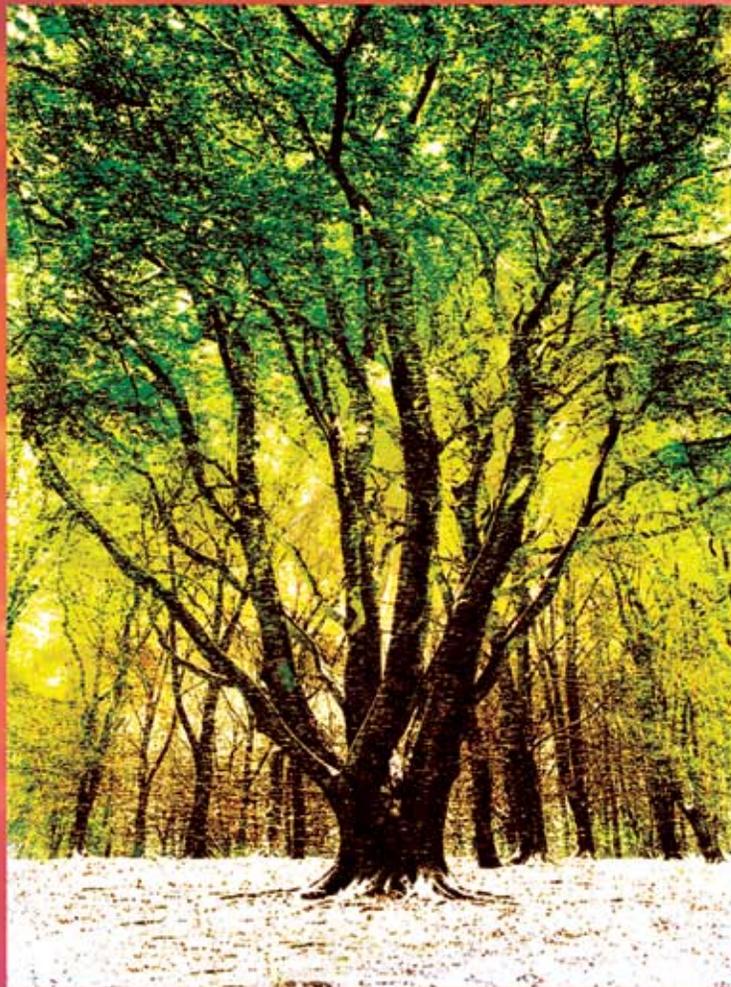


Small Group Program for

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION & INNER FREEDOM

Participant's Workbook



Alfred C.W. Davis MBA, MDIV.

Participant's Workbook

Small Group Program

for

Personal Transformation and Inner Freedom



Agape Healing International
www.agapehealing.org

Introduction

The Alpha Program offers an excellent introduction to the principles of Christianity. The Purpose Driven Life helps Christians discover their purpose. But, what happens after becoming a Christian? How do you develop and grow so that you can be the best that you can be? That is the purpose of this program called "*Personal Transformation*". Inviting Jesus into our lives is a great starting point. Then comes the best part of the Good News – personal freedom through the transformation of the mind. "*Be transformed by the renewing of the mind.*" Romans 12:2.

The question arises: "Is there a process and how does one become transformed?" The answer is "*Jesus Christ the Healer*". Not only has He been waiting to save our lives, but He loves us so much that he cannot wait to help us transform our lives. Welcome to an exciting ten weeks of personal growth, house cleaning and transformation inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Week # 1 - Introduction

Week # 2 - Rooms of the Mind

Week # 3 - Confession

Week # 4 - Forgiveness

Week # 5 - Self-Forgiveness

Week # 6 - Mental Agreements

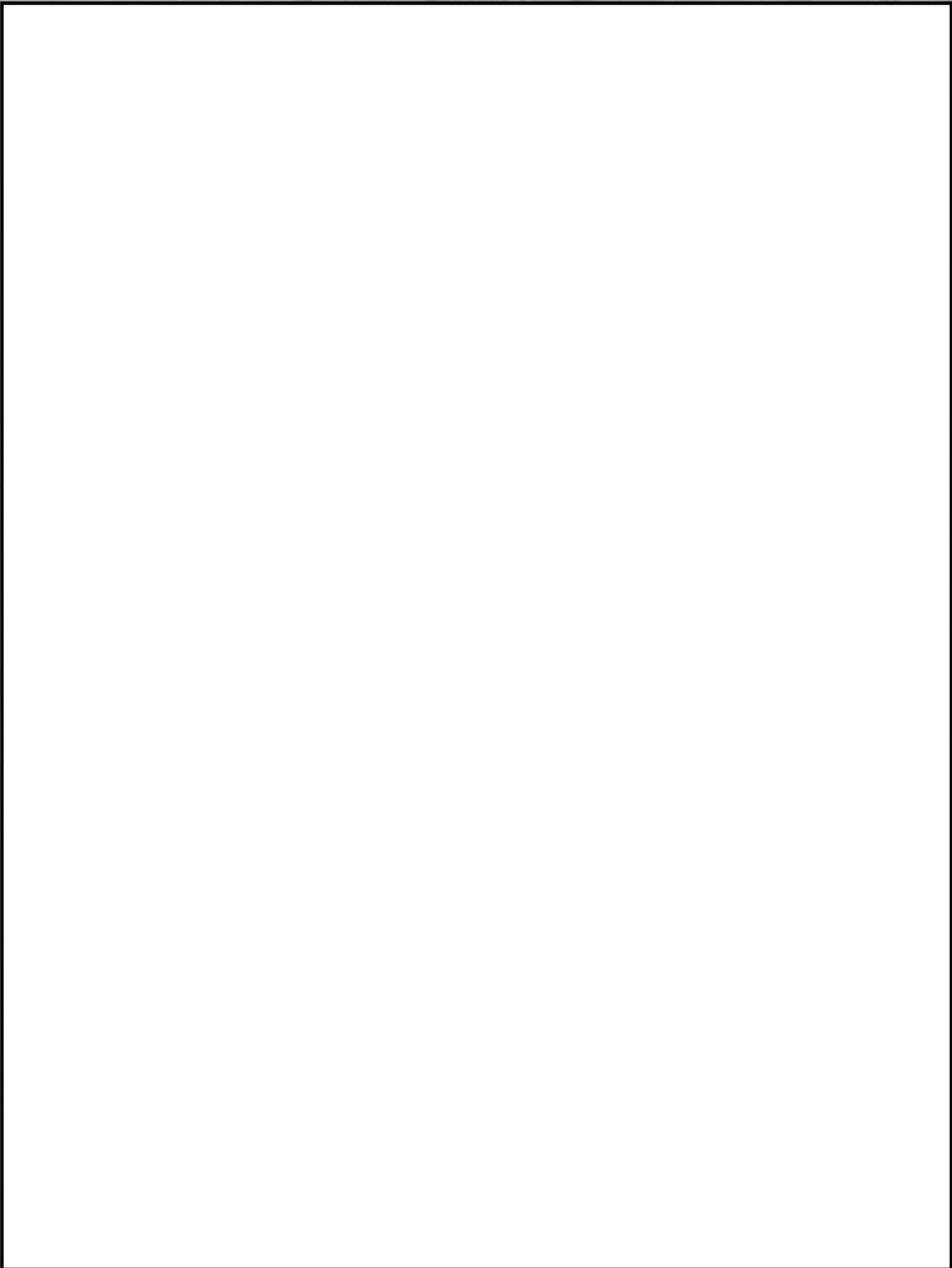
Week # 7 - Inviting Jesus into Past Memories

Week # 8 - Inviting Jesus into Current Thoughts

Week # 9 - Accepting My True Self In Christ

Week # 10 - Developing My True Self In Christ Story

May your journey together be fruitful and filled with peace!



Week One - Introduction

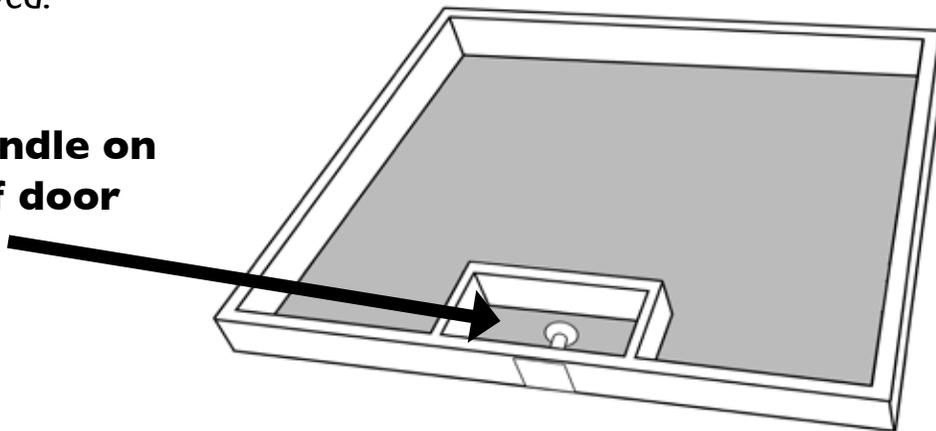
Testimony after testimony proclaims the transforming power of the salvation experience. From John Newton, who wrote the classic hymn, *Amazing Grace*, to the alcoholic, who invited Jesus into his/her life, experience shows us how Jesus comes and changes lives.

SALVATION

The Good News is that Jesus was sent to earth with a purpose. John 3:16 describes his mission: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

He came to save the lost. He came to remove the curse of Adam and restore mankind so that we again have *“the right to eat from the tree of life.”*² His grace, mercy and forgiveness were offered, so that our relationship with God could be restored through his righteousness. Jesus' death on the cross was the sacrifice that was offered, so that we could be free. The only condition to claim this gift is to believe in him. *“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*³

**Door handle on
inside of door**



² Revelation 2:7, NIV

³ Romans 10:9, NIV

The above metaphor of a house helps explain the salvation process. Jesus stands at the door of our house and knocks indicating that he wants to come into our lives. *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in.”*⁴

In the picture above, you can see that the door handle is only on the inside of the door. There is no handle on the outside for Jesus to use, so he is dependent on our opening the door for him to come in. This picture illustrates that our *“free will”* is involved in the process. Jesus respects us so much that he will not save us against our own free will. The salvation process involves our choosing to invite him into our lives.

And when we choose to invite Jesus in, it only takes a second for him to move from standing outside to residing inside. When he comes, he brings his Spirit and deposits it into our heart. *“He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”*⁵

In addition to guaranteeing eternal life with him in perfect love, he transforms our heart from one of depravity to love. The renewing of our heart from one of sin to love is the first step of healing. *“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”*⁶ With a new heart, we are able to see things differently and our attitudes and motivations change. John Newton did not want to be a drunk and a slave trader anymore. When his heart changed from depravity to love, his life and his story changed as well.

4 Revelation 3:20, NIV

5 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, NIV

6 Ezekiel 11:19, NIV

Salvation changes our story. Salvation brings with it a sense of belonging. Our worth becomes clear because the Son of God paid a ransom for our lives. We are OK inside knowing that we are loved. In the core or heart of our being, there is a security in the present and into the future. We are forgiven, beloved and eternally safe.

But, there is more than Salvation. I am suggesting that in the Christian process there are three steps: Salvation, Transformation (sanctification) and Works (serving others in love). Many Christians jump from salvation to works, bypassing the healing and transforming stage that empowers the works.



Salvation is the initial invitation where Jesus Christ is invited into our hearts. With the invitation comes healing of our hearts, forgiveness of our sins and ultimately we receive the gift of eternal life.

Transformation is about the healing of minds and emotions, which is referred to as the restoring of our souls.

Works describes the stage of serving others in love. Too often the Christian life has been conceived as: Be saved and then go do good works. As a result the middle stage of transformation is often missed.

WAKING THE DEAD

Eldredge summarizes the misconception of the Christian life this way in his book, *Waking the Dead*: “*This whole Christian thing is about trying not to sin. Going to church. Being nice.*”²¹ This approach focuses on rules and behaviour. This perspective misses the step of transformation through the healing of the mind and emotions. Jesus clearly outlined his mission in Isaiah 61 and confirmed it in Luke: “*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 broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, 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.*”²²

The truth is that, when God made us, he made us good. However, since birth we have lived in a fallen world. Negative life experiences, trauma, loss and hurtful words have helped us create Distorted Self images. Along the way our True Self In Christ became lost or covered up and today we need to be restored so that we can be who we were designed to be.

RESTORING THE SOUL

Psalm 23 refers to transformation when it says, “*he restores my soul.*”²³ This step of transformation is vital, because without transformation, we tend to do good works in our own strength in order to earn love instead of being empowered by a healthy desire to give selflessly.

Christ-centered inner healing, which is the approach I use in my counseling practice, addresses this second step in the Christian process. Jesus is invited into the mind to uncover the True Self in Christ. In the process, Jesus himself is the healer, Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals. “*For I am the Lord who heals you.*”²⁴ When asked, he comes to meet us in our brokenness and enters into

²¹ *Waking The Dead* by John Eldredge, p. 80

²² Isaiah 61:1-3 and Luke 4:18, NIV

²³ Psalm 23:3, NIV

²⁴ Exodus 15:26, NIV

the unhealed places of our hearts and minds.

I have seen his healing firsthand. When Jesus brings his truth to peoples' minds, the distortion is clarified and lives are changed for the better. When the Lord exposes the lies that distort our understanding of who we are and speaks the truth that heals, we begin to uncover our True Selves in Christ and are free to live the victorious life God promises.

When believers are exposed to the truth, it replaces the lies and breaks their power to oppress. Only then, can believers break free and begin to live a transformed life where they experience true freedom and joy.

WHO CARES?

God does. Truly, if it were not for Jesus' desire to heal the broken-hearted, many would remain troubled. The good news is God understands our plight, *"I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power; then you will know that I am the Lord. Because you dishearten the righteous with your lies."*²⁵

God recognizes the connection between lies that people believe and the Truth that heals a broken heart. He also knows how easy it is for us to become trapped by our negative thinking, *"A man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."*²⁶

But, if we turn to Him, He is willing to help. *"He will call upon me, and I will answer him."*²⁷ *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you."*²⁸

25 Ezekiel 13:21, NIV

26 2 Peter 2:19, NIV

27 Psalm 91:15, NIV

28 Psalm 32:8, NIV

WHERE IS GOD WHEN IT HURTS?

Remember that God wants to deliver you from the old, dead life and free you from the negative perceptions, distortions and lies you've been believing about who you think you are – the ones that hold you back from living life more abundantly.

Thankfully, God loves you too much to leave you the way you are. He wants to help you change. His desire is for His people to be transformed into the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ.

“But, whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”²⁹

²⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, NIV

7. Which comes first – works or personal transformation?

8. How is it helpful to have the mind transformed when serving others in love?

9. What is meant by Galatians 5:13, *“You were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another in love.”*

10. What is the importance of truth in the sanctification process?
– *“Sanctify them by the truth.”* – John 17:17

Question: Do you want to invite Jesus into your mind so that you can live a full and abundant life?

