Why do you think it is difficult for us to trust God with our lives?

We will look at ways to build our trust in God throughout Breakthroughs. For now, just keep in mind that God is all-knowing. He knows you, and He knows your life. He loves you just the way you are today. However, He also loves you enough to want you to live in His Kingdom and not on a destructive path.

Exposing Darkness

Painful experiences are only one way darkness enters our lives. Darkness can also enter our lives in the way that we think about ourselves, our lives, and other people. We can become blind to what God's Word says about us, about our lives, and about Him by being told lies and then believing those lies. Our minds can become full of darkness because of the types of thoughts we have.

On the following page is a list of common lies from the enemy. Circle the ones you've been told.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

The following is a list of common lies from the enemy. Circle the ones you've been told.

LIES

I am never going to get better

My life will never change

Nothing I do will really make a difference in my life

God doesn't really love me

I've done too much for God to want to help me

It's too late

I have to do it all on my own

My life isn't really important

If people knew me, they would leave me

The enemy doesn't really exist

I don't need God to change my life

I am stupid

I am fat

I am ugly

Nobody loves me

My life is a failure

I am a failure

I will never be good enough

I will never overcome this addiction

I can't change

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

When I began thinking about the kind of thoughts I had about myself, it was a little shocking. I had a long list of very negative things I would tell myself every day and it went on most of the day without me really knowing what was going on. I just knew I felt bad about myself and about my life. I tried to look okay on the outside, but inside it was not okay. I was ashamed at how bad I felt about myself and kept my feelings a secret. I hid in the dark with a long list of lies that worked effectively to keep me in the dark for many years.

What about you? What do you think about the lies that you've been told about your life? How do you think the lies have impacted your life?

We are going to look at some other areas of darkness in our lives for this week's lesson. If you need to take a break, then take one. These weekly lessons have a lot of information, which can be emotional and a lot to absorb. Give yourself enough time each week to really receive the truth that God is revealing to you. And by the way... I don't know you, but I am so proud of the work you are doing and I am praying for you every step of the way.

Our emotions and feelings can be difficult to identify. Many of us are not aware of our feelings. Many of us have turned to things to try and block out our feelings because our feelings are painful. Getting in touch with our feelings can be very difficult for a variety of reasons. The place we start this journey is to be willing to let God help you with your feelings. God knows what has caused you pain in life. He knows everything about you. He also knows how you are feeling at this very moment. Remember, He loves you and wants to heal your heart of painful emotions.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

Please circle any feelings that you have today or have had during the past week.

Depression

Loneliness

Helplessness

Hopelessness

Fear

Anxiety

Guilt

Shame

Anger

Discouragement

Rage

Wanting to die

Self-hatred

Feeling rejected

Feeling unloved

Forgotten

Insignificant

Please list any other negative emotions you have felt.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

The next area of darkness that we will look at is our actions or behaviors. These are the things we do that cause us pain, lead us down a destructive path, and cause problems in our lives.

Again, it is difficult to face the things that we've worked hard to keep in the dark. Your answers to the questions in this workbook do not need to be shared with others. Give yourself permission to be completely honest as you answer the questions throughout this workbook. Your honesty is essential to your healing and freedom.

Please see the list of actions/behaviors on the next page.

Please circle any behaviors that you struggle with in your life.

ACTIONS/BEHAVIORS

Overeating

Gambling

Alcohol

Drugs, including misuse of prescription drugs

Pornography

Sexual Sin

Overworking

Video games

Lying

Gossip

Overspending

Overexercising

Yelling/temper

Controlling behaviors

Isolation

People Pleasing

Please list any other behaviors you struggle with in your life.

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

It is not easy to look at things in our life and in our hearts that are dark. It takes courage to face our pain and sin. It also takes knowledge of the truth. This is one way the enemy works in our lives. Satan does not want us to know the truth about Christ. He wants us to believe that our pain and sin is bigger than Christ OR that our pain and sin is not that big of a deal. Think about it. If Satan can convince you that your bondage is too big, your secrets too shameful, your pain too great, you will not believe that change is possible. You will give up trying without a fight. On the other hand, if you believe that your pain or bondage is not that big of a deal, then you will never ask for God's help. You will settle for a little darkness in your heart and miss out on experiencing greater freedom.

The enemy knows that if we bring our pain and sin to Christ, we will be healed and set free. So the way the enemy works is to keep us from bringing our hearts to Christ. If we believe the lie that our pain or sin is not a big deal and choose to ignore the darkness in our lives, or believe the lie that our pain and bondage is too great, then the enemy has accomplished his purpose. He has kept us away from the healing power of Christ with his weapon – deception.

Consider your own thoughts and beliefs about the darkness in your life. Do you have any thoughts or beliefs that would discourage you from stepping out of any darkness in your life? You may want to take a moment and ask God to simply speak to your heart. Ask the Lord to expose any lies that the enemy has told you about your life and journey out of darkness. Write down what the Lord places on your heart.

As we close this week’s lesson, we need to put two life-saving truths into action. These two truths will be like water and a nutrition bar on a long and hot trail. These two truths will help us make difficult steps and to even climb the high places.

Truth #1: God loves you and will never leave you.

Truth #2: Christ defeated the enemy at the Cross.

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39 ESV)

What is God saying to YOU about His love for you?

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.” (Colossians 2:13-15 ESV)

God’s Word is telling us in Colossians 2:13-15 that we owed God a debt that we could never pay because of the sin in our lives. He is also telling us that Christ defeated the power of sin in our lives at the Cross. The enemy – the darkness in your life was defeated at the Cross.

We can NOT defeat the darkness in our lives. Only Christ has the power to defeat darkness. When Christ died on the Cross, He paid the debt for our sin and defeated darkness. It is

Lesson 2: Exposing Darkness

because of the death and resurrection of Christ that we can be free. However, the enemy wants to keep us in bondage.

This is the battle we face each day. Will you ignore the battle, try to fight in your own strength, or will you rely on the power of Christ to fight the battle for you? Throughout Breakthroughs, we will learn specific ways that Christ works in us to fight, but for now we need to acknowledge the battle and we need to know that Christ defeated the enemy at the Cross.

Please take a few moments (as much time as you need) and write a prayer to God asking Him to help you believe these two truths:

Truth #1: God loves you and will never leave you.

Truth #2: Christ defeated the enemy at the Cross.

Your Prayer to God:

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

Choosing to take steps toward God is often very difficult. Stepping towards God means that we are making a decision to ask God for help in our lives. In order to ask God for help with our lives, it requires us to 1) trust that He will help us and 2) acknowledge that we need His help.

This week and next week's lessons in our workbook will focus on helping us take steps towards God. We will look at things that keep us from trusting God and we will discover why we have such a tough time asking God for His help.

The title of this week's lesson is "An Honest Heart." What do you think of when you hear the words "an honest heart?"

The word "honest" is defined as "free of deceit and untruthfulness; sincere." Our heart is the place where our emotions, experiences and beliefs connect and form our inner selves. To have an honest heart means that our emotions (feelings), experiences and beliefs are free of deception. In other words, we are honest about how we feel. We look honestly at what has happened in our lives and our beliefs are based on truth.

Being honest about our feelings is difficult. Facing the truth of what has happened in our lives is difficult. Believing what God says about us, our lives, and Him is difficult. Adam and Eve were the first people that God created. Adam and Eve both had honest hearts... before the enemy (Satan) stepped onto their paths. When Satan entered their paths, he introduced Adam and Eve to deception. He told them a lie and they believed the lie. They exchanged the truth that God told them, for a lie that Satan told them. Once they exchanged the truth for a lie, they chose to hide from God. Suddenly their honest hearts became hearts that were

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

filled with deception and fear. They did not know how to deal with the deception and fear, so they hid from God. They did not ask God for His help, and instead of stepping towards God, they stepped away from God. This is the story of Adam and Eve, and this is our story too.

In order for us to step towards God, we often wait until we come to the end of our rope. We wait until we have tried every other possible means of rescuing ourselves before we call out for help. You've probably heard the phrase "hit rock bottom." Just what does it mean to hit rock bottom? Is rock bottom a place on our paths in life where we go after making a series of poor choices? Or perhaps rock bottom is a place where we land after experiencing one loss after another in life. There may be more than one way of reaching the destination of rock bottom, but the ground at rock bottom feels the same for all of us when we get there. We feel helpless. We feel alone. We feel afraid and we feel ashamed. We want to hide and we can't imagine anyone wanting to find us.

Take a few minutes and put into words how you feel about where you are in life today. Does it feel like you are at rock bottom? If so, describe the thoughts and feelings you are experiencing.

Please read the following verses and think about what God is saying to you about your life.

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8 NIV)

What is God saying to you about your life?

If you find yourself at “rock bottom” today, then you still have not gone too far from God’s reach. **The truth is we can never take too many steps away from God where He can’t hear us when we call out to Him for His help.** One of the most effective lies from Satan is that we need to get ourselves together, clean up our lives, make these changes and then we will be ready to take steps towards God. The reason that this lie is so effective is that it keeps us from asking God to help us. The lies tell us that we are responsible for making the changes in our lives apart from God’s help. The lies also tell us that God won’t accept us with the dirt in our lives so we better clean it up before we try and approach Him.

Stepping towards God requires that we step away from the lies the enemy has told us about God. We will never trust God to help us with our problems in life, heal our hearts from the pain we feel, and deliver us from the darkness in our lives if we believe lies about God. Remember that Satan’s first lie to Adam and Eve was about God. Satan wanted Adam and Eve to doubt God and not trust God with their lives. Satan’s plan has not changed and his method for accomplishing his plan has not changed... because it works. However, God’s Word, which is truth, is more powerful than Satan’s plan and method. We will learn more about this later in our workbook, but for now we need to focus on what lies the enemy is using in our lives to keep us from taking steps towards God.

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

You may be feeling a bit overwhelmed with the idea that you have an enemy that works in your life to keep you from trusting God. Perhaps you've heard things about the enemy that sounded strange and the people you heard it from sounded even stranger. The way we respond to the information we learn in Breakthroughs is very important. We will discover how the enemy works in our lives, so we can spot the lies when we hear them. We can choose to ignore what the Bible teaches about the enemy. We can choose to pay little attention to how the enemy works in our lives, or we can choose to focus most of our attention on how the enemy works in our lives. Each of those choices will be influenced by our past experiences, and can keep us from walking in victory over the darkness in our lives.

God's plan for our life is for us to walk in truth and to focus our attention on Him.

The reason that we will be looking at how the enemy works in our lives is to learn how he tries to keep us in darkness. As God exposes the lies Satan has told us about ourselves, about our lives, and about Him, we can begin to be set free from those lies. God will replace those lies with His truth. God will heal our hearts and minds and He will help us rebuild our lives based on truth.

Let's take a few minutes and write a prayer to God. Tell God any fears or concerns you have about learning how the enemy works in your life. Ask God to help you trust Him with this area of your life. Ask God to help you focus on Him and not the enemy. Close your prayer by thanking God that He has called you out of darkness to live in the light of His presence.

- ❖ **We are going to look at things that keep us from asking God for His help. If you need to take a break from this week's lesson, then take a break. Remember that you need to work at a pace that is not rushed. There is a lot of material in each week's lesson that can be mentally and emotionally challenging. Take time to absorb what you are learning. It's also very important to take time to be quiet and listen to what God is saying to your heart.**

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

We've already learned that after Adam and Eve exchanged the truth of God for a lie from the enemy, they tried to hide from God. God could have left them hiding in the dark, but He called them out of the dark and into His light. He helped Adam and Eve by leading them to deal with the deception in their lives. Just as God knew all about Adam and Eve, He knows all about you and your life. God's Word tells us that God is "all-knowing" and that He even numbers the hairs on your head (Luke 12:7).

How does it make you feel when you consider that God knows everything about you... all of your thoughts, your feelings, and your past and present struggles?

An honest heart is a heart that is not lying or pretending that things are okay, when things are not okay. An honest heart is not a perfect heart because a perfect heart does not exist. Instead, an honest heart is willing to look at mistakes, failures and weaknesses without trying to cover them up with deception.

How does looking at your mistakes, failures and weaknesses make you feel?

Looking at our mistakes, our failures and our weaknesses can be very scary. It can also be very painful and difficult. Remember that we are bent on hiding, but there is more to our stories. We all have experiences with people in our lives that have impacted us. Many of us learned at a young age that it is better to hide our mistakes than to face them. A lot of us grew up in homes where we learned to hide our pain and our struggles.

It is possible to ignore or deny things that have happened in our past, especially in our childhood. However, if we want to be healed from the pain in our lives and freed from the darkness, we need to give God full access to our hearts. This includes giving God permission

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

to show us anything from our past that is keeping us from trusting Him today. The most significant factor that impacts how we view God today will be the relationship that we had with our parents, especially with our fathers. Children develop their view of God based on how they view their earthly father. For example, if a child's father is present, loving and encouraging, a child is more likely to view God as present, loving and encouraging. If a child's father is absent, does not demonstrate love and is critical, the child will likely view God in the same manner.

This week's lesson calls us to glance in the rearview mirror. We will take a look at our relationships with our parents and how those relationships are affecting our view of God today.

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

Prayerfully answer the following:

Please check the adjective which best describe the way your **father** relates/related to you.

Characteristic Always Often Sometimes Seldom Never Don't Know

Gentle

Stern

Loving

Unpredictable

Just

Sensitive

Encouraging

Disapproving

Distant

Close/Intimate

Kind

Angry

Caring

Passive

Protective

Strong

Unreasonable

Impatient

Compassionate

Demanding

Interested

Gracious

Harsh

Wise

Approving

Affirming

Leader

Forgiving

Joyful

Trustworthy

Thoughtful

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

Please check the adjective which best describe the way your **mother** relates/related to you.

Characteristic **Always** **Often** **Sometimes** **Seldom** **Never** **Don't Know**

- Gentle
- Stern
- Loving
- Unpredictable
- Just
- Sensitive
- Encouraging
- Disapproving
- Distant
- Close/Intimate
- Kind
- Angry
- Caring
- Passive
- Protective
- Strong
- Unreasonable
- Impatient
- Compassionate
- Demanding
- Interested
- Gracious
- Harsh
- Wise
- Approving
- Affirming
- Leader
- Forgiving
- Joyful
- Trustworthy
- Thoughtful

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

Note: If looking at your relationship with your parents stirred up painful emotions, don't try to hide your feelings. Talk to someone about how you are feeling, like a trusted friend, mentor or counselor. It is very helpful to journal (write) your feelings on paper. You can write God a letter and tell Him about your feelings and any painful memories you may be experiencing.

How do you think your relationship with your father affects your view of God today?

How do you think your relationship with your mother affects your view of God today?

Can you think of any other experiences that have either positively or negatively affected your view of God?

We need to ask God for His help in answering the next question. This question is about the lies that the enemy has told us about God. Please begin by praying and asking God to reveal to you the lies that you believe about Him, about your relationship with Him and about how God sees you. Write your answers in the space provided.

How do you think those lies are influencing your ability to step towards God?

When we begin to believe and accept that God loves us, deeply and unconditionally loves us, it changes our hearts. We begin to move towards Him in times of trouble instead of away from Him. We begin to feel His presence, His peace and His love with each step, making the next step and the next step easier to take. There are so many verses in the Bible that tell us how much God loves us. We need to read and hear those truths every day of our lives. However, there is nothing that can replace what God does when we simply choose Him. Our hearts may be telling us all sorts of lies, but when we cry out to God and ask for His help, we will find Him. God is the One who pursued us when we were at rock bottom. He sent His Son to die on a cross for us so that we could be rescued from darkness. **God has not, and will not ever stop pursuing you. He will go to the deepest, darkest place to rescue you.**

You cannot go too far and it is never too late. If you want desperately to believe this is true and just can't cross over the line into believing it to be true, then do this one thing: Ask God to help you believe that He loves you. Ask God to take away the lies, the pain and the darkness that is separating you from believing that He loves you. If your heart is anywhere close to being as stubborn as mine, you will ask God and He will show you... and then you will need to ask Him again, and He will show you again. I assure you that He does not give up on the most stubborn of hearts. You are loved.

"I love the LORD, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live."
(Psalm 116:1-2 NIV)

Lesson 3: An Honest Heart

Close this week's lesson with a prayer to God. Cry out to God for His mercy for your life. Tell God that you need His help to have an honest heart, a heart that will no longer hide away or allow deception to reign. Ask God to help you believe and accept that He loves you just as you are today.

Your Prayer to God:

Lesson 4: Little Gods

We've completed 3 weeks of Breakthroughs together. Let me just begin this week's lesson by saying that I am so proud of you! The path that you stepped onto leads to healing, freedom and abundant life, but it is not an easy path. Do you recall the lesson about the wide and narrow gate? The narrow gate leads to life but it requires help. The wide gate is easy and leads to destruction. I think we could agree that we don't need a lot of help to reap destruction in our lives. We certainly have things that cause us pain and people who hurt us, but we can generally find a way to be destructive without help from others. As you continue to walk the path that is opened by the narrow gate, I pray that you are walking it with others. We need the support, encouragement and prayers of others who are traveling similar paths.

We learned last week that in order for us to step towards God, we need to:

- 1) Trust that He will help us.
- 2) Acknowledge that we need His help.

In order for us to trust that God will help us, what do we need to believe?

Hopefully your answer included that we need to believe that God loves us and that He wants to help us. Choosing to trust God to help us will become a way of life. It is something that we will learn to do on a daily basis. Each time we ask God for help we are training ourselves to rely upon Him. We are learning how to have a deeply personal relationship with God that will be life changing.

In addition to trusting that God will help us as we step towards Him, we also must acknowledge that we need His help before we step towards Him.

What do you think needs to happen in our lives before we acknowledge that we need God's help?

You may have answered that we need to hit "rock bottom," or experience something terrible in our lives before we acknowledge that we need God's help. Often we wait until desperate times before we ask God for His help, but this is not God's plan for our lives. God loves us and desires to walk with us every day of our lives. God's plan is for us to seek His help daily. He did not create us to walk this earth apart from Him. This is where the problem lies. We live in a world that teaches us to be independent. Our society prides itself in doing things in our own strength, by our own will, and for our own pleasure. We are even taught to heal our own hearts, overcome struggles with strong determination, and hide our weaknesses.

When we don't ask God and other people to help us, what statement are we making?

