

MyFreedom

growth***track***

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This book belongs to: _____

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BAYSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Bayside Community Church exists to help people:

KNOW _____

FIND _____

LIVE IN _____

DISCOVER _____

The Goal of MyFreedom

The goal of **MyFreedom** is to help you hear from God in a new way and learn how to live in the Freedom He has for you.

WHAT IS FREEDOM?

True freedom is not the absence of some “thing,” but the presence of some “one.”

Who is this some “one” you ask? This someone is the _____.

On this journey to freedom, you will have a guide; His name is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will speak to you and help you learn, grow, and understand how to get rid of some “things.” During this process, you will get to know the only “One” who can bring you to the place of true freedom.

In order to allow God to guide us into and through our freedom journey, we need to ask ourselves these questions:

- **Are there “things” keeping me from what God has for me?**
- **Are there “things” in my life that I have a hard time breaking away from?**
- **Are there “things” that are not healed inside of me?**
- **Are there “things” that I believe, but are not true?**
- **Are there “things” that I seemed to inherit from someone else?**
- **Are there “things” outside my control that influence my life?**

We can all relate to one of these things, maybe even all of them. Through our Freedom journey, we are going to uncover how these “things” have impacted the way we live, think, and love those around us.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is Freedom.”
- 2 Corinthians 3:17 (emphasis added)

WHY DO WE NEED FREEDOM?

Sin causes _____

Shame can be the result of heart blockages—we will learn more about these in week five—such as attitudes of pride, fear, unbelief, rejection, bitterness and trauma. These heart blockages can make it hard for us to hear God when He’s speaking to us.

Unfortunately, these heart blockages can also lead to even more shame as a result of engaging in lust, racism, addiction, codependency, workaholism, greed, materialism, and more. However, we can remove these blockages with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus gave His life to set us free. It is God’s _____ for us to be free.

Jesus came to restore us to God, our true self, each other, and all of creation so that we can live in this freedom.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” - John 8:36

Who Needs Freedom?

Everyone has sinned, so everyone needs _____

Because of sin, we are separated from God; as a result, we experience hurt and pain. God designed us to live in freedom, and He wants to bring this freedom to every area of our lives.

**YOU CAN'T
EXPERIENCE FREEDOM
FROM SIN WITHOUT
THE PRESENCE OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT.**

WHO IS FREEDOM?

The Friend Will Come

John 16: 4-16 (MSG)

4-7 “I didn’t tell you this earlier because I was with you every day. But now I am on my way to the One who sent me. Not one of you has asked, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, the longer I’ve talked, the sadder you’ve become. So let me say it again, this truth: It’s better for you that I leave. If I don’t leave, the Friend won’t come. But if I go, I’ll send him to you.

8-11 “When he comes, he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He’ll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted.

12-15 “I still have many things to tell you, but you can’t handle them now. But when the Friend comes, the Spirit of the Truth, he will take you by the hand and guide you into all the truth there is. [Emphasis added] He won’t draw attention to himself, but will make sense out of what is about to happen and, indeed, out of all that I have done and said. He will honor me; he will take from me and deliver it to you. Everything the Father has is also mine. That is why I’ve said, ‘He takes from me and delivers to you.’

16 “In a day or so you’re not going to see me, but then in another day or so you will see me.”

Z
O
H
M
S

How Do We Find Freedom?

Freedom is not the absence of something but the presence of someone.

Find Freedom: God is always _____ and speaking all the time.

This makes freedom available all day, every day.

Know Freedom: We understand freedom by _____ to God’s voice.

Hearing God’s Voice: Condemnation vs. Conviction

“So now there isn’t any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

- Romans 8:1-2 (CEB)

Both point to our separation and sin.

Condemnation is a lie from the enemy telling you that you will never be good enough.

Conviction is the Holy Spirit teaching you how you missed the mark yet also preparing your heart to receive His grace.

What Happens When We Are Free?

The church operates in love when it lives in _____ and is free from sin and death.

We no longer see one another as strangers but as neighbors, sisters and brothers, realizing each person is made in the _____ of God.

STRUCTURE OF FREEDOM

MyFreedom is a small group followed by a day of special services. We believe this format is important because:

- Life change happens in the context of relationships:
- This **MyFreedom** Experience will help you hear from God.
- You will be given the opportunity to spend quality time with God.

Three parts of the MyFreedom experience

Part 1: God's Story of Freedom Weeks 1-3

God's story of freedom never changes

- Group 1: Creation - What was God's original design for all of creation?
- Group 2: Choice - Why isn't our world perfect?
- Group 3: Christ - How is Jesus the solution?

Part 2: My Journey of Freedom Weeks 4-6

My journey of freedom never stops

- Group 4: My Identity - Who am I?
- Group 5: Heart Blockages - What gets in my way of connecting with God and reflecting His image?
- Group 6: Following Jesus - How do I live out my daily life from a place of freedom?

Part 3: MyFreedom Weekend

- Group 7: **MyFreedom** follow-up.

MyFreedom Date + Info:

**BEFORE YOU
MEET WITH YOUR
SMALL GROUP,**

**PLEASE READ
WEEK 1: CREATION**

OUR GUIDE TO FREEDOM

The Holy Spirit will be your guide on your journey of freedom.

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

- **In Jesus, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

*“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”
- Ephesians 1:13-14 (ESV)*

“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. 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.” - 2 Corinthians 1:21-22

- **The Holy Spirit speaks to you to make known the will of God.**

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” - John 16:13-15

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” - Romans 8:26-27

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” - Romans 8:14-16

MY FREEDOM OVERVIEW

The Purpose of the My Freedom Experience:

For all people to experience the freedom that comes from being in the daily presence of God.

The Purpose of the My Freedom Small Group/Devotional:

To experience God’s story of freedom and how it connects to your own journey of freedom, while listening to God’s voice and allowing yourself to be guided by that Voice.

The Purpose of the Freedom Weekend:

To experience the culmination of the My Freedom Experience with a powerful day filled with time in which you will have the chance to address specific topics with the help of the Holy Spirit.

PARTS OF THE STORY

- **Two Parts, One Story:**

The My Freedom Experience is made up of two separate parts; however, together these parts form one story. The first part is God’s Story of Freedom, and the second part is My Freedom. These two stories are joined together by one central event: The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- **God’s Story of Freedom:**

God’s story of freedom will never change. It is made up of three parts: God’s original design for creation, what went wrong, and how Jesus is the solution to the problem. This story applies to every single person.

- **My Journey of Freedom:**

Your journey of freedom begins when you are presented with the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. When you experience the work that Jesus did on the Cross, you have a decision to make: follow Christ and practice His ways, or reject Him. The purpose of My Journey of Freedom is for you to grow increasingly closer and more dependent on God, and less dependent on the things of this world.

Your journey begins by responding to Jesus’ invitation. You will then explore the things that get in the way of your freedom. Thankfully Jesus already cleared the way for you to be free. All you have to do is trust in the completed work of Christ, make space to hear what God is saying to you, and allow yourself to see things the way God sees them.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS AND BIG IDEAS

God's Story of Freedom

Essential Question

Big Idea

Week 1: Creation

What was God's original design for all of creation?

God's intended design for all of creation was perfection; we were designed to live in this perfect state of creation

Week 2: Choice

Why isn't our world perfect?

God shows us where everything went wrong and why.

Week 3: Christ

How is Jesus the solution?

God's love—through the person and work of Jesus Christ—sets us free from all the problems that came into the world as a result of The Choice.

Point of Transition: This is the transition from God's Story of Freedom to My Journey of Freedom.

My Journey of Freedom

Essential Question

Big Idea

Week 4: My Identity

Who am I?

Because of what Jesus accomplished, I am _____(this), so I do _____(that).

Week 5: Heart Blockages

What gets in my way of connecting with God and reflecting His image?

There are six primary areas in my life that can block me from connecting with God.

Week 6: Following Jesus

How do I live out my daily life from a place of freedom?

Resting in the finished work of Jesus in my daily life allows me to live in freedom.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This devotional is designed to help you build and develop your relationship with God. The primary way to build any relationship is through communication. So, the goal behind the entire Freedom Experience is to help you be able to hear God's voice and communicate with Him in new ways. Every week at the beginning of your small group time, you will have a video to watch along with interactive notes.

Left Page:

Scripture

As you read each day's daily Bible verse here in this devotional, we encourage you to also pick up an actual Bible, find the day's verse, and then read the entire chapter where the verse is found. This will increase your familiarity with Scripture and give you context to what is happening in the passage.

Essential Question

Every day will have its own essential question giving you direction about what you will be reading and exploring that day.

For Your Consideration

The consideration portion is an exploration into our faith as Christ followers. By raising an essential question, we hope you will be intrigued to investigate what the Bible says about that question.

Right Page:

Action

We believe that information on its own does not transform a person. True transformation comes from God. When we explore His Word and apply it to our lives, we begin to transform little by little each day to be more like Him. Each day this devotional's "Action" will lead you to a particular Scripture with questions to ask the Holy Spirit about the verse or the day's essential idea.

Reflection

When God speaks, it is our responsibility to respond; it is often helpful to do so in writing and reflection. The "Reflection" section is designed to help you process what the Holy Spirit just said to you. This is a powerful place to build your relationship with God.

Reaction

"Reaction" is the last piece of your daily devotional. This is the piece that takes the idea you just learned and helps you apply it to your life. Each day you will be given a practical way to apply what you just heard the Holy Spirit speaking to you.

Declaration

Some days will also have a declaration of freedom to stand on for that week.

CONNECTING WITH GOD

This devotional is designed to help you connect with your Father in heaven. As you explore these ideas over the next few weeks, the Holy Spirit will be your guide on your journey of freedom. Look at what Jesus says to His disciples about the Holy Spirit:

“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” - John 14:26

The Holy Spirit reflects the life and person of Jesus, reminding us of the will of God. He not only does that, but He also lives in us!

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.” - John 14:16-17

In the first My Freedom session, the video mentions our ability to hear God’s voice. Perhaps you don’t know if you have ever heard God’s voice before. That is okay! Over the next few weeks, you will have the opportunity to have the Holy Spirit lovingly guide you closer to God.

Before you jump into the devotional content, take a moment to ask God to bless these next few weeks. Ask God specifically to speak to you clearly and in a way in which you know you are hearing His voice. God wants to be in intimate relationship with His children.

Questions with the Holy Spirit

Take a few minutes to ask the Holy Spirit these questions. Don’t stress if you don’t hear anything; just relax and have fun.

1: Who am I to You?

2: What do You love about me?

3: What in me brings You joy?

4: If You could show me anything right now, what would it be and why?

WEEK ONE

CREATION

*That the creation itself
will be set **FREE** from its
bondage to corruption and
obtain the **FREEDOM** of the
glory of the children
of God.*

-Romans 8:21 ESV (emphasis added)

INTRODUCTION

The Essential Question: What was God's original design for all of creation?

The Big Idea: God's intended design for all of creation was perfection; we were designed to live in this perfect state of creation.

THIS WEEK

In order to truly understand this journey to freedom, we must step back to the very beginning. This week's study is all about God's original design for creation, and we are part of that creation. To grasp the magnitude of who we are, this week we will be focusing on these questions:

Day 1: Who is God?

Day 2: How do we reflect God's attributes?

Day 3: How does God reveal Himself to us?

Day 4: How did God design me for relationship with Him?

Day 5: How can I connect and hear from God?

Why is this important

To walk in our journey of freedom, we must know who God is and how He made us. In this first week, we will walk through the characteristics of God as we study Scripture, observe what it says, and apply it to our lives. Knowing who God is should be the first step in our freedom journey as we let go of possible wrong ideas that we have about God and create a foundation established in truth and love instead. Knowing who God is helps us to build a Christ-centered worldview and then live our life according to that worldview.

As Christians, we are part of the kingdom of God and must learn how to live in this kingdom. We live in a society where many consider truth to be relative. Rather than look for truth, we accept the lie that we may never know the answers to the essential questions. However, believing this will not make the questions go away. Instead, this week we will lay the foundation for the freedom that God desires for every single person. We will do this by revealing our Creator's vital characteristics, examining who God truly is, and understanding why this information is important for followers of Jesus to know.

Day 1: God Is

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” - Genesis 1:1-3

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who is God?

For Your Consideration

The first four words in the Bible are “In the beginning God...” These words might raise questions such as: Who is this God? Where did God come from? Today, we’ll focus on the fourth word in the Bible: God. We will examine three unique characteristics of God, begin to process how we can build a relationship with Him, and find our freedom by being in His presence.

God Is Self-Existing

God lives in the infinite. He existed before the beginning and exists outside of creation and outside of time and space. In 2 Peter 3:8 (DRA) we read, “...One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” God doesn’t look at time the way we limit it. If He lives outside of everything we know, then what sustains Him? Based on Genesis 1, the answer is still uncertain. However, when we take into account the entirety of Scripture, we know that God needs nothing to be sustained other than Himself. God is not dependent on any part of His creation for existence or character. God is completely self-contained and self-existing. He is the Father of all creation.

God is Equal but Different

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the three distinct parts of the Trinity. These three separate persons have unique descriptions and characteristics throughout Scripture, yet they are all identified as God. This is the first clue in the mystery of the Trinity: three separate persons, yet all equal and in perfect relationship with one another. No person can fully explain the Trinity, though many scholars have theorized and hypothesized to explore this mysterious truth. The Trinity reveals the revelation that God is much bigger and higher than we can grasp. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts’” (Isaiah 55:8-9). There is only one true God, but in the unity of the Godhead, there are three coeternal and coequal Persons which make up the Triune God. They are the same in essence but distinct in function.

God is the Source

It’s one thing to be a resource, and it’s another to be the Source. God is not a resource we use in times of need. He is the Source of all creation. He was never created and will never be destroyed because He lives outside of all creation. Yet when He spoke, things came into existence from nothing. So, how does God have the power to create like this? God is the Source of everything we know. We can experience His great power every day.

Action

The God-head is made up of the three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In your own words define the roles of...

The Father:

The Son:

The Spirit:

Reflection

Read John 1:1-17. Trace the triangle and label the three points: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Think about the word Trinity (i.e. tri = three; unity = oneness) and how God has existed fully together through all of time.

We think of Jesus as the baby in the manger. How does understanding Jesus as being part of this Trinity, and even existing before the foundation of the world, change your perspective of Jesus?



Reaction

Why it is important for me to know God as the Trinity and for me to be in relationship with Him? In my daily life, how can I make the Holy Spirit my main source of wisdom and be empowered by Him to walk in freedom daily?

Day 2: God's Attributes

"Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you." - Jeremiah 32:17 (ESV)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do we reflect God's attributes?

For Your Consideration

God is unlike any relationship we have ever experienced. Today, we will focus on the different attributes that only God has.

God's Crowning Achievement

Ephesians 3:20-21 reminds us that God is more than we can hope or imagine. His attributes are unmatched by anything we understand or even know. God is...