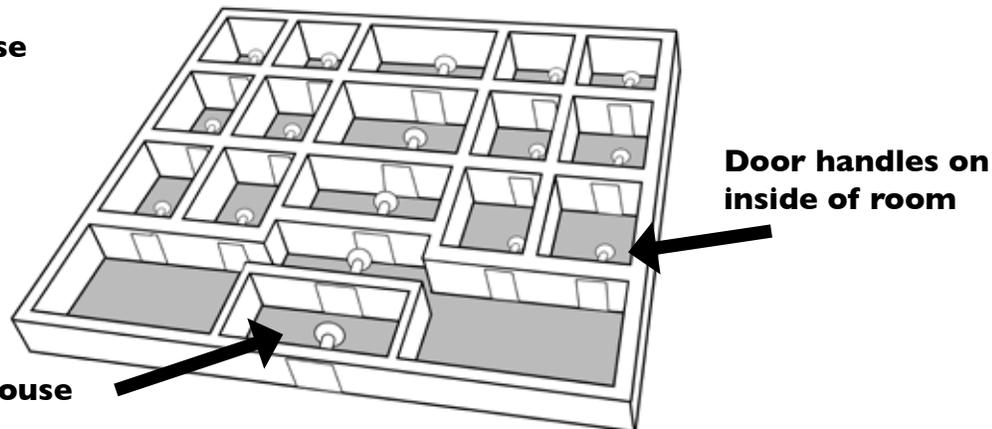
Discussion points:

Week Two - Rooms Of The Mind

SANCTIFICATION

Salvation is only the first step. While salvation enables Jesus to move from outside the house to the inside, He is now standing only in the front hall. But each person's house has many rooms. These rooms represent the different places of the mind where memories and thoughts are stored.

Rooms of house



Front hall of house

As you can see from the diagram, each room in the mind has a door handle only on the inside. Jesus will not enter any of these rooms unless he is invited. It is the same principle of “free will” that you see in the salvation process. Jesus respects our “free will” and he will not enter into any of those rooms of the mind without an invitation. He patiently waits in the front hall until he has been asked to come into the different rooms. As we’ve mentioned several times, the process of transforming and renewing the mind is called sanctification. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”⁷

Christ’s presence in the mind changes the story because he brings truth. Also, he is the healer. So Jesus, when invited, heals the mind and emotions by bringing truth. It is that truth of Jesus that sets people free from the bondage of the lies and false messages that they have been living with. Jesus wants us to be free. In fact, his second reason for coming to earth is described in John 10:10: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

⁷ Romans 12:2, NIV

Jesus does not want us to live with anger, depression and mental turmoil. In Galatians 5:1 he says: *“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.”*

So, Isaiah 61 describes Jesus' mission of sanctification: *“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners.”*

Unfortunately, hearts are broken by cruel and hurtful words. Eldredge, in his book *The Sacred Romance*, refers to these damaging and wounding words as *“arrows in the heart.”*⁸ Words have the ability to penetrate a person's soul and hurt his/her feelings. Jesus does not want us to be burdened with inner pain.

Jesus also knows that Satan and his helpers use these wounds to create further turmoil and destruction. So, Jesus tells us how to deal with emotional and mental trauma in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5: *“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.”*

We often hear about taking thoughts captive, but what does that really mean? I believe that inviting Jesus to come into the specific room in the mind is the process.

When you say, Dear Jesus, I invite you to come into this specific place in my mind where I am thinking this thought or where I am dwelling on this memory, he will come. In Psalm 91 it says: *“He will call upon me [Jesus], and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble.”*

⁸The Sacred Romance by John Eldredge, p. 27

If you call out to Jesus, he will hear you. In Psalm 139, it says: “Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely.” Jesus is so loving and caring that he does not want us to live in mental and emotional pain. He created us to be free, but our experiences in the world have created strongholds and wounds that we carry around in our minds. He knows that Satan can use those strongholds, so he is divinely willing to help heal our souls. We are the captives when our minds are bound up in lies. We are the prisoners when we have mentally taken ourselves to a dark pit where we are all alone. He wants us to be free from despair, mourning, grief, shame and disgrace.

As a counselor, I have the unique privilege of encouraging people to invite Jesus into their minds each and every day. I have observed that he comes every time when asked. He does not hold back or say, I will come if you meet these three conditions. He is so keen to help that he rushes in just as the father ran to his son in the Prodigal son story (Luke 15:11-32). I have also observed that when Jesus comes, he is always gentle, kind, friendly, caring, loving, helpful, and healing.

When a person hears his truth, the result is inevitably described as peaceful. Over thousands of hours of doing Inner Healing work, I have never observed Jesus come into a client's memory to criticize, condemn, rebuke, fight, mock, hurt, or create pain. In every case, his very presence and the truth that he brings are healing and helpful.

Jesus refers to this process as follows: “*The Counselor, I will send him to you.*”⁹ “*When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*”¹⁰

I believe Jesus uses the Holy Spirit to communicate the truth and it is that specific truth that helps transform memories and thoughts.

⁹ John 16:7, NIV

¹⁰ John 16:13, NIV

MORE THAN LIES

While some rooms of the mind contain lies, there are other rooms of the mind that also need the transforming power of Jesus for sanctification to occur. These rooms contain:

- 1) unconfessed sin
- 2) unforgiveness
- 3) mental agreements that are against the knowledge of God
- 4) lack of forgiveness for self

Unconfessed Sin

When a person sins, the natural instinct is to close the door, keep it a secret and not admit to anyone that it is there. As a result, the unaddressed sin gets bigger and darker. Examples are: infidelity, pornography, gluttony, pride, idolatry, envy, hate, lust and judgment. If the person opens the door to Jesus and invites him in through confession, Jesus will cleanse the room and forgive the person. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* ¹¹

This purification process involves the use of "free will" where confession and repentance are involved in the healing. Confession enables light to shine into the darkness and obedience to Jesus' truth cleanses the soul.

¹¹ | John 1:8-9, NIV

Unforgiveness

Another type of room where the door remains shut is unforgiveness. When a person has been hurt, the natural instinct is to fight back and repay the offender in like kind. If you hit me, I will hit you back. As long as a person holds onto the unforgiveness, the emotional anger builds and the bitterness grows stronger. The only way to be free is to invite Jesus into the pain through forgiveness and let go of the desire to repay. As Christians we are commanded to forgive and leave the revenge up to God.

Mental Agreements

The third type of room that needs cleansing is any place where the mind is committed to holding onto a fixed belief that is against God's will. This category includes vows, curses, covenants, and all the ways that the mind gets set against God's truth.

Lack Of Self-Forgiveness

The fourth category is any room holding self-condemnation, self-hatred and self-punishment that blocks the person from receiving the forgiveness of Christ. In this type of room, people turn from God and verbally abuse themselves with self-judgment and critical self-talk. Self-forgiveness is needed to let go of all the ways that the person blocks God's love so that he/she can receive the love of Jesus and heal these self-imposed wounds.

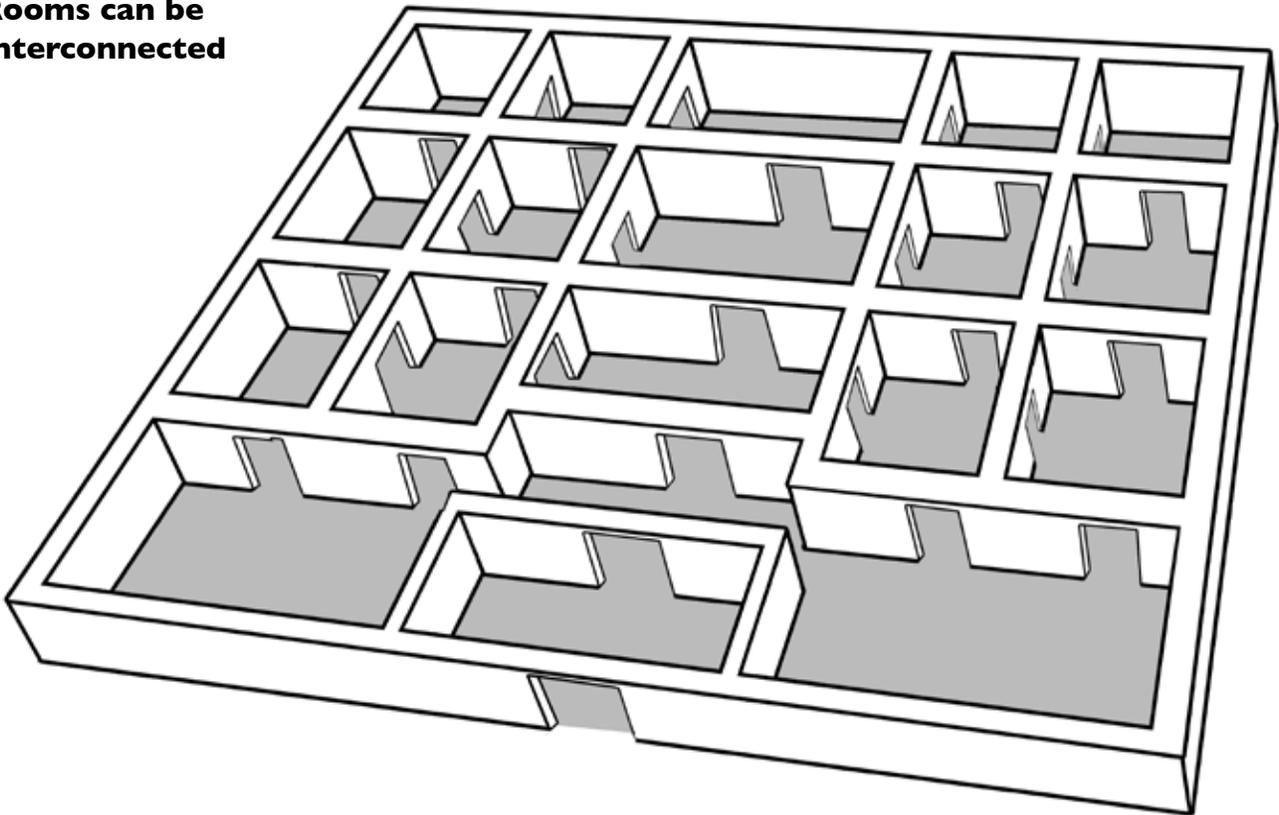
Interconnected Rooms

One important principle is that any or all of these different types of rooms in the mind can be interconnected. To deal with just one room may be helpful, but if there is interconnection, the person will need to work through healing in all the interconnected rooms for total healing to occur. An example of interconnection is shown by the story of a sexually abused female.

- 1) lies could include: I am unworthy, it was my fault
- 2) sin could include: judgment and malice
- 3) unforgiveness could include: bitterness towards the perpetrator
- 4) mental agreement could include: I cannot trust all men
- 5) Lack of self-forgiveness: I hate myself, I need to justify myself

When all these are interlinked, the person is bound up in a way that simple healing prayer does not comprehensively address.

**Rooms can be
Interconnected**



Week Two - Rooms OfThe Mind

Points for discussion

1. What is salvation?
2. What is sanctification?
3. What does “rooms of the mind” mean?
4. Into what rooms of the mind does Jesus need to be invited?
5. Does Jesus need to be invited into positive memories and thoughts?
6. How do you invite Jesus into the rooms of the mind?

7. How does Jesus heal the mind and emotions?

8. Can these rooms be interlinked, interconnected or tied to each other?

9. What happens if you do not address the negative thoughts and emotions that are stored in these rooms?

10. What happens if you do receive healing in these rooms?

Personal Reflection and Observations

Week Three - Confession

“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”¹

WHAT DO SIN AND CONFESSION HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

When Mary came into the clinic, she confessed that she was a broken person in every way. Her life was in shambles. Her health was bad. She was at the end of her rope and she said, I will do whatever God wants me to do. I am broken financially, physically, spiritually and emotionally. Help me Lord!

The truth is God wants to help us, but because he has given us free will, he cannot redeem us unless we extend the invitation. The responsibility to ask for help is entirely ours. When we come to God with a sincere desire to change, as Mary did, he will begin the process of healing.

Yet confession is not simply about admitting wrong doings or thoughts according to some moral standard. It is about getting our relationship right with God. If sin within the soul is seen as merely a psychological imbalance or illness, the predicament of good and evil at the core of man's being is never addressed.

Contrary to secular psychology, the Christian perspective on personhood is different. Christian therapy considers how pride, rebellion from God, prayer, grace, mercy, the truth of God's Word and the healing power of the Holy Spirit connect with the human spirit. In Christianity, sin is not merely a politically incorrect word, it is a significant issue that needs addressing.

¹ | John 1:8-9, NIV

Humans are spiritual beings, as well as rational and emotional. The place where the spiritual realm and the phenomenal world intersect is the mind. Payne writes: *“The mind of man, including his spirit and entire soul, are either cleansed and wise (in balance), or evil and darkened (unseeing), depending whether or not there is confession of sin and fellowship with God through Christ.”*²

Let's build on the metaphor of the house we spoke of earlier. When a person invites Jesus into the front hall of the house, the heart has been redeemed, but that does not mean that all the rooms of the mind have been surrendered to God and his truth. Transformation of the mind is a choice of the will to ask Jesus to come into the rooms where he has never been previously invited. In most of us, there are rooms where Jesus is Lord and there are other rooms where we keep the door tightly shut and Jesus is not welcome there. These are the rooms where our sinful mind chooses rebellion and disobedience over truth. Typically, these rooms house addictions, secret lust, and other sinful thoughts that we do not want anyone to know about.

The Book of Romans speaks to the sinful mind: *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, because the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.”*³

What adds to the confusion is that a person can have some rooms of the mind submitted to God and other rooms where Jesus has never been invited. This duplicity of mind explains how a person can go to church and live what appears to be a holy life on one level, and yet choose at other times to make decisions that are in total rebellion against God's will.

² The Healing Presence by Leanne Payne, p. 162

³ Romans 8:5-7, NIV

These rooms, which we choose to keep separated from the love of God, need light. The act of confession is the process of bringing the thoughts and mental agreements captive to Jesus and allowing him to purify us through forgiveness. As C.S. Lewis said, *“We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of sin. The guilt is washed out not by time but by repentance and the blood of Christ”*⁴

THE PROCESS OF CONFESSION INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

1. Recognize your condition of sinfulness
2. Choose Jesus and the cross
3. Name the sin
4. Renounce personal involvement
5. Bind the sin to the cross and receive forgiveness
6. Repent
7. Experience the freedom to function from the True Self in Christ

I. Recognize Your Condition of Sinfulness

The first step of confession is the realization that we are separated from God and living a life of spiritual poverty. Often pride insulates us from understanding how God wants us to be. Luke 18:11-14 describes this condition: *“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself; ‘God, I thank you that I am not like all other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.”*

⁴ The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis, p. 61

In psychology, pride is not considered an illness or a sickness and, therefore, is not diagnosed as pathological. But in the scriptures, the pride of the Pharisee does connect with the predicament of good and evil that is at the core of the human heart. The tax collector is aware of his brokenness and is struggling with the pain of his sin, as he asks for help in the form of mercy. Like the tax collector, our need is to look inward, see our shortcomings and humble ourselves in prayer. The proper attitude is described in Psalm 51:16-17, *“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart.”*

2. Choose Jesus and the Cross

Confession and repentance entail more than not doing something wicked. They involve turning to God in faith because we recognize that without him we are empty, lonely and broken. As we understand that our rebellious pride and our separation from God is our first big sin, we are brought to the point of choice between truth and lies, life and death, freedom and bondage, healing and ongoing pain.