When we attempt to heal the pain in our hearts and overcome our struggles without help, we are making a dangerous statement. **We are telling ourselves that we have the power to heal our hearts and set ourselves free from darkness.** We may not have even recognized that we've made that statement, because it can be very subtle. We can get so accustomed to hiding our pain by attempting to numb it, ignore it, or running from it, that we don't even recognize our own feelings. We get so lost in our own world of addictions, or some other type of darkness, we often can't even trace our own steps. We simply find something that makes us feel less pain and we go for it. We follow it and it becomes what we believe will

help us with the pain and loss within our own hearts. We don't see that the way we have chosen to follow has become a darkness of its own.

What have you followed that you thought would help you with your pain, but has caused you even greater pain?

Perhaps you've followed the path of drugs or pornography to try to lessen the pain in your life. There are things that are always destructive to our lives but, there are plenty of things that are intended to bless our lives. Food, sports, hobbies, work and people are examples of things that God intended for good in our lives. However, when we follow those things, demanding that they heal our hearts, we are putting those things or people in a very powerful place in our lives. *We are putting them in the place that is reserved only for God.* Only God has the power to heal our hearts and deliver us from darkness.

Consider your own life. Have you turned to other people in hopes they would heal your heart or change your life? If so, what happened?

What about putting yourself in the place of God in your life? Have you tried to change your life or overcome a struggle/addiction by your own strength? What was that like for you?

Read what God tells us in Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV) about our lives.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (NIV)”

What is God saying to you about your life through these verses?

When we turn to ourselves, another person, or something to heal our hearts and change us, we are inviting darkness into our lives. God tells us in His Word (the Bible) that we are not to have any other gods in our lives. You may be thinking that you don't worship any other gods in your life. However, if we put our trust in someone or something other than God to heal our hearts, set us free, and change our lives, we are exalting that person or thing above God. The people in the Bible did this. God called it worshipping other gods and it always led to darkness and destruction. These people and things were idols and the enemy loves for us to worship idols.

Based on what you are learning in Breakthroughs, why do you think the enemy loves for us to worship idols or 'little gods?'

You will hear throughout our time together in Breakthroughs that God loves you and wants to walk with you. He desires a close relationship with you daily. He wants to heal your heart and remove the darkness from your life. The only way this can become a reality for you is if you choose to trust Him and ask for His help. You will learn other steps and practical tools that you need to use in your life on a daily basis. *But the most important step that we take today and every day of our lives is to ask for God's help.*

When we don't ask for God's help and instead turn to 'little gods,' we will not be free. Please hear what a little god will never tell you. A little god will look and feel like your friend but will lead you down a dark path that you never thought you would travel. A little god has one very evil motive and goal for your life. It is to keep you from worshipping the One True God, who you and I were created to love and worship.

God's plan: *God created us with a deep desire and need to feel loved and accepted. He also made us with a need to worship Him. To worship God means that we acknowledge that He is God, we need Him and He is worthy of worship. To be loved by God and to love God is the way God designed our hearts.*

When we believe the enemy's lie that God doesn't really love us and that a 'little god' will fulfill the desires of our hearts, we walk away from God's plan. The enemy presents his path to us daily in a variety of ways with one goal: to lead us away from God. The enemy does not want us to trust God and follow God's path to freedom.

The enemy's plan is for us to follow his path of 'little gods' and lead us to bondage. **There is not a third path. There are two gates and two paths in our lives. We will never find the fulfillment that our hearts ache and long for apart from our God.**

One reason that 'little gods' are so effective in keeping us away from God, is because they try to look like God. 'Little gods' tell us they can help us feel better, make life easier, give us comfort, pleasure and confidence. 'Little gods' can provide immediate relief from pain so we become friends with them easily. If we have turned to 'little gods' for an extended period of time, we have established a relationship with them. The relationship may be harmful, but is

comfortable. We know we can count on them and know what to expect. We may even know we will end up in a bad place, but we believe the lie that the journey getting there is worth it. That is until we get there... and realize that once again we have been deceived.

I want you to know that I am praying so hard for you right now. I know that this is a lot to take in for most of us. I also know that what you are hearing is truth that can change your life. What I am sharing with you is 20 years of what God has taught me personally as well as professionally. These are not simply words that I read but words that I have lived. They are things God taught me while I was in the pit of my own pain and addictions. They are words God spoke to me through His written Word (the Bible) and they are things He showed me while counseling men and women in their darkness. *I pray that you will allow God to speak to your heart through these words because you matter to Him.* He wants to heal your heart and set you free. He is the only way out of darkness.

Would you please take a few minutes and ask God to help you believe that He will deliver you. Ask God to take away the desires you have to follow after 'little gods' and begin the process of destroying the power those 'little gods' have in your life. This is what we call a big prayer because it means we are taking a big step towards God. We are saying to our self and to God, that we need his help.

Before we move on, let's make sure that we have a clear understanding of 'little gods.' In your own words, what is the definition of a 'little god?'

What is the danger in following a 'little god?'

Remember that 'little gods' often feel like they are our friends, but they lead us down a dark path. The enemy does not want us to view these 'little gods' as being destructive so he will try to convince us they are not so bad. Have you ever heard messages such as:

“My _____ is not that bad.”

“My _____ could be a lot worse.”

“My _____ does not really hurt anybody.”

“My _____ is not that big of a deal.”

Are there any other messages that you've heard about the 'little gods' in your life? If so, please list them.

Last week's lesson was titled "An Honest Heart." What do you recall learning about an honest heart?

One of the things we learned about an honest heart is that it is a heart that is willing to face failure and weaknesses instead of hiding behind deception. An honest heart is a brave heart. However, if we are not careful, we can easily fall into a trap called pride. If we begin to think we are the brave ones, and lose sight that it is Christ in us that gives us the courage to face our failures and weaknesses, the result is pride. God does cause us to be brave and He will give us courage. However, we must guard our hearts and minds from thinking we can have an honest heart apart from Christ. Pride is a slippery slope. Once we begin to step towards

God we must take those steps recognizing He is the One giving us the courage to take those steps.

One simple but very effective way of guarding ourselves from pride is to thank God for what He is doing in our lives. Let's close this week's lesson by thanking God for what He is doing in our lives. Please list things He is doing that you are thankful for, or write a prayer thanking God for what He is doing in your life.

Lesson 5: Markers

You may recall a verse from earlier in the workbook that tells us that Jesus came to earth with a mission.

“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner.” (Luke 4:18)

This verse proclaimed about Jesus and was proclaimed by Jesus. Jesus is the One who came to heal your heart, set you free and deliver you from darkness.

How does it make you feel when you consider that Jesus came to do this kind of work in your life?

We learned last week that we may have a tough time asking for God’s help. We also learned that the enemy wants us to turn to ‘little gods’ to heal the pain and void in our lives. How can knowing what God tells us in Luke 4:18 help us with these two things?

We will spend this week and next week learning how to “Step Into Truth.” We will learn that stepping into truth is a choice that we will make many, many times in any given day. Stepping into truth involves taking action but not a physical action. Stepping into truth involves taking mental action. Our minds are constantly firing thoughts that deeply affect us mentally, emotionally and physically. Our thoughts also deeply affect our actions because we often make decisions based upon our thoughts. For example, if we have positive thoughts about someone, then we will be more open to spending time with that person. If we have very negative thoughts about someone, we will try to avoid that person. The same principle is applied to places, activities and things.

Our thoughts are very powerful because they can produce negative or positive feelings, which then influence the choices we make. People have described our minds as being like a battlefield, where thoughts can be arrows fired from the enemy to wound us.

Do you recall how the enemy works in our lives? It’s through deception. The enemy lies to us and tries to lead us away from following God by getting us to follow his lies. He is very strategic in choosing arrows designed specifically to target areas of our hearts. There are some arrows that the enemy uses in all of our lives such as telling us the lie that “God could never really love me,” or “I will never be able to overcome this problem.” However, the enemy knows what arrow will do the most damage in our individual lives as well, so he will choose arrows that will do the most damage based on what he knows about our lives.

For example, if someone grew up in a home where their father was critical, then an arrow that said “you will never be able to be successful” or “you will never amount to anything in life” will effectively target a wound that is already in this person’s life. God tells us in Psalm 18:18 that “the enemy confronts us in the day of disaster.” What God is telling us through this verse, is that when we experience pain in life the enemy

comes on the scene to watch the show. His plan is to take note of our pain and then form arrows he can later shoot straight at our wounds. This sounds sick but it is so much more than sick... it is evil. It is our enemy. We can't possibly stand against such assault in our own strength. The enemy knows this, so he provides 'little gods' for us to chase - to deal with our wounds. He shoots at our wounds with these strategic arrows.

Before you begin to feel overwhelmed at such a fierce battle, please read the following verses from God's Word.

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4 NIV).

"For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory"
(Deuteronomy 20:4 NIV).

These verses will help you see that we do not need to fear or be overwhelmed by the battle. However, we do need to understand the battle and how to fight. But even more importantly, **we need to know that Jesus has already given us victory.** In other words, when we are fighting a battle against the enemy's arrows, Jesus gave us every weapon that we need to destroy the arrows. The enemy's arrows have power when we lay down the weapons Jesus gave us for battle. So, our job is to learn what Jesus has given us to fight with, and then how to use what Jesus has given us, so we can fight.

It may sound as if we must battle constantly in order to experience healing and freedom in our lives. When we are at "rock bottom" or we are trying desperately to avoid doing something like taking a drink, popping a pill, looking at pornography or binge eating, we absolutely must fight and fight hard. When arrows are being fired at us in every direction it is not the time to take a break on the battlefield.

Thankfully we will not always experience such an intense time on the battlefield. As Jesus heals our hearts from past and present pain, we will not be so vulnerable to the

Lesson 5: Markers

enemy's attacks. As we face deception, walk away from it, and walk towards truth, we will become strong soldiers on that battlefield. It is not God's will for us to be wounded warriors who are constantly trying to avoid being ambushed by the enemy. God has so much more in store for our lives, but we must be healed and free to embrace His plan for us.

Please take a few minutes to process what you've just learned about arrows of the enemy and the battlefield. Summarize what you've learned in the space provided.

For us to take our next step, 'Step into Truth', we need to learn how to identify truth.

We need to be able to distinguish between what is true and what is false. Once we can learn to identify what is true and false, we train ourselves to choose truth over what is false. The more practice we have with identifying and choosing truth, the easier and more natural this will be for us to do each day.

Markers

A practical illustration in helping us identify and choose truth comes from a personal experience. I was on a hiking trail in the mountains a few years ago and came to a place along the trail where I could go in one of two directions, and I did not know which direction to take. I stood at a crossroads. One direction would lead me back to the cabins and the other direction would lead me further into the mountains. I have a very poor sense of direction and situations like this cause me to feel very insecure and actually a bit terrified. I knew that the decision I made at this point could lead me safely to our cabin or I would get lost in the mountains. As I stood at the crossroads, I began to frantically look for a marker on a tree. A marker would indicate which path I should choose to get back to camp.

Hikers know the importance of markers. They know that a marker, which can be a flag on a tree or a mark such as an arrow on a tree, directs the hikers so they won't get lost. As we travel through life, markers are placed along our path. These markers direct us and tell our hearts and minds and feet where to go. Some markers are helpful and lead us in a healthy direction, while other markers are harmful and lead us in an unhealthy direction. Markers that are based on truth will lead us closer to God and markers that are based on lies will lead us away from God.

What did we learn earlier about what the enemy does when we experience pain in life?

The enemy confronts us on the day we experience disaster (pain) and he develops a plan to use that pain to cause further damage in our lives. Pain is often a breeding ground that brings further pain because we are so vulnerable. The enemy will create a marker and place it along our way, hoping to lead us down a destructive path. Of course, 'little gods' are placed along the path as well. We simply follow the markers and 'little gods' that lead us into enemy territory.

Consider a time in your life when you experienced pain. Do you recall how you felt during that time in your life? Write down any thoughts and feelings you recall about yourself and your life during that painful experience.

Hopefully you are gaining some understanding as to why you have to fight against the enemy's arrows or markers directed at you. They are formed by the enemy to cause you pain, direct you away from God, and they are lies. Because these lies are often formed when we are in pain, and directed to us while we are in pain, they will feel like truth. For example, if we are rejected by someone we love and then a marker or arrow is formed saying "nobody will ever love you" or "you aren't worth loving" then it will be difficult to recognize the lie. It will feel like truth so the lie will go unnoticed. We pay no attention to what is taking place along the path of our own lives. We are unaware that the enemy placed a marker on our path directing us down a destructive path.

You may want to take a break at this point in this week's lesson. However, before you do, please take a few minutes and write down what God is teaching you about the enemy's arrows and markers. What is God showing you about how the enemy has worked in your life to lead you away from knowing and following truth?

One of the ways that we need to be especially aware of the enemy's markers is when we are struggling with temptation. For example, if we are seeking freedom from an addiction to pornography, we need to know how the enemy works during times of temptation. Here is one example:

You have not looked at pornography for three weeks. You are feeling encouraged about this victory but then have a bad day at work. You experienced a form of rejection and feel like a failure. You are not able to shake off the negative feelings

and feel very alone. You don't realize it, but you are standing at a crossroad at this very moment. The enemy is telling you that one look at pornography will not be a huge deal and that you can't really expect to ever be completely free of this addiction. You follow those markers that lead you to the 'little god' and arrive at a place you vowed three weeks ago to never enter again.

What was the other path that this person could have chosen?

Write an example of your own life. Write about a time when you were at a crossroad. You had one path that would lead you to a 'little god' and the other path away from the 'little god.' What did it feel like to stand at that crossroad? What lies did the enemy tell you at that crossroad?

A Battle at the Crossroad

When we are at a crossroad, there is a battle that is taking place. The battle is the same battle that Adam and Eve faced: the battle between believing God or believing the lies of the enemy. Some of us don't really know what God has to say in His Word about us, about our lives and about Him. We may have been told all sorts of lies about God making His path seem unpleasant or even scary. In the back of this

Lesson 5: Markers

workbook are something called ‘Truth Treasures’. These are verses from God’s Word about you and your life. **You can begin to place God’s markers along the path in your life by putting His Word in your mind.** Start by reading these verses several times a day. Choose one verse that stands out to you, and try to memorize it. God’s Word is not just encouraging, it is powerful. We will learn later in the workbook that God’s Word has the power to destroy the lies of the enemy. Every marker that the enemy has placed along our paths can be torn down and removed from our lives.

In closing, ask God to show you one marker that the enemy has placed along your path. Write down the lie and then write a prayer to God. Ask God to help you recognize every time you hear that lie and to help you see it as a lie. If you would like to take the next step in overcoming that lie, then choose a verse from Truth Treasures and when you are told that lie, then think of that verse. Begin to replace the lie with God’s truth. As you begin to experience healing in your life, that lie will lose its grip on you and God’s truth will feel right at home in your heart.

LESSON 6: PITS

We learned last week that markers give us direction in life and point us in one of two directions. Markers that are written by the enemy point us down a destructive path and are based on lies. Markers that are written by God are from His Word and point us toward Him. We also learned that markers from the enemy are arrows that the enemy uses to target places in our hearts where we have experienced pain.

Looking at the deception that is in our hearts and life is difficult. We learn at a young age to hide our pain and hiding is a form of deception because when we hide we are avoiding the truth. When we don't know and accept how much God loves us and what His grace means for us, hiding will seem safer than facing the truth. This week, we will look at what God's Word tells us about His love for us and about His grace. **As we begin to understand and accept God's love and grace, it will give us the courage to face what we try desperately to hide.**

Before we dive into this week's lesson, please take a few minutes and write a prayer to God. Ask God to help you open your heart and mind to His truth. Ask Him to give you courage to face the deception in your life and walk away from it.

For a quick review of last week's lesson, please answer the following question. What is the significance of markers when we are standing at a crossroad?

Hopefully your answer included that when standing at a crossroad, the markers we follow will either lead us into darkness and bondage or they will lead us to healing and freedom. For us to experience victory in our journey, we must learn to daily identify the markers set along our path. We also must pay attention to the arrows on the battlefield of our minds. The material that you are learning in this workbook may be very new to you. It can feel overwhelming if you expect to remember all of this and apply it to your life immediately. It takes time to learn to walk this new path. **God will help you and the walk will get easier. Keep asking God to help you and He will help you.**

PITS

There are several definitions of a pit and each definition helps give us a mental picture. A pit can be defined as:

- 1) a naturally formed or excavated hole in the ground
- 2) a covered or concealed excavation in the ground, serving as a trap
- 3) a cistern once full of water, now empty
- 4) a place of hopeless doom

This week we will take a look at our path. Our goal is to see the pits located on our path and how we can avoid stepping into them. As we look at pits, you may discover that you are currently in a pit. Perhaps you don't even need to look any further because you already know that you are in a pit and you just want to know how to get out of it. We will learn how to get out of the pit, but this week we will focus more on

how we get into pits so that we can avoid future ones. We absolutely can wise up and learn how to keep our feet from stepping into traps that result in falling into a pit. It does not matter how many pits we've been in during our lives, we can learn to recognize them before our feet step into them. This hope is one that I can personally share as my feet were once a magnet to pits. If there was a pit along the path, then my feet would find it. **Thank God that He sets our feet free to follow Him.**

There are two very different ways that we can enter a pit. One way is voluntarily walking into it, and the other way is being involuntarily pushed into a pit. Please read the following examples:

EXAMPLE of being pushed into a pit:

A little girl is pushed into a pit of darkness when her father robs her of what is sacred by sexually abusing her. As the little girl sits in the dark pit, the enemy writes markers upon her heart that say "it was your fault", "you are dirty", "you are a bad girl." The little girl believes these lies, because it matches the pain that she feels within her heart. This little girl grows up and finds herself struggling with unhealthy relationships with men, self-hatred and lots of 'little gods'. She wonders how she got to this place in life. She never stopped to notice all of the markers along the journey. She just followed the markers' direction.

EXAMPLE of being pushed into a pit:

A little boy comes home to an empty house again. He doesn't understand why he was the only boy in his class whose parents didn't come to watch his class play. When his father comes home from work that night he runs to see him and tell him about his class play. His father interrupts him and tells him "plays are stupid and will never get him anywhere in life." The little boy walks back to his bedroom, which now feels like a dark pit. The enemy joins him and writes markers that tell him, "I will never amount to anything in life," and "I don't matter," and "I am so stupid." The markers direct him on a mission in life. He will prove his father wrong. Even if he has to work 12 hours a day and spend little time with his children, the mission will be accomplished. The little boy sets out on a course in life to prove that he is significant.