- All-Present—Everywhere all the time
- All-Knowing—All mysteries and knowledge are His
- All-Powerful—Everything is under His control
- Changeless—Never changes His character, purpose, or essence
- Ageless—Lives outside time, was never born, and will never die
- Holy—Perfect, pure and good
- Loving—The Source of all love
- Truthful—His perfection makes all His words true

Living Mirrors

God designed a pristine creation as a home for His crowning achievement, humanity. In fact, humanity was to live connected with and reflecting God by living life in this perfect state as if they were living mirrors. YOU are this crowning achievement! You were intended to live in this perfect state, in the presence of God.

In John 16, Jesus explains that the Holy Spirit will guide us in all truth and reveal to us who God is. Because of who God is, we remember these truths and live as mirrors of hope to those around us.

Because God is all-present... I'm never alone.
Because God is all-knowing... God understands me.
Because God is all-powerful... Nothing is too difficult for Him.
Because God is changeless... We can trust God.
Because God is ageless... He gives me hope.
Because God is holy... He is always good.
Because God is truthful... I don't have to hide.
Because God is kind... I can be kind to others.

Because God is hospitable... I can welcome others.
Because God made me in His image... I am able to see God's image in others.
Because God is loving... I am loved and can love others.

Action

Open up your Bible and read Galatians 5:22-23. When we have the Holy Spirit in our lives, we reflect what the Bible calls Fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. Are there any of these "God attributes" that you can identify feeling during a moment, season, or experience in your life? Write down that example.

Reaction

Out of all the attributes of God that you just read about, which one do you find yourself struggling to accept? Give an example of why or when you began to struggle with that one identifiable attribute.

Reflection

How can I make God my source of everything today? When I look into the mirror, what and who do I see? How can I reflect God's attributes today with the help of the Holy Spirit in my life?

Day 3: God Speaks

“God said....” - Genesis 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,26

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does God reveal Himself to us?

For Your Consideration

Yesterday, we were introduced to the attributes of God. You might have asked: How can I know this mysterious God? One way God makes Himself known is through speaking. Open your Bible to John 1:1-17. Prior to reading, think about this fact: Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was even present back in Genesis at the time of creation. Amazing! This mysterious God reveals who He is through the use of speech.

Speech Creates Reality

Reality gives context to relationship. When God spoke, He constructed the reality that we would be created to live in a perfect world. God built this world out of nothing to give us a place to connect with Him. In the same way that parents prepare a room for their child to be born into, God prepared for us a perfect creation filled with bright light, pristine water, blue skies, a variety of plants, sea creatures, birds and animals, and diversity in humanity. This diverse and perfect creation revealed that God is a God of infinite beauty and perfection. From wherever you are today, can you see something beautiful around you?

Speech Creates Relationship

All of this was created for God’s glory and for humanity to enjoy and tend. Creation is the beautiful, wonderful, and expansive picture of who God is. God is totally self-existent; He didn’t need to create humanity because He was lonely. God created us for relationship and to create beauty. God shows us that communication is the primary way to build relationship with Him and with others. We use speech in exchanges of love and intimacy with God and one another as a form of connection. This connection all begins when we are in relationship with our Creator as we slow down to be in His presence.

Speech is a Powerful tool

We have a primary language based upon where we are from and it is influenced by our dialects, cultures, and environments. Did what we hear growing up line up with God’s truth? What do we fill ourselves with on a daily basis? Does it produce life or shame? God offers us another alternative, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will GUIDE you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will SPEAK only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13; emphasis added). When God speaks, He creates. When God speaks, He brings life. When God speaks, He encourages. When God speaks, He only speaks truth.

If you’ve ever thought negative thoughts about yourself or others, or someone has called you something that doesn’t line up with God’s Word and what He says about you, recognize that it is a lie. It’s time to replace the lies with God’s spoken truth.

Action

Identify lies you have possibly believed for far too long. Lies about self (example: I will never be good enough), lies about others (example: If people knew the truth about me, they wouldn’t accept me), lies about emotions and opinions (example: I need to put aside all difficult feelings), lies about God (example: God is punishing me), and lies about sex (example: Sex is secret and hidden). What are the lies someone has spoken over you, lies you have spoken over yourself, or lies you have spoken over others? Ask the Holy Spirit to identify lies that you have been believing. Then ask God what is the truth.

Lie _____

Truth _____

Lie _____

Truth _____

Reflection

As you reflect on the lies that you have been believing, is there a particular moment when you started believing this lie? Write about the moment that is lingering in your thoughts right now. Don’t question it; just write and see what the Lord reveals.

Reaction

Now it’s time to reject the lie and replace it with truth. Here’s how you do it:

Say aloud, “I reject the lie that I will never be good enough, in Jesus’ name. The truth is I am adequate for every good work.”

This is simple to do, but often disregarded by busyness or a denial mechanism that is keeping us from living in complete freedom. It’s time to let the truth move from the head to the heart. Whatever lies and truths the Holy Spirit revealed to you just now, over the next 30 days say them aloud each day and watch your heart be transformed by the truth. May the truth set you free!

*Saying these truth statements in front of a mirror can also be a very powerful tool of the Holy Spirit.

Day 4: God's Image

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.' So God created man in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female." Genesis 1:26-27 (CSB)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did God design me for relationship with Him?

For Your Consideration

God lived in perfect, unbroken, loving relationship before anything was created. He didn't need anything to fulfill Him. This raises another mystery question: Why did God create people? Genesis 1 tells us that when we were created, we were made in God's image. Read it for yourself.

Body

God designed our image in three parts: body, soul, and spirit. The image of God does not only refer to the appearance of your body. After all, human beings come in all shapes, sizes, skin colors, and ethnicities. We were not created to be the same, but beautifully different. Our bodies are made in beauty, for love, and for creative purpose. Remember you were made to be LIKE your Creator. Every one of us is made in His image to bring us into relationship with Him. God designed the body to house the two other parts of His image: the soul and spirit.

Soul and Spirit

The soul, simply put, is our mind, our will, and our emotions. Regarding the soul, God's image means that I resemble God in what I think (mind), in what I want (will), and in what I feel (emotions). Think of the soul as the "response center" that decides what to do when we hear God's voice. Only our spirit gives us the capacity to connect with God. Think of the spirit as the ear in which the words of God resonate. The spirit should become the "command center" of who we are as we fully align our body, soul, and spirit in obedience to God.

Man—Equal but Different

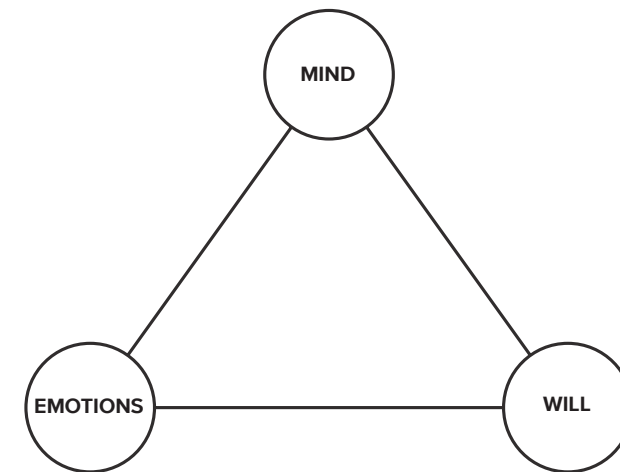
Genesis 1:27 says that God made male and female, both in His image. Today you are going to read about why God created two different types of humans. They both reflect God equally but in different ways. God designed man and woman to be one in essence but two separate persons. This is also to give us a picture of who the Trinity is, one in essence and three in person. Because we are made in God's image, we all have the same value, dignity, and worth to Him. Our being made in His image also gives us the same desire for relationship and community that He has. When He made us, He extended the perfect, unbroken, and loving relationship He has to us. Loving relationship, in the presence of God, was the whole purpose for our creation.

Action

Open your Bible and read Genesis 2:7-24. As you are reading, think about who you are, how you were formed, and take a deep breath in and out. Visualize God scooping up the earth and forming man... but notice how Adam doesn't become a living being until the breath of God is breathed into him. Your spirit is what connects you to God because it is from God. It is in your spirit where the Holy Spirit speaks to you. Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit, "What's a lie I have believed about You?" Once you have written it down, ask God, "What is the truth about how You have created me?"

Reflection

You are created in God's image. Look at this diagram below focusing on your soul. Which of these three (mind, will, or emotion) lead you the most? Give an example.



Reaction

Even if you are made in God's image, are there still things about yourself that you dislike? Where do you think those feelings about yourself come from? Was it because of something someone said about you? How you were raised to think? Write down what the Holy Spirit is dropping in your mind and heart right now.

Day 5: Connecting

“And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.”

- Acts 17:26-27 (ESV)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can I connect and hear from God?

For Your Consideration

It's interesting that God speaks everything into existence, yet the only thing that He forms by hand and breathes a spirit into is man. Then man comes alive. Nothing else in all of creation bears the image of God and can connect with Him like we can. Yesterday we discovered that God designed us to connect with Him. Today we are going to explore how we connect with Him through hearing His voice.

God Connects with Man

Immediately after breathing a spirit into humanity, God blesses and then speaks to Adam and Eve. God is the one who took the initiative for relationship. In the same way, it is up to a parent to define a relationship with his or her child. God models and defines that relationship to His children, Adam and Eve. Because He breathed a spirit into them, they were able to hear His voice and connect with Him. God is always speaking to us, and He has wisdom for every area of our lives. We don't have to look far to hear from God. God speaks to us through His Word. When we read the Bible, we begin to understand His character, how we can love others, and our identity as His child. The entire purpose of God's design was for pure and perfect connection with us.

Connected with the Source

God is the Source for everything we need. He designed us to connect with Him so that He can be not just our Creator but also our sustainer. Our spirit is where we hear His words, which are the source of spiritual nourishment and true life. Our soul is where we respond to the words of God and is the source of intellectual, emotional, and actionable growth. Our body houses the soul and spirit, and as a result, is brought to health by the words of God. God is the Source of physical nourishment that we need to preserve the body. Before we were even formed, He planted trees to nourish us. Nothing is an afterthought with our Father. All we have to do is stay connected with the Source.

Connected To Reflect

This connection with God has an incredible side effect. When we are connected with our Source, He provides life to us. When we receive that life from Him, we reflect who He is to all of creation. When His words change us, we reflect God through all that we do. God designed all humans to function as receivers of His words, love, and relationship. We all can freely connect with Him; then, as we are changed, we reflect who He is and can live in freedom daily.

Action

Read Psalm 19. David is sharing how God is speaking to us even through the world around us. How have you seen God through creation? What is an example of you finding Him in nature?

Reflection

Think of the most intimate relationships you have in your life. How did those connections form? The bottom line is, it takes time and shared experience to make such a secure connection.

Give an example of a time you felt fully connected to God.

The Holy Spirit wants to be our source of life and understanding. How easy is it to connect with our smartphones for life advice and understanding rather than to the Holy Spirit?

Reaction

Let's ask the Holy Spirit now...simply say, "What do you think of me?"

Today, I will turn off my phone for a few minutes and go outside. I will experience God as He reveals Himself in Creation. Thank you, God, that You are my Source of all life.

WEEK 1 CONCLUSION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was God's original design for all of creation?

Big Idea:

God's intended design for all of creation was perfection. We were designed to live in this perfect state of creation.

Visuals:

Trace the triangle; this represents God. Label it: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
Trace the three concentric circles representing humanity. Label them: body, soul, and spirit.



VIDEO SESSION

Creation

Why isn't our world perfect?

WEEK TWO

CHOICE

**For you were called to
FREEDOM, brothers. Only do
not use your FREEDOM as an
opportunity for the flesh, but
through love serve one another.**

**Galatians 5:13 ESV
(emphasis added)**

INTRODUCTION

The Essential Question: Why isn't our world perfect?

The Big Idea: God shows us where everything went wrong and why.

LAST WEEK

Last week we discovered God's intended design for creation. We read about who this mysterious God is and discovered that He is the source of all that's good and perfect. We learned that He created man for relationship, and He revealed Himself to us through speaking to us. Last week ended with His declaring everything was good!

THIS WEEK

But everything is not good. When we talk about the perfect state of creation, it's easy for us to notice the difference between God's perfection and the current state of things. We only have to turn on the news for a moment to see war, murder, racism, violence, starvation, and poverty. We've been raised in a world in which sin has and is corrupting the earth, people are hurting one another, and where creation is destroyed more often than cared for. We will discover where and why everything went wrong by exploring this week's essential questions:

Day 1: What is *The Choice*?

Day 2: What happens when I eat from the Tree of Life?

Day 3: Who is our enemy?

Day 4: What was broken between the two trees?

Day 5: What are the effects of sin and death?

Why Is This important?

It is so important to understand that the broken world that we live in is not a reflection of who God is. Here are a couple of the most common questions asked about God: Why do bad things happen to good people? Is God responsible for all these bad things that happen?

This week's devotions are meant to open your eyes to why our world has so much evil within it. It will challenge your long-held beliefs and change your perspective. It is vital to ask the Holy Spirit for insight every day as you journey into this week's study.

Day 1: Two Trees and the Choice between Them

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the Garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’” - Genesis 2:15-17

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is The Choice?

For Your Consideration

There was only one thing we couldn't do in the perfect state of creation: eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Today we're going to investigate the ideas behind the two trees in the Garden and the choice between them.

Tree of Life

The Tree of Life was a literal tree growing in the garden, and it represents God's intended design for creation. We don't know what fruit grew on the Tree of Life, but what we do know is if you ate from it, you would live forever. God's choice for us was to eat freely from this tree and build the perfect world of freedom God intended for us to live in daily.

Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil

God said we would die if we ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This command is the first time death is mentioned in Scripture. Adam and Eve had no understanding of what death actually was. Think about how a child doesn't understand death until the family pet or a grandparent passes away. That is a state of innocence similar to the one in which Adam and Eve lived. They had no context for this consequence.

Did Adam and Eve trust God enough to believe Him even though they did not understand the result of not listening to Him?

The Choice between Two Trees

Every day in perfection they had a choice to make:

“Do I live free in the perfect creation forever, as God intended, by eating from the Tree of Life?” or “Do I check out what this other tree has to offer and take my chances with this death thing?”

Adam and Eve faced this choice in a literal way, standing between two trees.

Though these literal trees are no longer in our world, we face the same choice every day: “Do I stay in God's presence and trust Him enough to follow what He says?” or “Do I take my chances, not listen to God, and live captive to sin?”

Action

Adam and Eve made a choice to sin, but Jesus offers a solution. Jesus presents us with a different choice in how to live as we walk in His freedom. Open your Bible and read Matthew 11:28-30. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you reflect on the effects of the choices offered in this passage and how these choices can bring forth blessings.

What are the things you need to personally lay down to Jesus?

What is Jesus offering that is countercultural to the world?

Reflection

Think about how you have to make daily choices and the consequences of each of your choices. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil can only give you the choice between right and wrong, but the Tree of Life gives you God's choice—His blessings in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of a choice you regularly face in which you must make the choice to trust God or rebel against Him. Write it below.