Understanding our sinfulness involves two steps: 1) recognize that all our efforts to save ourselves are meaningless, so we need to invite Jesus into the front hall, and 2) recognize that controlling and hiding our fallen selves grants evil an opportunity to sow destruction in our lives, so we need to invite Jesus into the rooms of our house.

Step 1 - Invite Jesus into the Front Hall

Jesus is all-sufficient and he is our only hope. No matter how hard we try, we will never receive salvation through our own good works. Because of Jesus' obedience to follow his Father's will and sacrifice himself as an atonement for us on the cross, we have the promise of salvation. He assumes our sin when we turn to him and confess it. He bears our sin so that we will no longer be burdened by it: *"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood."*⁵

The key to the above verses is *"to all who believe."* For as it says in Romans 1:17, *"The righteous will live by faith."* We need to turn to Jesus and by faith invite him into our lives as the Son of God who died for our sins: *"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."*⁶

Confessing that we are sinners and inviting Jesus into our lives are the first two steps of healing. The immediate fruits of the Sinner's Prayer are the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within us and a restored heart.

Step 2 - Invite Jesus into the Rooms Of Our House

For those of us who have received salvation by faith and are reborn in the spirit, we still have the task of transformation – the purifying of the mind from sin, unforgiveness and lies. As it relates to sin, there are two areas to consider: 1) past sin and memories hidden away in secret rooms with the door locked, and 2) current sin and thoughts that result from our living in a fallen world, where we constantly struggle with daily unrighteousness such as: pride, judging others, envy, disrespect, the lack of acceptance of others, etc.

⁵ Romans 3:22-25, NIV

⁶ Romans 10:10, NIV

The same principle that we used in inviting Jesus into our house is used when we invite Jesus into these unsundered rooms, where past and current sin reside and where lies and wrong agreements of our mind hold us in bondage. We need to come before God, or before another trusted person, and confess before God that we have fallen short. Just as he justified the tax collector as a sinner, he will come in, cleanse us from sin and forgive us.

3. Name the Sin

We need to take responsibility for the ways that we have lived an unrighteous life. Naming the specific sins is an important step. *“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.”*⁷

As we disclose our guilty offenses with a contrite heart, we lay before God the specific ways that we have been rebellious, separated ourselves from righteous living and caused ourselves to pursue evil rather than good. Naming our sins in confession is the way that God knows our heart and is the condition for working his divine healing of grace, mercy and forgiveness in our lives. Confession is how the darkness flows out of us into the Crucified One.

4. Renounce Personal Involvement

As Proverbs 28:13 says above, renouncing is integrally related to confession. After naming, admitting and expressing the sin, we need to reject and renounce it before turning from it in repentance. *“Renounce your sins by doing what is right.”*⁸

⁷ Proverbs 28:13, NIV

⁸ Daniel 4:27, NIV

Renouncing is not passive acquiescence. It is an active determination to give up the error of our ways and a declaration to refuse to participate in the wrong agreements of our mind again. It is an act of obedience to repudiate the destructive thoughts and behavior. Renouncing precedes repentance with an act of “will” that stands against the old way and it produces commitment that strengthens the effectiveness of turning from the wrongful ways.

5. Bind Sin to the Cross and Receive Forgiveness

Jesus died on the cross for our sins: *“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”*⁹

We can take our sins to the cross and bind them there: *“He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”*¹⁰

The good news is that Jesus has the authority to forgive, *“that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.”*¹¹ As we accept the forgiveness of Jesus, we need to allow that forgiveness to actually reach our hearts. For some Christians, receiving forgiveness is a real challenge, as we will see later.

6. Repent

Repentance is defined as turning toward God in all aspects of one's life. *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”*¹² Repentance requires a change that proves one's desire to be obedient to God. *“I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.”*¹³

9 Colossians 1:19-20, NIV
10 Colossians 2:13-14, NIV
11 Luke 5:24, NIV
12 Acts 3:19, NIV
13 Acts 26:20, NIV

Repentance requires action. With the change in heart comes the fruit of change – a new desire to be obedient to God's will and new behaviors. Change is never easy and change from the slavery of sin is even more difficult. As we move from the mind that is set on sin, where it is impossible to please God, to the mind that is set on what the Spirit desires, he will help, if we invite him into the process.

7. Experience the Freedom To Function From The True Self in Christ

What is the result of confession? **Freedom!** There is freedom to function from the **True Self in Christ** with less confusion and interference. Sin clouds our ability to know ourselves as God created us to be. The following list outlines some of the main sins that people encounter: pride, idolatry, sexual lust and fantasy to adultery and fornication, envy/jealousy, sinful anger, sloth/laziness, gluttony and greed. Dr. William Backus in his book, *What Your Counselor Never Told You*, offers further insights into these sins.

Week Three - Confession

Points for discussion

1. What is sin?
2. How do you deal with sin?
3. What is confession?
4. How do you confess?
5. To whom do you confess?
6. Is confession just words before God or is change required?

7. When does one confess: daily, weekly, annually, before communion?

8. How does pride block confession?

9. What are examples of what I need to confess?

Prayer of Confession

Dear Heavenly Father, Sovereign God, I come before you on bended knee as a sinner in need of mercy. I bring to you the sacrifice of a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

I humbly confess with my mouth that I have fallen short as follows:

a) I acknowledge, confess and take full responsibility for sinning against you and for transgressing your holy ways when I: _____

b) I renounce my participation and personal involvement in: _____

c) I bind this sin of _____ to the cross of Jesus Christ, and I now receive the forgiveness that only Jesus has authority to give on earth (Luke 5:24). Purify me now Lord from my unrighteousness. Set me free by your mercy and grace.

d) Lord, clean out this room of my mind and remove from me any further desire to sin. I now declare my willingness and commitment to follow your ways as follows:

e) Please take my pain away and give me the strength to follow through on this declaration. I choose to be obedient to your Word and I place my confidence in you. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Amen.

Week Four - Forgiveness

“Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant as I had on you?”¹

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”²

WHY SHOULD I BE THE ONE TO FORGIVE?

As Christians, we are commanded to forgive and yet we seem to have just as much difficulty forgiving as non-Christians. When I used to lead a Christian through Neil Anderson's Seven Steps to Freedom in Christ, I found that he/she would spend more time on the forgiveness step than on all the other six steps combined. How is this possible if we are new creations in Christ? The answer lies in our humanness. We feel pain just like any other person and it is the feeling of pain that leads us into unforgiveness.

HOW DOES UNFORGIVENESS WORK?

It begins when somebody offends you. The insult, the offense, or the wounding causes hurt and as a result, pain is felt. The incident may be something that breaks the law or not. In the case where a civil or criminal law is broken, the justice system provides a process where there is legal recourse. But often the offense is of a personal nature and there is no legal process for seeking justice. So we take things into our own hands. We say to ourselves, *“that person is causing me pain and yet he or she is not experiencing any pain. This is unfair. That person is getting away with something and I am going to make sure that he or she does not get away with it. I am going to make that person pay. And the pain I inflict will be repayment for the pain that was inflicted on me.”* So what may start out sounding like justice quickly transforms into revenge and

¹ Matthew 18:33, NIV

² Ephesians 4:32, NIV

causes the person who was originally affronted to become emotionally connected to the offender. This emotional enmeshment produces a variety of negative fruit ranging from resentment and anger, to bitterness, hate and even rage. I call this the path of revenge.

original offense

feeling of pain

desire to repay

path of revenge

the fruit of revenge

resentment
anger
bitterness
hate

One client I worked with explained how she had spoken words of forgiveness to her husband for an indiscretion he had committed against her. Yet a year later, she was still talking about how she was punishing him. I asked her what she was doing and she said, *"I am making him feel as much pain as he made me feel."* I asked her if that was forgiveness and when she reflected on it she realized that she had abandoned the forgiveness and was actually seeking revenge. You can see how the pain misled her into revenge.

The problem is that pain is a real feeling and it causes a person to want to strike back. We may have been told to turn the other cheek, but the natural response is to give back to the person what he/she has given to us.

WHERE DOES REVENGE FIT IN?

The Book of Romans offers insight into the Christian response to revenge: *“Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge. I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.’”*³

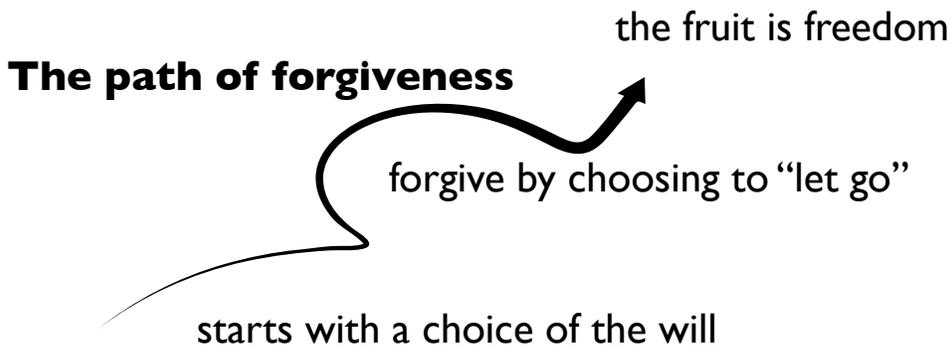
So, the Bible says that revenge is God’s job. In my experience the reason why we should not seek revenge is that we would not be fair. Our pain and emotions cloud our judgment and our responses would not be objective and probably not even reasonable. If we are to leave revenge to God, then what are we supposed to do?

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

The Greek word for forgive is *“aphiami”*, which means “to let go.” God’s direction for us is to let go of our anger and bitterness toward others. He has a better plan for us. That plan is the fruit of forgiveness, which is freedom and peace. He wants us to be emotionally free and the way to attain this freedom is through forgiving. Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is a *“choice of the will”* to overlook the pain and let go of one’s own efforts to make the other person pay. In my work I have consistently observed how the act of forgiveness allows the person to disconnect emotionally from his/her offender and the result of the forgiveness is often described as *“freeing”*.

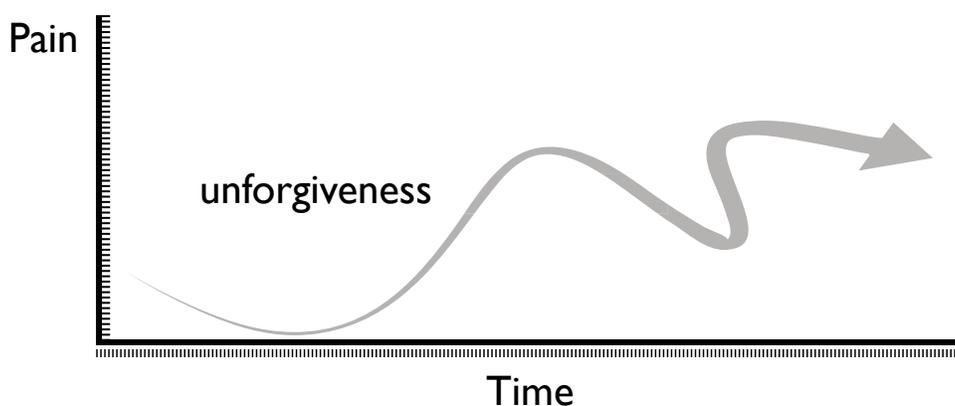
³ Romans 12:17-20, NIV

Jesus did not ask us to repay for our sins. He took what we deserved upon himself on the cross. Similarly, we can lay our judgment of others at the cross and allow the grace and mercy of Christ to flow into our lives so that we can choose to forgive others.

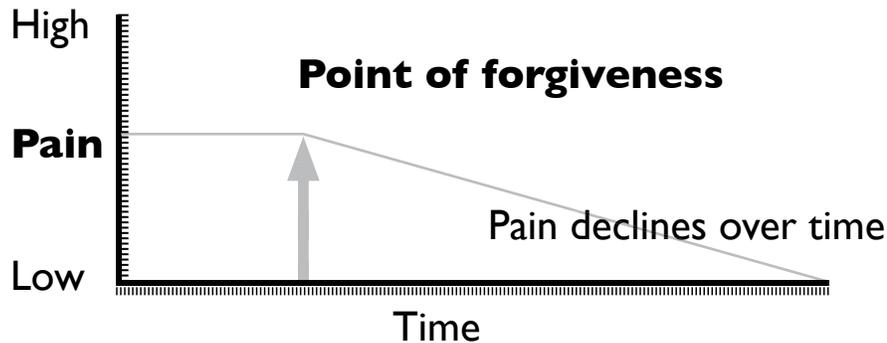


There is a spiritual principle here. You cannot be on the path of revenge and the path of forgiveness at the same time. God empowers us to seek the path of forgiveness by assuring us that he will take care of the path of revenge. The real problem in choosing forgiveness is coping with the pain that was caused by the offense. Often a person will forgive one day and then feel the pain the next day and return to the path of revenge.

That's what happened to the lady in the story above. The pain caused her to return to the desire to punish her husband. So the challenge of forgiveness is to choose to live with the consequences, (i.e., the pain caused by the other person's sin). The good news is that with forgiveness there is immediate emotional freedom. The challenging truth is that it takes time for the pain to lessen in intensity and eventually the pain will subside.

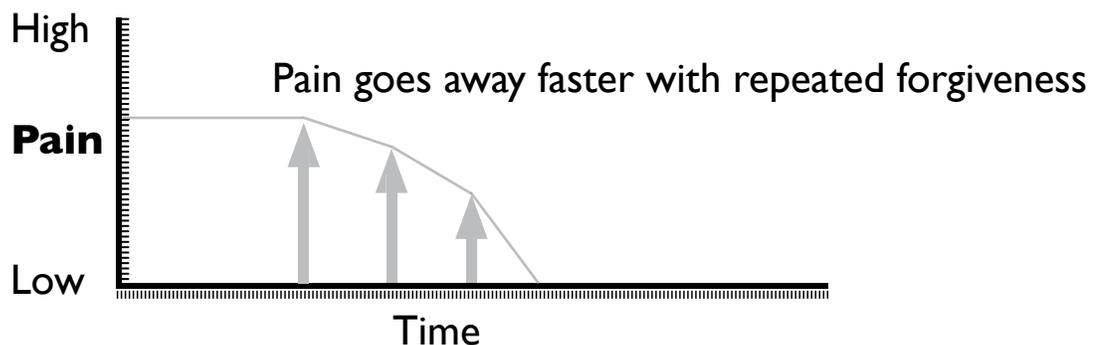


In the previous graphic, you can see that, if forgiveness is not offered, the pain will stay the same in intensity and maybe even increase over time. Conversely, once forgiveness is truly offered, the pain will begin to decline and over time the pain will diminish and eventually go away.



As you can see in the above graph, the turning point in the feeling of pain is when forgiveness is offered. However, just because you truly forgave does not mean that the event did not happen. The pain of the offense may take considerable time to go away. However, if you choose to repeat the forgiveness again the next day, there appears to be an acceleration in the speed with which the pain will go to zero. This observation helps explain why the Bible says, *“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”*⁴

If you forgive more than once, the benefit is that the pain will go away more quickly.