EXAMPLE of following a marker into a pit:

The markers tell me ‘not to trust people.’ The markers tell me that ‘I can’t let people really know who I am or they would reject me.’ The markers tell me that ‘if I tell God or anyone how I really feel, it would make things worse.’ The markers tell me that I have to deal with these feelings of insecurity, loneliness and at times self-hatred on my own. The markers tell me that ‘if I was a better Christian that I would not have these issues.’ The markers all point to further isolation. Who would have known one fight with a friend or one poor decision at work would cause a person to feel like giving up? Who would have ever imagined that the attractive, successful and popular one could be sitting alone in a dark pit? The enemy takes his seat next to you in the dark and whispers ‘you are a failure.’

EXAMPLE of following a marker into a pit:

He knew he should have listened when his pastor challenged the men to join an accountability group. He really thought he could handle his struggle with pornography. He had been attending church more regularly and the problems at work had gotten better. He was even beginning to connect more with his wife and children. Things were going in the right direction. Why did that crazy advertisement have to end up on his computer? At first it was just a peek out of curiosity but now he can’t get the image out of his head. He decides that if he just takes a few minutes to look and get it out of his system he can get back on track. As he sits alone in a dark pit he tells himself that he is an awful husband and father. He is gripped with shame and prays that nobody will ever find out his secret.

You may or may not be able to relate to these examples. However, most people are either pushed into pits or walk into pits along life’s journey.

Write about a time when you were pushed into a pit.

Write about a time when you walked (followed markers) into a pit.

Pits and 'little gods'

The experiences that lead us into a pit may differ, but the pit itself feels the same. A person sitting in a dark pit feels alone, afraid, defeated and hopeless. A pit can be so painful that a person will try anything to pull himself out of it. This is where the enemy's markers connect with the 'little gods.' After writing some markers on our heart, he presents us with a 'little god', which he tells us will help us get out of the pit.

In our pit we are confronted with:

- 1) Just drink this and you will feel better
- 2) Just take a pill one last time to get you out of this, so you can get through the day
- 3) Just look at a few of these pictures... it won't harm anybody
- 4) Just buy a couple of things and it won't be a huge deal
- 5) Just call _____, and they will fix this
- 6) Just keep working so you don't have to think about it
- 7) Just eat this and you can start a diet tomorrow

Circle the numbers of the things above you turn to when you feel angry, defeated, and alone. These are possibly a dark pit.

What other 'little gods' attempt to get you out of your pits?

Not many people will step into a pit and sit with us and try to help us out. It's too difficult for them, and we usually don't really want their help. A pit is a lonely place, so we tend to find people who are sitting in their own pits so that we are not alone. Pits can become a place where very unhealthy but comfortable friendships and relationships are formed. This can make getting out of our pits difficult because we often leave those people behind when we step out of our pits. When we step out of a pit, we may not have other people waiting to greet us and that is scary. Breakthroughs is a place where you have people waiting for you as you step out of the pit. God created us to connect with Him and with other people, but we need connections with people who want to live outside of pits.

Who do you have in your life that will encourage you to stay out of the pits in your life?

Do you have people in your life who encourage you to stay in the pits in your life? If so, ask God to help you know what changes need to take place so that you are not pulled back into a pit by these people.

Psalm 40:2 tells us:

“He lifted me out of my slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.”

How does God describe our pits?

How difficult do you think it is to get ourselves out of a slimy pit?

God describes our pits as slimy for a purpose. It is impossible to pull ourselves out of a slimy pit. As soon as we climb up a few inches we are destined to slip back down. This is for good reason. We are never intended to pull our self out of a pit. God’s hand is the only One who can pull us out of our pits and keep us out of our pits.

Look back at Psalm 40:2. Where does God place us after He pulls us out of the pit?

“He brought me out into a broad place; he rescued me, because he delighted in me.” (Psalm 18:19 ESV).

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.” (Colossians 1:13 ESV).

How do you think God sees you after He pulls you out of one of your pits?

How do you view yourself after God has pulled you out of a pit?

How do you think your experiences with your father/mother affect how you answered the last two questions?

If we had parents that showed us unconditional love when we made mistakes, then it is easier to accept that God's love for us is unconditional. If we had parents that were distant, critical and withdrew their love for us when we messed up, then we probably view God as distant, critical and unloving when we mess up. We have markers that point us away from the truth.

How do you think the markers in your life affect your understanding of how God responds to you after you've been in a pit?

God's Word tells us that:

“He brought me out into a spacious place; He rescued me because He delighted in me” (Psalm 18:19 CSB).

It is important to recognize that when we are pulled out of the pit we are not in the best condition. We've been sitting in a dark and filthy place. Humanly speaking, there is nothing delightful about us when we are in a pit or when we step out of a pit. However, Psalm 18:19 tells us that 'God finds us delightful.' Of course, God is not delighted that we are in a pit, but His love for us does not depend upon our actions or our conditions. God's love for us is completely unconditional.

Markers and Sin

The word 'sin' can create a negative response in us for a variety of reasons. We can associate the word 'sin' with painful experiences and perhaps have been hurt by people who pointed out sin in our lives. We may even immediately feel a cloak of shame around us when we even hear that word. God's plan is to heal us and free us from the power of sin in our lives, but we need to face sin and not hide from it regardless of how we feel about it. This means we need to ask God to help us and teach us what His Word tells us about sin.

When we **SIN** it will make a huge impact on us which **MARKERS** we choose to follow.

- 1) The Marker from the enemy – condemnation
- 2) The Markers from God – forgiveness and grace

CONDEMNATION

We are told in Romans 8:1 (ESV):

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

When we feel condemned after we mess up (sin), it is not from God. God disapproves of our sin but He does NOT disapprove of us. Condemnation is a personal attack against the person – not the action. In other words, to condemn a person means to reject strongly and seek to punish a person.

The reason that God does not condemn us is because the punishment that we deserve as a result of our sins was placed upon Christ.

“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed”
(Isaiah 53:4-5).

When we follow arrows and fall into a pit and turn to ‘little gods,’ we deserve harsh punishment. God is Holy and payment for sin is required in order to receive forgiveness. The payment was made. It was made at the Cross. The payment for all of our sins (past, present, future) was paid for by the brutal death of Jesus on the Cross. The enemy (Satan) knows this, and he hates it. He will grab as many markers as he can fit in his hands and drop them at our feet when we sin. Satan can’t do one thing to change what happened at the Cross. But Satan will do any and everything he can to keep our eyes off the Cross. When we sin, it is a perfect time for him to attempt to fill our minds with lies that will cause us to feel condemned. He hopes that we will turn and run from God.

Consider your own life. How do you feel after you sin? What kind of thoughts do you have about yourself and God after you sin?

How do you think God’s marker in Isaiah 53:4-5 could affect the steps you choose to take after you sin?

FORGIVENESS AND GRACE

It hurts the heart of God when we sin. It hurts our hearts and oftentimes other people's hearts when we sin. Scripture tells us that God hates sin. There are consequences when we sin and depending upon the sin, those consequences can be severe. This does not change the meaning of Isaiah 53:4-5. The payment for sin was paid in full. However, we are not exempt from the consequences of following bad arrows and turning to 'little gods.'

Forgiveness means that we are pardoned for our offenses and excused from the payment for a debt that we owe.

Grace has several specific meanings in scripture. The general meaning of the word grace is "undeserved acceptance and love received from another, granted by a superior to an inferior."

Forgiveness and grace are partners. God forgives us (pardons us from sin and has made the payment through the death of His Son) out of the abundance of His grace (giving us unconditional love and acceptance that we don't deserve). In order for us to receive forgiveness and grace we must:

- 1) Acknowledge that we need it and,
- 2) Ask for it.

When we ignore our sins and pretend that we don't need God's grace and forgiveness, we are NOT following some of the most precious and life-saving markers God has ever given us.

Please read the following markers from God's Word.

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:23-24 ESV)

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9 ESV)

Both of these verses speak of our sins and our need for God’s grace and forgiveness.

In order for us to find freedom from the pain that is caused from following the enemy’s markers, seeking after little gods and the dark pits in our lives, we **MUST** acknowledge that we have sin in our lives. We will never experience forgiveness and grace if we don’t see our need for it. We will also never experience forgiveness and grace if we believe that God would rather condemn us than free us.

Please take some time in prayer. Ask God to show you what markers you focus on when you sin. List those markers below.

Remember that God loves you and wants to forgive you of ALL of your sins. Ask God to show you the sins that you need to confess to Him, and list them on the space provided. If you are not comfortable listing them on paper... then, just voice them aloud to God. List or voice each sin aloud and ask God to forgive you. After confessing each sin, then ask God to forgive you and to help you accept His forgiveness.

Note: Take all the time that you need to complete this prayer. You can add to the list as God reveals things to you in the days ahead.

We all experience pain in life. We will visit pits along the journey. It is to God's glory and our best interest to learn how to get out of pits quickly. It certainly is not God's will for us to be in pits, but He can use our time in them, and our journey out of them, to teach us more about His forgiveness and grace.

It is important to understand that the darkness of a pit affects our vision. We don't see well in the dark. Our minds and hearts are easy targets for the enemy when we aren't seeing things clearly. He will often come with pen in hand, ready to create markers that have the ability to set the rest of the course of our lives down a destructive path.

If we want to shorten our time in the pits and avoid many of them that are along the path, then we must CHOOSE to think and believe the markers that are written by God while in a pit, regardless of how we FEEL. In other words, the emotions that we have while in a pit cannot direct us or we will never get out of the pit. We must be determined to focus our thoughts on the markers that point us to God.

In closing, please read the following words from God and write down what God is telling you about your darkness and your pit AND His forgiveness and grace.

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons, for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down, with none to help. Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! For He shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.

(Psalm 107:10-16 ESV).

Lesson 7: Strongholds, Part 1

When we begin to step into truth, we will begin to experience change in our lives. Those changes begin within our hearts and minds. As our hearts and minds begin to embrace truth, it will change the course of our lives because we will begin to make daily choices based on truth. Those daily choices will result in changed lives.

The material in this week's lesson requires us to do some serious thinking. The topic of Strongholds could take an entire workbook to unpack, but we are tackling this topic in just two weeks. To begin our lesson, we need a solid definition of a stronghold from the Bible so that we can understand why this is such a critical part of our healing and freedom.

Definition: A Stronghold is a “fortress” or a “refuge.” God tells us in the Bible that He is our stronghold, meaning that He is our refuge and we can go to Him in times of trouble and we are safe. We will experience healing and freedom when we make God our refuge (stronghold).

There are many places in the Bible where God describes Himself as being our Stronghold. However, there is one place in the Bible that a stronghold is presented in a very different manner. In fact, in this particular place in the Bible we are taught how to tear down a stronghold.

Based on what you've learned about the enemy and how he works in our lives, what do you think God is referring to when He speaks of tearing down strongholds? Just take a guess at this.

When God refers to tearing down strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) He is speaking of strongholds that the enemy built. The enemy knows that we desperately need a

refuge. The enemy knows we are desperate for this place of refuge in our lives because life is harsh, painful and stressful, so he builds his own strongholds. The enemy builds strongholds with hopes that we will find refuge in them instead of God; however, God is the only Stronghold with the power to save us.

EXAMPLE: We learned that ‘little gods’ are things that we turn to for help instead of asking God for help. For instance, food can be a ‘little god.’ When we are lonely, hurting or stressed, then we may find comfort in eating. Most of us find comfort in food from time to time but when we begin to turn to food when we are hurting or afraid, then food has become a place of refuge. Each time we run to food for comfort the enemy piles on another brick around the fortress that he is building. Of course, the material that the enemy is using to build the fortress is based on lies. If food is the stronghold then lies surrounding the stronghold will be things such as “This food will make me feel so much better,” “I need this food,” “I love this food too much and it’s not doing any harm.” Instead of food, we might turn to alcohol, drugs, pornography, shopping, working, people pleasing or any other thing that pulls us away from God.

Before we move forward into this lesson please write down what you’ve learned so far about strongholds.

Please read the following verse:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
(Romans 12:2 ESV)

What is God saying to us about our lives in Romans 12:2?

What is God saying to us about our minds in Romans 12:2?

The word “**transformed**” in Romans 12:2 is derived from the Greek word “metamorphoo.” The word means to be transformed, transfigured, and changed in form. We get the word “metamorphosis” from this word which describes the process of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly. A butterfly flies around showing off its beauty. A caterpillar crawls around hoping not to get stepped on. When looking at a beautiful butterfly it’s hard to imagine that it was once an ugly caterpillar.

Romans 12:2 tells us that God’s Word has the power to transform us from one form to another form. We can look and feel like a caterpillar and be transformed into what looks and feels like a butterfly, simply yet profoundly, by the Word of God.

What are some things that you have tried to change about yourself (not physical)?

Circle any of the following that you would like to change about yourself.

- My temper
- My negative outlook
- The way I see myself
- The way I see God
- The way I see other people
- My addiction to alcohol
- My addiction to drugs (including prescription medication)
- My addiction to gambling
- My feelings of insecurity
- My pride
- My constant need for approval from others
- My struggle with pornography
- My struggle with overeating
- My critical attitude towards other people
- My lack of self-control
- My gossiping
- My lying
- My procrastination

What other things come to mind that you would like to change about yourself?

What are some things you've done to try and make changes in your life?

God gives certain people wisdom and knowledge to help other people make changes in their lives. There are a lot of good programs and information in our society to help individuals make changes in their lives. However, there is not a program or method that has the power to transform a life the way the Word of God transforms a life. God's Word doesn't just help a person change something about them or get rid of a negative habit. **God's Word has the power to change a person from one form to another form.** The change that is happening through God's Word is causing the person to think, act, believe and look more like Christ.

The change in form can be immediate, but it is often a gradual process. As a person begins to read and to think about God's Word (markers), change begins to take place. The person begins to see things through a different set of lenses. The old lenses had lies, pain and a worldly view that caused the person's vision to be distorted. God's Word gives us the ability to see things correctly. When we look at our lives, ourselves and others, the way that God looks at our lives, ourselves and others literally changes our hearts and causes us to live lives in such a way that we don't look like the same person.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come"
(2 Corinthians 5:17 ESV).

EXAMPLE

I have known Christ for over 40 years and still have much to learn about Him. I have areas in my heart and life that have been transformed through God's Word and areas in my heart and life that desperately need transforming. However, there was a point along my journey with Christ that the way I was living my life, the way I viewed myself, others and Him, had led me to a dark pit. I tried all kinds of ways to get out of the pit but nothing worked. I sat in the dark pit with two markers. One marker would keep me in the pit and the other marker told me to take God's hand so that He could pull me out of the pit. For many years, I chose to believe the marker that kept me in the pit. God never gave up on me and eventually I decided to believe His marker. I stopped trying to pull myself out of the pit and asked God to help me. One of the first places that God took me was to His Word. As I began to read God's Word, the Lord began to change my vision. I began to see myself, my life, others, and God in a different way. The lies from the enemy were crushed every time that I read or listened to God's Word. Because my mind and heart had been filled with lies from the enemy, the process of transformation was gradual and is ongoing. I no longer believe

Lesson 7: Strongholds, Part 1

the lies of the enemy, but I must daily choose to focus my thoughts on God's Word or I become an easy target for old thought patterns to direct me back into a dark pit.

How does it make you feel when you consider that God's Word (Truth) has the power to change your life?

What have you learned so far in this lesson about being transformed through God's Word?

Hopefully you are gaining an understanding of how important God's Word is in order for us to experience healing and freedom in our lives. It literally has the power to transform our lives.

DECEPTION

Deception is defined as:

- 1) The practice of misleading somebody
- 2) Something intended to mislead somebody.

2 Corinthians 11:3 tells us, “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”

The enemy is the deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 12:9) and is the one behind the deception in our lives. We know that the enemy deceived Eve in the Garden with lies, but notice in 2 Corinthians 11:3 that we are warned not to be led astray from Christ through our thoughts.

The enemy is not all-knowing and he cannot read our minds, but he can influence our thoughts. The enemy lies to us and we experience those lies in our thoughts. The enemy speaks to us in our minds with the intent of leading us astray from Christ. The enemy has a purpose in the lies he tells us and it is to hurt us, but that’s not enough for him. The enemy wants to lead us away from Jesus. The enemy does not want us to have a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. He knows he can’t steal our salvation, so he goes after our relationship with Christ. If the enemy can get us to doubt God’s love for us, cause us to believe we aren’t really desperate for Jesus, and can live life apart from Him, then we will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to God. Our hearts will soon be divided and we will not be living the lives we were created to live.

The enemy does not wait until we experience pain to tell us lies. The enemy does not take a break in his mission to lead us away from Christ. He is at work in our lives daily to deceive us with the purpose of influencing our relationship with God. The enemy lies to us about God, about ourselves and about other people. Recognizing lies from the enemy and learning to reject his lies is absolutely necessary for us to live in freedom.

When we experience pain in our lives, we are especially vulnerable to the enemy. The enemy sees our pain as an opportune time to lie to us. The enemy targets the pain in our hearts and tells us lies that lead us away from God. The enemy knows that Jesus has the power to heal us and he does not want us to experience the healing power of Jesus Christ. He will tell us lies that exalt our pain, create doubt about the character of God and direct us to seek healing apart from Jesus. The enemy is deceptive and thrives when our heart turns even the slightest direction away from God.

Jesus is greater. There is not an enemy, a stronghold, a trial, a pain in life that is more powerful than Jesus. Jesus is King of King, Lord of Lords, The Great I AM, The Everlasting Prince of Peace, The Son of the Most High God, Deliverer, Healer, the

Word, The Light of the World, Savior, Redeemer, Living Water, Great High Priest, the Alpha and the Omega, The Beginning and The End.

The best news that we can hear is that Jesus is with us. Jesus came for us, to invade our lives with His presence and to liberate us from the power of the enemy. We are not alone and we do not fight the enemy alone. Jesus is the one at work in us and gave us His weapons to defeat the enemy.

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

(2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NIV)

As we begin to read and think about God’s Word, the enemy begins to dig in his heels. He knows the power of God’s Word and hates it when one of God’s children begins to experience change in their lives (transformation). The enemy’s plan is for God’s children to believe the lies and then follow the enemy’s markers and chase after ‘little gods.’ He knows that his markers and ‘little gods’ will not only cause us pain, but will keep us from experiencing change in our lives. We will just blend into the rest of the world and not be a threat to him.

Look back at 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. Notice two words that are used in these verses:

Arguments – Anything that tells us that God’s Word is not true.