Have you ever made the “right” choice for a situation in your life but found out it was not God's choice? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom on the difference between a right choice and God's choice for you. Which one is the correct choice toward your freedom journey?

Read Matthew 11:28-30 again and think about the life Jesus has invited us to. You can stop anytime or anywhere and ask the Holy Spirit to help you when trying to choose and make correct decisions.

Reaction

How do I deal with the choices in front of me today? Declare today: “When I am faced with a choice, I will ask the Holy Spirit to help me choose God's option.”

Day 2: Life-Giving

“And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.” The second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” No other commandment is greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31 (NLT)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What happens when I eat from the Tree of Life?

For Your Consideration

Let’s imagine the best-case scenario. God gives life to Adam and Eve, and they eat from the Tree of Life every day and live forever in perfection. They were fruitful. They multiplied and had the task of caring for the Earth, just as God intended. What would creation look like? How would that society function? What would be a characteristic to describe humanity? How about life-giving? Life-giving is having a relationship with God that allows us to function based on intimate relationship with Him and not on rules. Being life-giving changes your perspective towards God, self, and others.

Life-Giving toward God

The Tree of Life represents a godly-worldview that acknowledges God is the source of all creation. Life-giving people eat from the Tree of Life. Life-giving people see God as their source and their provider. They see God as a good father who gives them good things. They see God as all-knowing, all-powerful, and at all-places, all of the time, yet still intimate and personal. Life-giving people’s connection with God is strong. As a result, they internalize the love of Christ and then reflect Jesus to others. This was the kind of relationship God intended to have with us!

Life-Giving toward Self

Life-giving people are completely filled with God’s love and total acceptance. When we are connected with God, God’s image in us is strengthened, and we can operate out of the Holy Spirit’s perfect love. This perfect love and acceptance washes over our mind and makes our mind, will, and emotions whole, innocent, and pure. This love and acceptance eventually overflows, spilling into those we interact with.

Life-Giving toward Others

Life-giving toward others is the second part to the greatest command of loving God and loving your neighbor. To begin, each of us must believe that every person is made in the image of God. Every race of people, women and men, young and old, are all made reflecting God. When Adam and Eve made the choice to disobey God, sin entered in multiple ways of division and hate. In relationship with Jesus, a family is created of sisters and brothers caring for the least among them as they give generously toward one another, putting others needs before their own. Following the ways of Jesus enables God’s people to think the best of others, engage in kingdom values, and love people regardless of economic standing, race, or gender. The principle governing God’s kingdom is God’s perfect love and kingdom values seen through the work of His children as they bring righteous justice to the overlooked.

Life-giving is life focused on the love and grace of God. It is about daily intimate relationship with Jesus, not rules. This life-giving nature was God’s intended design for all people on the Earth. God is the giver of all life; when we reflect Jesus, we naturally become life-givers.

Action

God intended us to live as life-givers! How can we begin to be more life-giving? Read Galatians 5:22-23. Ask the Holy Spirit which fruit, specifically, He would like to grow in you. Trust you are hearing from Him and write it down below.

Reflection

Notice how Galatians 5:23 says, “Against such things there is no law.” As life-givers we are connected with our Source, and the need for rules diminishes. When faced with a choice, we can easily make God’s choice, because we are connected with the Source. Consider how the Holy Spirit wants to grow fruit in you. It might seem easy to create rules or laws to follow that will produce this fruit. However, fruit is naturally produced (that’s why it’s called produce) and needs time to grow and ripen. How can you create a time and place to daily connect with the Holy Spirit and have Him pour God’s love into you? Write down some ideas below.

Reaction

How can I rely on the Holy Spirit to grow this fruit in me? I will choose to eat from the Tree of Life today. Ask the Holy Spirit, “Will You give me an opportunity to allow this fruit to grow in me today?”

Day 3: Enemy

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the Garden?” ... You will not certainly die,’ the serpent said to the woman.” - Genesis 3:1,4

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who is our enemy?

For Your Consideration

The serpent is the first creature that is introduced since creation. We don't know much about him at this point, other than he was cunning. Many people believe that Satan and God are equals, but the Bible is very clear they are not. The Bible teaches us more about God than it does about Satan. The entire Bible mentions the enemy 96 times with different names; some of these are Satan, The Accuser, and Devil. The generic word God (Elohim) is mentioned 215 times, just in the book of Genesis! This one term for God is mentioned 4,154 times in the whole Bible! God wants us to know He is the central figure of this story. But this does raise some questions about our enemy.

Where Did He Come From?

The Bible says very clearly that God created Satan. God created him as an angel who was in charge of leading the rest of the angels in worship of God (Ezekiel 28:12-15). The Bible also gives us clues to how he became who he is now. It says that he desired the worship and glory that God was getting (Isaiah 14:13-14). As a result, he led one third of the angels in a battle against God (Revelation 12:4). He lost the battle and was thrown to earth, out of God's presence (Revelation 12:7-9). At this point, he had lost all of the former glory he had as one of the highest ranked angels (Isaiah 14:15-19; Ezekiel 28:16- 19; Revelation 12:8-9).

What Kind of Power Does He Have?

When Satan was kicked out of heaven, he lost any power he may have had. His Plan A of attacking God failed, so he hatched a Plan B. He would manipulate humanity to rebel against God. This would hurt God because it would hurt His people. Then he could steal the authority that God gave to humanity to care for and tend to creation and use it for himself. The enemy would divide humanity against God, one another, their own person, and all of creation.

What Is His Motive and Method?

Satan's motive and method has never changed. His motive is power, and his method is lies to make you feel shame, distancing you from God. Satan was not made like God; he has no creative nature. He can't think of anything new. All he can do is use our creative nature against us by manipulating us to think we are each other's enemies and that some of us are greater or lesser than others. If we believe that he can do things that he can't, then he has power over us. Satan uses whatever lie he needs to make us believe God is not for us and that we should hide in shame over how God made us. Yet, God gave us a creative nature to reflect who Jesus is; Satan exploits that same creative nature to impose his authority over us by separating us from God and all God has made. Satan oppresses us and keeps us from making God's choice and living in freedom.

Action

Satan wants us to believe he is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all around us. But these are the characteristics of God. Satan lies to us and wants us to believe they belong to him. Satan's method never changes. Read John 8:44. Lies are the only language Satan knows how to speak. Ask the Holy Spirit, "What are the lies that I am believing?" Write them below.

About God: _____

About Others: _____

About Myself: _____

Reflection

Has someone spoken words (lies) to you that go against the heart of God? Are there things (lies) that you have believed about yourself because of what they have done or not done to you or someone you love?

Consider what effects these lies have on your marriage, singleness, how you see others who are different than you (race, economics, culture, ethnicity), family or parenting, or even your job. Write any thoughts below.

Reaction

Pray: Holy Spirit, guide me to recognize the lies of the enemy in my life. I know who my enemy is. Today, every time I hear a lie--either on TV, social media, in music, or anywhere else--I will remember where it came from and counter it with Your truth about our world. I will also consider what lies others around me believe. How can I help them see the truth in a life-giving way?

Day 4: Shame

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’” - Genesis 3:6-9

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was broken between the two trees?

For Your Consideration

Satan had deceived Adam and Eve to rebel against their Father, the Giver of Life and their Source. In a single moment, God’s intended design for humanity and creation was broken. When Adam and Eve sinned, shame immediately entered, driving them to cover themselves and hide from their Creator.

Severed Relationship

The connection between God and humanity had been disconnected in an instant. What was fostered instead was a connection between humanity and shame, the enemy’s plan. This disconnection with God through shame would have disastrous results for the future of humanity and creation. Humanity could no longer connect with God because God’s image in them had been shattered.

Shattered Image

Adam and Eve’s bodies and souls, though broken, weren’t dead. When they ate the fruit, Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death and shame, just like God said when He gave the command. This rebellion and spiritual death changed God’s image in humanity. Satan had distorted their identity, introducing shame in the way they were created; he distorted how they saw themselves and one another. When identity changes, parameters of responsibility change as well. Satan broke humanity’s identity, how they saw one another, and how they interacted with God.

Decaying Creation

This was damaging to humanity, but all of creation experienced the tragedy of this choice. All the perfection that God designed was poisoned in an instant because of shame. This is where sin and death entered the world. Like radioactive waste, sin and death permeated all of creation as a byproduct of that choice. Now, like radiation poisoning silently mutating and degenerating health, we are all born into the slow, painful effects of sin and death. The shame we live in tries to keep us from being free in God’s presence. Shame wants to keep us positioned against God, ourselves, one another, and all of creation. But there is hope, and His name is Jesus.

Action

Open your Bible to Romans 5:17-21. Just as sin entered the world through one man, the gift of grace came through another, Jesus. We have all felt the effects of shame in our lives. What sin, past or present, keeps you in shame? Nothing is too much for God; be bold and write it below.

Reflection

These memories may be painful, but this is a safe space to process them with God. How do those memories make you feel? Is there a strong sense of pain, shame, or regret that comes with those feelings of past sin? Or have the effects of death taken a loved one from you and left a lasting wound? Write what you are feeling below. These memories that cause you pain also break the heart of God. He loves you and cares for you and wants to heal what was broken.

Reaction

What lies, ideas, and prejudices have you formed from pain, shame, or regret? Read Psalms 139. David asks God to search his heart and reveal things known and unknown. Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart revealing to you the same prayer, and write it below.

Pray: Holy Spirit, fill me with the Father’s overflowing love today. Help me notice opportunities to get quiet with You and rest in Your loving grace and compassion. I let go of the shame that wants to trap me from living in the freedom You have for me. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 5: Sin and Death

“The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. And the Lord God said, ‘The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.’ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” - Genesis 3:21-24

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What are the effects of sin and death?

For Your Consideration

Remember a few days ago when we imagined the best-case scenario? It was a nice thought, but we now know we are living in the worst-case scenario. This choice didn't just break God's image in humanity; it also broke the heart of God. Humanity was never designed to be exposed to sin and death and the shame it brings.

Captive to Sin

Yesterday, we saw that the primary effect of sin is shame. God didn't separate from us. God came looking for us. The separation happens when we willfully make “The Choice” to push God away. When shame causes us to disconnect from God, we lose our ability to be filled with love. It distorts how we view everyone around us. When we are void of God, something else needs to fill that hole in us. Sin takes root and wickedness begins to fill us. Wickedness rots our soul, and then what is inside comes out. We invent new ways to become increasingly cruel to one another. Rather than being Life-Givers, this wickedness defines man. Sin rots the soul, like death rots the body.

Oppressed by Death

God speaks life into us through Scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit. When Adam and Eve sinned, the connection to our life-giving Source was severed, and our bodies began to decay. The results of this decay are illness of the body, soul, and mind (i.e. lust, racism, addiction, codependency, workaholism, greed, and materialism).

Eviction as an Act of Mercy

This was a severe tragedy, but why couldn't God just fix it then? Why did God have to kick His kids out of the garden if He loved them so much? It's because of His love that He removed them. God's eviction of humanity was an act of mercy. See, otherwise humanity would have been able to reach out, eat from the Tree of Life, and live forever broken. God could not let His kids live broken, decaying, and wicked. He killed an animal to show them that their sin would cost a life and that cost would cover their shame. Then He walked them out of the garden for their own good. Can you imagine the inner turmoil in God as He did this? He didn't just make the right choice; He made “The Choice” only He could make.

Action

Read Ephesians 2:1-5. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you times in your life you experienced God's grace and mercy despite your sinful state.

Reflection

When was a time that God did something that didn't seem like it made sense at the time, but later you realized how it fit into His bigger picture? Write it down below.

Reaction

Take some time today and write a letter to God. Tell him anything you have been holding onto and thank God for the many moments in life where He has shown you great grace and mercy.

WEEK THREE

CHRIST

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you FREE in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

***-Romans 8:1-2 ESV
(emphasis added)***

INTRODUCTION

The Essential Question: How is Jesus the solution?

The Big Idea: God's love—through the person and work of Jesus Christ—sets us free from all of the problems that came into the world as a result of The Choice.

LAST WEEK

Last week we learned that all people are broken by sin and filled with wickedness. As a result, we all are under the oppressive weight of death. God is not responsible for the bad things that happen, but our world is broken and decaying. Satan is the one who is ruling over man and bolstering the violence we experience every day. Finally, last week we ended by learning that everything God intended to be perfect was now broken.

THIS WEEK

This week we are going to explore how God fixed what went wrong through the person and work of Jesus Christ. In fact, God doesn't just fix what was broken, but instead recreates to make something newer and better! Questions we will be exploring this week:

Day 1: Why did Jesus come to earth?

Day 2: What is the kingdom Jesus preaches about and who is it for?

Day 3: What and/or who did Jesus heal?

Day 4: Who did Jesus free?

Day 5: What do I do because of what Jesus did?

Why Is This important

This week might be a little different from what you may expect about a teaching on Jesus. It would be easy to present knowledge about Jesus' life. We could explain to you the who's, what's, where's, and how's of Jesus' life; and the week would look something like this:

Life of Jesus

- **Born of a virgin**
- **Lived a sinless life**
- **Paid for sin through death on the Cross**
- **Conquered death by rising from the tomb**
- **Ascended to heaven**
- **Sent the Holy Spirit to us**

These elements will be covered this week. However, the focus of this week will be why He did these things. When you understand why, it will become the answer to thousands of questions. The person and work of Jesus has been radically transforming lives for over 2,000 years. This week, we want to challenge you to experience Jesus in a transformational way. This is going to require you to really lean into the Holy Spirit and build your relationship with Him.

Day 1: Jesus' 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." John 3:16

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Why did Jesus come to Earth?

For Your Consideration

Recall that in the beginning of the Old Testament we see the Trinity in perfect, unbroken, and loving relationship. We see this as the Father's love is poured out by the Holy Spirit through the Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus, fully divine, takes on our humanity becoming like us in order to save us. This is God's mission in the world that He so loved: He gave us hope. In Philippians 2:7, we see Jesus as He walked through His purpose, fully divine and fully human.

Jesus Resists Satan

In Matthew 4, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus out into the desert to be tested by Satan. This testing by Satan is the continuation of the war that Satan has been fighting against God. This war resulted in our becoming broken casualties, yet Jesus successfully resisted all the temptations of the enemy that we could not resist. He then begins His ministry, anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Fulfills the Prophecy

In Luke 4, Jesus walks into a local synagogue, and He reads aloud the prophecy in Isaiah 61 about the coming Savior. He tells the people that this prophecy has been fulfilled. This polarizes the people. They were angry at His outrageous statement that He was the Savior (v. 29) yet amazed at how Jesus spoke with authority (v. 32). As Jesus boldly proclaims this, He is declaring why He came to Earth: to preach, heal, open eyes, and free. At the same time, Jesus is confirming that He was the Savior that the Jewish people had been awaiting for thousands of years.