⁴ Matthew 18:21-22, NIV

So we are told that Christians are to be a forgiving people. Forgiveness is not something that is done once a year or once in a lifetime. It is an ongoing and active process that we are to practice daily. When a person cuts you off on the highway, what is your response? Do you raise your finger in anger or do you say, Bless you! You go first and have a good day! Jesus wants us to become habitual forgivers, whereby we make forgiveness a way of life. Most people do not have the problem of forgiving too quickly. I find that people hold onto unforgiveness for years and the result is constantly living with emotional turmoil.

The issue is seeing the difference between the negative fruit of unforgiveness, which is bondage and anger; and the positive fruit of forgiveness, which is freedom and peace. Then the question is asked, How do you want to live your life? Do you want to be angry all the time or do you want to be free? It is important to know that we can choose between the two.

CAN'T WE JUST FORGET THE MEMORY?

It would be nice if we could just forget a painful experience, but that is impossible because the mind records every memory, just like a computer. We can try to suppress the painful memory, but eventually it will come shooting up like a beach ball that is held under water. Usually, it will appear at the most inopportune time. On the other hand, can we learn from how God handles it? The psalmist says, *"He forgives all my sins ... as far as east is from west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."*⁵ With grace, mercy and compassion, God chooses to let go of the transgression and not hold it against us. In 1 Corinthians 13, it says that "[Love] keeps no record of wrongs." God does not forget, but instead chooses to offer mercy instead of punishment. It is a gift like the cancellation of a debt. Once the debt is forgiven, it does not need to be addressed again.

⁵ Psalm 103:3-12, NIV

Similarly, we can choose mercy over judgment and let go of the anger and the desire to seek revenge. We can set aside the commitment of the mind to repay the other person and instead offer love. It is a choice of the will, an active decision to not hold the offense and the pain against the offender.

Forgiveness is the opposite of forgetting. It is a conscious choice to cancel the debt and choose to hold the sin against the person no longer. The benefit of this choice is emotional healing and eventual elimination of the pain. Isn't it great that God knows how he designed us and wants us to learn from him how to be free?

WHO DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE?

The people who are most likely to hurt us are those with whom we spend the most time and who are closest to us. They simply have more opportunity to offend us. So when a person reflects on the past, parents are usually the first people who come to mind needing to be forgiven, by virtue of the fact that they have had more opportunity to cause pain. The siblings are the next closest people. As the circle extends out, others who may have caused pain are: friends, relatives, teachers, peers, boyfriends, girlfriends, spouses, bosses at work and lastly casual acquaintances.

To be free, we need to forgive every person who has hurt us or caused us pain. The spiritual principle is that God heals in a divine way through forgiveness and whenever we feel bitterness and anger towards a person, we need to forgive that person.

DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE THE PERSON FACE-TO-FACE?

Since forgiveness is a choice of will to let go of judgment, anger and the right to punish another person, you do not need to meet the person to forgive. In fact, you can choose to forgive a person who is deceased. How is this possible? Because the act of forgiveness is not between

that person and you, it is really between God and you. Are you going to choose to continue to sin and go against God's decree to forgive, or are you going to be obedient to God's will?

Often, one of my clients will choose to forgive a person in a counseling session and afterwards tell me that a big weight has been lifted and yet the offending person has not been present. In some cases, the other person may not even know that he/she offended you. So you can see that all the turmoil and anger is only in your own mind. To meet with that person would cause confusion when really the issue is how you think and how you choose to deal with the situation?

DO WE NEED TO BE FRIENDS WITH THOSE WE FORGIVE?

There are two issues here: the first is forgiveness and the second is boundaries. Often people are afraid to forgive because they do not want to have anything to do with that person again. They think that by forgiving, it means they have to befriend the person after the forgiveness. While God asks us to love others, we are also to use our intellect and wisdom to protect ourselves.

For example, if I have been sexually abused by a person, I need to go before God in prayer and choose to forgive the person, so that I can be emotionally free from that individual. That is also the only way that I can heal from the pain of the abuse. But in no way am I going to put myself at risk again by being in that person's presence, so that the abuse can be repeated. The later is called managing my boundaries. I need to protect myself so that I will not be hurt again.

So, forgiveness is important because that is how internal freedom and peace can be achieved. Good boundary management is also needed to ensure that the internal peace and freedom is maintained. Wisdom requires us to determine how to relate to an individual after forgiving and that does not

mean opening the door and freely welcoming the person into your life again. There may need to be some restrictions and confidence-building steps that must occur before trust can safely be offered again.

THE LAW OF SOWING AND REAPING

In the middle of the Garden of Eden, the Bible tells us there were two trees: the Tree Of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God wanted Adam and Eve to eat from the Tree of Life. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God's will by eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were not allowed to continue eating from the Tree of Life. *"After he drove the man out, he placed a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life."*⁶

It wasn't until Jesus came to earth and died for our sins that humanity had the ability to eat from the Tree of Life again. *"Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."*⁷

So, today we have the choice again as to which tree we will eat from. What is the difference between these two trees?

Tree of Life

Grace
Mercy
Forgiveness
Humility
Love
Life

Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil

Justice = good and fair
Judgment
Accusation
Pride
Punishment
Death

John Arnott in his booklet, *"What Christians Should Know About The Importance of Forgiveness"*, calls the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,

⁶ Genesis 3:24, NIV

⁷ Revelation 2:7, NIV

the tree of judgment. He says, In our pride and self-sufficiency, we think we have enough understanding and information to make fair and honest judgments in every situation. We instinctively judge much of the time and when we judge, we are usually negative, biased and unfair.

It may be true that justice is good and fair, but nobody ever went to heaven by justice. One goes to heaven by grace. When you choose to judge a person, you need to gather information, but James 2:13 says, *“Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*

The wisdom of the Bible tells us to turn away from judging. *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*⁸

This reference is to the law of sowing and reaping. What we sow, we will reap. If we judge, we will be judged. Similarly, if we accuse, we will be accused – and in like measure. When we accuse and blame others, we are acting out of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Jesus tells us to forgive and not accuse so that we will reap forgiveness. *“Forgive, and you will be forgiven..... For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*⁹

In other words, we have a choice. We can seek justice, judgment, accusation and live out of worldly pride, or we can seek grace, mercy and forgiveness and live in humility and love. Whichever we sow, we will reap. The possibility of partaking in the Tree of Life exists because Jesus offers us grace, mercy and forgiveness. His example leads us to the Tree and Life. The Tree of Life will give life to others as we bless and curse not, forgive and accuse not. So forgiveness is more than personal healing from pain and a way of achieving individual freedom. It is a decision about which tree we choose and how we want to sow and reap as we live in this world.

What is your choice? Do you choose the path of revenge or the path of forgiveness? Do you choose to live from the Tree of Life or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

⁸ Matthew 7:1-2, NIV

⁹ Luke 6:37-38, NIV

Week Four - Forgiveness

Points for discussion

1. How do you “feel” when somebody offends you or wrongs you?
2. When you repay another who offends you, what is it called?
3. Whose job is it to seek revenge?
4. What is the fruit of revenge/unforgiveness?
5. What is the fruit of forgiveness?
6. Is forgiveness a “choice of your will”?

7. Can you be on the path to revenge and forgiveness at the same time?

8. How do you forgive?

9. When do you forgive?

10. When you forgive, does that mean you forget?

11. What spiritual gifts precede forgiveness?

12. What is our motivation to forgive as Christians?

13. Do you want to be free now? It is your choice!

Prayer of Forgiveness

Lord Jesus, you have asked me to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Give me the grace, mercy and strength to forgive those who have hurt me.

Holy Spirit, please reveal to me now the names of all the people whom I need to forgive:.

For Each Individual

Lord, I choose now to forgive (person's name)_____

I place before me now a big, white cloth sheet and I put on it the following painful memories:

1. I forgive (name) _____
for _____

(describe in detail the painful offense or hurt that is inside of you, and then place it with all its pain on the sheet).

2. Repeat as many times as needed until all the painful memories and events are on the sheet.

When all the painful memories and events are on the sheet, pray:

Lord, I bundle up all these painful memories on the sheet into one big bundle and I ask that you would come now and take the bundle away. I do not want to hold onto them any longer, so I let them go and ask you to take them away now.

When the bundle is gone:

Lord, I also confess and renounce any remaining sin of judgment that I still harbour against (name)_____. I repent of that judgment and I bind it to the cross. I choose now to live out of the tree of life with grace, mercy and forgiveness.

I pray this in the name of my Savior, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Amen.

Note: Repeat this process for each person whom you need to forgive.

Week Five - Self-Forgiveness

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”¹

WHY CAN'T I SEEM TO FORGIVE MYSELF?

Mary had been in counseling and had received considerable healing through confession of sin, forgiving others and inner healing prayer. Yet, she reached a place where she was blocked and stuck. I introduced the possibility of the need for self-forgiveness and her response was, “No! Self-forgiveness is not an issue!” Mary really believed that she didn't have a problem forgiving herself. Yet when we talked further, the subject of abortion came up. It turned out that she had gone through an abortion and the guilt related to the abortion was so strong that she felt God would never forgive her. She knew God's forgiveness on a cognitive level, but when it came to the reality of daily living, the “feeling” of guilt related to the abortion was so overpowering that it inhibited her ability to receive the freedom that God wanted her to have.

While lack of self-forgiveness is not an issue with every individual, where it is an issue, it can be very significant. As you can see from this story, Mary was not even aware that it was a problem. What I have learned is that there is a direct relationship between the perceived enormity of the sin and the tendency within the individual to choose to withhold self-forgiveness. The greater the sin, the more difficult self-forgiveness becomes.

This principle applies both to forgiving others and forgiving ourselves. People seem to be able to cope with smaller sins, but some bigger sins can appear so great that forgiveness seems an impossibility. In the example above, the abortion was perceived as an unpardonable sin. God could forgive other people and other sins, but Mary thought her sin was

¹ Matthew 22:39, NIV

so immense that even God's love could not help. Initially, it appeared that self-forgiveness was not an important issue, but as it turned out, for this woman, self-forgiveness was the most significant aspect of the healing process.

WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO FORGIVE YOURSELF

[Forgive your neighbor as you forgive yourself.]

The second commandment of the New Testament tells us to love others as we would love ourselves. So the logical conclusion is that we are expected to love ourselves. Can that really be true? Haven't we all thought that loving one's self was called narcissism? Well, there is a big difference between narcissism and the Christian concept of love. Narcissism describes a person who holds an exaggerated sense of self-importance, whereas Christian love embraces: humility, acceptance, caring, forgiving, respecting and nurturing growth. Christian love for self is not about self-aggrandizement, but rather about valuing the truth of who God made us to be. It relates to self-esteem and healthy growth versus self-worship. Support for this is found in Philippians 4:8-9, where it says that we are to think about what is good about others and ourselves: *"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things."*

Once again we see that the battleground is for the mind. What we think about is critical to our self image. The thoughts we hold about ourselves are central to our mental health. Therefore, if a person's self image is distorted, that person's self esteem will be as well. So how does self-forgiveness fit into the picture? To help understand, try to imagine how a person feels when he or she thinks in the following way: *"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."*²

² Psalm 51:3-4, NIV

The truth is that, by Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross, God has removed all the believer's sin and he looks at it no more. The problem in Mary's case is that she doesn't believe the sin is gone because it is still in her mind. She can't get it out of the mind, because it is "*always before me.*" God is not the one dwelling on the transgression. As Mary ruminates and wallows in the sin, her mind is occupied and consumed with guilt and remorse. In essence, she doesn't really believe the following truth: "*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.*"³

The truth is that Jesus' death atones for the believer's sin. The Christian is forgiven. The problem is that the feelings of guilt, shame and remorse make the person feel "*unforgiven*". This feeling misleads the person into thinking that some punishment is needed in order to be free from the sin. We are so used to receiving consequences for our behaviour that grace and mercy seem beyond comprehension. But, if God loves us, and we are told he does, and if Jesus forgives us, and the Scripture tells us that he does, then who are we to stand against that truth. Yet many people do just that. They intervene in the process of receiving God's forgiveness and block the love they are meant to have by not forgiving themselves. In the Healing Presence, Leanne Payne calls it "*our failure to receive forgiveness from God.*"

TURNING FROM JESUS

In some ways, the solution offered by Jesus is too easy. The mind wants to complicate the matter. The truth is: "*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*"⁴ But, as human beings, we want to use our brains to make the subject more difficult than it needs to be. We look at the gracious gift of mercy and forgiveness that Jesus offers and

³ Romans 3:22-25, NIV

⁴ John 3:17, NIV

say, "But you don't get it Jesus. I am really bad, and I need to be punished. If you are not going to punish me, then I guess I will have to take over the job and punish myself."

In essence, this turning from Jesus is a function of pride. The individual looks at his/her sin and says, My sin is bigger than other people's sin and it is so big and bad that your death on the cross does not cover this one. So the person turns from Jesus and begins to deal with the sin in his/her own way.



Jesus



Person

This is described in Jeremiah 2:13: "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water. And have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."

Choosing to turn your back on Jesus and trying to deal with it on your own is described as "guilt" by David Benner and Robert Harvey in their book, *Choosing the Gift of Forgiveness*. They define "guilt" as follows: "Essentially a self-punitive strategy to attempt to atone for one's own sins."⁵ If a person does not believe that Jesus' death will atone for the sin, then one needs to find another way to be absolved or justified.

Our culture contributes to the problem. We learn at an early age that, if we make a mistake, we will be punished. There are consequences for wrong behaviour. In our legal system, we learn that if we break the law then we will be fined or sent to jail. The punishment must fit the crime. As responsible

⁵ Choosing The Gift Of Forgiveness by David Benner and Robert Harvey, p. 86

citizens, we must take responsibility for our actions. Also, our culture is performance oriented. We are expected to be independent, strong, take charge and solve our own problems. So our culture helps us to believe that we need to be punished if we do wrong and if Jesus is not going to punish us, then we need to take over and perform the punishment ourselves. This dynamic is what I call Satan's game because it is not logical that God would use guilt to remove our feelings of guilt. Condemnation is not God's way. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*⁶

The truth is that God is in the business of removing guilt. He wants us to be free. If that's true, then how are we so misled? One explanation is moral masochism. For some Christians, suffering is interpreted as spiritual maturity. If feeling badly about oneself is viewed as a mark of humility and spirituality, then focusing on one's guilt is a dependable means of achieving such a false spiritual goal.

Also, in our performance-oriented society, working harder and serving more is seen as a good thing. Value is conditional. We have learned from our parents, teachers and friends that acceptance and achievement are founded on what we do. Therefore, we intuitively believe that we must *"do something"* to make amends. This distorted activity of self-punishment is the fruit of false guilt and it only makes the person feel worse.

God does not require performance. He accepts us on the basis of what He did, not on the basis of what we are trying to do. God's forgiveness is free. Denying his forgiveness is a self-imposed punishment that is the opposite of what God wants for us. The following model shows how this unbelief and prideful self-justification works.

⁶ Romans 8:1, NIV

Guilt – Satan's Game (unbelief & pride)

Definition: choosing to atone for one's own sin through self-punishment



The process starts with a “*bad feeling*” that misleads the person into guilt. The feeling may be remorse or just a bad feeling as a result of what happened in the person’s life. Then the person turns from the forgiveness that Jesus is offering and begins to take charge of the process. The performance orientation causes the person to take action to self-justify.