Pretension – Something that is lifting itself up and pretending to be something that it is not, or do something that it can’t do.

God’s Word is telling us that “arguments” and “pretensions” are exalting themselves AGAINST God. These arguments and pretensions are waging war against the “knowledge of God,” which is God’s Word. Notice that God is telling us 1) to fight 2) and to make our thoughts obey Christ.

Arguments and pretensions are weapons that the enemy uses to wage war against God’s Word. The enemy will argue against God’s Word by telling us that ‘it’s not true’ and that ‘it is not that important so you don’t need to read it.’ The enemy argues that God’s Word is not significant or life-changing. Instead, the enemy will try to convince

us that a little god will rescue us, heal us and get us out of pits. He will try to convince us that the little gods can do and be something that they are not (pretensions).

These arguments and pretensions, partner together to build strongholds in our lives.

EXAMPLE OF BUILDING A STRONGHOLD:

We are told that nobody loves us, but God tells us that He delights in us and sings love songs over us (Zephaniah 3:17). The lie that we are not loved is arguing against the truth that God loves us. We believe the lie that we are not loved, so we feel pain. We see something or someone that can ease the pain and we turn to it. We seek comfort (refuge) in that thing or person, rather than God. We believe the lie that a thing or a person has the power to heal our hearts. Each time we believe the lie that we are not loved and turn to the thing or person to heal our hearts, we lay another brick in building the stronghold. The thing or person is actually becoming our place of refuge (stronghold) instead of God. The goal of the enemy, to pull us away from God, is accomplished and each time we choose the thing or person over God, the stronghold becomes stronger and stronger.

What do you recall about 'little gods?'

IN SUMMARY

'Little gods' are things (including people) that we consistently turn to instead of turning to God. When we consistently turn to a 'little god' instead of God, then we are allowing a stronghold to be built in our lives. As we believe a lie, it points us in a direction to seek relief (refuge) from the pain that the lie causes. As we turn to the 'little god' and gain some relief from the pain, we begin to form an unhealthy/ungodly attachment to the person or thing. We begin to see the 'little god' as a place of refuge and we run to this place when we feel pain or life feels difficult.

Each time we run to the 'little god,' we are buying into the lie that it has the power to change our lives. We may experience temporary relief but the final destination will be a pit.

Lesson 7: Strongholds, Part 1

Can you relate to this in your own life? If so, describe how you see the enemy building a stronghold in your life.

Perhaps you feel at times that you are helplessly being dragged towards a ‘little god.’ You may have promised yourself to stop turning to food, pornography, people-pleasing, or any other ‘little god,’ but find it impossible to keep your promise. Somehow you end up doing exactly what you sincerely promised to give up. When a ‘little god’ has become a stronghold in our lives it is just as the word suggests. The stronghold has such a strong hold or tight grip around us that it feels impossible to break free. Thank God that He has the power to set us free IF we choose to make Him our stronghold. However, we must surrender control to God and stop trying to heal and free ourselves. We need to choose to trust God and believe His Word... regardless of how we feel.

Please write in the space provided a prayer to God. Ask God to help you understand what strongholds are, how they are built and how they work in your life.

Next, ask God to help you identify the strongholds in your life. Write down what God reveals to you about strongholds and ‘little gods’ that are in your life.

Trusting God

A stronghold is all about trust. This is why what we *know and believe* about God and His love for us matters so much. If we believe that God loves us, and can rescue us from darkness, heal our hearts, and set us free, then we will run to Him. He will become our stronghold.

Please read the following words about God:

“The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” (Psalm 9:9 NIV)

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1 NIV)

“The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in who I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (Psalm 18:2 ESV)

“For You have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat; for the breath of the ruthless is like a storm against a wall.” (Isaiah 25:4 ESV)

“O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble.” (Jeremiah 16:19a)

In closing this week’s lesson, ask God to help you make Him the only stronghold in your life. Ask God to help you trust him. Ask God to help you believe that He is the only stronghold that will heal your heart and set you free. Ask God to set you free from all other strongholds in your life.

Prayer to God:

Lesson 8: Strongholds, Part 2

Let's begin this week's lesson with a review of some things that we are learning in Breakthroughs. Reviewing what we are learning will help us remember the material so that we can apply it to our lives. If you are having a tough time absorbing the material then look back at previous lessons.

For review:

What does it take for us to begin to take steps out of darkness?

What are markers and how are they formed?

What is the purpose of arrows formed by the enemy?

What are 'little gods'?

What is the basic definition of a stronghold?

You are starting the 8th week in Breakthroughs. It is a huge accomplishment to stick to a process that digs into our hearts and life. It is not easy to look at the pain in our lives and to commit to make changes. Be encouraged that you are taking huge steps and have not given up. **That is what we call walking in faith!**

Last week we were introduced to the topic of Strongholds. Strongholds are very difficult to destroy in our lives, but God teaches us how to destroy them in His Word. We will learn in Lesson 11 how to destroy strongholds in our lives but this week we will focus on a very common but dangerous type of stronghold which is our emotions. Again, this lesson calls for us to think deeply.

Emotions as a stronghold can grip us in such a way that they lead us to other strongholds. For example, if fear is an emotional stronghold then we may run to food or a drug to help us with the fear. As we seek relief from fear with food or a drug we end up making the food or drug another stronghold in our lives. So, we can actually have multiple strongholds at the same time. Before you begin to feel overwhelmed, please remember that we are asking God to direct our steps and help us on this road to healing and freedom in our lives. God usually frees us from one stronghold at a time. *As we understand and trust God's path towards healing and freedom, we will walk it with more ease.* It will be easier to trust God. It will also be easier to identify the arrows and markers that led us to follow the little gods until they become strongholds.

Those of us who struggle with addictions often have a tough time identifying our feelings. We may have had to ignore our feelings as a child because they were too painful to face, or we did not have anyone to help us deal with them. Disconnecting from our emotions/feelings is often a way we survive painful things in our life.

How difficult is it for you to identify your feelings/emotions?

Perhaps you can identify one emotion but not other emotions. For example, some people have a lot of anger and they struggle with losing their temper. They can't identify the pain behind anger and they rarely cry, but anger comes natural to them.

Do you have one emotion that seems to dominate all other emotions? If so, what is that emotion?

It is very important for us to learn to identify our emotions and then learn to manage them in a healthy way. Our emotions can tell us something about what we are thinking and feeling about ourselves, our lives and others, but our emotions are not always reliable. When we don't eat properly, get enough sleep and don't exercise, it will affect us emotionally. Our emotions are influenced by the music we listen to and the shows that we watch. There are a variety of things that influence our emotions on any given day.

Consider your emotions and how they may impact your choice to follow 'little gods.' Do you think that your emotions have ever pulled you in a direction that you did not want to go? Describe what that felt like for you.

For us to identify emotional strongholds in our lives, we need to first learn to identify our emotions. This may seem basic but when we turn to little gods for comfort, it is also to escape painful emotions. Our little gods help us gain temporary relief from painful emotions so we learn to disconnect from our emotions. As we seek healing and freedom from Christ, we will begin to connect with those emotions that we tried

Lesson 8: Strongholds, Part 2

to push down hoping they would disappear. Remember that God calls us out of darkness (hiding our emotions) and into His light (1 Peter 2:9) so that He can heal and free us of our pain.

Please circle any of the following emotions that you have recently experienced:

Anger	Fear	Guilt	Helplessness
Hopelessness	Jealousy	Self-Pity	Resentment
Shame	Anxiety	Depression	Pride
Loneliness	Desperation	Apathy	Defeated

If you have experienced other painful emotions recently, then please list them.

Do you feel that any of the emotions that you circled seem to control you at times? If so, what emotions would you like help in overcoming?

Lesson 8: Strongholds, Part 2

Strongholds such as drugs, alcohol, food, shopping and pornography are tangible things. Emotions are not tangible (we can't touch, taste or see them), but they are just as real as a tangible stronghold. There is another difference between a tangible stronghold and an emotional stronghold. A tangible stronghold usually produces an immediate pleasurable response, but an emotional stronghold does not usually produce an immediate pleasure response. An emotional stronghold, such as fear, produces an immediate and unpleasant response. You may be wondering how something unpleasant can become a place of refuge (stronghold). Why would we find refuge in an unpleasant emotion? Wouldn't we want to run from unpleasant emotions and not run to them?

This brings us to a place where we must look at how twisted the enemy can work in hearts that have been wounded. When we experience pain in life, either because someone hurt us, we made a poor choice, or we experienced a loss of some sort, our hearts will feel pain. This is normal and a natural part of life. When we are hurt, we feel pain. God's plan is to heal our pain through our relationship with Him and the people He places in our life to help us, such as our parents. However, because we don't go to God for healing and we don't always have people in our life to help us heal, we try to heal our own hearts. We do this by ignoring pain, turning to 'little gods' to help numb the pain, or by allowing an emotion to become greater than the pain. This is how an emotional stronghold is formed. For example, if we are abandoned, we may allow our anger to become a hiding place to keep us from connecting with others as a way of protecting ourselves from getting hurt again. Another example would be if we had critical parents, then we may try to avoid the pain of facing our own weaknesses, so we hide behind pride.

Emotional strongholds can also be formed as a result of traumatic experiences in our lives. For example, if a child grows up in an unstable home where they do not feel secure, then fear will be a natural by-product of that environment. Children who grow up in these unstable homes or children who experience abuse will have deep feelings of insecurity. *Feeling insecure is a breeding ground for fear and fear is an emotion that can grip the soul. When fear grips a soul, it feels exactly like a stronghold. The fear has such a strong hold on the individual that they can't free themselves from the emotion.* The fear may be less intense at times but it is always near and does not stay away for very long.

Lesson 8: Strongholds, Part 2

So, if our definition of a stronghold is a place of refuge, then how can an emotion like fear possibly be a place of refuge? This is where things get twisted for us and we need to think deeply. Abandonment, abuse, and rejection will cause a person to become fearful. These types of wounds swing the door wide open for fear to walk in and make itself at home. *Fear will not be pleasant, like a tangible stronghold, but we will become comfortable with having this unpleasant emotion in our life because we have wounds that welcome the fear. In other words, **our unhealed wounds find refuge in painful emotions.** Unhealed wounds can't feel comfortable and safe with anything other than painful emotions such as fear and shame.* The unhealed wounds and painful emotions can't separate from one another. They are tied to one another until we take our unhealed wounds to God. As God begins to heal our wounds, then emotions such as fear and shame aren't so comfortable for our hearts.

Understanding how emotional strongholds are built in our lives is difficult. We won't get a clear understanding of this overnight and this is not even our goal for this week's lesson. We need to be able to identify the emotional strongholds in our lives so that we can ask God to free us from them. Often we know what emotional stronghold we have because we desperately want to stop feeling a certain emotion. We know exactly how the bondage of an emotional stronghold feels.

It may be a great time to take a break from this week's lesson. You may want to take a break and come back to the lesson tomorrow. If so, may I suggest that when you come back to the lesson, begin by reading it from the start. The remainder of our workbook is not as complex as this week's lesson. Thankfully we have the hardest part of this week's lesson behind us.

If it helps for you to review what we've learned so far in this week's lesson, then summarize by listing the main points in the space provided.

FEAR OF MAN

We have looked at physical strongholds and emotional strongholds. Both types of strongholds build a fortress around our hearts and separate us from God. We will never experience significant change in our lives while being bound by the chains of a stronghold. If you have identified several strongholds in your life, you will experience significant change every time a stronghold is broken off from your life. However, *God's plan is for us to be free from ALL strongholds.*

The last type of stronghold we need to identify in our lives is “*fear of man.*”

We are told in Proverbs 29:25 (NIV) that “***Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.***”

What do you think it means to ‘fear man’ or to fear a person?

The type of fear that God is describing in Proverbs 29:25 is a fear that involves panic and trembling. To fear man means that we are so afraid of another person’s opinion of us, or view of us, that it produces a strong fear of rejection. When we fear that a person may reject us, we will try to please them, hoping to gain their approval. We may say things or do things to try to gain their approval. We learn to hide our true selves to avoid being rejected by those we seek to please. ***Fear of man is what is more commonly referred to as people pleasing.***

There are a few reasons why fear of man seems to affect one person more than another. First of all, God gives us personalities which affect how we respond to situations in life. Secondly, our family of origin deeply affects the degree in which we struggle with fear of man. A child that is raised in a healthy home with a mom and dad who love them and one another, and who is taught God’s Word in a loving manner will naturally be more secure than a child who is raised in a broken home or who has experienced abuse or has moved around a lot, etc.

This is not to say that if you struggle with fear of man that you were raised in an unhealthy home. There are plenty of people from healthy homes who struggle with fear of man. The third influence, our culture, feeds us messages that cause us to fear man. We are fed images of perfect looking people who have fancy cars, houses, jobs and relationships, and this can cause the most secure person to doubt themselves. These messages indirectly tell us that we are not good enough so we better change or risk rejection.

It is time to do a little more digging into our heart's soil as it pertains to fear of man. Please take a moment and ask God to help you answer the following questions. These are not easy questions to answer. Again, most of us have learned to hide our hearts, even from ourselves. Take as much time as you need to really think about the questions and your answers.

Do you care about what others think about you?

How much do you care about what other people think about your appearance?

How much do you care about what other people think about your car, home, clothes?

How much do you care about what other people think about your education and occupation?

How much do you care about what other people think about your spouse, parents, and friends?

How does it make you feel when someone says something negative about you?

Do you ever try to impress people? If so, how?

Do you ever lie to keep others from knowing the truth about you?

Do you ever say things about yourself to try to make others think you are special or better than others?

Do you ever talk about your walk with God to impress others?

How much time do you spend wondering what another person thinks about you?

How much time do you spend critiquing something you said or did around another person?

Do you ever say or do things to get other people's approval or acceptance? If so, give examples.

Who are some people you try to impress?

Who are some people whose approval is very important to you? Why do you think their approval is important?

How has your family of origin and your experiences in life affected your level of fear of man?

How does your personality affect your level of fear of man?

How does the culture and media affect your fear of man?

In summary, what have you learned about yourself regarding fear of man?

If a stronghold is a place of refuge, then how do you think fear of man can become a stronghold?

You just answered a lot of questions. You are doing a great job as looking within our hearts and lives is hard work. I hope you are encouraged because God loves you and is helping you!

Pain, as well as insecurity, can cause a person to become vulnerable to the opinions of other people. When we are hurting or we are feeling insecure, a kind word or an unkind word has greater impact on us than when we are having a good day and feeling secure about ourselves. If we get in a habit of looking for a kind word or approval from people when we are hurting, we can slowly begin to build a stronghold. We do this by seeking man's approval when we are hurting or feeling insecure and at the same time, try to avoid man's rejection. The cycle of seeking

approval and avoiding rejection is exactly what God's Word warns us about in Proverbs 29:25. God tells us that this cycle will get us in trouble, prove to be a snare or trap and disable us.

Think about how much energy it takes to try to gain approval from others and avoid their rejection. Think about what you have to do in order to get their approval and avoid their rejection. It may have a temporary level of comfort, but God tells us that in the end, we will be in trouble.

However, God has a plan for our hearts. He does not leave the hurting heart or the insecure heart alone, but provides the approval that our hearts long to receive. We are told in Proverbs 29:25 that "whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe." To trust God means to rely on Him, and to put our confidence in Him. This sounds very much like what we do when we run to a stronghold. Do you see the difference in the two strongholds? One is running to man and relying on his/her opinions, and one is running to God and putting confidence in Him. This does not mean that hearing a kind word from another person is wrong. God created us with a need to be encouraged. God also uses people to encourage us. However, we can begin to build a stronghold when we become dependent on man's approval of us instead of looking to God for His approval. It goes back to the messages that we read along the path. Our hearts desperately need to read God's messages – not man's opinions.

We've spent the last two weeks looking intently at the strongholds in our lives. It takes courage to face the physical and emotional strongholds that exist in our lives. It takes honesty to face our fear of man. Our strongholds have been a place of refuge for us but have caused us pain and bondage. For us to experience change, we need to admit to ourselves and to God that our strongholds are more powerful than we are and that we do not have the power to overcome them. When we admit this to ourselves and to God, we are positioning ourselves where we can begin to experience change in our lives.

The change that we need to make in our lives will be to make God our one and only stronghold. This means that we will let go of what is familiar and comfortable, and even pleasant at times, in order to embrace God. This change in direction is not easy and can be scary. **Making God our refuge is the single most important change that we can make in our lives.** When we make God our refuge, we will experience His presence in our lives. We will experience His peace, His love, His joy and our hearts will be healed and set free.

Lesson 9: Receiving Forgiveness

The focus of this week's lesson is receiving forgiveness. Next week our focus will be on extending forgiveness.

Before we begin this week's lesson, I need to confess how inadequate I feel to write this lesson. I have depended heavily on God to write each lesson but this particular topic takes my dependency on Him to an entirely different level. Writing about God's forgiveness is difficult because it means writing about His love for us, His pursuit of us, His sacrifice, His grace, His power, His Cross. I am convinced that the more we receive God's forgiveness, the less we will run after 'little gods' and struggle with darkness. It is God's forgiveness that reveals His heart to us, which is what our hearts desperately crave.

Please take a moment and ask God to open your heart and mind to what He wants you to receive through this week's lesson. Ask God to help you receive more than what I can possibly write in one lesson about His forgiveness.

To begin this week's lesson, please write down how you would describe forgiveness.

The Biblical **definition of forgiveness** is "a term used to indicate pardon for a fault or offense; to excuse without payment for a debt owed; completely put aside an offense and a debt owed."

Did you notice that forgiveness does not require payment from the one who committed an offense and needs to be forgiven? Did you also notice that forgiveness completely, not partially, cancels a debt owed? What this definition of forgiveness is

telling us is that 1) we cannot do anything to earn forgiveness and 2) forgiveness is complete.

The things we do that hurt ourselves and others are what the Bible calls “sin.” Sin actually means “to miss the mark.” God has a plan for us and teaches us how to follow His plan for our lives. When we don’t follow God’s plan for our lives, or we don’t follow His plan in the way He tells us to follow, we “miss the mark.” Obviously, we cannot live in this world and perfectly follow God’s plan for our lives or follow His plan in a perfect way. We will “miss the mark” and sin.