Jesus Brings Light to the Kingdom of Darkness

The Jewish people of Jesus' time had forgotten the real reason that they needed a Savior. Israel was under Roman rule, and teaching about a Savior was the most popular subject in the synagogue. The Jews were waiting for this Savior to free them from the oppression of Rome. They had been in Satan's kingdom of darkness for so long that they had become blinded to the real enemy who was oppressing them. This was the kingdom of darkness that Jesus came to light up with His love and presence. We all are living in a darkened world, broken from the effects of The Choice and filled with sin and death. We all need our eyes to be opened to the love of Jesus as we seek why Jesus came and how His coming is the reason for our freedom!

Action

Read Colossians 1:12-23. What was Jesus' purpose for coming to Earth for me?

Reflection

Revisit the above scripture and picture yourself sitting down with Paul as he tells you how you can be reconnected with Jesus today. Place your name into the paraphrase verse of 21 and 22 below and read it again, emphasizing each word to revolutionize and personalize why Jesus came to this Earth for YOU.

Once _____ (your name) was alienated from God, and I was an enemy of God in my mind because of my evil behavior. But now God has reconciled me by Christ's physical body through death to present _____ (your name) holy in His sight, without blemish, and free from blame.

Reread verses 21 and 22 and highlight, underline, and/or circle each time you read the words that relate to "you" and those that relate to "Him."

Reaction

What are the areas of your life that you have not given control to Jesus? What are the reasons?

As you reflect throughout today on why Jesus came to Earth, you will find peace in knowing that you are loved and free if you choose to accept the truth found in today's scripture.

Pray: Father, empower me to make the choice to accept that Jesus came to Earth for me. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 2: Jesus Preaches

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’” - Matthew 4:17

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is the kingdom Jesus preaches about and who is it for?

For Your Consideration

Jesus came to light up the kingdom of darkness that had been in the world for thousands of years. Over the next three days, we will focus on why Jesus came, as we read yesterday in John 3:16. This was the good news that Jesus was here because of God’s love for us. Today we will look at how Jesus brought a kingdom of love to a kingdom of darkness.

Jesus Preaches About the Kingdom of God

In His time, Jesus was the only living example of the kingdom of God. Imagine a black sky with one single star in it. That was what the kingdom looked like in Jesus’ time. Jesus began preaching about how the kingdom of God can bring light to the darkness. When we live in darkness, light can be foreign and painful to the eyes. In the same way, this kingdom Jesus preached about seemed strange and offensive. The kingdom of God had a new way of living where the last are first and first are last, and those who are greatest are the servants. Also, it brought a new way of thinking. This kingdom centered on a God who came to serve and a society governed by love. Does this kingdom sound like the life-giving society we talked about last week? Jesus is preaching about the kingdom where God intended for us to live on a daily basis, abiding in His presence. Jesus gave sight to the blind by opening their eyes to this kingdom of God.

Jesus Preaches About Being Spiritually Dead

Even though the eyes of the people Jesus preached to were opened, their spirits were dead. They couldn’t do the things Jesus was requiring, even if they wanted to. The measure for righteousness was too high for all people. The kingdom of God that Jesus is preaching about elevated the standard of righteous living beyond their ability—as long as their spirit was dead.

Jesus Preaches about Those with a Broken Spirit

Everyone is spiritually dead as a result of The Choice. Jesus came specifically to speak to those who were spiritually dead—everyone. In Luke 4:18 (ESV), Jesus came “to proclaim the good news to the poor.” Jesus knew His audience and knew they couldn’t measure up to what He was preaching, which was for them to direct their attention to Him—who is life—instead of the things they thought they knew. For some, He was the solution their eyes were open to see; they just didn’t know what to look for as their source. Jesus came to reconnect us to our source, God. Being in God’s presence and connecting with Him brings our spirits to life and revitalizes us to reflect who God is.

Action

Re-read Matthew 4:17. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the life-giving kingdom Jesus is preaching about, who He is preaching to, and why He came to preach these powerful words. What is Jesus preaching about, and why is He preaching what He is preaching?

How do we see the kingdom of God around us?

Reflection

Based on today’s scripture, compare how the messages in Matthew 4:17, Luke 4:18, and Ephesians 2:1-6 are alike. Analyze the multiple perspectives within these scriptures.

In your own words, explain this statement: In Jesus’ time, He was sharing that the only way for people to achieve what He was preaching was for them to keep their eyes on Him.

Keep in mind that His goal was to seat them in heavenly places, or more simply, bring them to where He is so they can live in the free kingdom of God. Is there anything in your life that is holding you captive, keeping you from living in freedom in a particular area?

Reaction

Thank you, God, for loving me so much that You sent Your only Son for me! How and why can I be seated with You in the heavenly realm in Your kingdom today? I will listen to Jesus’ preaching and see myself seated in the Kingdom of God.

Pray: Father, show me what is necessary in my life to bring life to my spirit. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 3: Jesus Heals

“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.” - 1 Peter 2:24

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What and/or who did Jesus heal?

For Your Consideration

In Scripture, we see Jesus perform many physical and spiritual miracles throughout His ministry here on Earth. He gave sight to the blind, made the lame walk, and healed those struggling with chronic illness because of His love for us. As we think about our essential question today, you may find it easy to think of healing for visible ailments or sickness. What about the sicknesses we can’t see? The areas of our heart that need a supernatural touch to “heal the brokenhearted.” Today, we are going to explore how Jesus holistically healed us through His death on the Cross.

Jesus Heals Our Brokenness

Philippians 2:5-9 explains Jesus coming fully divine and fully human to step into our stories. God humbles Himself, becoming like us and experiencing life as one of us. Throughout Scripture, we see leaders, judges, kings, and rulers fail time after time to live justly or live up to the standards of God’s law as they give into pressures of the world. Even Jesus was confronted with temptation, betrayal, loss, pain, and death. Jesus knows our brokenness and healed it by the work of the Cross.

Jesus Heals by Paying Our Sins

Jesus made the choice only God could make and became the personification of sin and death. Personification means “the living embodiment of an abstract quality.” We know from Week 2: Choice, that sin is paid for by death. The effects of death are physical disease and illness in our souls. When He went to the Cross, Jesus paid for all our sin by being whipped, tortured, crowned with thorns, and being nailed to the Cross so we could be healed. Jesus knew this would be His fate. The moment Jesus finished this work on the Cross was when Jesus gave up His spirit and died.

Jesus Heals Our Shattered Soul and Broken Body

Jesus lovingly let our sin kill Him, because He desired us to be free from it. Jesus took the effects of sin and death upon Himself on the Cross. This is how Jesus paid for our physical and spiritual healing. In doing so, He healed not just our broken body but also our shattered soul. This healing power is still available for you today, and the Scripture is very clear on how we see this miracle working power operate in and through our lives in our freedom journey.

And it doesn’t stop there. Tomorrow, we will explore how He freed the prisoners and the oppressed. This freedom is not just for those in Jesus’ time but for us today as His presence allows Him to heal us.

Action

Many times trying to find healing for our bodies and souls can cause us to grow weary. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus offers a rest countercultural to what we know. In seeking freedom, we often focus so much on the healing and miss the Healer. Where are you tired? Where are you worn out? Where are you sick? Where do you need rest? Take some time to write your thoughts below.

Reflection

How much of what you wrote above was new to you? How must you begin to view the healing Jesus gives to you differently?

Reaction

As I reflect on how Jesus’ suffering was in place for my sin and healing, I will focus on the significance of the complete work of the Cross. How can I glean peace and healing from God’s love for me through what Jesus did for me?

Pray: Father, thank You for being my Healer! Holy Spirit, help me to believe and stand on Your Word and know that by Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross I am healed. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 4: Jesus Frees

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free... Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.’” - John 8:32, 34-36

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who did Jesus free?

For Your Consideration

The last three days we have explored how Jesus has been restoring our spirit, soul, and body through His life and sacrifice. Today, we will focus on the freedom Jesus provided to us through His death on the Cross and resurrection from the tomb. This is how Jesus brought “freedom for the prisoners and... set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18).

Jesus Freed All Prisoners of Sin

Everyone is naturally a prisoner to sin. In the war between God and Satan, our enemy has taken us as prisoners of war. Prisoners are chained, and Satan uses the chains of sin to keep us as slaves to the shame sin brings. The shame of sin rules over us and dominates who we are. But Jesus supernaturally freed us from sin through His death on the Cross. He embodied all our sin and paid the debt we couldn't pay! Jesus used death as the method to finalize the payment of our sin, but He exerted His power over death by rising from the grave!

Jesus Freed All Oppressed by Death

Everyone is oppressed by the weight of death. We can carry the burden of death on our shoulders. Most people fear death because we don't know where, when, or how it will happen, but we know it's impending. Like a heavy load slowly crushing us, death wears on us until we eventually fracture. But Jesus supernaturally freed us from the weight of death that we couldn't handle when He carried the Cross on His shoulders. He bore the overwhelming weight of death for all of humanity. Then He rose to life so that we can be free from the weight and oppression death can bring! Jesus defeated death and the grave, and now He gives that same power to us.

Jesus Freed All Oppressed by the Devil

Jesus supernaturally freed us from the suffocating grip of the devil through His work on the Cross and by defeating the grave. The devil wants to do everything in his power to keep you from freedom and relationship with God. Yet, Jesus defeated the enemy that we couldn't defeat because of The Choice, and we are now freed from everything that broke God's intention for creation! God's story of freedom used Jesus to save us from sin, death, and even the devil. Our story of freedom begins with knowing Jesus' journey and allowing it to propel us on our journey of freedom!

Action

John 10:10 says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Have you ever thought why Jesus would say these two statements together? Knowing now that Jesus did speak these statements together, what do you make of it?

Reflection

Read Titus 3:4-7. Visualize the Cross and how Jesus dealt with the bondage Satan has had on you through the curse of humanities' sins. Where do you think all the opposition and assault in your life is coming from? Ponder how Jesus bore your sins so that you might inherit the blessings of the Spirit, which is ultimately freedom. The Scriptures refer to “all” and “everyone” as those who can be set free.

Reaction

What are the areas where shame is speaking to you right now? Can you counter this and describe the truth about how Jesus sees you and sees others?

Declaration

As I reflect on Jesus' purpose for His act on the Cross and the power behind His resurrection, I realize that Jesus is giving me a chance to live in freedom. I declare today that I will pursue knowing God's truth and allow the truth to set me free.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”
- John 8:32

Day 5: Jesus' Commission

"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'" - Matthew 28:18-20

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do I do because of what Jesus did?

For Your Consideration

This week we have come to know the indescribable gift we have in Jesus—His sacrifice and His power that He so graciously and generously shares with us. As we wrap up this week, the question becomes now: What do I do because of what Jesus did?

I Share with Others in Community

After Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples were probably asking themselves our essential question for today. In today's Scripture, Jesus gave them The Great Commission; and then He ascended to heaven, leaving His disciples to finish the mission He started. Commission has the prefix "com," which means (to do something) together. Today, we could easily feel the intensity of the freedom Jesus gave us and want to launch all alone into just telling people the good news. However, Jesus wants us to partner with others in deep love—not just preaching—as we share life, generously serve, and worship God together by inviting those who don't know Him to join us in these things.

I Am Empowered by the Holy Spirit

Jesus freed us from sin and death and completely restored our God-given image. But why? Jesus cleansed us from every impurity to prepare a place for the Holy Spirit. In our broken state, we couldn't have had the Holy Spirit living inside of us. Now, the infinite nature of God lives in us, giving us the ability to live like Jesus lived. The Holy Spirit empowers us and is who we have relationship with daily. This is vital for a believer because though we are free from sin and death, we are still surrounded by Satan's kingdom of darkness and need God's presence daily. John 16:13 reminds us that when the Friend (His Spirit) comes, He will guide us and lead us in love.

I Light Up the Darkness

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we become personifications of the kingdom of God, just like Jesus was in His time. The difference is, instead of a dark sky with one single star, we are millions of stars that are spread throughout the entire sky, until we light up the darkness. This was God's plan all along: to build His life-giving kingdom through people who were connected with Him through the Holy Spirit and reflecting His love to those lost in darkness. God loves the lost. His desire is for them to be free and live with Him in this kingdom. It's up to us to reflect our Father's love to the lost so they continue to populate the kingdom. This is our co-mission.

Action

Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-18. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see yourself as the earthen vessel or clay jars in which the Holy Spirit lives. Search through today's scripture to figure out why we are called to do The Great Commission and how we must do it.

Complete the chart below, as you read through verses 8-9, when it talks about what we are and what we are not.

Hard Pressed	<input type="text"/>
Perplexed	<input type="text"/>
Persecuted	<input type="text"/>
Struck Down	<input type="text"/>

Reflection

What was the most thought-provoking idea or understanding you gained about Jesus this week? What questions do you still have about Jesus?

Reaction

Take a moment and consider how your heart is doing as we come to a close this week. How is your heart? Where is the battle in your life? To take on and live out the great co-mission with Christ, it is important to not neglect the ministry of Christ to our hearts. Do you need to deal with anything that would reduce this week to simply "getting through" another week?

Pray: Father, thank You for sending Your son, Jesus. I desire to be more like Him each and every day. So today, show me who You want me to reflect Your love to. In Jesus' name, Amen!

WEEK 3 CONCLUSION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How is Jesus the solution?

The Big Idea:

God's love—through the person and work of Jesus Christ—is the Source to set us free from all the problems that came into the world as a result of The Choice.

THIS WEEK

This week we learned why Jesus came to earth: to set us free, reconnect us to our Source, and empower us to share and serve in His mission, making it a Co-Mission!

Remember this: there is nothing that we can add or take away from the complete and finished work of the Cross. Jesus did all the work. He bore all the wounds of sin and all the weight of oppression. He conquered death by rising from the tomb. He came to Earth fully divine and fully man so that humanity could bear the image of God again. He was tortured so that our body, mind, will, and emotions could be healed and restored. His spirit was separated from God so that our spirit could be reconnected with the Source. We are free from the oppression of death because He carried its weight. He brought us from darkness to light, from death to life, and from separation to connection.

When all of Jesus' work was done, He ascended to heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father. In the same way that the Father rested after creation, Jesus is resting after restoration. Freedom is not the absence of something but the presence of someone, and that someone is the Holy Spirit.

Why This Is Important

God's kingdom vision for us is to live in loving community with one another. God wants our creative participation as Jesus tells us it's our turn to go make disciples by sharing the good news about the love of Jesus and what He's done for us to the rest of the world. It's our mission now to bring the healing power of Christ to those who have a shattered heart and soul. We get to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and liberty to those oppressed by death and the devil. It's our turn to change the world by the power of the Holy Spirit!

We are now living in a new Kingdom reality, and this changes the way we live everyday. It changes our very nature. When we believe in the person and work of Jesus, we reflect God and become life-givers and reach out to those still in the darkness.

The life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the moment that split history in half. This is also the middle point of our story as well. The coming of Jesus completes **Part 1: God's Story of Freedom** and begins **Part 2: My Journey of Freedom**.