The activity of guilt is described as atoning for one’s own sin through self-punishment. It starts with being aware of one’s own sin, fault or failure. This self-centred activity is inwardly directed as the self-talk becomes negative, critical and self-judging. The self-criticism flows into blaming and self-accusing, such as: *I can’t do anything right. I am so stupid. What an idiot. It’s my fault.*

The next step is shame and condemnation, as the person receives the words and absorbs the feelings of not being good enough. As the internal dialogue turns to self-anger and loathing, the person starts to sin against his/herself with punishing and hurtful words, such as: *"I am such a jerk. I hate myself. I am worth nothing."* The person at this point can even get into destructive behaviors that hurt the physical self.

As Satan leads the person downwards into the lies and negative thinking, the person's energy is stolen away and the person starts to feel tired and fatigued. The mind begins to become cloudy and confusion sets in along with the fatigue. At these lower stages of the process, the person feels useless and thoughts of hopelessness and helplessness emerge. *"I just can't do it. Nothing works. Why try? Nobody cares and I am all alone."* This thinking leads to discouragement and the darkness of depression.

For the more extreme cases, the thinking becomes suicidal. Spiritual death occurs and sometimes even physical death. Some people look at the above chart and say, That describes me! Others can identify with the top half and some say, All those things down to depression describe my life, but I am not suicidal.

As you can see, guilt is not a force for constructive change. More often than not, guilt immobilizes the person and keeps the focus on the pain rather than on the helpful change that is required. As Screwtape says in C.S Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*, *"Turn his shame into despair."*⁷

Judas is a good example of how guilt affects a person. After his betrayal of Jesus, Judas did not seek forgiveness from Jesus and he did not forgive himself. Instead he chose to exact the ultimate self-punishment. *"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood. What is*

⁷The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis, p. 149

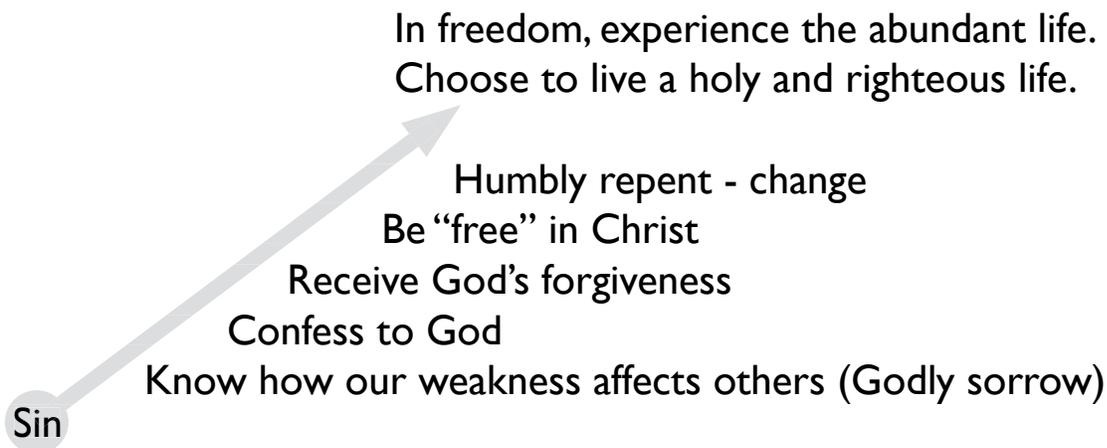
is that to us?' they replied. 'That's your responsibility.' So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself."⁸

In Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion Of The Christ*, you see Judas in torment wrestling with his thoughts. As Judas focused on what he had done, his worldly, self-centred sorrow led him in a downward spiral until he finally took his own life.

In contrast, Peter, after he denied Jesus three times, also felt sorrow. It says in Matthew 26:75: "Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: 'Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly."

When Jesus rose from the dead, he met with Peter and they talked. Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter three times confirmed his love for Jesus. In this way, Peter repented and Jesus forgave him. The two approaches to dealing with feeling bad are described in 2 Corinthians 7:10: "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."

God's desire for us is not punishment, it's repentance. The graph below explains how the Lord wants us to deal with the feeling of sin.



⁸ Matthew 27:3-5, NIV

God's plan is superior to Satan's game of guilt, because God's goal is to set us free. It sounds fantastic, but that is the truth. As outlined above, we are to know our sin and be convicted of its wrongness. But, we are not to turn inward and just focus on our own sin. Godly sorrow is "other" focused. We are to look outside of ourselves and see what effect our sin has had on other peoples' lives. As we grieve for others and grieve for how we have let God down, Jesus wants us to come to him the way Peter did. He wants us to bring that sin to him in confession so that he can deal with it.

When God has removed the sin as far away as east is from west, he wants us to dwell on it no more. He sets us free. It's the opposite of Satan's plan. Satan wants to keep us in bondage to the sin and in the process he steals our energy. God, on the other hand, wants to set us free and energize us so that we can overcome the sin.

In our freedom, God asks us to sin no more and to seek to change whatever was causing the sorrow in the first place. This freedom and repentance is what brings about the life of no regret and empowers us to be able to live the abundant life. Repentance is a love-motivated desire to change, which is rooted in concern for the offended person and in one's relationship with God.

THE KEY ISSUE

Often we know our sin, feel remorse, and even take it to God in confession. But instead of receiving his forgiveness, we stop there and move right back to Satan's game of guilt. After confession, many of us do not follow through with receiving the forgiveness that Jesus offers. When a person rejects God's forgiveness and moves to guilt, the person tends to end up in a place that is dark, lonely and disconnected from God. Some describe it as a prison. Some see it as a dark pit. Others describe it as a box. While each person's experience may be visually different, the feeling is the same – lonely, beaten down, dark and unable to hear from or relate to God.

The result of putting the burden on ourselves, instead of giving the burden to God, is self-imposed bondage. While we mentally create the prison and put ourselves into captivity, Satan helps keep us there by continuously replaying the destructive messages that God has already forgotten. Charles Stanley describes this process in his book, *The Gift Of Forgiveness*, Every time we say to ourselves: “*I know what the Bible says about forgiveness, but . . .*’ every time we include the *but [in the sentence]*, we put one more bar in our prison of guilt.”⁹

The alternative to guilt is grace. Guilt produces bondage, grace produces peace. Unforgiveness for self requires huge amounts of energy, as attention is diverted from the real issue of repentance to punishment. Grace frees a person to seek productive change. Guilt creates a debt where the only way to get out of the hole is to earn your way out with excessive compulsive behaviour, or as Judas did, seek to end the despair with death.

Once again, in Isaiah 61:3, we recognize the good news that Jesus came to set the captives free: “*He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God, 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 despair.*”

RECOGNIZING SELF-DIRECTED UNFORGIVENESS

There are three possible symptoms or characteristics to help us recognize this condition:

- 1) rigid, logical, dichotomous thinking,
- 2) numbness plus self-destructive behavior; and/or
- 3) feelings of self-disgust, self-hatred, and low self-esteem.

⁹The Gift of Forgiveness by Charles Stanley, p. 149

The first characteristic results in the person's story getting stuck in a collapsed, negative state. The rigid logic says that if you are not good, then you are bad. This inflexible dichotomous thinking blinds the person to other options. Inside the mind, it looks or feels like immovable walls. This type of rigid belief system makes it particularly difficult for the person to hear and know God's truth of forgiveness.

The second characteristic of "numbness" can be a response to the inner pain he/she is feeling. The lack of feelings results in the pain being expressed through self-destructive behavior rather than being communicated verbally. Self-inflicted pain is a sign that the individual has taken over the job of making him/herself pay for the sin.

The third indicator of unforgiveness towards self is a wallowing in feelings of shame, self-loathing and self-deprecation. These negative expressions of inferiority and low self-esteem indicate that the individual has not received the freedom that is God's divine gift through confession and forgiveness.

HOW TO HANDLE GUILT

1. Recognize the difference between Godly, other-oriented sorrow and worldly or self-centered sorrow.
2. Acknowledging the problem of unforgiveness of self
 - *confess the sin of pride that separates one from God's grace*
 - *acknowledge the bondage of self-punishment*
3. Renounce all efforts to atone for one's own sin
 - *give up all efforts of self-justification*
4. Repent of everything that separates you from God
 - *repent of the unbelief that caused the guilt*
 - *seek action that would please God*
5. By faith, choose to forgive one's self and accept God's forgiveness

Week Five - Self-Forgiveness

Points for discussion

1. What is lack of self-forgiveness?
2. How do you know if you have not forgiven yourself?
3. Who is doing the wounding?
4. What does lack of self-forgiveness foster?
5. Does God use guilt to motivate you?
6. Why should you forgive yourself?
7. What is your negative self-talk?
8. How do you forgive yourself?

Prayer of Self-Forgiveness

I proclaim my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

*I **confess** that I have not lived out of the freedom of the cross of Jesus Christ. Instead, I have allowed my pride to lead me into a belief that I could justify myself and atone for my own sins through works and self-punishment. As well, I confess that my feelings of guilt have led me into acts of self-criticism, self-hatred and self-condemnation.*

*Lord, I **renounce** my choice of trying to earn my forgiveness through works and performance. I want to be free from this self-imposed bondage today.*

*I **bind** my sin to the cross of Jesus Christ and I repent of all my efforts at self-justification. I choose to receive your forgiveness now.*

Holy Spirit, reveal to me now all the ways that I have not allowed the forgiveness of Jesus Christ to reach me. (Examples: self-criticism, self-anger, self-judgment, self-hatred, self accusation, self-belittlement, self-cursing, self punishment, self destruction and others.)

I place before me now a big, white cloth sheet and I put on it the following ways that I have hurt myself and come against myself:

*Lord, I **choose to forgive myself for:***

When everything is out of you and on the sheet, lift up the four corners and bundle it all in the sheet. Then, ask Jesus to come and take the bundle away.

I choose now to release myself from the prison of guilt that I created for myself. I now accept myself as forgiven.

Lord, please take away all the pain that I have brought upon myself, so that I may be free to love you and love others. I pray this in the precious name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Week Six - Mental Agreements

WEEK 6

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”¹

“For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”²

WHY ARE NEGATIVE MENTAL AGREEMENTS SO DAMAGING?

As we've mentioned several times throughout the book, the battleground is the mind and the words that we hold in our mind have power. Words of truth set us free and words that are against the knowledge and will of God hold us in captivity.

The subject of mental agreements leads us beyond the importance of words themselves to the commitment given to the words. Mental agreements engage the human will and declare an intensity of commitment. When a person says, I agree with . . . the person is making a choice and is taking a position related to the words in the statement. In the business world, an agreement is a contract that is duly executed and legally binding. Similarly, a mental agreement involves the making of a commitment that has the power to bind, either for good or evil. On the positive side, God asks for intensity of commitment when he says in Matthew 22:37, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”* He wants us to be totally committed to him and his truth - even legally bound to him for our own good. He knows the power of truth in our lives and he wants the best for us. On the other hand, God knows that if we commit and bind ourselves to thoughts, attitudes and actions that are against the knowledge of God, that there will be negative consequences.

¹ Matthew 6:9-10, NIV

² Matthew 12:37, NIV

Mental agreements are the way we, as human beings, choose to set our “will” for or against the will of God. Negative agreements are so damaging because they not only block our ability to know God, but also our ability to know our True Self In Christ. The blinding stubbornness of a mental agreement can keep us in bondage for years until finally we see the light of truth.

In the Lord's Prayer, we hear God directing us to do his will here on earth. He knows that a full commitment to what he wills is good for us. But as self-centered, fallen human beings, we have a tendency to focus our wills on our own desires and then we proceed to act out in our own strength. We actually make many more mental agreements than we realize and these mental agreements have power and consequences in our lives.

It is interesting to observe that agreements function with what seems to be a law and force of their own – (wrong mental agreements bring forth the power of darkness and bondage, and right mental agreements bring forth God's power and freedom). Just as words can have a spiritual power to set us free or hold us in captivity, mental agreements seem to have an even stronger power for good or evil.

The human will, which combines the spirit, the mind and the emotions, is free to bind itself to God and his truth or to bind to the wisdom of the world. The following examples explore different ways that we can use our minds to make negative mental agreements.

EXAMPLES OF UNHEALTHY MENTAL AGREEMENTS

Unhealthy mental agreements can include: vows, curses, covenants, spirit-ties, soul-ties, guardian lies, and generational curses. These mental agreements are present more often than we realize and can even be hidden to the person's perception. When mental agreements are consciously aligned with God's will, there is spiritual freedom. But when mental agreements protect attitudes, patterns of thinking and beliefs that

are against God's will, then strongholds are created that produce a spiritual vulnerability. Strongholds are defined in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 as, "*Arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.*"

Let's take a look at the different types of mental agreements:

Vow – A vow is a selection of a person's own internally generated words that the individual believes in strongly. As such, a vow can be positive or negative. An example of a positive vow is a "*marriage vow*" where a person commits to making a marriage work. You can hear the energy and resolve in this personal statement as the person says to him/herself, I agree with myself that I am going to do whatever is required to make this marriage successful. You can also hear Jesus applauding this commitment.

On the other hand, a negative vow is illustrated by the statement, I vow that I will never speak to that person again. This unloving attitude and firm commitment produces a mental "*stronghold*" that becomes a place for spirits of darkness to attach and help keep the enmity and hostility towards that person in place. In essence, the person in this case is saying to him/herself, I agree with myself that I will never speak to that person who is the focus of my negative emotion. When a self-created vow is functioning, the anger and the negative emotions contribute to the person not knowing their True Self In Christ and from even knowing God's will.

Curse – A curse is created when another person selects words and strongly speaks those words into one's life. The source of these words is external and the curse only has power if the individual accepts the words into his/her life and then comes into agreement with them. The harsh, evil and hurtful words of a curse can only land if the person accepts them. For example, if a man speaks a curse of sickness on a woman, the curse will only have power if the woman comes into agreement with the belief that she is going to become sick. Fear and worry are tools that Satan then uses to keep the focus on the curse and away from truth. A curse is like a lie. It is not true,

but if the person believes it and agrees with it, then the words have power and the spirits of darkness can use the words for destructive purposes. An example of a curse is, *"You are never going to amount to anything."*

Covenant – A covenant is a contract where two people or two sides come together in a binding agreement. The strength of a covenant is in the belief that it is unbreakable. For example, the covenant God made with his people is the unbreakable promise that if they believe in his son Jesus, they will be saved and receive eternal life in heaven. In the world, people covenant when they agree with each other to behave and think in a certain way. When two young boys cut their fingers and in a ceremony become blood brothers, they are making a covenant to think and behave like brothers. Another example is Freemasons who covenant to secrecy to protect their ceremonies, rituals and practices. In the covenant, both sides agree in words to be committed to a certain action or fulfill a certain promise.

Spirit-tie – A variation on the covenant is the informal mutual agreement between two people who intermingle their minds and spirits to the point where they share the same deception. When two people reach a unity of belief and the belief is coming from their unsundered souls, then a spirit-tie can be created. A spirit-tie is the result of a wrong agreement between two people, which usually appears to hold some benefit for each person involved. A spirit-tie can exist between a husband and wife when they mutually agree that one spouse has an unequal responsibility for meeting the other's needs. Co-dependency can result from both agreeing that one partner is the strong one and the other needs to depend on the partner instead of being an equal.