When we begin looking at our lives and the things we have done to hurt ourselves and others (our sins) we can respond in several different ways. We may decide to stop looking for God and step back into darkness. We may be so overwhelmed with guilt and shame that we run back to our strongholds. We may decide we need to punish ourselves, so we do something destructive. We may think we can earn the forgiveness we need, so we get busy doing good deeds. All of these responses are natural because there is a natural law within us that knows that payment must be made when we do wrong. We may attempt to make payment by punishing ourselves or others, hiding, doing good things or hardening our hearts through denial. However, we will respond in some way when we look at how we have hurt ourselves and others by the choices we made in our lives.

How do you usually respond when you look at how you have hurt yourself and others?

How does looking at the mistakes you’ve made in your life make you feel?

Do you think that looking at the mistakes you’ve made in your life can lead you to seek comfort in ‘little gods?’ If so, how?

Please read the following verses, giving careful thought to what God is saying to you about forgiveness:

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22 NIV).

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding (Ephesians 1:7-8).

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23 NIV).

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:7).

What is God's Word telling you about your sins?

Lesson 9: Forgiveness

Recall that the Biblical definition of forgiveness means that 1) we cannot do anything to earn forgiveness and 2) forgiveness is complete. This is where grace and forgiveness collide. Grace is getting favor or a gift that we don't deserve. Grace cannot be earned in any way. There is not one thing that we can do to earn grace. We cannot make ourselves worthy for receiving grace, prepare ourselves to receive grace, nor can we make grace disappear. Grace is larger than us, larger than our lives and certainly larger than our sins. Grace has no end and is beyond all measure. Grace is what gives us entrance into our relationship with God, keeps us in our relationship with God, and places a permanent seal around our relationship with God (a covenant).

Our sins require payment for us to receive God's forgiveness. Without payment, our sins would not be forgiven. Without forgiveness, we are left with the weight of guilt and shame, and are bound to chains of darkness. The enemy would have power over us because sin is his domain. So, if our sins require payment and we cannot do anything to earn forgiveness, then how is payment made? The Cross. Jesus. Grace. Jesus took our sins upon Himself, carried our sins to the Cross and died for our sins. His blood made complete payment for our sins and made forgiveness a gift to all who would receive His grace.

When you consider that Jesus made full payment for ALL your sins, how does that make you feel about God's love for you?

How do you think knowing of God's grace and forgiveness will affect the way you view the sin in your own life?

Lesson 9: Forgiveness

This would be a great time to take a break in this week's lesson and spend some time thanking God for His grace. Write a prayer to God in the space provided and share your heart with God. You may want to ask Him to help you accept His grace. You may want to thank God for His grace. You may want to thank Jesus for giving His life for you. Allow yourself to feel the depth of God's love and grace during this time with Him. If you are having a difficult time understanding God's grace and forgiveness, ask Him to help you understand and accept this amazing gift.

As we continue this week's lesson, we will step further towards receiving God's forgiveness. We will also look at some ways that sin operates in our lives as it relates to things we are learning in our workbook. Keep in mind what we have been learning about God's grace and forgiveness as you take these steps. God's grace has gone before us and covers all of our sins. We can trust Him to lovingly help us look honestly at the sin in our lives.

Lesson 9: Forgiveness

When we make choices to follow the enemy's markers and turn to 'little gods,' we are choosing to sin against God. When we say and do things to hurt other people we are choosing to sin against God. When we fail to acknowledge that our actions, including the things we say and the things we think about, offend God, we are keeping God at arm's length. **These are all things that Jesus paid for on the Cross so that we can receive God's forgiveness.**

God knows everything about us, including our sins. God's plan is for us to tell (confess) our sins to Him, so that He can forgive us and help us overcome the sins in our lives. Sin offends God and it also leads us into bondage. Our sins don't only hurt us, they hurt other people. As uncomfortable as it may feel at times, we need to confess our sins to God. *Instead of trying to keep God at arm's length we need to invite Him to wrap His nail-scarred hands around the sin in our lives.* He has the **desire** and **power** to forgive us of our sins, and to free us from the power of our sins. Remember that it is God's grace alone that provides forgiveness of our sins. However, we must face our sins and ask for forgiveness in order to receive this gift of grace.

When you consider confessing your sins to God, what thoughts and feelings does that bring up for you?

How can knowing of God's grace and forgiveness help you confess your sins to Him?

Please carefully Romans 5:6-8 (NIV):

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Summarize what God is saying to you through Romans 5:6-8.

Remember that our sins require a payment for us to receive forgiveness from God. Jesus made complete payment for all of our past, present and future sins, when He gave His life for us on the Cross.

Why do you think it is so important for us to acknowledge that forgiveness is a gift from God when we confess our sins to Him?

We have been looking at the darkness in our lives for the past several weeks. We have looked at some of the markers we follow, the ‘little gods’ we chase, and the strongholds in our lives. Sin plays a significant role in how markers are formed, through ‘little gods’ and strongholds. For us to experience healing and freedom from

the markers, 'little gods' and strongholds, we must face the sin that is the basis of all these things. Knowing that Jesus made the payment for our sins on the Cross will help us face our sins. Knowing that God's gift of forgiveness will cover all of our sins will help us face the sins that we desperately try to hide.

1 John 1:9 (NIV) tells us:

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

God promises that He will be faithful to forgive us and cleanse (purify) us from the stain of sin. His forgiveness will wash over us and we will experience healing when we confess our sins to Him.

You may be thinking that there is no way that God could ever forgive you of some particular sin. We might be willing to accept that God will forgive some of our sins but we all have a few that fall under the “no way could He forgive that” list. The sins on that list are the ones that cause us the most shame, and no matter how hard we try, they still haunt us from time to time. Sin that we try to hide has a way of rearing its ugly head and wrapping us with a cloak of shame when we least expect it.

Remember the Cross. Remember that the Cross took every sin, including all of the ones on “that list.” No matter how many times the enemy has told you to hide that sin from God because it was too much or too bad or not forgivable, make a decision today to follow Truth. Choose to believe God's Word (His marker) over the lies of the enemy (Satan's markers).

This next question will take some time for us to complete. We are going to ask God to show us sin in our lives that we need to confess. If you can, write down the sins that God brings to your mind on a piece of notebook paper. After you confess (tell) to God each sin, ask God to forgive you of the sin, and then thank God for His forgiveness. Do this for each sin that God brings to your mind. If you have never confessed sin and asked for God's forgiveness then it may take some time to do this assignment. You may even want to work on this assignment several times during the upcoming week. After you write down your sins, confess them and ask for forgiveness. Then tear the notebook paper into pieces and throw it away.

Lesson 9: Forgiveness

The following is an example of what your prayer may look like to God. This is simply an example if you are having trouble starting this assignment.

PRAYER: God, thank you that you love me and want to forgive me of all of my sins. I confess that I have _____ and need your forgiveness. Please forgive me for this sin and help me accept your forgiveness. Cleanse me from the darkness, guilt and shame of this sin and break the power of this sin over my life. I ask this in Jesus Name, Amen.

Lesson 10: Forgiving Others

Last week we focused on God’s forgiveness and grace. Our focus for this week’s lesson will be on forgiving others.

For some, ‘accepting forgiveness’ is more challenging than extending forgiveness. For others, ‘extending forgiveness’ will feel next to impossible. We will learn this week that just as forgiveness is a gift from God, so is our ability to forgive others. God gives us His grace to forgive those who have hurt us and His grace is enough.

We will concentrate on one verse from the Bible this week as we learn how to forgive others through God’s grace. This verse is Ephesians 4:32 (NIV):

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

According to Ephesians 4:32 and what you learned in last week’s lesson, how do we forgive others?

Forgiving those who hurt us is a huge part of our healing and freedom. *When we don’t forgive people, the wounds in our hearts cannot heal.* We know that pain is often what leads us to follow ‘little gods,’ step into pits and build strongholds. For us to gain the emotional and spiritual strength that we need to continue to walk in the light, we must deal with any unforgiveness in our lives. This week’s lesson can be painful and difficult but the result is our healing and freedom. **Remember that God’s grace is enough.**

Lesson 10: Forgiving Others

If you need to take a moment to ask God to help you have faith and courage to do this week's lesson, then do that now.

Ephesians 4:32 tells us how we forgive others. We are to forgive others the same way that God forgave us.

How did God forgive us?

Hopefully your answer included that God forgave us through Jesus. Jesus paid the debt for our sins through His blood. We did not do anything to earn this gift of forgiveness. Our forgiveness is the gift of grace.

God tells us that we forgive others through the same grace that we received when He forgave us. We forgive others through the grace of the Cross. This way of forgiving others is nothing short of a miracle. God is telling us that He has made provision for us to forgive with the kind of forgiveness that He uses to forgive us. Jesus. We forgive others through the same amazing grace that we receive from the Cross, the forgiveness of our own sins. This is such great news for us, because we do not have the power within ourselves to forgive the people who have hurt us. If not for Christ giving us His grace to forgive, we would not be able to forgive.

Lesson 10: Forgiving Others

Summarize in your words what God is saying to you about the people that you need to forgive:

Perhaps you have been hurt deeply by someone and you don't want to forgive them. You may be feeling that they don't deserve your forgiveness. God knows your pain and He knows that you don't have what it takes to forgive them. This is another example of God's love for you and His provision for you, so that you can be free. God knows that if you don't forgive the ones who have hurt you that your heart will never be free of the pain, anger, bitterness and rage that their sin created when it entered your life. So, God made a way for you to forgive. His Name is Jesus.

What does it mean to forgive through Jesus Christ? Forgiving through Christ means that we ask Jesus to do something for us that we don't have the power to do apart from Him. We ask Jesus to give us His grace to forgive and then we forgive them. We may need to get on our knees and SAY OUT LOUD to God that we are angry and don't want to forgive, but we are choosing to forgive so that we can be free. If you have been hurt deeply, this will be painful, but God will help you, comfort you and give you His strength.

Forgiveness does not mean that you are saying that what a person did to hurt you was not wrong. When someone hurts us by sinning against us, it is wrong. Forgiving them of the offense does not change what happened, or make the offense any less offensive. Forgiveness is about releasing the person who hurt you from needing to 'say or do' anything to pay for the offense. Recall that when we sin, a payment had to be made for the sin to be forgiven. Jesus made that payment for us so that we can be freely forgiven for our sins. When we forgive someone, like God forgives us, we don't need anything from the person who hurt us in order for us to forgive them. In other

Lesson 10: Forgiving Others

words, we freely forgive them. Forgiving others in this way is exactly what God is telling us to do in Ephesians 4:32. **God is telling us to forgive without demanding anything in return.**

SPECIAL NOTE: I would love to look you in the eye and tell you that I am so sorry for the pain that you feel. The person or people who have hurt you should not have hurt you. You did not deserve to be hurt and it was never God's will for someone to hurt you. Your Heavenly Father sees your pain and He knows what you have gone through. His heart hurts for you and for what was done to you. Forgiving the person that hurt you will never make what happened to you okay. It is not okay. Forgiving the person who hurt you is letting go of the offense and giving it completely over to God. It is releasing the person to God and letting go of the offense. As you forgive, God will begin to heal you of the pain this person caused in your life. He will begin taking away the pain and anger and replacing it with His grace.

When we have pain in our lives we will seek comfort to help us deal with it. When people hurt us, and we don't forgive them, it causes that pain to grow. **Unforgiveness can spread like a cancer and leave us feeling bitter and angry at the world.**

Consider your own heart. Do you struggle with feeling angry and bitter? Do you think that unforgiveness has spread throughout your own heart?

This next assignment is one that will result in tremendous healing and freedom. It will take some time, so you may want to work on it more than one sitting over the next week or weeks. Ask God to help you make a list of the people you need to forgive, and make a list of the things that hurt you that you need to forgive each person of doing (or not doing). There is space at the end of this chapter for your list.

Lesson 10: Forgiving Others

After you make the list, ask God to help you forgive each person and forgive each offense. You may want to use a prayer similar to this:

God, I do not have what it takes to forgive _____ for hurting me. I ask You to help me forgive _____ for _____ (list things they did that hurt you). You said to forgive as you forgave me through Christ. I forgive _____ through the power and grace of Christ. I release _____ to You and I let go of any expectation or need for them to do anything to make things right. I do not need them to do anything for me to receive freedom and healing. I look to You, and ask for You to heal my heart and free me from the pain they have caused in my life. I completely forgive _____ in the name of Jesus, Amen.

The space provided on the next page is for you to make a list of people you need to forgive. Include next to the person's name what you specifically need to forgive them for doing (or not doing). It will help to write these things down but when you pray and forgive them please pray aloud to God. Go someplace where you can be alone with God and feel the freedom to express any hurt or anger that you have about what the person did to hurt you. God tells us in **Psalm 62:8, "Trust in Him at all times, O People; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge."** This means that we can pour out the good and the bad and our hearts are safe with Him. God wants to take the pain and anger from our hearts, but we have to give it to Him.

Stepping into Forgiveness leads to freedom, but it can be emotionally draining. Making a list of our sins that we need to confess and forgiving those who have hurt us is very difficult. You may feel emotionally drained after walking through this week's lesson. Give yourself permission to rest after completing such hard emotional work. You are doing a great job. Take time to recognize what God is doing in you and the changes He is already making in your life. Healing and forgiveness takes time. As God allows pain and/or sin to surface in the weeks, months, years ahead, this path can be traveled again. God will continue to heal and free us throughout our lives.

*Please see list on the following page.

Lesson 10: Forgiving Others

People I Need To Forgive

Offense

Lesson 11: Destroying Strongholds

We have actually been stepping into freedom for weeks, as we've looked to God to help us out of the darkness in our lives. However, this week, we take very intentional steps into freedom by asking God to destroy all of the strongholds in our lives.

It is important to understand that it took time for strongholds to be built in our lives and it takes time for strongholds to be completely torn down in our lives. Certainly, the Lord can demolish a stronghold in an instant. However, I have found that it takes time for strongholds to be completely destroyed. God works in our hearts and in our relationship with Him through the process of setting us free from strongholds. He actually reveals Himself in beautiful and powerful ways as He is freeing us and He knows exactly what we need in order to grow our faith and trust in Him during this process.

Let's take a moment to pray and surrender the process of destroying stronghold to the Lord.

PRAYER: Father, thank you that you love me. Thank you that you are all-knowing and all-powerful. I trust you and submit my path to freedom to you. I believe that you have the power to destroy every stronghold in my life and that you will direct my healing and freedom according to your perfect plan for my life. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Our focus the last two weeks has been on God's forgiveness and forgiving others. To help us begin this week's lesson on destroying strongholds, let's have a quick review.

What is a stronghold?

How are strongholds built in our lives?

How do strongholds keep us in darkness and bondage?

Lesson 11: Destroying Strongholds

Strongholds are a place we seek refuge. We identified three different types of strongholds that can be built in our lives that separate us from God. We can have a 'little god' become a stronghold, expressed in an addiction. Next are emotional strongholds, like fear. And lastly the stronghold known as the 'fear of man,' expressed in people pleasing. When we continually follow 'little gods' and their markers, or arrows, from the enemy, strongholds are built in our lives. We know that God's plan is for Him to be our only stronghold. When we follow God and His markers (His Word) then He becomes our stronghold.

We asked God to show us the strongholds in our lives a few weeks ago. Do you remember what God showed you? Please list the strongholds that you have in your life.

When you look at what the strongholds are in your life, how does it make you feel?

What did we learn earlier in the workbook about our emotions and how they can affect the choices we make?

If we are having a good day and feeling positive about things, our strongholds will not look so intimidating. However, if we are not having a good day, and we are struggling with negative emotions, our strongholds will intimidate us. It will be easy for the enemy to convince us that we will never be able to overcome the strongholds in our lives. He will tell us to give up trying and we will give up... if we believe him. Our feelings matter, and when the enemy is telling us that we can't overcome the strongholds in our lives, we find ourselves at a crossroad. This crossroad is very important and there is one thing that can help us believe God over the enemy. **The Cross.** The Cross is where God poured out His love to us, forgiveness was complete, grace won.

In your own words, what does the Cross (and what took place there) mean to you?

THE ENEMY'S PERSPECTIVE

How we view our strongholds will impact our decision to run to take shelter in them or allow God to tear them down.

Based on what you've learned, describe how the enemy wants you to view the strongholds in your life.

GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Based on what you've learned, describe how God wants you to view the strongholds in your life.

Thinking about God's love for us, His power over sin and darkness, and His passion to set us free, will change the way we view our strongholds. We will begin to see that God is stronger than any stronghold and that He has the power to demolish every stronghold. It is crucial that we view strongholds from God's perspective, because

there is a huge battle that takes place within our minds when we look at strongholds. The enemy will do his best to exalt the stronghold. He will pull out every lie, remind you of every failure, and you will feel like you are being dragged into darkness. For us to overcome the forces of the enemy, God gives us specific weapons to use in these battles. These weapons are the same weapons used in destroying the strongholds in our lives.

THE WEAPONS

“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have Divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)

The following are the weapons that God gives us to use to destroy strongholds:

1) FAITH

Faith is ***“being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see”*** (*Hebrews 11:1*). Faith is the foundation of our relationship with God. When we are walking on a foundation that is firmly built on God’s Word, we can walk through the toughest storms in life. We may feel the harsh winds blow, but we can stand because of what is beneath our feet. ***Faith is believing that God is Who His Word says He is, and that He is faithful to His Word.*** Remember that the enemy attacked Adam and Eve by tempting them to doubt God and His Word. The enemy attacked their faith.

It’s fitting that God uses faith as a weapon to defeat the enemy’s arrows. God tells us in *Ephesians 6:16 (NIV)*, ***“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”***

Based on what you know about the enemy's arrows, why do you think faith is such an important weapon used in destroying strongholds?

2) PRAYER

Prayer is communication with God. We cannot depend on God, make Him our stronghold, seek forgiveness, extend forgiveness and experience a deep and personal relationship with God without communicating with Him. When it comes to fighting spiritual battles and destroying strongholds, prayer is one of our greatest weapons. All other weapons we use depend upon prayer to make them effective on the battlefield.

The following is a story in the Bible that clearly teaches us what happens when we pray.

It is about two men (Paul and Silas) who were followers of Christ and put in prison. As we follow Christ, the enemy has the same plans for our lives that he did for Paul and Silas. **The enemy wants to imprison us.** Strongholds are a huge way in which the enemy imprisons us. The way that God set Paul and Silas free from their prison is the same way God sets us free from our prisons – through prayer.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose.”
Acts 16:25-26 (NIV)

What were Paul and Silas doing in prison?

Lesson 11: Destroying Strongholds

Paul and Silas had just been severely beaten and flogged and then their feet were fastened in stocks. How do you think Paul and Silas were thinking and feeling at this point? What do you think Paul and Silas's perspective was on their current situation?