POINT OF TRANSITION

This is the transition from God's Story of Freedom to My Journey of Freedom.

GOD'S STORY OF FREEDOM

God's story of freedom never changes. It is broken into three parts: God's original design for creation, what went wrong at The Choice, and how Christ is the solution. This story applies to every single human.

MY JOURNEY OF FREEDOM

Your journey of freedom begins when you are presented with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and it never ends. When you experience the work that Jesus did on the Cross, you have a decision to make: trust Him or reject Him. This choice is no different than the choice made between the two trees.

My Journey of Freedom has an arc similar to God's Story of Freedom. The purpose of My Journey of Freedom is to grow increasingly closer to, and more dependent on, God, and less dependent on yourself.

My Journey begins with living out a New Identity that Christ gave us. My Journey next explores the heart blockages that get in the way of freedom and then finishes with how Christ did the work of clearing blockages out of the way. All we have to do is rest in the completed work of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What if I have never accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior?

Maybe you have never looked at Jesus this way before. If you have never trusted Jesus with your life, you have an opportunity to connect with Him right now! Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you as you read through these Scriptures below.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” - Romans 3:23

Because you were born into the broken family of Adam, you are part of the ALL.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 6:23

At The Choice, man sinned and death came as a result.

The payment for sin is death.

Jesus died to pay for your sin and to give you life.

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

You may be willing to die for a child, spouse, or parent, but what about an enemy? Jesus volunteered to die for you while you were weak, ungodly, unrighteous, captive to sin, and oppressed by death.

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” - Romans 10:9-10

Jesus died so that every person can have equal opportunity to be saved from sin and death. Do you believe this? Have you ever confessed that Jesus is your Lord and Savior?

“For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’” - Romans 10:13

You can be saved if you call out to God!

“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” - Romans 8:1-2

Jesus took away your guilt, shame, and blame. Jesus set you free from sin and death.

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 8:38-39

Nothing can remove this Freedom Jesus gives you!

This is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This was God’s Plan for Freedom.

Have you ever recognized the sacrifice of Jesus in this way?
Have you exchanged your sin and death for life through Jesus?

If not, here is a simple prayer you can pray. Saying this prayer is a way to declare to God that you are relying on Jesus Christ for your salvation.

“God, I know Jesus Christ freed me from sin and death. By faith I believe in my heart and confess with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. Thank You for Your grace, forgiveness, and eternal life! In Jesus’ name, Amen!”

If you just gave your life to Jesus, put this book down and call your Freedom group leader right now! They will want to celebrate with you!

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

***So if the Son sets you FREE,
you will be FREE indeed.***

***-John 8:36 ESV
(emphasis added)***

WEEK FOUR

MY IDENTITY

INTRODUCTION

The Essential Question: Who am I?

The Big Idea: Because of what Jesus accomplished, I am _____(this), so I do _____ (that).

LAST WEEK

The big idea of last week was discovering how Jesus is the solution. Jesus lovingly came to show us a better way to live as we rest in His finished work on the Cross and through His resurrection. As He completed His work, He did something even more shocking. He turned His mission over to us to participate in as we live in community with one another and tell others about God's love. We can accomplish this mission because we're no longer oppressed by the kingdom of darkness. Instead we are a living personification of the kingdom of God.

He did all the work to give us something we couldn't pay for—a new identity:

Jesus paid my sin, so I am free!

Jesus reconnected me, so I am free to be God's friend!

Jesus' holiness covers me, so I am a priest!

Jesus brought me back into relationship, so I am God's child!

Jesus was an heir, so I am a co-heir!

Christ came to bring us into a completely different way of kingdom living, and with that new way of living comes a new identity. Jesus doesn't just fix our broken image; He gives us a completely new one. That is what we are going to be learning about this week!

THIS WEEK

The big idea for this week is, "Because of what Jesus accomplished, I am this, so I do that." Identity comes from whatever gives you value, dignity, and worth. In the kingdom of darkness, value and worth are determined by action. In the life-giving kingdom of God, action grows out of who you are; and certain actions naturally grow out of our new identity. Often, we classify these actions as spiritual disciplines. They become something to do, rather than responses of love and renewed identity. What is this new identity, and what are the actions that are a natural byproduct of it?

I am this ... SO I do that ...

Day 1: I am free, so I praise.

Day 2: I am God's friend, so I follow.

Day 3: I am a priest, so I worship.

Day 4: I am God's child, so I pray.

Day 5: I am a co-heir, so I speak with authority.

There are more than these five different aspects of our new identity in Christ. However, if we could just live out these five, the church would look strong, beautiful, and loving—a life-giving family who reflects God.

Why is This Important?

This is probably the most important week for us because knowing **who** we are in Christ is key to our freedom. The enemy tries to confuse and deceive your identity. When we don't live in or operate out of this new identity, we dip back into our old life, before Jesus freed us from sin. We become consumed with fear of death. We try to work hard to earn God's love, favor, and approval. We end up working rather than resting in the finished work of Jesus. If we don't activate our new identity in Christ, the cause He died for gets cheapened to a powerless religion of works and anxiety, rather than of love and freedom in relationship with Him.

Day 1: I Am Free... So I Praise

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" - 2 Corinthians 5:17

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do free people do?

For Your Consideration

Christ set us free from past hurts, past wrongs, and past sins when He shed His blood for us on the Cross. Praise Him. Thank Him. We should always start with praise of what God has done. Praise is saying thank you to God for the freedom He has given to you.

Upward—Praise

How often have we said, "Thank God!" even for something small and seemingly insignificant? Thanksgiving is simply praise offered to God in response to His faithfulness and freedom. The Greek word for praise, *epainos*, means a story. The first three weeks we have been exploring God's story of freedom. Stories change our hearts, increase our faith in God, and fill us with gratitude. Our story starts as a thought that God has done something worthy of praise. This story saturates our heart with gratitude for God. Our story eventually makes its way out of our mouth as we praise God. When our praise is heard by others, it inspires more faith in God and shows how much we value how Jesus set us free.

Inward—Stay Free

As believers we continually praise God for the amazing things that He's done for us through Jesus Christ. However, we are not perfect. In fact, even though we are completely new creations, it's still very easy for us to begin dipping back into our old life and old habits. This is the tension that makes Christianity difficult at times. Jesus took care of everything that could potentially destroy our relationship with God and us, but sometimes we get in our own way by stepping back into sin or old habitual patterns. We need to remember when we do slip back, Jesus paid for that sin as well. So now, once again you can live free and stay free by living and staying "in Christ" and not in your past, in your hurts, or in sin that entangles you.

Outward—Free People Free People

There's no limit to telling people about the work that God has done in your life. Let's constantly be praising Him and maintaining our own freedom through the Holy Spirit. When you sing His praise and when you are continually becoming more free, there's a natural overflow that occurs. This overflow happens when you tell "God stories" to other people. These stories inspire faith and help others get free. When you are free, you help others be free. We've heard the saying "hurt people, hurt people." Well, we can also know that "free people, free people!"

Action

Read Hebrews 13:15-16 reflecting on a sacrifice of praise. Write down some things that you are thankful for and turn them into a song of praise.

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you a picture of what your future, free self looks like. Write down any ideas or things revealed to you.

Reflection

Read Hebrews 13:16 and circle or highlight the word share. God has caused us to praise Him because of our personal relationship with Him and called us to tell others about how He has set us free. What has God done for you through Jesus' work on the Cross? Name one person who needs to hear what Jesus has done for you and why you have a continual praise on your lips for Jesus.

Reaction

I know that my freedom is found in God's presence, and today I learned that one of the best ways of being aware of God's presence is through praise. Do I live a life of continual praise? Today I will record each time I stop to praise God.

Declaration

"I am a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come because of Jesus. I no longer partner with my past, and I receive my new heart."

Day 2: I Am a Friend...So I Follow

"I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." - John 15:15

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do friends of God do?

For Your Consideration

We are friends with God! Friendship is something we undervalue in today's culture. It's easy for us to think that we have lots of friends because of social media; yet the truth is, even though we're living in the most connected time socially, we may feel disconnected from others. Today we're going to talk about friendship with God. It's one of the characteristics of identity that is very practical and impactful but often gets missed.

Upward—Be Connected

John 1:14 (NLT) says about Jesus, "So the Word became human and made his home among us..." Jesus embodies the entirety of Scripture. This is the same Jesus that calls us friends. Why? Because friends know each other's business. Jesus says we can know the Father's business. How? Through reading the Bible and hearing His voice! Friends connect by doing things that both parties enjoy. In order to build a friendship with God, we need to get to know Him. God reveals what He likes and what He doesn't like through Scripture. As friends, the easiest way to begin building a relationship with Him is by connecting through Scripture and accepting Jesus' invitation to follow Him. Friends connect with each other.

Inward—Be Accepted

Through connecting with God daily, it becomes easier to discover how He gifted you and how you can use your gifts to develop into who He designed you to be. God fully accepts who you are, because He designed you and continues to make you more like Him. God genuinely likes who you are. He enjoys the aspects of your personality that make you unique because He placed them in you. Friendship with God allows you to understand and unlock those aspects and use them to reflect who He is to others. When you feel accepted, you can easily accept others. Friends accept each other.

Outward—Be Friendly

As we live in perpetual friendship with God, we will start to change. The personality attributes that He gifted us with become increasingly oriented to how He originally intended us to be. Rather than feeling the effects and weight of The Choice, we begin to operate as if it never happened. And if it never happened, then we get much closer to the life-giving society that God intended, where God is the center and we are in loving relationship with others. What is truly unique about friendship with God is that He will change you to begin loving the unlovable. He transforms you to be friendly to others and accept them where they are, so He can reach them. You are a friend of God to be a friend to others.

Action

From the beginning in Genesis 1:26, when He made us in His image, God has sought a relationship with us. Then God sent Jesus as His ultimate invitation for us to be able to connect with Him in a personal way. Read John 15:13-17, and ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your desire to know God as a friend. Do you know God as much as you know one of your dearest friends? Why or why not?

Reflection

Based on John 15:13-17, friends connect with each other. What are some ways that you can connect with God? Where do you see or hear Him?

Take a minute and ask the Holy Spirit who you are. Ask Him to give you one word for who you are according to the following:

Who does your family say you are?

Who do you say you are?

Who does God say you are?

Reaction

What can I do as a friend of God? Because I am a friend of God, I will do things with Him that I like and that He likes. I will see God as my friend and will connect and communicate with Him daily as friends do.

Pray: Thank you, Father, for wanting a relationship with me. I choose today to accept Your love and friendship. I will show others today, through my actions to them, that I am a friend of God. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 3: I Am a Priest...So I Worship

*“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”
- Revelation 5:10*

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do priests do?

For Your Consideration

Your upbringing may bring to mind different images of what priests should look like, but being a priest isn't about what we look like. Being a priest is a state of the heart. Old Testament priests were the only people allowed to go into God's presence. Now, through Jesus Christ, we can have access to God's presence whenever and wherever we go. His presence now lives in us through the Holy Spirit. So, who are you? You're a priest, and priests praise and worship! Worship is our response to God for who He is and what He has done, expressed by the things we say and the way we live.

Upward—Worship

If the Cross proves how much we are worth to God, then our worship proves how much God is worth to us. Worship is a lifestyle for those who are in Christ. Worship is not confined to Sunday. In fact, we are all worshipping all the time. Our mind, will, and emotions determine what we worship. Our worship has no start or end. We choose what we worship every moment of every day. It's our spirit's only job to worship. It's all our spirit knows to do.

Inward—Purity

Worshipping God for who He is changes us inwardly. As a priest, it's our responsibility to maintain internal purity. Jesus criticized the Pharisees because on the outside they looked perfect, but on the inside they were filled with uncleanness and wickedness. When Jesus died on the Cross, He completely cleaned us internally. But it takes our partnering with the Holy Spirit to be able to maintain internal purity. This internal purity deals in the soul. Are your thoughts pure? Do your emotions ever get the better of you? When we allow our internal purity to begin to be corrupted, we begin to reflect our old life before Christ rather than reflecting God's grace, love, and peace to others.

Outward—Representation

A priest's primary job is to represent God to people by reflecting who He is. A priest also represents people before God through prayer. This love of others is an extension of the idea of “free people, free people.” Free people can't free people in their own power; they can only free people through God's power. As priests, it's our job to enter into God's presence and ask Him to free others. As a kingdom of priests, we create a life-giving society through worship, internal purity, and representing God to people and people to God, offering freedom to all.

Action

Read Philippians 4:4-8 on how to have internal purity. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you contemplate the beauty and righteousness found in God's Word. Write any thoughts He gives you. Then find the key actions found in these scriptures and record them here.

Reflection

Verse 8 ends with telling us to “think about such things,” and gives us eight different adjectives to describe how we are to focus our thoughts. Think about the ways the eight different adjectives found in verse 8 all contribute to the same thing—your purity, your priesthood.

Revisit verse 5, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” What does “gentleness” mean to you? In what ways have you allowed your “gentleness” to be evident to others?

Reaction

How can I align my thinking to whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy as a priest for God? I will remember today that because I am a priest, I worship and represent people to God and God to people.

Pray: Father, show me any areas I need to change the focus of my thinking to be more pleasing to You. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 4: I Am a Child...So I Pray

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” - John 1:12-13

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How and/or why am I a Child of God?

For Your Consideration

This is one of the most powerful aspects of identity because being a child relates to being unconditionally and totally loved. There’s an aspect of parenting that’s all about being unconditional. This is the same way that God looks at us—with unconditional love for His child. The way we receive this love and build this relationship with Him is through prayer.

Upward—Continual Communication

Prayer is simply talking to God and listening to His voice. Over the last couple of weeks, we have had opportunities to speak to the Holy Spirit and have Him answer us. If we did this with another human that would be called having a conversation, would it not? These are the types of conversations children have with their parents. This type of conversational prayer flows out of our body, soul, and spirit because of love. This love is about intimacy and connection, and it is not based on what God can do for us. Conversational prayer is the free-flowing exchange between you and God on a day-to-day basis. This is the place where intimacy with God is birthed. Throughout the day, we have intimate conversational prayer with a Father who unconditionally loves us as His child. This type of prayer is not a discipline to be learned but a response to live out.

Inward—Unconditional Love

Prayer is the cornerstone to understanding our role as a child of God. Conversational prayer has to be totally submerged in love. Think of how a parent spends time with a small child: connecting with them and having conversation at the child’s level. What communicates love to that child isn’t just the words of love but also the time and attention given to the child. This is the same way God connects with us, on our level, totally loving us where we are. He desires and wants to fill us so full with His unconditional love that it overflows into others.

Outward—Overflowing Love

As this love spills over in our hearts, we begin to surround other people with the same love and peace that God gives us. The whole point of this is to love others as God loves them. We believe the best in others, trust them, and love them because first He did that for us. We treat others with the innocence and purity of a child. When we operate out of total love and acceptance, the external world no longer affects our internal world. Being children of God allows us to love others with childlike innocence and grace.