Christian prayer partners can create spirit-ties when they pray together out of mutually held negative agreements. An example is praying to have a minister removed from a church, as opposed to praying for God's will to be done in the situation. Friendship is good, but a spirit-tie involves the co-dependent state of two people sharing one misperception. God made each

individual unique, special and distinct. We were given minds to know God's will and discern truth. It says in I Thessalonians 5:20-22, "Test everything. Hold onto the good. Avoid every kind of evil." As we bind ourselves to the will of God, we can discern the subtle ways that spirit-tie agreements have infiltrated the mind.

Soul-tie – The most common way for a soul-tie to be created is when two consenting unmarried people agree to become involved in sexual intercourse with each other. Through this agreement to participate in sexual intimacy, which is not condoned by God's truth, a soul-tie is established. Where a spirit-tie is a verbal agreement to think, pray and share spirits together, a soul-tie requires personal action and deeper involvement. There are several other ways where an ungodly soul-tie can be created without both parties necessarily agreeing to the process. These include: sharing the same drug needle, sharing blood in ceremonies, rape and ritual abuse ceremonies where a person is taken close to death as part of a ceremony.

Guardian Lies – I have noticed that some clients are blocked from receiving the benefits of inner healing by an overriding mental agreement that can be called a guardian lie. Such a mental agreement is often general in nature and affects the person's thinking, so that the individual is unable to address the trauma that is deeply embedded in the person's mind. An example of a guardian lie is a self-agreement such as, "God will heal others but He will never heal me. Or, I will never get better."

For addictive individuals, the mental agreement can be, "I am going to fall again in a few days." The mental agreement is like an assumption that has been accepted so forcefully that the person believes it to be true without question. These types of mental agreements block out all truth and stop the inner healing process even before it begins. Such a guardian lie needs to be uncovered, renounced and broken, before inner healing work can proceed.

Generational Curses – Family characteristics and sinful behaviour, such as hurtful anger, unforgiveness, impatience and abuse, produce thought processes that are passed on from one generation to another. When families live together, the daily exposure of one unsundered person to another produces a thought pattern that is, in effect, a spirit agreement. One of the most powerful ways that people learn in life is to look at a model and copy it. These family experiences become thought processes and, similar to curses, cannot land unless the person gives them a home by coming into agreement with them. An example is a child experiencing emotional, mental or physical abuse and then accepting that this is normal. Another is a girl seeing her father abuse her mother and the little girl then comes into agreement with the thought that women are inferior. While the spirits of darkness may use these generational thought patterns as a stronghold, the problem is not the spirits of darkness. The problem is the mental agreement, which is not aligned with the will of God. It is the mental agreement that gives the spirits of darkness an opportunity to confuse the person and mask the knowledge of their True Self In Christ.

Summary – Mental agreements, whether agreeing with self or two people agreeing with each other, can either be bound to God's will or be bound to an unsundered mind and will. God's command is that our will on earth be aligned with his will in heaven. When Abraham heard God and believed, then he was in conformity with God's will in His every purpose, thought and action. To believe is more than just mental assent to the words of the Bible. It is a commitment that all your body, soul and spirit be in agreement with what you believe and do.

As Christians, we need to identify any wrong agreements so that we can renounce them, break them and surrender our wills to God's will. The renewal of the mind includes confession of sin, forgiveness, transforming lies with truth and coming into right agreement with God's beliefs, values, patterns of thinking and will. Believing the truth of the Word, agreeing with it

and committing to it with intensity is how a person appropriates the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

HOW TO KNOW GOD'S WILL

Even though Christians are justified by faith, often we live out of the results of "The Fall" rather than the victory of the Cross of Jesus. If the soul is not totally transformed by the renewing of the mind, and if all the rooms of the house have not been surrendered to Christ, then God's will may be difficult to know. Sin, unforgiveness, lies that have been accepted, wrong mental agreements, pride and negative mental attitudes can create confusion.

This is why it's so important to work through confession, forgiveness and self-forgiveness. Only then are we able to clear our minds so that we can hear the will of God. In addition, learning how to invite Jesus into our mental processes will help us be able to take thoughts captive to Jesus.

Other ways to know God's will include: being still, reading and contemplating Holy Scripture, praying and listening for God's leading, consulting with mature Christians and praying with members of the church who have the gift of discernment.

Week Six - Mental Agreements

Points for discussion

1. What is a mental agreement?
2. Are all mental agreements negative?
3. What are examples of mental agreements?
4. How does a vow work?
5. How does a curse work?
6. How does a covenant work?
7. Are all mental agreements spoken out loud?
8. What are some of my mental agreements?

Prayer of Renunciation

I proclaim my faith in Jesus Christ of Nazareth as my Lord and Savior.

Lord, I confess that I have held strongly to beliefs that are contrary to your truth. Forgive me for justifying my own thinking.

Lord, reveal to me all the ways that I have been blind, stubborn, rebellious or confused and where my mind has been unsundered to yours:

I renounce the belief, thought and attitude that I have held in my mind when I committed to agreeing with myself that:

I declare this mental agreement to be null and void now

I break the mental agreement and I no longer choose to live under its power and authority. I declare it to be broken now in the name of the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

I now commit myself to every thought, purpose and action that conforms with your will. Lord, reveal to me now - what is your new mental agreement to which you want me to commit.

I now replace the old mental agreement with your new truth. I submit to this new mental agreement so that I may be obedient to your leading and guiding truth. I pray this in the name of the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Amen.

Week Seven - Inviting Jesus Into Past Memories

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”.¹

HOW DOES INVITING JESUS INTO THE MIND HELP?

Mark was sexually abused as a child. Every time the memory came back into his mind, it felt like the attack was happening all over again. He relived the pain every time he remembered the event and he believed the words that were attached to the memory that it is happening now and that it was his fault. He lived with that memory until the day that he invited Jesus into the memory and Jesus said to him, *“It is over. That happened to you years ago and now you are free.”*

It was the transforming truth of Jesus Christ that released Mark from being stuck in the past. From a narrative perspective, inviting Jesus into his memory allowed for a co-authoring with Jesus, as the truth not only transforms the words that had been accepted, but also changes the emotional feeling in the memory. The pain is removed and the person is left with a feeling of peace. I call it *“The Prince of Peace factor.”* It's amazing how many clients, after hearing Jesus' truth, say that the feeling in the memory is now *“peaceful.”*

SALVATION AND SANCTIFICATION

Inviting Jesus into the heart is the step of salvation. Inviting Jesus into the mind is the process of transformation. When invited Jesus will come into the mind and reveal his truth. When asked to come, he is faithful and willing to heal both the emotional pain and the cognitive distortions of the mind.

¹ Romans 12:2, NIV

The good news is that healing from distortion truly is possible. Lies and their associated distorted interpretations can be changed because they are perceived realities. Inner Healing does not change facts, such as a lost job or a death in the family, but the truth of Jesus can transform the interpretation of the experience. What changes is the person's perception and interpretation in his/her mind.

Since the battleground is for the mind, the issue is whether all parts of the mind have been surrendered to Jesus' truth. Whenever a door of the mind is shut to Jesus, the possibility exists for a stronghold to be created that will only darken and deteriorate with time. We are told in Ephesians 6:12 that *"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood,"* it is a struggle between truth and lies.

Inviting Jesus into the mind helps us fight the struggle: *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."*²

HOW DOES THE MIND FUNCTION?

The mind works like a computer storing every memory since conception. In fact, more than 99 percent of all life's experiences are stored in the unconscious mind while we function mostly out of our recent experiences. However, a thought, interpretation or belief that is stored in the unconscious mind can be just as relevant and powerful as a recent thought.

A person may have become a new creation in Christ at age 30, but still have many rooms of the mind from before 30 that have never been surrendered to Jesus. While living a clean and pure life in the present

² John 17:15-17, NIV

creates new rooms of the mind that are healthy, any unsundered rooms of the past life remain in the mind as memories that can still hold hurt and pain.

SOME MEMORIES GET STUCK

Most memories are uneventful and they just exist in the mind, creating little impact or recall. A small number of memories, however, are truly significant in a person's life. That is why Dr. Phil in his book, *Self Matters*, asks the reader to explore:

1) "ten defining moments", 2) "seven critical choices", and 3) "five pivotal people".³ Identifying these defining moments then is a helpful tool used in the inner healing process.

What I have noticed in working with my clients is that certain key memories are visited, revisited and talked about, but often they are not dealt with or resolved. In some cases, the memory sits in the unconscious mind and is not even recognized as significant. Consequently, the memory continues to influence the person in ways that the person does not even realize.

What happens is that the memory of the experience is stored in the brain and the words that were accepted at the time and the related emotions are attached to the memory. The memory is recorded in the present tense, as if it is happening now, and the person's age in the memory stays the same as when the experience happened. So, the experience, the words and the emotions become stuck and remain unchanged, negatively affecting the person forever or until the memory is transformed.

³ *Self Matters* by Phillip C. McGraw, Ph.D., p. 90

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF JESUS' TRUTH

What is it that takes the sting out of the memory? It is the truth that Jesus brings that changes the feeling in the memory. The process is not hypnosis, guided imagery or mind control. It is the person using his/her own free will to ask for and listen to the truth that Jesus reveals as the person invites Jesus into the process.

When the truth is received and accepted, the pain departs and the person is set free. Often people will say, I am no longer little in the memory. Somehow I seem to have grown up. The block that was created when the memory became stuck is set free by the truth. The cognitive words are altered by the truth and the emotional attachment is released at the same time. Somehow the words and the feelings are intertwined. When the words change, the feelings change as well. It is this experience that is called the transformation of the mind.

JESUS HELPS FIND THE RIGHT MEMORY

Inviting Jesus into the process is helpful in getting back to the right painful memory, because He knows all about us. He knows our story since He has been with each of us from the beginning, from even before we invited him into our hearts. He created us. He is omniscient (infinite awareness) and omnipresent (present in all places at all times). So when one prays for Jesus to take a person back along the path of a bothersome feeling to the earliest memory, the Holy Spirit knows exactly where to go.

It is amazing how the Holy Spirit will bring the right memory forward, even if it does not seem to be a particularly meaningful recollection. There have been times with clients where a memory comes into their mind and I say to myself, *"There does not seem to be much pain in that memory or how can that memory be the source of the pain?"* But, Jesus knows the person.

In fact, this is a key point. A counselor or therapist may go on a fishing expedition looking for the trauma, and the right memory may come forward and be overlooked because it does not look bad enough. So the client and the counselor continue to search in vain looking for something that they think in their worldly wisdom is the cause of the problem.

It is important for the counselor to get out of the way and allow Jesus and the Holy Spirit to locate the right memory. Inviting Jesus to locate the right memory is one of the significant ways that Jesus helps in the process.

Let me give you an example. A client of mine was experiencing a persistent feeling of abandonment. When we prayed for the Holy Spirit to lead him back to the key memory, the client said, *"I am little. I am in bed in my dark bedroom looking out the slightly opened door at the light in the hall."*

Now, when you look at that story, it does not appear very traumatic. It would have been easy to pass that incident by and go looking for a more traumatic memory. But this was the significant memory for this person and the Holy Spirit knew it. What happened was that his parents did not tuck him into bed and he felt frightened and abandoned. He needed the assurance of his parent's touch at that time and they were not there for him because something else was going on in their lives. That memory became stuck inside him at that early age and he accepted the words: *I have been abandoned*. The feeling of pain was connected to the memory and whenever he felt abandoned in present situations, he would be flooded by the feelings from that memory of his childhood. The Holy Spirit helped bring that early memory forward and the client was able to invite Jesus into that specific memory and be set free.

JESUS HELPS IDENTIFY THE LIES AND HURTFUL WORDS

When the memory has been located, the person chooses, with his/her will, to invite Jesus into the memory. Every person is different. Some people are

visual. Some are auditory and others are kinesthetic. When Jesus is invited, visual people see him in the memory. Auditory people will only hear his words and kinesthetic people will feel a sense of his presence. There is no right or wrong way. Since this process is not guided imagery, it is not important how Jesus reveals his truth. The key is that his truth is healing.

When Jesus has been invited into the memory, the next important step is to identify the exact words that the person accepted in the memory because these words are the key to the wounding.

When you pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal the precise words that were accepted in the memory, Jesus helps by bringing the words to the person's mind. These lies, their destructive conclusions and bothersome words are the key to the transforming experience.

It's important to know which words are connected to the memory first before praying for truth. For example, if you just pray for truth without knowing the hurtful words, the person may well hear truth, but it may not set him/her free, because it does not relate to the specific words that were embedded in the hurtful memory. So, accurately identifying the negative words is the first step and Jesus helps by bringing back to the person's mind all the words attached to the memory.

JESUS BRINGS THE HEALING TRUTH

The ***Distorted Self*** story is often formulated out of the lies embedded in early memories that have been stored and forgotten. The process of sanctification is inviting Jesus into these rooms of the mind, where old memories hold the lies that help create the dominant negative story.

When Jesus is invited into these old memories, the lies that have covered over the **True Self In Christ** are removed when his truth is revealed. It

is the truth Jesus brings into the mind that sets the person free. It may be the same truth that a pastor, counselor or friend tried to communicate to the person with no effect. The difference is that Jesus' truth is internal to the mind.

Furthermore, Jesus' presence is helpful because he brings the exact truth for the lie or lies that have been embedded in the memory. Once the lie or negative words have been identified, the prayer is for Jesus to reveal the truth that will offset those words. Since the destructive words are specific, the truth needs to be specific and Jesus knows which words are right for that person and that situation in the memory.

Let me give you an example. A woman was living with the belief that she was worthless. Jesus brought words that said she was his creation and that he did not make junk. He told her that she was precious in his eyes and that he loved her. This truth was the precise message that she needed to hear to banish the lie that she was worthless. It may seem like it is just words, but that, in fact, is the point. It's the positive, healing words of our creator that have power. He is the healer and he heals with the right truth for the person's specific situation.

So you can see that Jesus is not only helpful in the process, He is the key to transforming the mind. When invited Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit, finds the right memory, identifies the precise negative words attached to the memory and brings the exact truth that is needed to set the person free. Praise God that we have such an intimate, caring and loving redeemer.

Week Seven - Inviting Jesus Into Past Memories

WEEK 7

Points for discussion

1. How are memories stored in the mind?
2. Can past memories have a negative affect in current life? If yes, why?
3. Do you need to go back to the pain for the memory to be healed?
4. How do you get to a past memory that is painful?
5. If Jesus is the healer, how does he get into the memory to heal it?
6. How does Jesus come into the memory? How do you know he is there?

7. How does healing in the memory happen?

8. How do you know when a memory has been healed?

9. What happens when there is still a negative feeling in the memory?

10. What happens when there are still problems after successful inner healing?

11. Can other people tell you the healing truth (does it have to be Jesus)?

12. How do I know the truth is from Jesus and not just my own thinking?

Inner Healing Prayer Process

Step 1 Identify the “feeling” that is bothering you (fear, anger, anxiety, sadness etc)

Step 2 Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you back to the first memory that holds that feeling.

Dear Jesus, I pray that the Holy Spirit will follow the feeling of “.....” back in my life to the first and original memory that holds this feeling. Please bring into my mind the memory that I need to deal with now.

Step 3 Choose as an act of your will to invite Jesus into the memory.

Dear Jesus, I invite you to come into this specific memory where.....

Step 4 Identify the lie(s)/ negative words that are embedded in this memory or theme of memories.