What did Paul and Silas choose to do instead of following the obvious emotions that a man would feel after being beaten, flogged and thrown into prison?

This may sound repetitive but what can we learn from Paul and Silas's example?

3) THE NAME OF JESUS

The next weapon that we use on the battlefield and in tearing down strongholds is simply, yet powerfully, calling on the name of Jesus. That may sound odd to call on the name of Jesus, but God's Word teaches us that there is power in the name of Jesus. Please take the time to read the following verses to gain an understanding of the name of Jesus.

"Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Philippians 2:9-10 (ESV)

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:13 (NIV)

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Colossians 3:17 (NIV)

“The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” Luke 10:17 (NIV)

What are these verses from God’s Word teaching us about the name of Jesus?

When we wake up from the fear that grips us in the middle of the night, we can call on the name of Jesus. When we feel the presence of the enemy, we need to call on the name of Jesus. When we feel like giving up on life, we need to call on the name of Jesus. When the battle is fierce and we feel like giving up the fight, we need to call on the name of Jesus.

Take a moment and write a prayer to God. Ask God to help you grasp the significance of using the name of Jesus in the battle and out of the battle. Ask God to help you learn to call on the name of Jesus when you need to be saved from the enemy. Ask God to help you learn to pray using the name of Jesus.

4) GOD'S WORD

We learned that the enemy writes markers and places them along our path to point us in a direction that leads us to darkness. Those markers are lies which stand in opposition to God's Word. We also learned that God has markers that He wants us to follow, that are true and lead us to Him. Those markers are His Word. Look back at 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. The enemy's markers argue against God's Word. The enemy's markers pretend to be real but they oppose and "set themselves up against" God's Word.

God's Word is a sword (Ephesians 6:17). It has the power to demolish, which means completely destroy, lies from the enemy. The magnitude of the force of God's Word against a lie from the enemy is hard to put into human words. The best way to help you begin to grasp the power of the sword is by seeing it in God's Word.

Speaking of the final battle when our enemies meet Christ:

"From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." Revelation 19:15 (ESV)

Jesus will one day completely wipe out the existence of evil and He will do it with the sharp sword which is His very words. If you have any doubt about the authority and power of God's Word, then think back to the creation of the world. The world was created by the spoken Word of God.

We will spend the remainder of this week's lesson taking the steps that will begin the process of tearing down the strongholds in our lives.

Please give yourself at least one hour to complete the following lesson. If you don't have the time to do that now, then come back to the lesson when you won't feel rushed.

CHANGING OUR MINDS

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of you mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:2 (ESV)

Hopefully you remember Romans 12:2 from a previous lesson. We learned that we are

changed beyond recognition and transformed when we change the way that we see ourselves, our lives, others and God. *We are going to learn a very strategic way of changing our minds, which will cause the strongholds in our lives to come crumbling down.* This strategy is essential to experiencing healing and freedom from strongholds as well as pain and pits along our journey. It is also a strategy that we need to use often to maintain our freedom and healing.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

Please follow the steps that are outlined below. Please do not attempt to rush through this outline. God will use this in your life today if you prayerfully seek Him through these steps.

Step 1: Begin your time in prayer. Ask God to help you learn how to renew your mind. Ask God to speak to your heart and mind. Ask God to help you trust Him to tear down the strongholds in your life.

Step 2: Ask God to show you one stronghold that He wants to tear down in your life. We will work on one stronghold at a time so start with the one that seems most pressing to you. Write down the stronghold in the space provided

Lesson 11: Destroying Strongholds

Step 3: Next ask God to reveal to you the lies that you have been told about the stronghold. What has the enemy told you, the arrows, and the markers? Write down everything that God reveals to you. It could be one lie or a long list of lies. Just write what whatever comes to your mind about the stronghold.

Step 4: Confess each lie to God. Tell God that you chose to believe the lies from the enemy and ask His forgiveness. There are times when the enemy tells us things and we don't believe his lies. It is not a sin when this happens, but it becomes a sin when we choose to believe the lie. God's Word is truth so when we choose to believe the enemy's lies, we are going against God's Word. God is exposing these lies so that He can heal you and set you free from the power they have in your life. Write your prayer to God in the space provided. Then thank God for His forgiveness.

My Prayer:

Step 5: Ask God to destroy the lies that you believe – IN JESUS NAME. For example, if you believed that “God doesn't really love you,” then your prayer would be “Lord, I ask you to destroy the lie that you don't really love me. I ask that you destroy the lie in the name of Jesus.” Pray in this way for each lie that you wrote down.

Note: It is important to pray through these lies out loud. When we say things aloud we are exposing them. The enemy can't read our minds so when we call on the name of Jesus then our enemy hears this and he must flee.

Lesson 11: Destroying Strongholds

Step 6: Once you have confessed the lies that you believed about the stronghold and asked God to destroy those lies, then we will pray about the stronghold. Ask God to forgive you for making the stronghold a refuge in your life. Ask God to forgive you for making the stronghold an idol in your life that you turned to, instead of turning to Him. Ask God to forgive you for worshipping the stronghold instead of worshipping Him. After you confess this to God, ask God to forgive you and to break the power of the stronghold off of your life. Ask God to free you of any hold that the enemy has on you because of this stronghold. Ask God to completely break the sin and powers of the sins of this stronghold off of your life. Ask God to break all ties to this stronghold off of you and set you completely free to worship Him. Thank God for setting you free from this stronghold and ask Him to heal and restore you from all that wounded you as a result of seeking refuge in that stronghold. Pray all of this in the name of Jesus.

* Don't forget to pray out loud.

Step 7: Replace the lie with God's Word.

Now that you have asked God to expose the lie, to forgive you of believing the lie, and to destroy the lie, then it is time to replace the lie with truth. This step is putting Romans 12:2 to work in your life. Let's use the lie "God doesn't really love me" as our example. To replace the lie with truth we need a verse that tells us the truth about God's love for us. *If you need help in finding a verse, then go to Appendix II.*

"For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths of the grave." Psalm 86:13

Once you choose a verse to replace the lie, then you need to begin memorizing the verse. Every time a lie about God's love is fired, you pick up the shield of faith and the sword of the spirit – the Word of God. You tell yourself that God's Word says that His love for you is great and that He has given you eternal life (delivered you from the depths of the grave).

This may seem like a lot of work and it can be. But it is not the type of work that leaves us feeling tired and weary. It is also not burdensome work that is boring and routine. When we read God's Word, listen to God's Word through sermons or devotionals or Christian books, we are getting to know God. We are getting to know our Creator, the all-powerful and all-knowing God of this universe. We are getting to know the One who defeated sin, death, and darkness and has called us to live in His light, experience freedom, healing, and abundant life. We are getting to know the One who we were created to love and worship for all of eternity. This sounds more like an adventure than a homework assignment. ***Don't let the enemy fool you into***

thinking that getting to know God through His Word is anything less than extraordinary and life-changing.

OTHER STRONGHOLDS

We focused on one stronghold today. When you feel God directing you to work on another stronghold then go back to this week's lesson. Go through the same steps that you did today in praying through the stronghold.

NOTE: We have included a couple of prayers in the back of the workbook (Appendix VII and VIII) that are extremely helpful in praying through 1) sexual strongholds 2) habitual sins. In addition to the steps you prayed through today, I encourage you to look at these prayers to see if they apply to your particular strongholds.

The enemy will attempt to gain back ground in your mind that he once held captive. It is a battle but one that will become easier to fight as your feelings begin to line up with God's Word. In other words, as you begin to believe God's Word your heart will experience truth. The truth will become more comfortable in time until the truth of God's Word feels at home in your heart. Before long the lies will feel out of place in your heart. They won't be easily welcomed into your heart. You will become an experienced warrior on the battlefield of your own mind and victory will be a new way of life for you.

Lesson 12: Loving God

The purpose of Breakthroughs is to help us walk out of darkness and experience healing and freedom in our lives. We've learned a lot about God, His Word, ourselves and how the enemy works in our lives over the past 12 weeks. Hopefully you are beginning to experience healing and freedom in your life. Our journey together is nearing the end, but our journey with God never ends. God will continue to help us and direct us further into healing and freedom. The steps that we've taken in Breakthroughs and the things that God has taught us along the way are for keeps. We don't just toss them aside once we've completed a 13 week study. God has equipped us through His Word, His presence, His weapons, forgiveness and grace to continue the journey. We have been richly blessed by our Heavenly Father to overcome darkness and walk in the light. ***We have been given everything we need to be free from the bondage of the enemy. God has poured out His love and grace on the Cross and we are forgiven.***

How does it make you feel when you consider all that God has done for you and given you?

Hopefully you are experiencing a greater depth of God's love for you. If you are struggling with feeling loved by God then tell Him. Continue to ask God to help you accept that He loves you. I have cried out to God many times for Him to help me receive His love for me. I still have times when I struggle with accepting God's love for me and ask Him to help me receive His love. Remember that we need to be honest with ourselves and with God, approaching Him with an honest heart on a daily basis.

This week's lesson is titled "Loving God." Loving God is the result of experiencing healing and freedom in our lives. We will learn in this week's lesson that loving God is a strong indicator of an individual's freedom. In other words, our freedom and our love for God are connected in such a way that they grow together. As we experience more freedom, our love for God grows more deeply. Our love for God is a result of what He does in our lives.

Please read the following verses:

This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10 NIV).

We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19 NIV).

God is the initiator of love (1 John 4:10). We are able to love God because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Loving God is a result of us accepting His love for us. Recall that God created us with a deep need to know Him, experience His love for us, and to love Him. As we continue to make God our only stronghold, we will experience more of His love, deeper healing, and greater freedom in our lives. Our love for God will increase as a result of what He is doing within our hearts.

WHY IS LOVING GOD CRITICAL FOR OUR FREEDOM?

Our freedom is a gift that God gave us at the Cross. Grace poured out abundantly, completely destroying the power of sin and darkness. Our debts are paid in full by the blood of Jesus. Forgiven. Set free. So, how do we live our lives after receiving such grace?

We love God. After receiving God's grace, we love God back. We give God what He gave us. We give Him our lives. We give Him our hearts. We give Him our all. Religious leaders asked Jesus what was the most important thing they could do (the greatest commandment), and Jesus told them to love God.

"Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37 NIV).

We can learn a lot from what the religious leaders asked Jesus. They had darkness and bondage in their lives and they were trying to get free by doing all the right things. They knew the “to do” list and tried to do it all perfectly. Jesus told them that loving God needed to be first on their list, and the rest of things would fall in place. The religious leaders chose to deny grace and focused on their “to do” list. They believed that doing all the right things would bring them closer to God. Of course, their hearts longed for God’s love and acceptance. Like us, they were created with a deep need to experience God’s love and to love and worship Him. However, they did not accept God’s grace, so they lived in bondage. They may have looked good on the outside because of the things they did, but those things did not bring them closer to God. It actually separated them from God. This is why loving God is critical to our freedom. As we follow God we must be aware of a dangerous trap, *legalism*.

Legalism

Legalism teaches that if we do everything that God tells us to do, we will be acceptable to God. If we don’t do everything that God tells us to do, God will not accept us. Legalism is the polar opposite of grace. Legalism teaches that we must earn God’s forgiveness and acceptance by what we do and not by what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

How do you think legalism could be used as a trap in your life?

When we are tempted to leave God out of our lives we need to remind ourselves of what **the enemy** is trying to do to us. He wants us to leave God out, and try to live our lives apart from God. He will try to get us to follow God through our actions and not our heart (legalism). He will try to yoke us back into bondage. God tells us in Galatians 5:1 (NIV):

“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.”

Based on what you've learned over the past 12 weeks, what can we do to "stand firm" and not allow ourselves to be yoked back into bondage?

Following God

God's Word gives us clear directions on how to follow Him. The directions are simple; however, following the directions is difficult. One reason following God is difficult is because we try to follow His directions without asking for His help. *We attempt to do what God is asking us to do, but we fail to ask God to help us to do those things.* This is a huge way that legalism becomes a trap for us. We forget that our lives are changed because of the Cross, and we begin doing things in our own strength. We start feeling discouraged because we are tired and feel empty and then are tempted to follow a 'little god.'

If you find yourself trying to make changes in your life without asking God for help, what will you do?

(Hopefully you answered that you will ask God to help you.)

We have been given everything we need to live free from darkness, 'little gods,' and strongholds. Yet we stand at a crossroad every day of our lives. Will we follow God and ask Him to help us, which is the narrow path? Or will we deny the Cross? Yes, not following God and asking Him for help is denying our desperate need for God's grace (the Cross). *When we don't follow God and ask for His help, we are telling ourselves that we don't really need God.* We are following the markers that are directing us to rely on our own strength. We are positioning ourselves for arrows from the enemy, making ourselves vulnerable to 'little gods' and we can easily step into a pit.

Lesson 12: Loving God

The question we will face each day for the rest of our lives is this: Will we deny our desperate need for the Cross... or will we cling to the Cross? You may be thinking that those two choices seem a bit radical. Is there not a more subtle choice? Does the choice have to be so black and white? It seems to me that God did not provide a more subtle choice. Walk in the dark, or walk in the light? Live in bondage or be free? Walk in Grace or legalism? Serve One God or many gods? Have God as your Stronghold or build many useless strongholds? Seek the narrow gate or wide gate? Believe the Truth or chose to believe lies? Choose the Cross, or deny the Cross?

The choices may appear to be harsh, but look closer. God knows us. He knows our wounds, the arrows that have pierced us deeply, the pits we've been in, and the weight of our chains. Because He loves us so much, He wants us near Him. He knows the battles to come, the trials to come, and how truly desperate we are for Him. He created us to walk with Him and to be near Him. The enemy took this from us when he entered the garden, but God restores it to us through the Cross.

Please take a few minutes and think about God's pursuit of you. He came for you. He died for you. He wants to be with you. What are your thoughts and feelings when you think of how passionately God loves you?

When following after 'little gods' looks easier and you are being pulled towards old strongholds, how can thinking about God's love help you choose Him?

LOVING GOD by FOLLOWING GOD

“This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome.” 1 John 5:3 (NIVUK)

According to 1 John 5:3, how do we show God that we love Him?

It is easy to read 1 John 5:3 and focus our attention on trying to become obedient to God’s commands. The danger is not in trying to become an obedient follower. The danger lies in what is motivating us to follow.

As we study God’s Word and learn directions to follow, we can respond in a couple of different ways. One way is to see these directions as rules which we must follow, or we will end up chasing after ‘little gods’ and find ourselves sitting in a pit. The motivation behind following directions this way is fear. We follow the directions because we are afraid of something bad happening. Well, this is not entirely a bad way of viewing directions. God makes it clear that we have consequences to our disobedience. However, following directions because we are motivated by fear is not God’s desire. We can also be motivated to follow directions because we are afraid that God will reject or abandon us if we disobey. Again, this is not how God wants us to travel the journey with Him. He has a much better way.

The better way is for us to follow directions because we love and trust the One giving the directions. We follow God because we are motivated by love – not fear.

Why do you think our motivation for following God is important?

Let's read what God has to say about the 'little gods' in our lives and how He describes His love for us.

“Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' iniquity, to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.”

Exodus 20:4-6 (CSB)

It may sound strange that God would tell us that He is a 'jealous God.' When we think of the word jealous we think of it in a negative way. We think of a jealous boyfriend or girlfriend, who is overly suspicious, possessive and controlling. All of this is motivated by fear and selfishness. This is not good. God is jealous for us because He is our Creator and He formed our hearts. God knows that our hearts were created with a desperate need to experience His love for us, and for us to love Him back. He knows that we were created to walk life's difficult and often painful journey with a heart that belongs fully to Him. Giving God anything less than our entire heart will cause us to feel discomfort. The discomfort can range from feeling stressed, depressed, or angry, to feeling like we want to end the journey. The discomfort is what causes us to run after 'little gods' and makes us an easy target for the enemy.

How does it make you feel to think of God being jealous for your heart?

When you think of God's plan for you to love Him more than any person or thing, how does that make you feel?

How much of a challenge do you think it is to love God with all of your heart?

Hopefully you see that there is a connection between following God and loving God. Our journey out of darkness and into healing and freedom is a based on a deep love relationship between the Creator (God) and His creation (us). God's passion for our healing and freedom is fueled by His deep love for us.

HOW DO WE LOVE GOD WITH ALL OF OUR HEART?

1. We tell God that we can't love Him the way He wants us to love Him, and we need His help to love Him.

Take a moment and do that now. Ask God to help you love Him with your whole heart.

2. We ask God to give us a heart that is sensitive to His knocking. We also ask God to help us trust Him that He will open doors to our hearts. All we need to do is respond to His knock by asking Him to make Himself at home in our heart.

Take a moment and do that now.

3. This is a simple, but powerful way of growing in your knowledge (heart and head) of God’s love for you. Commit to daily asking God through prayer to help you receive His love for you. Ask God to help you “get it.”

Take a moment and write your prayer in the space provided.

4. Ask God to help you accept His truth about His love for you. As we grow in our knowledge of how much God loves us we will respond with a greater love for Him. We are told in His Word:

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

“We love because He first loved us.” 1 John 4:19 (NIV)

God is the initiator in our love relationship with Him. We must begin with the knowledge and acceptance of God’s love for us first. It is God’s love within our hearts that allows us to love Him. Remember we can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:5) – not even love God.

Take a moment now and commit to reading and thinking about verses that tell us about God’s love for us. Look at the back of this workbook for verses about God’s love for you (Appendix II).

Lesson 12: Loving God

Based on what you learned in this week's lesson, what is the connection between loving God and experiencing freedom?

Based on what we've learned about 'little gods,' how can loving God keep us from chasing after 'little gods?'

Based on what we know about strongholds, how can loving God keep us from building strongholds in our lives?

Cling to the Cross. When you are afraid, doubting God, tempted to return to the darkness, then call on the name of Jesus. Fix your mind on Truth, and cry out to God to deliver you. Remind yourself of the grace that was poured out for you to be free. Bring your desperate heart to God and ask Him to consume you with His love for you. Then follow Him because you love Him. Follow Him because you know you can't live without Him. *Cling to the Cross.*

Notes

Lesson 13: Live Out Loud

We've treaded through tough waters together to reach this point in our journey. The path to healing and freedom is life-changing, and one far worth walking, but it is not easy. It has required faith, perseverance, courage, fight and a passion to be free. Grace. It has required God's grace.