Action

Read Romans 8:14-30. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discover more about your role and your place as a child of God. Many of us grew up in homes that did not give us unconditional love. How does this make it harder or easier to receive unconditional love from God?

Reflection

Creation didn’t ask for suffering. The choice between two trees brought suffering into creation. Reread aloud Romans 8:26-30. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about what this means for you as a child of God. Ask God to write you a letter to express His unconditional love for you. Write what you hear from the Holy Spirit.

Reaction

In what areas do I need the Holy Spirit to intervene on my behalf today? Today, I will remember that I am a child of God; and because I am a child, I talk to my Father.

Pray: Thank you, Father, for allowing nothing to separate me from Your love. Thank You for interceding on my behalf and leading me on my freedom journey as a child of God. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 5: I Am a Co-Heir... So I Speak with Authority

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” - Romans 8:17

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is a co-heir and what can co-heirs do?

For Your Consideration

An heir is someone who receives an inheritance after the death of someone else. If someone has something they want to give you upon their death, you receive it as an inheritance when they die. Jesus died to pay for our sins; but as our inheritance, He gave us a new identity, a new heart, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible describes us as not just heirs but also co-heirs. This means that everything Jesus has inherited, we have as well.

Upward—Understand My Authority Comes from Jesus

The entire focus of a being a co-heir is upward. The Bible says that Jesus is in Heaven sitting at the right hand of God, and we are seated with Him in heavenly places. Not only is the presence of God with us every day through the Holy Spirit, but this means we are with Christ in Heaven every day. This should give us a heavenly perspective. Think about this: if you were sitting next to Jesus right now, what couldn't you accomplish with His power helping you? How does this change who you are? Jesus took the authority that Satan had stolen and handed it back to us as His co-heir.

Inward—Be Filled with Faith

This gives you a new perspective on the world. Instead of being surrounded by the kingdom of darkness, we operate from a heavenly place. That heavenly place sees Jesus with all power, all authority, and capable of doing anything. Because we are co-heirs, we can operate from that same authority every day. When we let this perspective take root in us, our faith begins to blossom. And just like God's love and acceptance fills us to the point of overflowing, faith will do the same. Being filled with faith allows you to be free from bondage and use the same power as Jesus had to speak with authority.

Outward—Speak with Authority

Now, even though we are seated with Christ spiritually, physically we are on Earth. We see the world from a kingdom-of-God perspective rather than a kingdom-of-darkness perspective. But we are not here to float passively through the dark until we are actually present with Christ. Instead, we are here to create a new kingdom reality, the same way that God created reality in the beginning. Jesus gives us back our authority over the Earth so we can speak God's kingdom into existence. And if we are completely co-heirs with Jesus, He gives us the same power, authority, and ability to declare the coming of God's kingdom and to declare freedom over those captive and oppressed. There's power in the words you speak. Let's use that power to speak the kingdom of God into existence here on Earth. In our reflection time, we're going to explore how to do this. It's simpler than you think.

Action

God said...and it happened. God called...and it was so. When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus repeatedly used the Word of God, saying, “It is written ...” Proverbs 18:2 declares that there is life and death in the power of the tongue. Read aloud Hebrews 4:12-13 and Ephesians 6:17. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how your tongue can be a weapon and how the words we speak can carry God's creative power every day.

Reflection

We are in a spiritual war here on Earth. In Matthew 28:18 Jesus states, “...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” As our identity is found in Christ, we have the same authority and power with our words as Christ. As a co-heir with Christ, we need to use this same spiritual authority and supernatural power given by Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, to speak life into our dark places. In what areas of your life, circumstances, or relationships, do you need to speak with authority?

What battle are you facing today where you need to take your rightful position as a co-heir with Christ and use your authority to speak freedom in that particular area of your life? Having a kingdom perspective changes the way we view things on Earth. What are some things that lose their importance in light of eternity?

Reaction

Do I use my tongue to speak the kingdom of God into existence here on Earth? I will remember that because I am a co-heir, I have access to everything that Jesus has.

Pray: Thank You, Jesus, for giving me a new identity. Holy Spirit, help me to use my tongue to speak God's words with the authority given to me today. In Jesus' name, Amen!



WEEK FIVE

HEART BLOCKAGES

**For FREEDOM Christ has
set us FREE; stand firm
therefore, and do not submit
again to a yoke of slavery.**

**- Galatians 5:1 ESV
(emphasis added)**

INTRODUCTION

The Essential Question: What gets in my way of connecting with God and reflecting His image?

The Big Idea: Here are 6 areas that can block you from connecting with God.

LAST WEEK

Last week, we experienced how to walk out our new identity in Christ. This is the whole idea: because of what Jesus accomplished, I am (this), so I do (that). This is one of the most critical ideas we live out as a follower of Jesus. If we could simply operate out of this new identity, we would be in freedom daily and be in great shape, right?

THIS WEEK

Why does it sometimes seem like my relationship with God is strained? If Jesus freed me from sin and death and gave me a new identity, why is connecting so difficult sometimes? It is essential to identify these heart blockages before they ruin our relationships with God and others. We often know that these heart blockages exist inside us. We let them stay buried until something triggers one of the blockages. To help identify these heart blockages, we will be exploring these essential questions:

Day 1: Who's first?

Day 2: How does fear affect my present and/or future?

Day 3: What do I believe?

Day 4: How does rejection block my heart from connecting with God?

Day 5: How does bitterness affect your life?

Day 6: How does trauma change who you are?

Why Is This Important?

Proverbs 4:23 tells us that everything we do flows from the heart, so we should guard it. We need to guard our heart against the culture we are submerged in, the kingdom of darkness. Remember in this fallen world, everything is designed to keep you from connecting with and reflecting God's love.

The Bible talks a lot about your spiritual heart. In the same way the physical heart has two main sections--inflow and outflow--and four total chambers, let's think about how your biblical heart has the same parts. Your biblical heart has a "self-side" (inflow) and an "others-side" (outflow). If you don't take care of your spiritual health and guard your heart, problems will occur. These different parts have problems that can cause our heart to distribute unhealthy attributes in us rather than what are needed for a life of freedom.

Most problems we face are rooted in shame. Shame can stem from heart blockages: pride, fear, unbelief, rejection, and bitterness. Shame is often the result of trauma. Having a spiritual heart clean and cared for by God is what we're after. When our heart has no blockages, it allows God's freedom to flow in our life. Just like your physical heart can get blocked and cause major damage and even death, so can our spiritual heart.

It is critical that we take the time to examine our heart with the Holy Spirit, so we can keep the flow of the life-giving blood of Jesus in our system. Jesus' blood cleansing our heart keeps us from causing a relational blockage toward God and others. These blockages often go undetected until it's too late; then they cause us to avoid being in God's presence, leading to massive relational damage. When our heart has no blockages, it allows God's freedom to flow in our life.

Day 1: Pride

“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” - James 4:6 ESV

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who’s first?

For Your Consideration

Me, me, me! We say we’re not the center of the universe, but the reality is self-centeredness is our default setting. Self-centeredness is sneaky and flies under the radar most of the time. It makes us look really good on the outside, but internally we are not able to please God. Self-centeredness shows up in three ways: selfishness, pride, and self-worship.

Selfishness: Me as the Center

Selfishness is the tendency to only prioritize our needs or do things without any consideration as to how they impact others. This behavior blocks our ability to see things clearly. Taking care of yourself is not selfish; taking from others is. Selfish living keeps us blinded, lonely, isolated, and distant from others.

Pride: Me above Others

When we are prideful, we become hyper-focused on comparing ourselves to others. We create standards that others can’t fulfill but think we can live up to them. We look down on those who are not gifted like we are gifted, not privileged like we are privileged, and not popular like we think we are. Pride distorts our reality to the point where we live in a near-constant state of judgment of others.

Self-Worship: Me above God

Self-worship removes God from the throne of our heart and puts “self” there instead. When God is not on the throne of our heart, we invite chaos and disorder into our lives. Self-worship is insidious because externally it makes us look like we have it all together. In reality when we self-worship, we are addicted to control. Every thought, decision, and opinion must submit itself to us so that we can place it under our control.

Asking the question, “Who’s first?” causes us to evaluate our priorities in life. At the choice, man chose to trust in self above God, so our natural bend is toward self-centeredness. Not asking this question leads our heart to become hardened toward God and others, and blocks us from a life filled with the freedom of God’s presence.

Action

Read James 3:14-16. Search your heart concerning today’s heart blockage. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you hear God’s voice on what you may be harboring in your heart. What is this verse calling evil?

Reflection

Based on James 3:14-16, what characteristics cause disorder in your life? When you look inside your heart do you find envy, jealousy, or self-ambition? In what areas of your life do you struggle with these traits?

Take a moment and think about how often you think about you. Describe a time when you were selfish. How did it affect your relationship with others and cause disorder in your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any other hindrances you may have in this area.

Reaction

Am I judging others with a critical viewpoint so I will look good and feel good? How am I comparing myself to others in a competitive way? How do I react to today’s culture about how I should view myself (i.e., we hear: “Just do it!” “You deserve it!” “You’re the best!”)? Who’s first in my life?

Pray: Father, show me ways I can focus more on pleasing You and less on me. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Clearing

Each day you are going to be given an opportunity to pray a prayer that renounces the heart blockage and any lies tied to it that you have been believing.

With the authority I have as a child of God, I renounce the heart blockage of Pride that I’ve held on to for far too long. Pride, get out of my heart in Jesus’ name. Go to the feet of Jesus, or wherever He chooses to send you. Holy Spirit wherever my heart has held onto the heart blockage of Pride, I ask you to clear my Pride and replace it with the humility of Christ: meek, selfless, and others focused. I desire to be more like Christ in this way. I declare in and from my heart today. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 2: Fear

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.” - 1 John 4:18

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does fear affect my present and/or future?

For Your Consideration

Every circumstance in life gives an opportunity for you to choose between operating out of faith or responding in fear. Fear can come from a variety of places. Today’s heart blockage of fear may stem from a traumatic event we experienced early in life. It may come from parents or caregivers who never wanted their child to get hurt, so they said things such as: “No, you can’t do that; you’ll get hurt,” or “That is too dangerous! I don’t want you to do that.” Fear may come from someone who had a negative impact on your life (i.e. a coach, mentor, teacher) who may have said, “You’re not good enough for that,” or “You’re not what they’re looking for.” Each of these statements can be internalized and cause your imagination to be filled with fear.

Origin of Fear

Fear first entered creation at the choice. After Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, they hid from God because they were afraid. They didn’t know how to live with this sudden, unhealthy fear. In that moment, Satan saw one of the primary ways to keep man from connecting with God was to make them afraid of Him. Satan uses fear-filled thoughts to have us imagine situations through the lens of fear, in order to block us from seeing our God-given future. A fear-filled imagination steals our time, our health, our finances, and our relationships. Fear can steal our present and future through worry and stress.

Worry

Worry is the fearful response about what could happen in the future. We fear what might happen (i.e. financial ruin, failure, and rejection). Studies have shown that 85% of what people are fearful of or worry about never happens. The Bible tells us 365 times not to worry. When we are fearful of what could happen, we lose our vision. Proverbs 29:18 (ESV) states, “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint.”

Stress

Stress is a fearful response to what is happening in the present. Studies have shown that living “in worry” too much of the time causes stress, which in turn can cause serious problems. This stress activates our body’s automatic response system, and our body begins creating and releasing the hormone cortisol. According to *The End of Stress*, written by Don J. Goewey, stress hormones that worry puts into the brain are linked to a range of issues including lower IQ; increased risk of heart disease, cancer, and premature aging; increased likelihood of family problems and clinical depression; and increased risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s. Worry or stress blocks our ability to hear and receive from God. Our focus is placed on circumstances, not on God. The heart blockage of fear can completely consume our thought life to the point where we can’t trust God anymore, and we live enslaved to fear rather than free.

Action

Read Matthew 6:25-34. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you about areas in your life where fear has hindered your faith and ability to trust God and others. Begin to visualize each fear as a brick that slowly builds a wall, creating a blockage from your future freedom. Write each fear on the bricks below.

Reflection

Ask the Holy Spirit when you experienced the following: fear of man, fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of the unknown, or fear of God.

Reaction

I will be aware today of how often I find myself in fear or worry. When I notice it happening, I will capture my thoughts. Note: For more awareness of what’s happening, try reaching your hand in the air, pretending to physically grab your thought and hold it captive.

Pray: Father, show me how I can stop partnering with fear and worry and change these thoughts to action rather than reaction. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Clearing

With the authority I have as a child of God, I renounce the heart blockage of Fear that I’ve held on to for far too long. Fear, get out of my heart in Jesus’ name. Go to the feet of Jesus, or wherever He chooses to send you. Holy Spirit, wherever my heart has held onto the heart blockage of Fear, I ask you to clear this Fear and replace it with Your perfect love. Because I know it’s Your perfect love that casts out all fear. For I know I have not been given a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind. I declare in and from my heart today. In Jesus name, Amen

Day 3: Unbelief

“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.” - John 3:16

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What do I believe?

For Your Consideration

Unbelief is believing something other than what God has said about a situation. You can believe Jesus was raised from the dead. You can believe He is your Lord. You can believe He is coming soon. But if you don't believe and do what He says, you are operating in unbelief. You can believe in Him, but still not believe what He says.

God Loves You

One of the core building blocks to our belief is accepting that God loves us. We all probably accept that God is loving. However, a heart blockage occurs from not accepting that God loves you specifically. He is not just a loving father. He loves you as an individual. He is not disappointed in you; He accepts you. You have been adopted into the family as an heir. When you receive His love, your heart begins to heal, and you are then able to love others.

God Is Good

If God is good, then why do bad things happen? If God is good, then why doesn't He fix all of our problems? We see Him being good in creation; we accept that He is good for other people. Your heart blockage comes from not believing that He is good in your own life. He is working all things together for your good. Romans 8:28 (NLT) says, “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.”

God Is Real

It is not a question of whether God exists. When dealing with the heart blockage of unbelief, we are doubting if He cares about us. Does He care about where you work, who you will marry, where you will live, or who you are friends with? If God is real, then He is who He says He is, and He can do what He says He can do. If God is real in your life, then you see Him; you hear His voice; and you can see Him working out situations in your life. He is opening and closing doors. He is guiding and directing your steps.

Action

Read John 10:27-28. It says that we hear His voice. What are some ways that Holy Spirit speaks to you?

Reflection

He is who He says He is. Who is God to you?

He can do what He says He can do. What do you need Him to do?

You are who He says you are. What does He say about you?

Reaction

Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you right now. Ask Him the following questions:

What is a lie that I believe about God?

What is the truth?

Clearing

With the authority I have as a child of God, I renounce the heart blockage of Unbelief that I've held on to for far too long. Unbelief, get out of my heart in Jesus' name. Go to the feet of Jesus, or wherever He chooses to send you. Holy Spirit, wherever my heart has held onto the heart blockage of Unbelief, I ask you to clear my unbelief and replace it with an increase of Faith. Help me to walk by faith and not by sight, or base my faith on my feelings. I believe You are real, I believe You are good, I believe God loves me. I believe. I declare in and from my heart today. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 4: Rejection

“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.” - Luke 10:16

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does rejection block my heart from connecting with God?