Dear Jesus, I pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal to me now all the negative words that are connected to this memory. Bring those words to my mind now.

Step 5 Write down all the negative words.

Step 6 Pray for Jesus to reveal his truth related to those negative words.

Dear Jesus, I pray that the Holy Spirit now reveal to me your truth related to these negative words. What truth do you want me to know that relates to those specific words?

Step 7 Write down all the words of truth that you receive.

Step 8 Accept those words and Jesus' healing love.

Step 9. Go back now to the original memory and check to see if the memory has changed.

Step 10. If the original feeling is gone – thank God – you are done.

If there is still some negative feeling, continue with the following process:

Dear Jesus, I pray that the Holy Spirit will now reveal to me the linked memory that is still holding some of this feeling“ _____

_____”

When the linked memory comes forward, repeat the process from Step 3.

Step 11. When the negative feeling has gone to zero, thank God.

Dear Jesus, I thank you for transforming my mind and taking away this pain and negative feeling. I commit to living out of your truth now. I pray this in the name of the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Amen.

Week Eight - Inviting Jesus Into Current Thoughts

And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

– 2 Cor. 10:5

They will call on my name and I will answer them.

– Zech. 13:9

Come Lord Jesus

– Rev. 22:20

Inner healing work involves inviting the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth into our past memories to bring healing to the pain and emotional trauma that is stuck there. As the Holy Spirit brings truth to re-interpret the lies and negative mental agreements, destructive feelings are released and we feel peace and freedom. While going back to the source and origin of a problem is necessary to heal **the past** experiences, there is an equally important process of inviting Jesus into our **present thoughts**. Transformation is an on-going process. Renewing the mind of past sin, unforgiveness, lies and mental agreements is needed to heal the past, but there is the equally important task of dealing with our present sins, unforgiveness, lies, mental agreements and ways that we choose to not forgive ourselves.

This week focuses on the amazing opportunity that we have as Christians to partner with Christ in the present. Inviting the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth into our thoughts and minds on a daily basis is the key to living a life of victory. To do this, we need to understand how to “*Take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 10:5)

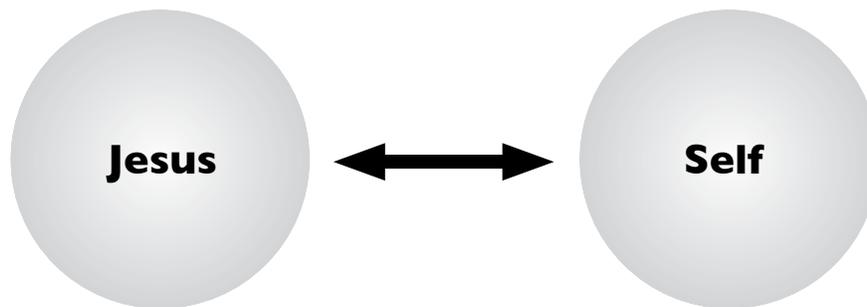
The Secular Model for Victorious Living

In the secular world, “self help” is the paradigm for personal growth. The

“self help” industry is based on the belief that the only person who is around all the time to observe and experience everything an individual does is his/her own “self.” As a result, all the responsibility for growth and personal success is loaded onto the individual’s shoulders alone.

The Christian Model for Victorious Living

In the Christian worldview, the individual is not alone. There is someone else who is also present with the individual in every step of his/her life and that is Jesus Christ. As an omniscient and omnipresent God, who loves each one of us, Christ is walking with every one of us as we journey through life. It is this presence of Christ that makes the concept of a partnership with Jesus possible. As it says in Hebrews 13:5, “*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.*” Jesus is our partner for life.



However, the presence of Jesus does not mean that he automatically takes care of us. There is the important principle of our free will. While he knows everything about us, he respects us too much to interfere in our lives unless we request it. As we saw in the salvation experience, he stands at the door and knocks and waits for us to invite him into our house. In the transformation process, Jesus waits to be invited into our past memories, and when the request comes, he wastes no time in being there to help us. Similarly, in our daily living, Jesus waits to be called into our thought processes as an act of our free will. He wants to help us, and he watches over us. When we finally invite him into our current thoughts, he comes to help there as well. So, the two important elements that are needed in partnering daily with Jesus are: 1) our “will,” and 2) our “*choice to invite him into the thoughts in our minds.*”

The Three Components of The Partnership For Life

To have a fruitful life, there are three components that are all needed for success :

- 1) a positive self-esteem and strong self-confidence
- 2) a well directed focus with good time management
- 3) an unencumbered commitment to delivering the desired goal

If we do not have self-confidence, we will not even start. Procrastination, indecision and inertia will stop the process before it even begins. The next component involves moving in the right direction. We need to be clear about where we are going or the time and effort will be wasted. However, even with good self-confidence and a well thought out plan, if we de-commit along the way, there is no performance.

A victorious life needs follow-through on the commitment for there to be results.

I. How To Partner With Christ For High Self-Confidence

In every person's life, we have two cups that hold words and thoughts. In one cup, we place negative words, the criticisms we hear and all of our negative interpretations. Let's call this the negative cup. In the second cup, the positive cup, we hold all the helpful inputs that we hear, think and experience.



negative cup



positive cup



Countering The Lies and Negative Input

One of the ways to stop the build up of hurtful thoughts in the negative cup is to check with our partner, Jesus, about the truth of the thought. When a negative thought is encountered, we can invite Jesus into the place in our minds where the negative thought is held and ask, “*The True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, is that true?*” Two things can happen. Either it is not true or it is true.

In the case where the negative statement is not true, we can ask Jesus to provide further clarity by bringing us his truth. When we hear the truth that Christ wants us to receive in our minds, we can place this truth into the positive cup. The result is twofold. First, no new damaging material goes into the negative cup. Second, something good is now available to be put into the positive cup. Already the feeling inside starts to change as the balance shifts from negative to positive.

In the case where the negative statement is true, we can ask Jesus, “*If it’s true Lord, what do I need to know?*” (a) If the negative statement is revealed to be a sin, we can confess the sin to God and ask Jesus for help in knowing how to repent. (b) If there is no sin involved, we can still ask Jesus what change would be helpful to eliminate similar future negative inputs. When repentance or change occurs, either way, we are addressing what needs to be changed and new positive behavior is introduced.

Previously, without using Jesus in this way, we would probably have lived with the guilt of the sin and put all the self-punishing thoughts into our negative cup. Little would have gone into the positive cup. As we stop sinning and start doing what God wants, guilt falls away, less is put into the negative cup and now the repenting produces something that can be put into our positive cup. In this way the negative cup can be capped, eliminating a buildup of negative thoughts and our positive cup can be filled until it is full.



With Jesus as a partner, we can invite the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth into our thoughts to confirm truth, dismiss lies and invalid negative thoughts, and we can eliminate sin where it exists. As we develop this active daily dialogue with Christ, we have the ability to manage our negative and positive cups. The beneficial result will be a growing and strengthening self-esteem and self-confidence.

2. How to Partner With Christ For Good Focus and Time Management

The elements of being well directed include: values, vision, mission, goals, priorities, strategies, plans, tactics and time management. The self-help industry teaches us that the “self” is responsible for managing each one of these activities. In the secular world that is true because God is not in the self-help paradigm. The more effective the self is in planning each of these functions, theoretically, the more successful the person will be. As a result, the world’s approach is all about the “will” of the self, which fosters comparrogance and doing everything in one’s own strength.

A partnership with Christ offers a different dynamic. Here, the “*will of God*” is introduced into the decision making process. Instead of being alone in the decision, we can involve the will of our partner for life, the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and verify if our will is compatible with God’s will. The benefit of aligning our human will with God’s will is that God’s desire is that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We can then proceed knowing that we are working out of obedience to God. It is far easier to function out of obedience than to have all the weight on our own shoulders.

Warning: God does not want us to be involved with the fallen angel called divination. Divination is the practice that seeks **to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge** by the interpretation of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers. Jesus wants us to have a personal relationship with him and only him. He clearly states that he does not want us to be involved with any form of idolatry or any other supernatural powers. So, we **need to be extra careful in this process of checking with Jesus that it is the True Lord Jesus Christ to whom we are consulting.** If the answer that you hear seems strange, check again with the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth who was born in the flesh and who died on the cross. God wants us to live in the present not in the past or future. So, the checking is for a daily verification that we are in God’s will, as opposed to a long-term forecast, which God normally does not provide.

As we use Jesus Christ as our daily partner for checking on what direction to go and how to use our available time, decisions become easier. Procrastination and indecision are reduced and we have less personal pressure because we are proceeding with confidence that springs from being obedient to God.

3. How To Partner With Christ For Delivering The Desired Goal

The third component of partnering with Christ for victorious living is delivering results on time. The problem that many of us experience is the issue of decommitment. We decommit somewhere along the way and the job does not get done. Even with high self-confidence and clearly functioning in God's will, we do not always follow through on the activity as planned. It may be fear, fatigue, distractions, diversions or any number of blockages, but the result is the same – an uncompleted goal or task. So, the issue is one of commitment. How can we stay committed until the job or task is finished? Once again, partnering with the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth is the solution. Whenever we go to decommit, we need invite Jesus into the process and ask him if he wants us to stop or keep going until completion.

For example, if you want to take Friday afternoon off, invite Jesus into the decision and ask him if he wants you to stay with the task or take a rest. In some cases, he will communicate the need to complete the task first before resting and at other times he will say – take a rest and pick this up on Monday. Listen for the wisdom that Jesus has in the situation.

Once again, the benefit of this process is knowing God's will in the situation. If the communication is to not decommit, then there is a new drive and energy that will help you complete the task. If the communication is to rest, then you can rest without guilt. Either way there is more freedom to proceed in the indicated direction.

When we partner with Jesus and find extra energy to complete the task, there is now more material to put into our positive cups. This good news helps build up our positive cups and as a result our self-esteem and self-confidence continues to grow. This process re-inforces our **True Self In Christ** stories and causes a growing strength and ability to influence the future in a positive way.

Success = higher confidence

Active Daily Relationship With Christ

In summary, the principle of inviting the True Lord Jesus Christ into past memories for healing and transformation can equally be applied to the present. As we invite Jesus into our present thoughts, there is a greater chance for victory. A number of people are using this technique to overcome their addictions. When the first thought of desire or temptation comes into their minds, they invite Jesus to come into that place in the mind where the thought resides and they state their will that they do not want this thought, or desire to be there. They ask Jesus to take it away and then ask Jesus to replace it with the truth that Jesus wants them to have. This process is active and immediate. It is also a function of the person's will. As he/she invites Jesus into the thought to take it captive, Jesus comes and helps the person live in truth. Obedience to that truth is then the key to victorious living. *"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:32).

Week Eight - Inviting Jesus Into Current Thoughts

Points for discussion

1. What is the difference between a memory and a thought?
2. Can you invite Jesus into a current thought the same way that you invite Him into a memory?
3. How do you actually invite Jesus into a thought?
4. What might block you from hearing his truth?
5. What does it mean that the battle is for your mind?
6. What is the first piece of spiritual armour in Ephesians?

Prayer For Inviting Jesus Into Current Thoughts

Dear Jesus, I invite you into the place in my mind where I am thinking the following thought: (Describe the specific thought or feeling)

Lord Jesus, what is your truth that you want me to hear that relates to the above thought? (Listen for the specific truth that Jesus wants you to know that relates to the specific thought or feeling).

Lord, I commit to be obedient to your truth now. (Obey this truth now and it will be your armour)

*I pray this in the name of the **True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth.***

Amen.

Week Nine - Accepting My True Self In Christ

“The soul, with its new center in Christ, radically changed and redirected, is to be accepted. Until this redeemed self is acknowledged and accepted, we live out of the immature, unaffirmed self, and we cannot hear God aright.”¹

“When I express my true reality in a non-judgmental, non-punishing, non-manipulative way, and I am accepted, then it means that the real I, the precious wounded but maturing Person inside, is accepted. This sense of being accepted affects almost everything in a positive way.”²

“What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”³

WHY DOES IT MATTER THAT I ACCEPT MYSELF?

When Amanda came to see me for counseling, she described herself as, a piece of garbage. She felt useless, disposable, redundant and worthless. The picture she held of herself was so low that she saw herself at the bottom of the heap. She did not value herself because all the words she had heard about herself created the impression that she was a thing to get rid of, not a precious creation of God. She didn't believe that she was *“fearfully and wonderfully made.”⁴*

If God accepts us unconditionally, however, even though we have sinned, then why is it that we have so much trouble accepting ourselves? One answer is our sin. Because we see and know our own sin, it blocks us from seeing ourselves the way Jesus sees us. *“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.”⁵*

¹ The Healing Presence by Leanne Payne, p. 54

² Compelled To Control by Keith Miller, p. 169

³ Romans 11:15, NIV

⁴ Psalm 139:14, NIV

⁵ Psalm 51:3, NIV

Jesus' perspective is different. He sees us as holy and righteous because he has taken our sin from us: *"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."* ⁶

Jesus accepts us as holy and blameless in his sight because the sin has been removed, as Andy Comiskey says in his book, Living Waters Program, "One greater bears our shame and dishonor; one greater heals and restores wounded hearts in a way that grants us a fresh opportunity to accept one's true self.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT YOUR TRUE SELF IN CHRIST?

Accepting our True Self in Christ is difficult because we have been living in the darkness with the old story of the ***Distorted Self*** for a long time. We have experienced our own sin and because of the feeling of pain, we choose to function out of guilt and self-criticism.

But there is a second reason why this opportunity to accept our ***True Self*** is difficult and that relates to the words and actions of others. We have watched how people treated us and we have listened to people around us use negative and destructive words that we have come to believe and accept.

Our brains have recorded and stored the memories, including our own sin, and other people's words. Unless transformed, those memories and words don't just go away. Even if one memory is transformed, the interpretation of the incident may not change the bigger story that has been accepted over time.

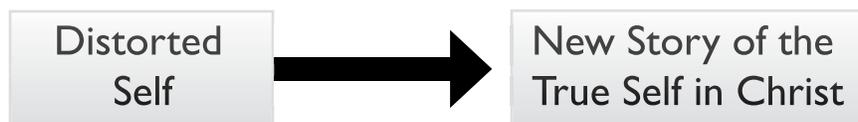
Since God did not give us an owners manual with a clear description of our ***True Self in Christ***, we have created and lived with a story that

⁶ Colossians 1:13, NIV

we have accepted that is often based on lies, the confusion of our sin and the world's distorted and false messages that we have accepted as reality.

STRENGTHENING THE “TRUE SELF IN CHRIST” STORY

This part of the healing process involves the important principles of Narrative Therapy where the new story needs developing.



The transition from the ***Distorted Self*** to the ***True Self In Christ*** story involves the removal of the lies and false messages that have misled us for so long. Helpful steps include: confession, forgiveness, self-forgiveness and the truth of Jesus discovered through the inner healing process. But once the truth has been uncovered, there remains the important steps of self-acceptance and acceptance of the new story. The story of the ***True Self In Christ***, which has been covered up and lost in the distorted story, needs to be accepted so that one can function out of the new reality as a wonderful creation of God.

OVERCOMING UNBELIEF

In Webster's Dictionary, we find that the word “*accept*” is given the following meaning: “*to recognize as true: believe.*” So acceptance means that one must believe the truth.