As we come to the close of this study, we have this promise from God. He is faithful to continue working in our lives. God tells us:

“Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Remember that God's work in our lives is not to make us better for Him, because He loves and accepts us just as we are right now. God continues to work in our lives because He loves us, and His plan is for us to walk more and more in Truth and Freedom. The journey with Him will continue all the days of our lives until we meet Him face to face.

Your Story...

At the beginning of our workbook, I shared a part of “My Story.” I shared with you about my time in 6th grade in a bathroom stall hiding in pain and darkness. I've shared with you throughout our journey in Breakthroughs of how God has worked in my life to heal and free me. I hope and pray that as you've read parts of my story, you were pointed to “His Story.” It is the story of Christ coming to earth... to save us, rescue us from darkness and to set us free from pain and darkness.

I am a visual learner and it has helped me to think of my life as a book. Within the book are characters, and chapters, and stories within each chapter. Some of the stories are sad, while others are funny, happy, adventurous or even boring at times.

What about you? Have you ever considered your life a book with chapters and characters?

Think about it. If we considered our lives as a book with chapters, then we would more than likely view ourselves as the main character. The book would be about us,

and the events in our life, how the events shaped us, and how the book ends. Was it a book with a good or bad ending? Was it a book that was worth reading? Did we even like the main character?

We live in a world that teaches us at a young age that we are the main character in the book titled “Our Life Story.” We are bent on being self-focused, so it is easy to fill the role as the main character of our story. We all want a happy ending, so we do what we can to write chapters that create a character that readers love. Of course, we would rather be a hero, or perhaps a villain, as long as we get the credit due us for playing such a vital role in the story. The problem with us writing our own story is that we have intruders. We have uninvited characters and uninvited events that enter the pages of our book...our story. Still, we attempt to create some sort of story line that will keep the main character in their rightful place. Remember, we’ve been taught that the book must have a main character, so we can’t allow the uninvited characters or events to take the spotlight.

You may be wondering what a book and story has to do with healing and freedom in Christ. So how does this book, “Our Life Story,” connect with the freedom of Christ that we’ve spent the last 12 weeks learning about? Well, if we consider our lives a story, then obviously there will be people who read our story. The people that God puts in our lives will be the ones who read our story. It may be a spouse who reads the book in its entirety, a friend who reads a few chapters or an acquaintance who reads a few lines.

Considering our lives a story leads to a question that profoundly affects our continued freedom AND the freedom of those included in our story. Do we want to continue to be the main character in the book, or do we want God to become the main character? When others read our life story, who do we want them to see as the main character? Do we want our spouse, our friends, our co-workers, acquaintances to see more of us, or do we want them to see more of Christ in us?

The people in our lives need Christ as desperately as we need Christ. They need God’s love, forgiveness and grace just as we need God’s love, forgiveness and grace. Before we quickly take on the task of saving the world (or those presently in our story), let’s remember that there is only one Savior. Jesus is the only One who can save us. However, God’s plan is to use our story to tell HIS STORY.

Our Lives... HIS Story

Let's again consider that our life is a book with one main character. This time the main character in the book is God. Does this sound confusing? A book about our life, but the main character is God? Think about it. If we choose the narrow path that requires help from God, then won't others see God's strength in our life? What about when we experience healing from the sin and pain in our lives? Won't others see God's grace in our lives? What about when we are free from the bondage of addictions? Surely then others will see the power of Christ in our lives.

God loves us and His passion is to heal our hearts, and set us free (Isaiah 61:3). If we never invited anyone to read our story, then He would still be passionate to heal and free us. However, God's plan is for others to see Christ in our lives. When others see that our lives have been transformed, and that we are set free, it gives other people hope. Our transformed lives tell the story of God's great mercy and grace. The mercy and grace that is weaved throughout every page of our lives will point to the main character... the One who saved us... Jesus.

How do you think seeing your life as a story with God as the main character is different than seeing yourself as the main character?

If God is the main character in our life story then what does that say about our life story?

Live Out Loud – Your Pain

As we continue to walk with God down the narrow path, He will put people in our lives that need to hear our story. He will put some people in our life that read our story from a distance, and He will put others in our life that we sit with over coffee and read the words of our story aloud.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us:

“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 have received from God.”

According to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, what is God saying to us about the painful experiences we have in our life story?

God uses our pain when we chose to live out loud. God will put people in our life and direct us to share what He has done in our lives. Of course, it takes courage to share our story, because we risk being rejected and judged by others. It is extremely important to ask God for wisdom about what we share, how much we share, and with whom we share our story.

Have you experienced a time in your life when someone shared part of their life story that helped you in some way? If so, how did it help you?

Have you been comforted in your pain by someone who shared how God helped them with their pain (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)? If so, how did God work in that situation?

How does it make you feel to think that God may use the pain you've experienced in your life to help someone with their pain?

Live Out Loud – Your Story

There is a story in Mark 5:1-20 about a man who was in severe bondage and Jesus set him free. This man's darkness was extreme. People were so afraid of his darkness that they tried to keep him in physical chains. It didn't work because the power of darkness was greater than the physical chains. Jesus showed up and He saw the man's spiritual chains that were keeping him in bondage, and He set the man free. Jesus broke the spiritual chains off the man and set him free from the power of darkness. Then Jesus told the man to go and tell his story.

“Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” Mark 5:19 (NIV)

When Jesus sets us free from any amount of darkness, we have a story to tell. Our story focuses the reader's attention to the main character of our lives and gives them hope.

Lesson 13: Live Out Loud

You have a story. You've made it through 13 weeks of an intense look at your life and that has not been easy. God has given you the grace to not give up, even if you have taken a few steps backward along the way. What chains has Jesus loosened around your neck or possibly broken in the past 13 weeks?

If you told part of your life story today, what are some of the main points that you would include in your story?

Live Out Loud – With Other People

It is difficult to allow other people to see our weaknesses. We want to hide our pain, sin, insecurities and fears from other people. Everyone experiences rejection in life, but some of us have experienced more than others. For those of us who have been deeply wounded by rejection, it is extremely difficult to allow others to see our weaknesses. We develop ways to hide our weaknesses such as wearing a mask and pretending we are someone we are not, or pretending that we are strong when we feel weak.

Acknowledging our own weaknesses and admitting them to ourselves is a huge first step towards living out loud. We can't share our hearts, our story, and certainly not our weaknesses when we are afraid of rejection. We will continue to hide and protect ourselves to avoid the pain of rejection. This is another place where God's grace steps into our story. God will help us and teach us how to have healthy relationships with other people. God did not create us to live in isolation physically, emotionally or spiritually. God also did not create us to hide behind a mask by pretending we are strong when we are weak, or happy when we are sad or brave when we are afraid.

Hopefully you have been a part of a small group during Breakthroughs where you have felt safe and accepted. A significant part of our healing and freedom comes from living our lives with people who can help us experience God's grace. When we share our pain and struggles with others, and they show us acceptance and encourage us, we are strengthened. When we hear someone share their pain and struggles, we realize that we are not alone. The shame of living in isolation is lifted and we have courage to be more transparent.

If you've been a part of a small group the past 13 weeks, how has it helped you?

When I entered a treatment facility for alcohol addiction at the age of 22, I wanted nothing to do with the other patients. I was not interested in hearing their story and they certainly were not going to hear mine. I had lived with secrets and in emotional isolation for years, and had thick walls around my heart. Nobody was getting in, and nothing was getting out. That is until God's grace showed up.

As part of the treatment, we were required to attend a small group where we shared parts of our life story. Each day the patients gathered in a small group that was led by one of their staff counselors. The purpose of the group was to share your heart in an environment that was safe. Each time someone shared their heart the others in the group said something of God's grace. They may not have mentioned God's name but God's grace was present. After a short time, I slowly shared bits and pieces of my life story. Each time I shared, a section of the wall around my heart came down. I can't say that after 30 days in the treatment facility, the entire wall around my heart was removed. And after 27 years, there are still walls around some areas of my heart. I am still growing and learning how to live out loud. However, because of the people that God has placed in my life over the years, I have experienced His grace. I have experienced God's unconditional love and acceptance, which has helped me remove the walls around my heart.

Proverbs 4:23 tells us, **“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”**

There is a difference between us placing walls around our hearts and us asking God to guard our hearts. Walls are man-made with tools such as fear, control, insecurity and pride. Man-made walls keep us in bondage. When God guards our hearts, His wisdom is directing us towards emotional health and spiritual freedom.

As you continue to walk in truth and the light, God will direct your steps. God will help you discern the difference between man-made walls and wisely guarding your heart. The purpose of Breakthroughs has been to lead you to Christ. It has been our goal to present the Truth of God's Word to you, through this workbook, the lessons, and our stories. As you continue your journey to live in Truth and in the light of God's presence, please allow me to encourage you to remain in some form of small group. There are other classes and groups where you can learn more about God's Word and share part of your story with others and where you can experience God's grace.

Lesson 13: Live Out Loud

In closing, this week’s lesson takes some time to write part of your life story. Instead of you being the main character in your life story, ask God to help you make Him the main character of your story. For example, if a chapter in your life story is about being addicted to alcohol or pornography, write about what happened when God showed up. How did God’s love for you and His grace change the story line? Other people are not the only ones who need to hear our story. We need to remind ourselves often of what God has done in our lives. Reminding ourselves of God’s grace will give us hope and strength to stay on the narrow path that leads to life. It will encourage us to trust God to continue writing His story through the pages of our lives.

Your Story

Horizontal lines for writing.

THE LAST PAGE

Writing Breakthroughs has been quite the story for me personally. I have walked through the pages of my life, visiting its many chapters and rejoiced and cried along the way. I came to know people whose faces I've yet to see. I've cheered, prayed, and cried for the ones who are still hiding, believing the darkness is their friend. To you, the brave ones, I can't wait to hear your story one day. It may be after all of our books are completed, but there will be a time. Until then, thank you for walking with me. Our time together has taught me much about God's grace.

- Susan

LORD,

You have blessed me by giving me the honor of visiting your child's heart through the pages of this workbook. I have felt Your love for them and Your pain. I have felt You urging them out of their darkness and calling them to Your side. I have felt Your joy as they took steps towards you. Lord, thank You for this person who has chosen to believe You and follow You. Thank You for giving them courage to face pain and darkness. Thank You for giving them faith to stand on the battlefield, with Your shield and Your Word. Thank You for the Cross that took all of our sins and paid our debt in full. Lord, continue to heal their heart of the pain and restore all that was taken from them. Give them eyes to see You clearly, and to see that they were created in your image. Help them to have wisdom and discernment to quickly recognize the work of the enemy and give them faith to stand firm against his work. Protect them and continue to destroy the strongholds in their life. May they continue to seek refuge in You alone. Increase their love for You as you continue to pour Your love into their heart and life. Give this child of Yours a passion to know You and follow You all the days of their life. In Jesus name, Amen.

Connecting with God through Christ

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23 ESV)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23 ESV)

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 ESV)

Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Romans 10:9-10 ESV)

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV)

Prayer of Salvation

“Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I need your forgiveness for the things I have done. I believe that you are the Son of God and that you died for me. I know you rose from the dead and have complete victory over death. Come live in my heart and take my life. Cleanse me and make me whole. Thank you for what you have done for me. I love you. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”

God's Love for ME

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23)

For God so loved the world, that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

The LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jeremiah 31:3)

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

Give thanks to the God of gods, for His steadfast love endures forever. (Psalm 136:2)

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39)

And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by his love; He will exult over you with loud singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:6)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace. (2 Thessalonians 2:16)

All verses on pg 173 from English Standard Version

Prayer

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. (Colossians 4:2)

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to Him? (Deuteronomy 4:7)

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. (1 Samuel 12:23)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. (Ephesians 6:18)

And Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, LORD, so that he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:17)

But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat. (Nehemiah 4:9)

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May those who love you be secure. (Psalm 122:6)

Pray continually. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:44)

The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. (1 Peter 4:7)

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (Luke 18:1)

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me. (Romans 15:30)

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. (1 Timothy 2:8)

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. (1 Peter 3:12)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. (James 5:16)

Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:12-1)

Truth Treasures

I am blessed and surrounded by God's favor (Psalm 5:12).

The Lord is at my right hand, I will not be shaken (Psalm 16:8).

I am the apple of God's eye (Psalm 17:8).

Because I look to the Lord, I am radiant and my face is never covered with shame
(Psalm 34:5).

I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

Nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39).

Because I love God, He is working things out in my life for my good and His purpose
(Romans 8:28).

The Lord delights in me; He will quiet me with His love and rejoice over me with
singing (Zephaniah 3:17).

The Lord is the potter and I am the clay – the work of His hands (Isaiah 64:8).

My name is engraved on the palm of God's hands (Isaiah 49:16).

I am God's treasured possession (Deuteronomy 7:6).

God has lavished His great love on me and I am His child (1 John 3:1).

I have been called out of darkness and into God's wonderful light to praise Him
(1 Peter 2:9)

I have been marked and sealed with the Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing my
inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Christ set me free so that I could live in freedom (Galatians 5:13).

God is my Father and I am His child and He has made me His heir (Galatians 4:6-7).

The Lord is with me to fight for me against my enemies to give me victory
(Deuteronomy 20:4).

God gives me His abounding grace so that I can abound in His good work
(2 Corinthians 9:8).

God's grace is enough for me because His power is made perfect in my weakness
(2 Corinthians 12:9).

I have been given every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

God chose me and I am holy and blameless in His sight (Ephesians 1:4).

God's word is in my mouth and in my heart so I may obey it (Deuteronomy 30:14).

I am no longer controlled by my sinful nature but by the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9)

I am a New Creation! I have been given a new life in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17).

God's love for me is great; His compassions never fail; they are new every morning
(Lamentations 3:22-23).

The Lord has given me authority to overcome all the power of my enemy (Luke
10:19).

God showed he loved me by sending Jesus to die for me when I was living in sin
(Romans 5:8).

There is no condemnation for me because I am in Christ (Romans 8:1).

I have been given the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).

I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind
(2 Timothy 1:7).

I am God's workmanship, created for good works (Ephesians 2:10).

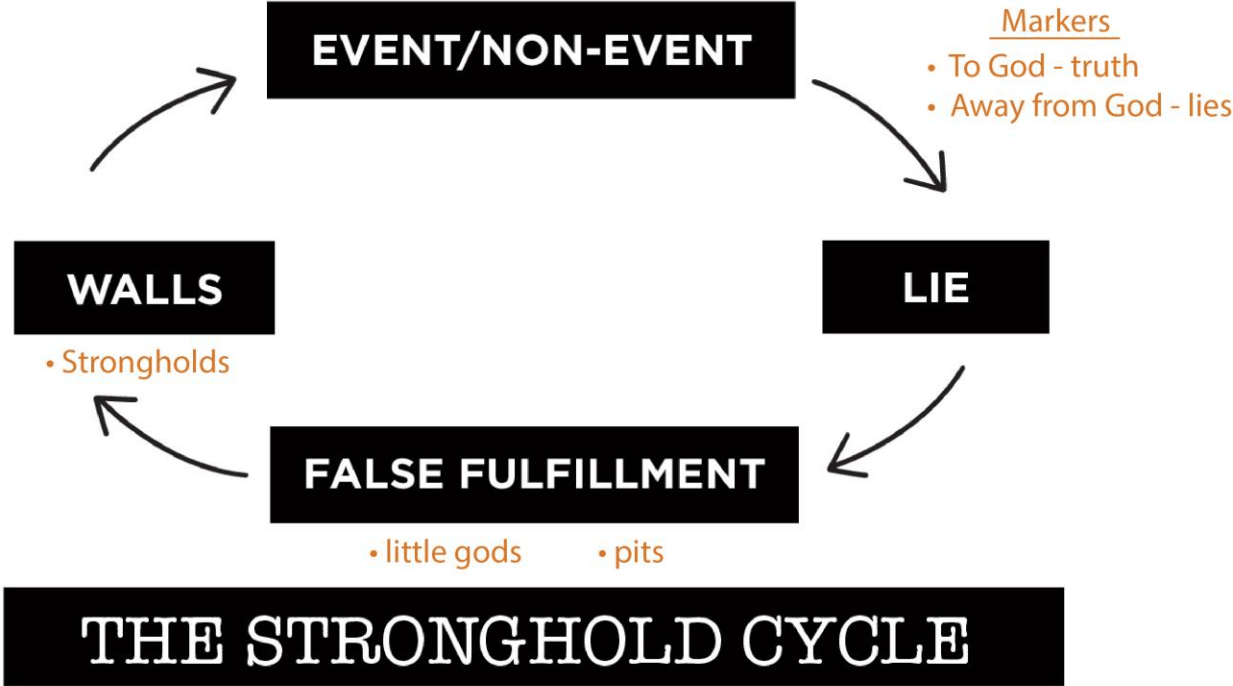
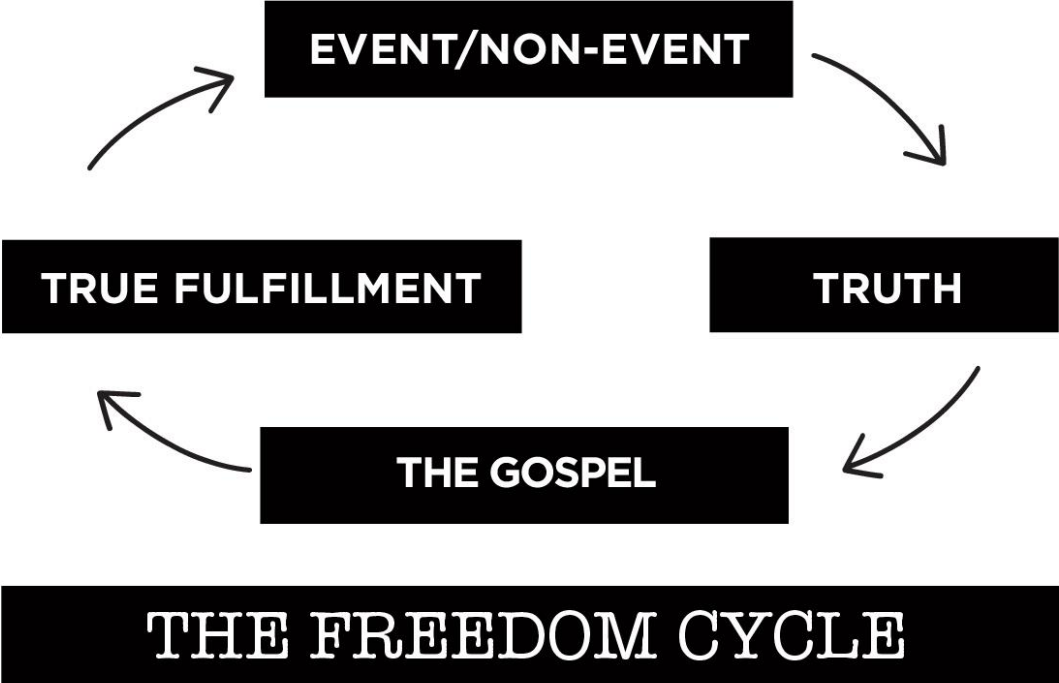
God loves me so much that He sent His only Son to die for me (John 3:16).