For Your Consideration

All people experience rejection. Fear and rejection often pair together. Our heart blockages come from a place that says, “I will reject you so you don’t reject me.” Types of rejection can be rooted in race, religion, height, weight, intellect, athletic ability, performance, beliefs, values, any type of prejudice, or stereotype. Rejection triggers a heart blockage when acceptance from someone becomes more important than acceptance from God.

Rejection

Rejection is the refusal to accept a person or to discard their value and worth. This is what makes rejection one of the most destructive heart blockages. It barricades our relationships with others and God. The irony in this is when we experience rejection from others, we are more likely to reject others. There are two primary forms of rejection: passive and active.

Passive

Passive rejection occurs when the “Rejector” ignores the Rejected with or without reason. A form of this is favoritism. This is when parents give less attention to one of their children or more love to one of their children instead of another. Another form of passive rejection is the “silent treatment,” in which the Rejector refuses to speak to the Rejected. This method, though silent, communicates you are unworthy of my love, attention, or opinion. Passive rejection leaves the Rejected constantly questioning their relationship with the Rejector. This form of rejection makes the rejected person modify behavior (i.e. crave affirmation or create confrontation) to be able to define where they stand with the Rejector. Passive rejection leaves us feeling we are not worthy to connect with God or others.

Active

Active rejection happens when the Rejector intentionally and cruelly excludes the Rejected without reason. Forms of active rejection are bullying, teasing, ridiculing, and hazing. The greatest danger of active rejection is that it tends to be less one-on-one. Active rejection is vocal, so it gathers other Rejectors to reinforce how little value the Rejected has. Like sharks in the water, the Rejectors circle the Rejected, endlessly degrading or defaming.

The results of both active and passive rejection leave the Rejected deeply wounded internally. The Rejected can often suffer from being lonely and experience low self-worth, aggression, depression, insecurity, and intense awareness of future rejection. All of these hamper having a healthy heart to be able to freely move toward the destiny God has designed for you.

Action

Read Genesis 37:1-36 about Joseph being rejected by his brothers. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you see the pattern of rejection and the negative effect it has on the hearts of all involved. What is one of your earliest memories of feeling rejected?

Reflection

In Joseph’s life we see favoritism, offense, rejection. Perhaps you accepted this hurtful word “rejection” as your truth. If you are tempted to believe those kinds of lies about yourself, it can cause you to reject the truth of what God’s word has to say about you. Remember a time when you felt rejected. Describe how it was either passive or active rejection.

Reaction

Have I allowed the enemy to use rejection as a weapon in my life to keep me from being free? When have I experienced rejection, and how did my heart become hardened toward the situation, the people involved, and maybe even God?

Clearing

With the authority I have as a child of God, I renounce the heart blockage of Rejection that I’ve held on to for far too long. Rejection, get out of my heart in Jesus’ name. Go to the feet of Jesus, or wherever He chooses to send you. Holy Spirit, wherever my heart has held onto the heart blockage of Rejection, I ask you to clear it and replace it with the truth of my acceptance and adoption through Christ Jesus. You have never left me nor forsaken me, not even for a moment. I declare in and from my heart today that I am an accepted Child of God. In Jesus’ name, Amen!

Day 5: Bitterness

“Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.” - Hebrews 12:15 (NLT)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does bitterness affect your life?

For Your Consideration

Most bitter people have no idea they are bitter. They will rant, complain, and moan about all the bad things that are happening to them, others, or the world. Being around bitter people is usually not a lot of fun. Oftentimes people who are bitter can suck the life out of those they are around. Bitterness doesn't begin like this; it usually starts with a small offense. Bitterness is a long-term effect of a short-term offense.

Seed of Offense

Offense is the reaction to an event that causes us pain. When we feel hurt or are insulted because of the acts of others, we become irritated, angry or may even shut down. Offenses will come in life. Even Jesus says, “Offenses will certainly come” Luke 17:1 (HCSB). Most offenses are easy to overlook. However, when we allow an offense to stick, it can turn into bitterness, which is the Heart Blockage we focus on today.

Bitterness Takes Root

Offense is like a seed; when it is planted in your heart, it grows into bitterness. Bitterness is resentment and has deep roots of ill will, anger, and disappointment from being offended. The root grows deeper with every offense that follows. Even offenses that normally would be easy to shrug off become stuck to you. Holding on to bitterness causes damage to our hearts and distorts our thoughts and perceptions. What ends up happening in the long run is bitterness consumes who you are.

Bitterness Defines You

The book of Ruth tells a story of a woman named Naomi. Naomi's story is tragic, and she suffers a considerable amount of loss. When she goes back to her home region after extreme hardship, she tells people to call her Mara instead of Naomi. The name Naomi means pleasant. However, she changed it to Mara, which is Hebrew for bitterness. The tragic events she experienced forever changed her, so she renamed herself, allowing her pain to define her. You may have experienced tragic circumstances in your life as well. Like Naomi, you may have allowed your circumstance to define you.

Many of these Heart Blockages can rename us. People may call you John, but you label yourself Fear. People may call you Sarah, but you call yourself Rejected. People may call you Jim, but you call yourself Proudful. When we rename ourselves, we identify with our pain and often become known by the worst attribute of our character.

Action

Think about Naomi's story found in the book of Ruth. First read Ruth 1:1-5, then read Ruth 1:20-21. As you read, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal a time when you have allowed a circumstance to change your name to Bitterness.

Reflection

Explain why Naomi acted in the way she did. Think about how Naomi changed her name based on her circumstances because, as she said, God has dealt bitterly with her. Consider this: when we give ourselves a negative name, we might have an incorrect view of God attached to it. How are you like Naomi?

Have you ever blamed God for your circumstances? What is the relationship between being offended and bitter? How has being offended led to bitterness in your life and blocked you from your relationship with God?

Reaction

Have I renamed myself because I've allowed my past to define me?
I will reflect on how I see God incorrectly because of a name I have called myself.

Pray: Father, show me if I am bitter! Have I let offenses consume me?
Help me let go of this bitterness in Jesus Name!

Clearing

With the authority I have as a child of God, I renounce the heart blockage of Bitterness that I've held on to for far too long. Bitterness, get out of my heart in Jesus name. Go to the feet of Jesus, or wherever He chooses to send you. No longer will I hold onto unforgiveness from those that have wronged me. Holy Spirit, I repent for harboring unforgiveness towards those that have hurt me. I can forgive much for I have been forgiven much. So I release them into your hands. You are my protector, my comfort, and my justifier. Help me to forgive others in advance who will offend or have offended me. I declare in and from my heart today. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Day 6: Trauma

"I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does trauma change who you are?

For Your Consideration

What we are talking about today may be hard for some of you. Many of us have experienced some form of trauma in our lives. Trauma can change the way that we perceive the world. It comes from a Greek word meaning "wounded." A simple way to understand the definition of trauma is anything that overwhelms our system.

Call It What It Is

When we take the time to expose trauma in our heart, we can move past the denial that keeps us stuck. Awareness is such a powerful tool in this process. There are many things that cause trauma: physical and sexual abuse, neglect/abandonment, war-related violence, accident, death, racial injustice, verbal abuse, diagnosis of illness or medical condition, neglect from childhood, domestic violence, environmental disasters, human made disasters (school shooting, terrorist attack, war), unemployment, racially/ethnically based violence or persecution, and family alcohol or substance abuse, just to name a few.

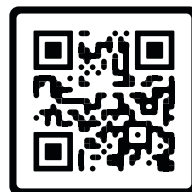
Face It

Maybe now is the time you are ready to validate your pain. When we take the time to label our pain, it gives way to being able to release it. God made us with feelings and emotions, and there are certain times they help us understand what is going on in our hearts. Here are some emotions that you might feel when your trauma is surfacing or when you are triggered by being put in situations that remind you of your trauma. You may have times of feeling afraid, hurt, sad, depressed, helpless, avoiding, stuck, confused, angry, judgmental, indifferent, repulsed, tense, stressed, shut down, bitter, or resentful. Just like a bully that keeps picking on you, the enemy will keep throwing these emotions at you.

Release It

Imagine a life being free from these emotions and situations. How would this affect your daily life? Would you be more open, loving, happy, positive, peaceful, strong, relaxed, and alive? As we seek understanding into these traumas that have been a part of our lives—some from the time we were very young—there comes a time that we need to release them to the One who wants us to live a life free from these things. Jesus Christ is the Source to set us free and help us heal from all the problems that came into the world as a result of The Choice. What trauma do you feel that you are still holding onto? Do you need to tell someone?

We understand the traumas you may have identified can be hard to talk about in a small group setting. The heart of our church is to resource you. Please ask your group leader or a pastor to help you take the next step in the healing process. We have Care Departments at each campus and you may fill out a request on the website or scan the QR code to the right.



SCAN ME

Action

What is the trauma that you are still carrying today?

What is the shame that you are still experiencing from that trauma?

Reflection

Take a few minutes and ask Jesus to show you where He was when this trauma occurred. The truth is, He has never left you or forsaken you.

Reaction

Ask Holy Spirit to begin the healing work in your heart through a simple prayer like this: Holy Spirit help me release the pain that this trauma has caused me.

Ask Holy Spirit what he wants to give you instead of the pain.

Pray: Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you that even though I didn't deserve it, He died to pay the price for my sins. I've been carrying unforgiveness toward this person who hurt me for much too long. Please forgive me and help me to forgive and release them. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Clearing

With the authority I have as a child of God, I renounce the heart blockage of Trauma that has held me captive far too long. In Jesus' name, I declare "Trauma, let go of my heart." Holy Spirit, I'm asking for a deep supernatural healing to take place where the wounds from this trauma have occurred. I am letting go of the trauma and asking that You, Lord, come and take hold of me. Holy Spirit, break the chains of this trauma over my life. I am free from this through the cross, death, blood, and sacrifice of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I declare in and from my heart today. In Jesus' name, Amen!

FORGIVENESS

Read Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

We want to give you the opportunity to take a deeper look at forgiveness after identifying your heart blockages. This is an important part of your freedom journey. Jesus’ work on the Cross was not for you alone. Jesus offered Himself for the sins of all humanity, and there may be some people you also need to forgive. God knows the public and private sins of the past, present, and future of every human that has and will ever live. These sins are what Jesus had in mind when He went to the Cross. Sin is an offense against God, and Jesus took care of it all! Jesus offers total forgiveness for each sin. When you sin, it’s forgiven. When others sin against you, it’s forgiven. Think about the power of this. Jesus offered forgiveness to all humanity! Now it’s up to us to offer that same forgiveness to those who offend us.

OFFERING FORGIVENESS

The question is no longer, “How often do I forgive?” but “How do I live unoffended?” God’s forgiveness towards us should motivate us to forgive others. Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross empowers us to forgive as we have been forgiven and to give love as we have freely received God’s love. Stay in God’s presence as you choose to forgive yourself and others.

CHOOSING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is not an option for a believer, but it is a choice. We have the ability to choose who and when we forgive. We have to make a willful choice to overlook someone’s wrongs. In fact, the Greek word for forgive, *aphesis*, means to push something away or to release. We must push away and release that which offends us. When we forgive others, we are imitating the vast love and forgiveness that Jesus showed us when He died for our own sins. God offers total forgiveness against any offense through the payment that Jesus made, and so should we offer that forgiveness to others.

WEEK SIX

FOLLOWING JESUS

***Come to me, all you who are
struggling hard and carrying
heavy loads, and I will give
you rest.***

Matthew 11:28 (CEB)

INTRODUCTION

The Essential Question: How do I live out my daily life from a place of freedom?

The Big Idea: Resting in the finished work of Jesus in my daily life allows me to live in freedom.

LAST WEEK

We learned about the six heart blockages: pride, fear, unbelief, rejection, bitterness, and trauma. Pride puts us, rather than God, at the center of our world. Fear occurs when our imagination takes over and steals from our present and future. Unbelief is the absence of understanding the character of God. Rejection happens when someone refuses to accept you or undermines your value and worth. Bitterness is resentment and has deep roots of ill will, anger, and disappointment from being offended. Trauma is the long-term effect of a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. These heart blockages set themselves up in our spiritual heart and harden it. This limits the effectiveness of how we connect with God and others.

THIS WEEK

What now? After identifying and clearing heart blockages, how do we continue to live a life of freedom? How do we continue to recognize the lies that want to rob us of peace, the lies that want to divide us, and the lies that cause us to pull away from intimacy with God? God did not make you to live a life with a spiritual heart full of blockages. He designed you to live life in a place of freedom with a tender heart like His. This week we are going to examine our hearts a little further as we begin to incorporate practices leading us into deeply formed lives, rooted in the way of Jesus.

Day 1: What is a life of rest?

Day 2: How do I remove the noise and distractions of life?

Day 3: How do I build a life with margin?

Day 4: How do I live a life of contentment?

Day 5: How do I slow down to be present with God and others?

Why Is This Important?

We often know that these heart blockages exist inside us. Other times it takes us quieting our souls to really listen to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us.

In the past five weeks, we have talked about who God is and how to grasp the reality that Jesus really loves us. This week we are continuing the work of freedom as we focus on constructing our lives to remain present with God, our souls, and others around us. Eliminating the busyness from our everyday lives makes room for us to get quiet and hear from the Holy Spirit. Hurry can consume us, leaving us with little time and space to rest. Without rest we become prone to falling back into destructive habits of spiritual sickness, as we pick things up we were never meant to carry. This week we will talk about forming our lives to deeply rest in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Day 1: Rest

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” - Matthew 11:28-30

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What is a life of rest?

For Your Consideration

Last week we uncovered the heart blockages all of us face and did the work of identifying them and allowing the Holy Spirit to heal us. So, how do we remain clear of heart blockages and open to the leading of the Spirit? To live spiritually healthy lives, we must create space to follow Jesus and practice His ways. This means rejecting the lifestyle of busyness as we move to adopt a lifestyle of rest. We begin by looking at this invitation from Jesus, “Take my yoke...come and walk with me...I’ll show you rest” (see Matthew 11:28).

Busyness

“How are you?” “Busy!” Are we not all guilty of saying this at times? “Busy” is the new, “Good, and you?” Jesus was rarely ever busy, never seeming to be in a hurry or running frantically from one thing to another. Jesus was present in the moment with God, His soul and body, and with those around Him. Even when He was going from place to place, He created a present life. Busyness steals our rest as we try to match the standard pace of the world around us. God designed us to both connect with Him and to reflect who He is to creation. Busyness hurts our souls by selling us a lie that if we only did more, people around us would think more highly of us or that we would finally be happy. But there is no joy in gaining the world, only to lose your soul.