The first issue is that unbelief keeps a person from receiving God's forgiveness. People hear and read that God's grace is all-sufficient and that they should tear up the IOUs and lay them at the cross. However, the old distorted story is so strong that it has an ability to overpower the truth. **While God's forgiveness is assured, it must be appropriated.**

Similar to the repentance and guilt discussion in the previous chapter, before self-acceptance can be meaningful, the individual must believe that forgiveness really applies to him/her.

Grace is a most difficult concept for someone who believes in justice. At the end of the play *Les Miserables*, the police officer, who had been unmercifully chasing Jean Valjean, was unable to receive mercy for himself and chose to take his own life. He could not receive mercy for himself. *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*⁷

This principle applies to us as well. If we believe the gift of Jesus' mercy applies to us, then we can be merciful towards ourselves and we will receive mercy. But, we must accept the gift. Helping people move from unbelief to belief regarding God's grace, mercy and forgiveness is crucial to experiencing self-acceptance.

The second issue of unbelief is that the story of the True Self In Christ feels unbelievable. If a lie has lived in a person for a lifetime, the lie can seem more real than the truth. If you accept the lies that make you feel bad, then you will live in a state of low self-esteem, because what you accept about yourself defines whom you are.

As Virginia Satir says in her book, *The New People Making*, *“If I do not like myself, I devalue and punish myself. I meet life from a position of fear and impotence, creating a state in which I feel victimized and act accordingly. I punish myself and others blindly. I become interchangeably subservient and tyrannical.”*⁸

If the words we hold within us produce such powerful results, as described above by Virginia Satir, then it is critical that we know and retain the words that reflect the truth of whom we really are.

Christ-Centered inner healing is very helpful in reinterpreting the lies with the truth that is revealed by the Holy Spirit. However, the truths that heal the

⁷ Matthew 5:7

⁸ *The New People Making* by Virginia Satir, p. 31

past wounds are not a complete picture in themselves. We need to work at clarifying and expanding the story of the True Self by listening further to God and by re-authoring the story with audiences that are trustworthy and encouraging. As Leanne Payne says, *“Healing prayer is not the “instant fix,” nor the bypassing of slow and steady growth. It is that which clears the path and makes such progress possible.”*⁹

As we look at ourselves through the eyes of Jesus, we are able to see the gifts, talents, strengths and competencies of this wonderful child that God has created. The slow and steady progress, referred to by Leanne Payne, is made possible by the healing that clears the mind and enables the individual to see and comprehend the True Self In Christ.

Too much of the Christian movement comes out of the coaching/sports mind set that emphasizes: encouragement, exhortation, admonition and the keeping of promises. Such an approach focuses on *“better techniques”* to fix things or deal with shortcomings, which often increases the shame and guilt. As Andy Comiskey said in Appendix # 9 of the Living Waters material, *“Gordon Dalbey, who wrote Healing the Masculine Soul, followed the lead of Leanne Payne in believing that healing the male soul must precede exhortation. It is through healing prayer that God heals men and allows them to receive and act on exhortation.”*

It makes sense that, for men and women, healing precedes a clear understanding of the True Self In Christ. Freedom from sin, freedom from lies, freedom from guilt and freedom from self-punishment enable a person to see the truth of self more clearly, which paves the way for self-acceptance and accepting the new story.

The subject of acceptance brings to the forefront the distinctive difference of the Christian experience. When an individual knows and feels the unconditional acceptance of Christ in his/her life, it is much easier to accept him/herself. *“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you.”*¹⁰

⁹The Healing Presence by Leanne Payne, p. 63

¹⁰ Romans 1:5-7, NIV

This is not the secular self-help concept of accepting yourself, but rather the belief inspired by the Holy Spirit that brings with it the blessing of belonging as a child of God, who is free, redeemed, forgiven and without condemnation. *“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”*¹¹

ACCEPTING SELF

This program has discussed in length the Distorted Negative Self, but distortion can go in two directions. A person can have a negative distorted Self or a positive distorted self, both being equally removed from the True Self In Christ. William T. Kirwan describes this in his book, *Biblical Concepts for Christian Counselling*, when he talks about the Idealized Self and the Rejected Self.



Just as a person can accept a Self that is based on rejection, negative comments, fear and terrible life experiences, a person can also

¹¹ Romans 4:7-8, NIV

unrealistically establish a concept of false self that is based in pride, overdriving ambition, perfectionism and goals that are beyond reach.

The delusion and fantasy of the Idealized Self creates disillusionment and anger as the person is unable to achieve the perfection desired in the ideal. Society places pressures on us to live up to the idealized image and then, we pour our energies into trying to actualize and maintain the false idealized Self.

Christians are not immune to the development of a false Idealized Self, because the church has a tendency to view righteousness as a matter of ritual, rules and regulations. The Pharisees gained spiritual status by living up to the ideal of fulfilling every detail of the law.

On the other hand, Jesus stressed the spirit and the heart rather than the letter of the law, and the real self rather than the idealized self. As Kirwan says, *“Jesus in effect told the Pharisees that God will never accept us on the basis of our struggle to achieve the idealized image, since that struggle necessarily involves false pride, alienation from self and God, and hypocrisy.”*¹²

Paul struggled with this as a Pharisee: *“If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: in regard to the law, [I was] a Pharisee; as for legalistic righteousness, [I was] faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him.”*¹³ Paul was a classic striver who was living according to the law, but after his conversion, he realized that his true self was found in Christ.

Similarly, Leanne Payne talks about this when she says, *“In accepting myself in him, I am no longer trapped in the mode of trying to win my own righteousness.”*¹⁴

¹² Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling by William T. Kirwan, p. 182-183

¹³ Philippians 3:4-9, NIV

¹⁴ The Healing Presence by Leanne Payne, p. 54

In this amazing condition of Christ's acceptance, the individual is set free to see the truth of whom God made him/her to be. The big question is, OK, so if the Idealized Self is not the true me and the Distorted Negative Self is not the true me, then, how do I get to know my True Self In Christ?

KNOWING AND ACCEPTING THE TRUE SELF IN CHRIST

In essence, the process of knowing and accepting the True Self In Christ is asking Jesus for the truth, listening to Jesus' truth and accepting his truth. As we take our thoughts captive by inviting Jesus into past memories and current thoughts and ask him to reveal truth to us, he will answer. The Spirit of truth that has been given to us will guide us into all truth. This process is spiritually based as our spirit and mind come together to discern truth. In addition, we have the Holy Scripture to guide us and we have mature Christians with whom we can consult.

We are not alone in this journey. Christ is with us and so are members of his church. But once we have learned the truth, we need to accept it and apply it in our lives. *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice."*¹⁵

Earlier we learned that acceptance means *"to recognize as true and believe."* When a lie is displaced with truth, we need to accept the truth by believing it.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, it goes a step further when the Bible says, make the thought *"obedient to Christ."* Obey means *"to conform or comply with and follow the command or guidance."* Obedience means *"willing to obey"*. So here we see that our will is involved as we no longer conform to the world, but listen to God's transforming truth and allow ourselves to be guided by it.

¹⁵ Philippians 4:8-9, NIV

When a person hears that he/she is not a failure, but a precious child of God, the next step is to receive that truth and live out of what that means.

WHAT DOES A TRUE SELF IN CHRIST STORY LOOK LIKE?

A True Self In Christ story will sound and feel: real, honest, safe, loving and comfortable. The truth is that we really like who God made us to be and when we connect with that truth, it feels good.

In one person's story, when success stories were analyzed, there was a consistent theme of being a good listener. Now being a good listener is not exactly the macho characteristic that men like to hold up as a major attribute. Yet, this ability of listening helped this person succeed in situation after situation. It helped the person learn and understand other people and their situations, which in turn created opportunities for success. As the person reflected on the skill of listening, as part of his True Self In Christ, it felt good. It was true. As a result of becoming consciously aware of this characteristic, the person chose to make a career change, leaving the business world to go back to school to become a therapist. And what is one of the main qualities of a therapist? The ability to listen! This person thrived as a therapist because the new career utilized the core skill. It felt more comfortable to empathize and care for people than compete and fight for market share and bottom line earnings. Life became more congruent as the person lived with the knowledge that he was a good listener. Now he could say, *"I can be myself and that is OK."*

ACCEPTING AND DEVELOPING THE NEW STORY

As truth is revealed and received, the next step is to incorporate the information in the life narrative as the new story is accepted. What does the truth mean and what will that truth allow you to do? These are key questions as you start to apply the truth to your life. If I am worthy, then

I become free to live life without fear of judgment. If I am accepted by Jesus, then I don't need to organize my life around trying to impress people to gain their acceptance. The purpose of acknowledging and accepting the **True Self in Christ** story is helpful because it allows the individual to consciously function out of the True Self instead of remaining in bondage to the old lies and false images.

Week Nine -Accepting My True Self In Christ

Points for discussion

1. How does a person get to know him/her self?
2. How are words involved in the concept of self?
3. How does the false self become created?
4. Can a false self seem and feel real?
5. Is your True Self in Christ different from your false self?
6. What are examples of what the True Self would sound like?

7. How do you learn about your True Self In Christ?

8. Does your True Self In Christ feel better than the false self?

9. How do you manage the words that come your way?

10. How do you accept the words of your True Self In Christ?

Prayer of Self-Acceptance

I proclaim my faith in the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth

I confess that I have looked at myself through the distorted eyes of my sin, my unforgiveness, and the lies and false messages that I have come to believe about myself. Lord, I have also trapped myself in my incorrect feeling that I need to win acceptance and earn my righteousness.

I renounce these lies and feelings. I choose now to see myself through the eyes of Jesus Christ and His salvation.

Holy spirit, I invite you to reveal to me now how Jesus sees me. Communicate to me now about my True Self In Christ, so that I may understand who I am as a creation of God. Help me to know my True Self In Christ "full well". Psalm 139:14

Lord I choose to accept myself now as:

Lord, thank you for offering yourself as a sacrifice, so that I may be free to know who I really am. With your forgiving love and acceptance, I choose to accept myself as worthy and special. I release myself from my self-judgment and I claim the above truths about myself. I pray that I may bring glory to you by living out of the truth and reality of my True Self In Christ.

I pray this in the name of the one who is truth – the True Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Amen.

Week Ten - Developing My True Self In Christ Story

“Each remembered event constitutes a story, which together with our other stories constitutes a life narrative, and, experientially speaking, our life narrative is our life.”¹

HOW IMPORTANT IS A PERSON'S STORY?

Narrative Therapists have come to learn that words are important. Positive words have positive power and negative words have negative power. When a person listens to and accepts the negative words that make up a negative story, the individual experiences painful and destructive emotions and feelings. Conversely, when a person listens to and accepts positive words and truthful words, the story takes on a completely different tone and feeling. Christ-Centered Inner Healing is one of the ways of shifting from the negative words of the Old Story to the positive new words of the New Story.

The New Words Need To Be Accepted

Finding the new words is only the beginning of the process. Once the new words have been identified, they need to be embraced, accepted and made part of the New Story.

The more the person talks about his/her story, the stronger the story becomes. With repetition, the story feels more real until the story becomes the person.

THE POWER OF AUDIENCE

In his book, *On Being A Client*, David Howe noted that all therapies and counseling styles involve “talk” because dialogue is the “*stuff of relationships.*”³ Dialogue needs a speaker and a listener, which points out an important principle. Every story needs an audience. A story does not

¹ Narrative Therapy by Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, p. 32

³ On Being A Client by David Howe, p. 3

exist in a vacuum. A novel needs a reader. A movie needs people sitting in the theatre. And every person's story needs an audience.

Part of the job of a friend, prayer partner or small group member is to be the person who listens to and hears the new story that the person is authoring. If the old story was strong and resilient, that is because it had been told often and in many different ways. If the new story is to become strong, it also needs to be told to many varied audiences.

Churches understand this when they ask new Christians to stand at the front and share their testimony of when and how they invited Jesus into their lives. The congregation is the audience and the person's faith is stronger for having told the story.

Similarly, when a person is creating a New Story based on Jesus' Truth, the story needs to find a variety of ways of being expressed so that it can grow in strength and power. Here are some ways of helping the New Story grow:

Other modes of expression include:

- 1) *God as audience through prayer,*
- 2) *Diary as audience, as a person writes about the meaning of the new story,*
- 3) *Spouse/partner as audience, as the good news is shared,*
- 4) *Fellowship groups as audience, as changes in one's life are communicated,*
- 5) *Counselor as audience, as the person explains how the changes are affecting his/her life,*
- 6) *Trusted mentor or favorite grandmother or aunt as audience, to extend the circle of communication.*
- 7) *Life story scrap book as audience with photos, poems, positive memories recorded and drawings picturing the New Story.*

In the beginning, the New Story is fragile and the audience needs to be safe and trustworthy. To develop a New Story, it is best to start slowly by locating safe people who will favourably receive the New Words and listen with encouragement and support. Friends in a small fellowship

group are an ideal audience because they are not only available, but they are there for each other with love and prayer support.

For some people, when the new words are heard, the truth is received and the acceptance is instant. The lie disappears, the truth is received and the person's story starts to change immediately. These people often say, I was in bondage but now I am free.

On the other hand, some people hear the truth and the old lies seem so real and believable that they have trouble receiving the truth. For these people, the choice between living with the new words of truth versus the old words is a dilemma. The new words don't feel comfortable and it is easier to just return to the Old Story. That's why the new words need to be expressed and reaffirmed by a supportive audience. As the person takes ownership of authoring and expressing the new story, the emerging narrative becomes a viable alternative to the words that previously dominated his/her life.

As Christians, we have the unique opportunity to co-author our life story with God. We can turn to Jesus as a loving friend and invite him to confirm truth for us. Since we are His creation, He knows our True Self. We can turn to Him and invite Him into the process and He will help. He is ready and willing to reveal truth so that we can be the best that we can be. We can check our story with him and find out if it is accurate. He knows us better than any human being on earth. As it says in Psalm 139:3-4: *"You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely."*

Then, we need to find a caring audience to express this New Story. I really encourage each of you take advantage of the unique opportunity you have in your small group to tell your New Story and find the words to share what the new story means to you. Talk about how these new words are changing your life and what your New Story is allowing you to do.

Week Ten -Developing My True Self In Christ Story

Points for discussion

1. How does a story get created?
2. Who creates your story?
3. Before you heard the truth, what was the title of your Old Story?
4. What is the title of your New Story that you and Christ are developing?
5. Every story needs an audience. Who will be audiences for your New Story?

11. What chapters will now be part of your New Story?

12. Write on paper your New Story starting with your new title.

13. Take turns sharing whatever part of your New Story is safe to tell. Then, pray for each other's New Story as loving friends.

14. How does your New Story feel to you?

This 10 week program is designed for individuals in small groups to work through a process of personal transformation and inner healing. The step-by-step process is progressive as rooms of the mind are cleansed and the individual becomes freer to know and understand his/her own True Self in Christ.



Romans 12:2 “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

**INTRODUCTION • ROOMS OF THE MIND
CONFESSION • FORGIVENESS
SELF-FORGIVENESS • MENTAL AGREEMENTS
INVITING JESUS INTO PAST MEMORIES
INVITING JESUS INTO CURRENT THOUGHTS
ACCEPTING MY TRUE SELF IN CHRIST
DEVELOPING MY TRUE SELF IN CHRIST STORY**



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