Daily Prayer

Father, I declare that You are a good and faithful God, so today I choose to place my hope and my confidence in You. I receive and welcome Your presence, and I thank You for promising that You will never leave me nor forsake me. Your promises are always true. So even when I feel alone, I will choose to believe in Your constant, abiding presence. I am not alone. Thank You for holding me close to You.

Thank You for the freedom You have given me in Jesus. You have washed me clean and filled me with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to keep my heart open and turned to You. Help me to abide in You, confident in Your promise I will bear much fruit. Because You have loved me, forgiven me, and saved me, I reject and renounce wicked and shameful ways. I will run in the path of Your commands, for You have set my heart free. I will look to You alone as my source for truth, and I reject every lie from the enemy. You alone are my comforter, my strength, and my shield. I renounce all of my efforts to comfort or protect myself. My life is now hidden in Christ, and I trust that You will finish the good work You have begun in me.

Lord, I realize my struggle is not against flesh and blood, so I choose to put on the full armor of God. I will stand against the devil's schemes knowing that the One who is in me is greater than the one who is in the world. Lord Jesus, thank You for Your promise that nothing and no one can snatch me from Your hand. I offer myself to You as a living sacrifice, and I ask You to transform me by renewing my mind. Thank You for loving me and setting me free. I love You, and I praise You. In the powerful name of Jesus, Amen.



A Prayer for Sexual Healing

Healing for your sexuality is available; this is a very hopeful truth! But you must realize that your sexuality is deep and core to your nature as a human being. Therefore, sexual brokenness can be one of the deepest types of brokenness a person might experience. You must take your healing and restoration seriously. This guided prayer will help immensely. You may find you need to pray through it a few times in order to experience a lasting freedom.

A bit of explanation on the reasons for the prayer: first, when we misuse our sexuality through sin, we give Satan an open door to oppress us in our sexuality. A man who uses pornography will find himself in a very deep struggle with lust; a woman who was sexually promiscuous before marriage may find herself wrestling with sexual temptation years afterward. So it is important to bring our sexuality under the lordship (and therefore protection) of the Lord Jesus Christ and seek his cleansing of our sexual sins.

Second, sexual brokenness—whether through abuse of our sexuality by our own actions or by the actions of others—can create sexual difficulties and also opens the door for the enemy to oppress us. Quite often forgiveness is needed—both the confidence that we are forgiven by the Lord and the choice we make to forgive others. This will prove immensely freeing.

Let us begin by bringing our lives and sexuality under the lordship of Jesus Christ:

Lord Jesus Christ, I confess here and now that you are my Creator (John 1:3) and therefore the creator of my sexuality. I confess that you are also my Savior, that you have ransomed me with your blood (1 Corinthians 15:3, Matthew 20:28). I have been bought with the blood of Jesus Christ; my life and my body belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Jesus, I present myself to you now to be made whole and holy in every way, including in my sexuality. You ask us to present our bodies to you as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1) and the parts of our bodies as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13). I do this now. I present my body, my sexuality [“as a man” or “as a woman”] and I present my sexual nature to you. I consecrate my sexuality to Jesus Christ.

Next, you need to renounce the ways you have misused your sexuality. The more specific you can be, the more helpful this will be. God created your sexuality for pleasure and joy within the context of the marriage covenant. Sexual activity outside of marriage can be very damaging to a person and to their relationships (1 Corinthians 6:18–20). What you want to do in this part of the prayer is confess and renounce all sexual sin—for example, sexual intimacy outside of marriage: not only

intercourse, but other forms of sexual intimacy such as mutual masturbation or oral sex. Many people assume these “don’t really count as sin” because they didn’t result in actual intercourse; however, there was sexual stimulation and intimacy outside marriage. Keep in mind there is the “spirit of the law” and the “letter of the law.” What matters are issues of heart and mind as well as body. Other examples of sins to renounce would be extramarital affairs, the use of pornography, and sexual fantasies. You may know exactly what you need to confess and renounce; you may need to ask God’s help to remember. Take your time here. As memories and events come to mind, confess and renounce them. For example: “Lord Jesus I ask your forgiveness for my sins of masturbation and using pornography. I renounce those sins in your name.” After you have confessed your sins, go on with the rest of the prayer.

Jesus, I ask your Holy Spirit to help me now remember, confess, and renounce my sexual sins. [Pause. Listen. Remember. Confess and renounce.] Lord Jesus, I ask your forgiveness for every act of sexual sin. You promised that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). I ask you to cleanse me of my sexual sins now; cleanse my body, soul, and spirit, cleanse my heart and mind and will, cleanse my sexuality. Thank you for forgiving me and cleansing me. I receive your forgiveness and cleansing. I renounce every claim I have given Satan to my life or sexuality through my sexual sins. Those claims are now broken by the cross and blood of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:13– 15).

Next comes forgiveness. It is vital that you forgive both yourself and those who have harmed you sexually. LISTEN CAREFULLY: forgiveness is a choice; we often have to make the decision to forgive long before we feel forgiving. We realize this can be difficult, but the freedom you will find will be worth it! Forgiveness is not saying, “It didn’t hurt me.” Forgiveness is not saying, “It didn’t matter.” Forgiveness is the act whereby we pardon the person, we release them from all bitterness and judgment. We give them to God to deal with.

Lord Jesus, I thank you for offering me total and complete forgiveness. I receive that forgiveness now. I choose to forgive myself for all of my sexual wrongdoing. I also choose to forgive those who have harmed me sexually. [Be specific here; name those people and forgive them.] I release them to you. I release all my anger and judgment toward them. Come, Lord Jesus, into the pain they caused me, and heal me with your love.

This next step involves breaking the unhealthy emotional and spiritual bonds formed with other people through sexual sin. One of the reasons the Bible takes sexual sin so seriously is because of the damage it does. Another reason is because

of the bonds it forms with people, bonds meant to be formed only between husband and wife (see 1 Corinthians 6:15–20). One of the marvelous effects of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is that it breaks these unhealthy bonds. “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

I now bring the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ between me and every person with whom I have been sexually intimate. [Name them specifically whenever possible. Also name those who have abused you sexually.] I break all sexual, emotional, and spiritual bonds with [name if possible, or just “that girl in high school” if you can’t remember her name]. I keep the cross of Christ between us.

Many people experience negative consequences through the misuse of their sexuality. Those consequences might be lingering guilt (even after confession) or repeated sexual temptation.

Consequences might also be the inability to enjoy sex with their spouse. It will help to bring the work of Christ here as well. Many people end up making unhealthy “agreements” about sex or themselves, about men or women or intimacy, because of the damage they have experienced through sexual sin (their sin, or the sin of someone against them). You will want to ask Christ what those agreements are and break them!

Lord Jesus, I ask you to reveal to me every “agreement” I have made about my sexuality or this specific struggle. [An example would be “I will always struggle with this” or “I can never get free” or “I don’t deserve to enjoy sex now” or “My sexuality is dirty.” Pause and let Jesus reveal those agreements to you. Then break them.] I break this agreement [name it] in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ, and I renounce every claim I have given it in my life. I renounce [name what the struggle is—“the inability to have an orgasm” or “this lingering shame” or “the hatred of my body”]. I bring the cross and blood of Jesus Christ against this [guilt or shame, every negative consequence]. I banish my enemy from my sexuality in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I invite the healing presence of Jesus Christ to cleanse me and restore me as a sexual being in fullness of joy and wholeness. I ask you, Jesus, to fill my sexuality with your holiness, to strengthen me and restore me in your name.

Finally, it will prove helpful to consecrate your sexuality to Jesus Christ once more.

Lord Jesus, I now consecrate my sexuality to you in every way. I consecrate my sexual intimacy with my spouse to you. I ask you to cleanse and heal my sexuality and our sexual intimacy in every way. I ask your healing grace to come and free me from all consequences of sexual sin. I ask you to fill my sexuality with your healing love and

goodness. Restore my sexuality in wholeness. Let my spouse and me experience all of the intimacy and pleasure you intended a man and woman to enjoy in marriage. I invite the Spirit of God to fill our marriage bed. I pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen!!

We could report many, many stories of stunning redemption that have come as a result of individuals and couples praying through this type of prayer. Now remember—sometimes the wounds and consequences take time to heal. You might want to revisit this prayer several times over if lasting healing has not yet taken place. You may recall actions that need confession later; return to this prayer and confess those as well. Some of you will also benefit from seeing a good Christian counselor. Hold fast to these truths:

You, your body, and your sexuality belong to Jesus Christ. He has completely forgiven you. He created your sexuality to be whole and holy. He created your sexuality to be a source of intimacy and joy. Jesus Christ came to seek and save “what was lost” (Luke 19:10), including all that was lost in the blessings he intended through our sexuality!

Prayer for Freedom from Habitual Sins

(from *The Utter Relief of Holiness*)

Renouncing the Sin

Freedom comes only as we bring these unsanctified and unholy places under the rule of Jesus Christ, so that he can possess these very places deeply and truly. Therefore, part of this first step involves sanctifying to Christ the place of bondage. If it's sexual, you sanctify your sexuality to Christ; if it's emotional (as with rage, or fear, or even grief), you sanctify your emotions; if it involves addiction, you sanctify your appetite, your obsession, and your body. At the retreats we do, we walk through this process in prayer, and many people are shocked to realize that they have never taken the first, simple step of sanctifying their sexuality (or emotions, or appetites) to Jesus Christ. But if you want to be free in this place, it must come under the total, intimate, ongoing rule of God.

Lord Jesus, forgive me. I confess I have been offering myself over to sin, and now I am its slave. I renounce it; I renounce my sins. [Be very specific here. For example, "I renounce the ways I have presented my sexuality to sin; I renounce my sexual sins. I present my sexuality to Jesus Christ. I sanctify my sexuality to Jesus Christ. I present the members of my body and my sexuality as instruments of righteousness. I renounce the ways I have presented my appetite and my drinking to sin; I renounce my sins with alcohol. I present my appetite and my drinking to Jesus Christ. I sanctify my body to Jesus Christ."] I renounce every way I have given myself over to sin. I dedicate and I consecrate my life [and this specific area] once more to the rule of Jesus Christ, to be his and his alone. May your atoning blood cover my sins and cleanse me. May your holiness possess me totally and completely.

You will also find it helpful to renounce the "sins of your fathers." Often in these places of lasting bondage you will find that a father (or mother, or brother, or grandparent) struggled with the same issue. The scriptures present to us the reality that sin is often passed down within a family line, and the effects of those sins are also passed down generation to generation (see Exodus 20:5, 34:7, Leviticus 26:39-42, Nehemiah 9:2).

Lord Jesus, I also renounce the sins of my fathers here [or my mother, my grandmother, what have you]. I renounce their sins of [be specific, as in, "their rage, their sexual sins, their alcoholism."] I utterly renounce and break with the sins of my family line. I plead the blood of Christ over those sins, so that they may not have a hold on me. I renounce them and break with them utterly.

Breaking the Stronghold

We begin to break the enemy's hold on us through the presence of "agreements." By this I mean places in our own hearts that have made a deep agreement with a feeling, a thought, a sentence. If you have struggled with something for years now, there are probably agreements along the lines of: "I'll never get free of this," "I am such a \$%#@," "Who cares anyway?" "It's too late," and a host of others. Those are agreements, and they serve as a kind of permission for the enemy to keep you in bondage. So you must break them. In addition to these, there are the agreements with the sin itself: "I am filled with rage," "I am a drunk," "I am gay." They can even "feel" biblical but, friends, you do not want to be making agreements with your sin. You are dead to sin and alive to God. You are the dwelling place of Jesus Christ. You are forgiven and dearly loved. So you must break the agreements you've been making here, in this area. Some will be obvious to you; others require the presence of the Holy Spirit to reveal them.

Spirit of God, search me, know me, reveal to me the agreements I have been making in this area. I renounce those agreements now. [Be very specific.] I renounce the agreement that [What is it? "I'll never get free?" "Rage is just a part of me?" "It's too late?"] I break these agreements in the name of my Lord Jesus Christ. I renounce them. I renounce every claim they have given the enemy in my life. Jesus, my Deliverer, come and break these strongholds. Set me free in this very place.

Lord Jesus, show me every companion agreement operating here. I renounce the agreement that I'm alone, that no one will protect me. I renounce the agreement that I am dirty and disgusting. I renounce every agreement with shame. I renounce the agreement that I can never be forgiven. Spirit, show me what to pray, reveal these agreements.

This is how we undo that dynamic about letting the sun go down on these things and the enemy getting a foothold (Ephesians 4:26-27). Bit by bit you are recovering parts of your heart. You are taking them back from when you gave them away. This erodes the claim that you gave the enemy in your heart. Yes, terrible things may have happened to us, but we are the ones who made these agreements, these resolutions, these vows, and we're not going to see victory in that area until we renounce them.

I will be honest—if you've given your heart over to something many times over, you've given it a good stronghold, and if it is also tangled up in issues of wounds and sin, it's going to take some time to untangle and heal this, but it is worth the work. Don't just bury it. It's worth going into those dark places and those murky waters

and working through it. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us of everything. Everything.

Having broken the agreements and renounced the sin, we often find that we have to be quite intentional in commanding the enemy to leave. “Submit therefore to God,” wrote James the brother of Jesus, “resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Much of what we have been doing up to this point is submitting to God, bringing these specific issues under the rule of Jesus by renouncing the sins, breaking the agreements, sanctifying these places back to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Now comes part two of this verse: resist.

I bring the blood of my Lord Jesus Christ right here, in this very place. I renounce every claim I gave the evil one to my life right here, in this very place. And I bring the blood of Christ now against the strongholds and against the spirits operating here. [Sometimes you will need to be firm and specific: I bring the blood of Jesus against all spirits of addiction, of alcoholism, all spirits of rage, of homosexuality, and so on]. I banish these enemies from my life now—from my body, my soul, and my spirit. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). I resist the devil here and now and I command these spirits to flee in the name of Jesus Christ my Lord.

Ask the Spirit to guide you. If you will stick with this and let the Holy Spirit guide you, you can be free.

Lord, forgive me for giving place in my heart to resentment, to lust, to anger, to alcohol. Forgive me for giving place in my life to resignation and self-reproach and shame, to fear and doubt and control. I renounce it now. Come, Jesus Christ, and take your rightful place in my heart and in my life here. Come and set me free here, in these very places. I plead your blood over these sins, and I break every hold I gave my enemy here, in the name of Jesus Christ.

As you do this, you erode your enemy’s claims to keep you in bondage. By the way, your enemy is not going to like the fact that you are about to get free. He will try to discourage you from praying like this. He will try to distract you (the phone will ring, you’ll suddenly be hungry, you’ll feel like doing it tomorrow). He’ll try to make you feel like, *this is so stupid, I can’t believe I’m doing this out loud*. He’s going to make you feel like *this isn’t working* or *this isn’t going to work; now I’m becoming one of those nuts*. Just push through all of that.

I bring the work of Jesus Christ once more against you [shame, rage, fear, sexual sin, resignation, etc.] and I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to go to the throne of Jesus Christ in his mighty name. “It is for freedom that Christ has set you free” (Galatians 5:1). I claim my freedom now in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus, I ask you to sanctify me through and through. May my whole spirit, soul, and body be kept

blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). Sanctify me through and through, in this place, in this issue.

Healing the Brokenness

Now for the best part: the healing. God wants to make you whole and holy. He promises to heal the brokenhearted. So now you invite Jesus in to heal the wound, to love you in this place, to restore your soul, to heal this memory. You invite him into your past.

Lord Jesus, I invite you into my wounds and my brokenness. [Again, don't be vague and general; be very specific.] Jesus, I invite you into the day I was abused. Come into my shattered heart, my shame, come into that moment in my life. I ask you to cleanse me here, to heal my broken heart and make me whole.

Linger in this place in prayer. Listen. Pay attention. Often Jesus will bring up something necessary to your healing. For example, suddenly you feel the anger toward your abuser—Jesus is showing you that you need to forgive.

Jesus, I forgive my brother for abusing me. I release him from my rage and I give him over to you.

Sometimes you'll feel the shame and self-rejection.

Lord Jesus, come into this shame. I renounce self-rejection. I renounce despising myself because of all that has happened. I forgive myself as well. Come and heal me.

Sometimes you will feel the young places in your heart crying out for love or for protection.

Lord Jesus, gather the young and frightened place in my heart into your loving arms. Come and find me here, in these very places. Gather my heart into your love and make me whole.

As you are inviting Jesus into your wounds, what is so very beautiful is the fact that quite often—not every time, but more than you'll expect—Jesus will show you what he is doing; you will see him come. Call it seeing with your mind's eye or Christ using your imagination or seeing with the eyes of your heart or your spirit—however you want to describe it. Often you will see Christ come back into your past. He may take you by the hand and lead you out of that room. You might see him step between you and the one who wounded you, or he might simply tell you, "You are forgiven, you are safe, I love you."

Healing doesn't necessarily have to be dramatic. Oftentimes it is very quiet. Jesus simply comes as we invite him to, and though we may not "see" him or "hear" him, he comes, and we sense a new peace or quietness in our soul. Our heart feels better somehow. The important thing is for us to give him permission to these wounded places, invite his healing love, and wait in prayer for him to come. Do this with each memory of wounding, with each event (ask the Holy Spirit to guide you). Often I will pray Isaiah 61 as I do this:

Lord Jesus, you have come to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. Come and heal my brokenness right here, Lord; free me from this captivity, release me from all darkness, bring your favor here in my soul and bring your vengeance here against my enemies. Lord, you came to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. I ask you to do this in me—comfort me where I am hurting; bestow on me a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. Come in this memory, in this wound. I receive you here.

Many times Jesus simply says, "Let me love you." We need to open our hearts up to his love. As we do, it allows him to come to this very place. Linger there and listen; ask for the healing grace of Jesus Christ over and over again. He comes, dear friends, he comes.