Practices of Rest

Jesus is our example of what it is to live a life of rest as He went back and forth from being with people to resting in quiet places alone. The way of Jesus is a way of life as we retreat to places to pray, share meals with loved ones, and find moments to disconnect. Most of us work up to a vacation to find rest, but that is not what Jesus invites us to. Jesus invites us to daily resting in the power of the Holy Spirit. Without a lifestyle of daily rest, we miss opportunities to build deep relationships with those in our church or communities. We don’t have time to have dinner with people we love. We don’t have time to pray or read our Bibles. The most important things in our lives are traded for another hour at the office or another hour scrolling.

Rule of Life

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus invites us to take His yoke. What does that mean? A yoke is a “rule of life” or structure we put into place. Like a vine needs a trellis to grow and thrive, we also need a structure holding us up, a set of practices or even disciplines. Jesus invites us to be His students by taking His yoke, His structure. This week we will begin to create a set of disciplines or practices to learn to be apprentices of Jesus. These rules of life will produce deep grooves for us to rest in the finished work of Jesus, show us our identity in Christ, and show us that others around us are also made in the image of God. Removing the habit of busyness leads us into true rest found in God’s presence.

Action

Read Matthew 11:28-30 again in the Message translation. In what areas of your life are you tired and burned out?

Reflection

Take a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to show you what areas of busyness you need to let go of and replace with rest. Write those areas now down below.

Reaction

What are the lies you are believing about what you have to do to be loved by God and loved by others? What is the truth? Write it down.

Pray: Father, remind me that You never leave me or forsake me. I know You love me and sent Jesus to show me how to rest. Today, I lay down anything that makes me believe that if I do something, You will love me more, or it will finally make You love me. Show me that You already accept my full identity as your daughter or son, and there is nothing that I have to do to earn that love.

Day 2: Silence and Solitude

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” - Mark 1:35

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do I remove the noise and distractions of life?

For Your Consideration

If Jesus, God himself, went to quiet places to pray and get away, don't you think we should follow Him in doing so? Today, we are going to talk about quieting our lives. In silence and solitude, we quiet our mind, body, and soul to align ourselves with what the Holy Spirit is speaking to us.

Silence

Life is loud. The loudness may come from school, taking advice on who and how to date, raising kids, work, agendas, the news, volunteering, book clubs, social media, and all the things we think we should be doing to be successful or attractive. Even our retirements are filled with noise. We receive thousands of conflicting messages about who we are and who we should be. To hear the voice of God, we need to make space in our lives and turn off the distractions. Practicing silence is the way we do that. We need to shut out the voices of others as we think about who God is and what the Bible says about how we are to live. Silence helps us thrive in the middle of the chaos around us. Silence gives us space to hear what the Holy Spirit is speaking and trying to show us.

Solitude

Solitude is the state of retreating and being alone. You may need this after spending time with your big, crazy family during the holidays or maybe even a long week at work. In solitude, we experience stillness, and stillness often scares us. In these places of solitude, we recognize God's power in our lives and make room to clear more heart blockages. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God...” In places of solitude, we make space to accept God's love toward us, while He transforms us into people of deep love. Solitude helps us recognize our current state, remember that we belong to the Creator of the universe, and realize we are deeply loved.

Practicing Silence and Solitude

You may be asking yourself how you can move away from the noise, thoughts, and busyness? Silence and solitude are disciplines that need to be developed, like any other habit in our lives. You can't succeed or fail at it, but simply practice it. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can use self-control to grow in this area. In silence and solitude, we realize our need to pray and have conversations with God about our own souls and the emotions we are experiencing. Silence and solitude allow us space in our lives to hear from God and be honest with how we are doing emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

There are two parts to this process: finding a time and a place. For some people, that might be in the early morning when the house is quiet before everyone wakes up. For others, it may be in the evening when everything has settled, and you can think back through the day. When you find the time and place, remove the distractions around you. Cut out the noise of electronics, music, and anything that easily distracts you.

Action

Take 20 minutes and go outside with a pen and paper. Ask God to reveal Himself to you. What did God show you? Write it below.

Reflection

Cast your cares on God. What are you anxious or worried about? Write a prayer surrendering these things to God.

Reaction

Ask the Holy Spirit which habits He would have you change. Pick a time in the week that you would normally be scrolling, watching TV, or overworking, etc... and replace it with silence and solitude. Write out the plan He is showing you below.

Pray: Father, reveal to me the things I don't currently see. Forgive me for allowing things to take up space in my mind causing me to worry or live anxiously. Remind my mind that I have everything I need in You.

Day 3: Sabbath

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake.” - Psalm 23:1-3

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do I live a life of margin?

For Your Consideration

Sabbath is a word that when we hear it said, it might sound like something from the Old Testament or maybe even something you have never heard about before this. The goal of Sabbath is to take an entire day to rest with God, spend time with the people you love, and disconnect from the hustle. Sabbath goes against our entire Western culture as it calls us to rest, and culture calls us to always do more. The enemy does not want us to rest and make space to come before God.

What Is Sabbath?

Sabbath by definition is a 24-hour period of restful worship of God. The Old Testament describes the Sabbath as a time when God’s people refrained from work and rest, like God did on the seventh day after creation. When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, God took care of them by providing food on the sixth day to meet their needs for the seventh day. When we practice Sabbath, we demonstrate our submission to God and dependence upon God to provide for us. As God’s children, we get to enjoy His yoke of rest.

Building in a Day of Rest

Applying the Sabbath to our lives has massive implications as to how we live and love others. In Psalm 23, the author reminds us that God leads us and provides rest by refreshing our souls and taking care of us. Rest helps us put God first and surrender who we are to Him. Sabbath is more than just a day off. It is a day to connect and be guided, refreshed, and content. Building in a day of rest allows us to be spiritually healthy. Rest itself is a form of spiritual warfare. It is really hard for the enemy to destroy and wreck the love of those who are well-rested, spiritually healthy, and at peace with God.

Practicing Sabbath

Pick a time and place to have a Sabbath. Choose a day of the week with your family, roommates, or even some friends to have a Sabbath together. Sabbath is more than just a passive day off. Sabbath is an active day to stop, rest, delight, and worship. This is easy to say but sometimes difficult to do. It means you have to prepare your spirit and life to cut out the noise and work for a set time. It means actually preparing during the week for the day that you choose as your Sabbath. Have a prep day to do the laundry, check emails, set up boundaries, and do all the errands before so that you can be present with God, the people you love, and your own soul. On the day you choose to rest, make good food, pray, wake up early or sleep in late, and read Scripture with those around you. Make a list of what you are grateful for, nap, and maybe even take a walk. Put away the electronics, TV, computers, phones, and be present with God and others. Rest.

Action

Start small and work up to more! Remember Sabbath is a time to rest, refresh, and spend time with God and the ones we love. What time in your week can you set aside to remember, reflect, and receive from God? Write out your plan below.

Reflection

Guilt and condemnation can quickly come when we take time to rest. What makes it hard to rest? What thoughts or things do you feel like you need to be doing but are stealing your peace?

Reaction

Read Philippians 4:4-9. What lies do you need to replace with the truth found in this verse?

Pray: Father, help me to lay myself down and focus more on You, in Jesus’ name! I am Your daughter or Your son. I am enough because of who You are. Thank You for all You have done for me. Thank You for never leaving me. I love You, God.

Day 4: Simplicity

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." - Philippians 4:11-13

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do I live a life of contentment?

For Your Consideration

Often we are told the lie that we need to achieve more, be more, and own more in order to be valued by others. The good news is that it's not true. You are chosen. You are royalty. You are holy. You are treasured. You are in the light, and there is nothing you can do about it! Nothing you do can separate you from the love of God! We are free to live a life of simplicity, focusing on the things that matter, which really aren't things at all.

What is Simplicity?

1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NLT) says, "But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content." Simplicity is an inward reality resulting in an outward lifestyle. We look at the life of Jesus and the good news that He proclaimed about the kingdom of God. He came as a simple man proclaiming that the greatest in this kingdom were the least of these. Jesus is calling us to love our neighbor, love our enemies, and be generous to one another. This is our foundation of simplicity and simple living. Simplicity gives us clarity about our identities in Christ.

Stripping Back

We have more distractions in our lives than at any other time in history. Ads are everywhere telling us that we need more things, and we need them now. This occupies our attention and time, while influencing our values, as we lose focus on what is truly important. We work longer hours, compete as parents because of what we see on social media, and even set false ideas around what our lives should look like. We need to get rid of distractions, work to eliminate debt, reevaluate our values, and work to own less needless stuff.

Practicing Simplicity

Simplifying life is anything but simple. To practice simplicity we create space by owning less, living in generosity, and prioritizing what is important. First, simplify material things and begin questioning how they are physically and mentally taking up space. A practical first step to simplify your personal belongings is to make four piles: keep, donate, give, and trash. Follow these guidelines to decide if you need and enjoy the things taking up space in your life. Second, set a budget so that your spending is not over your means so you can live with less stress and be open to more generosity and justice. Lastly, simplify your calendar by cutting out excess obligations and scheduling only the important things. These steps will give you a start toward the practice of simplification as we examine our hearts about where we have placed our attention, on things instead of abiding with Christ.

Action

Read Matthew 6:25-34. Consider what occupies your time, attention, and even your money daily. How have these things made life more complicated for you and those around you?

Reflection

Ask the Holy Spirit for five ways you can simplify your life. Write them below.

Reaction

Your identity comes from God. How has your life been complicated or consumed by living from a place of seeking the approval of others?

Take some time and read the verses below. Remember your identity is NOT based on what you can do, but on what Jesus has already done.

You Are:	Because God's Word Says So:
Chosen	Isaiah 41:9
Adopted	1 John 3:1
Joint Heirs	Romans 8:17
Righteousness of Christ	Romans 3:22
Loved	John 17:23
More than a Conqueror	Romans 8:37

Pray: Father, help me live a life of simplicity and show me the areas of my life that have become complicated or where I have tried to prove myself. I know I am loved and chosen by You.

Day 5: Slowing

“Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ‘Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.’” - Matthew 6:31-34 (ESV)

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do I slow down to be present with God and others?

For Your Consideration

Our pace is killing us. Work, kids, influence, leisure, and our retirement plans! Even our pace in line at the supermarket is hurried as we look to see the shortest line and jump from one to another. We desperately need to slow down. John Ortberg, author and pastor, defines this practice of slowing as “cultivating patience by deliberately choosing to place ourselves in positions where we simply have to wait.” We need to slow our mind and body to the pace Jesus shows us to bring our souls to rest.

Pressure of Speed

As we get older, time speeds up. When we are 15 years old, days drag on and on, and then we’re 50, trying to figure out where the time went. This focus on time and speed kills our relationship with God and others as it is a counterfeit reality of life. It lies to us, telling us that if we did more, we wouldn’t experience any trials or hardships. If you only did more, you wouldn’t experience disappointment. But when our value is based on what we do or feel, we are faced with unmet expectations, shattering our beliefs about who God is and leaving us with broken identities.

Eliminating Hurry

Jesus was never in a hurry. He moved deliberately and slowly, allowing Him to see the people and speak to them, reviving their identities. As Western Christ-followers, we often spend more time on what we are accomplishing, instead of who we are becoming. We often live from one discontentment to the next, anxious about who we aren’t or worried about what we don’t have. Slowing down in actions of prayer and gratitude grow fields of loving contentment in our weaknesses as we remember Christ is our strength. He is our hope.

Practicing Slowing

Slow down to hear from God. In the practice of slowing, we intentionally choose to spend time resting in God’s presence. We actively slow down our days, actions, and bodies. In these moments, we are able to be aware of God’s closeness. By choosing to slow down, we cultivate patience in situations where we have to wait, which produces an unhurried soul. Be present with God this week by practically choosing to slow your pace. Slow your pace in the grocery store and choose a longer line; slow your pace as you walk; turn your smartphone into a dumb phone by deleting apps, email, and social media; and cut out things that make you rush. Use this time to pray and spend time in God’s Word without interruptions from the things around you.

Action

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11. Ask the Holy Spirit if there are any areas of your life where you need to slow down. What are those areas, and what are the steps you can take to slow down and pursue the kingdom of God?

Slow down your digital life by deleting social media, news apps, games, email, etc., anything that might be a constant distraction or stealing your peace. How does this make you feel?

Reflection

How has slowing down impacted the close relationships in your life? What have you realized?

Reaction:

When we choose to slow down and focus on God, we realize how much He loves us. Take some time to write a list of gratitude for all God has done in your life through your freedom journey.

Pray: God, continue to show me the things I need to remove, eliminate, and trim from my life so that I can live in joy and peace. Help me to see areas where I have been selfish. Show me how to love people for exactly who You have called them to be and not what I may see. Thank You for showing me these things.

WEEK 6 CONCLUSION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do I live out my daily life from a place of freedom?

The Big Idea:

Resting in the finished work of Jesus in my daily life allows me to live in freedom.

THIS WEEK

This week we discovered how we all need to build a foundation for rest so we can continue to live in freedom. In doing so, we allow Him to build, cut, and clear habits and things to develop a closer awareness of Jesus in our lives. The Holy Spirit revealed to us the areas of our lives where we are living spiritually hurried and reckless. We learned the importance of slowing down and making space for rest and freedom in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why Is This Important?

The concepts we explored this week are not “one-offs” or things that happen only once. They are also not times to be mastered but areas to make room for the love of God and to share that love with others. This week’s exercises are tools for you to continuously evaluate your heart before God. When we allow the Holy Spirit to have space to speak to us, it helps us identify the blockages and remember that the blood of Jesus heals and restores us.

When we recognize God’s nearness, the better we connect with Him, and the more we reflect Jesus to others. A pure, tender heart gives us the ability to exchange our old, broken image for the New Identity Jesus gives us. What you have experienced on this journey is a new life with the Holy Spirit— a new life filled with the freedom of His presence!

VIDEO SESSION

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How do I live out my daily life from a place of freedom?

MY FREEDOM

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is FREEDOM.

***-2 Corinthians 3:17 ESV
(emphasis added)***

God has done some incredible things over the last few weeks. We have explored God's story of freedom through creation, God's image, and Jesus' work on the Cross. Thankfully God's story of freedom never changes, and we will always have a place in His story.

Our personal journey of freedom never ends; we will always be growing in our relationship with the Holy Spirit. With His help, we can live in our new identity by recognizing our heart blockages and building habits and structures to overcome them. This will allow us to live healthy, spiritually-stable lives. All of this has laid the foundation of freedom for our next step. As we continue our journey at Freedom Weekend, you are going to experience connection with God unlike anything you've ever experienced.

Freedom Weekend may be a few days away, so continue connecting daily with God like you have been doing for the last six weeks. On the next few pages, there are some verses and questions to help you focus on God, while remaining free and in His presence. Remember, freedom is not the absence of something; freedom is found in the presence of God.

We can't wait to see how God moves in your life, and how your Journey of Freedom continues.

LIVING IN FREEDOM EVERYDAY

***And you will know the
truth, and the truth will
set you FREE.***

***-John 8:32 ESV
(emphasis added)***

NEXT STEPS

***Talk to your Freedom Leader and discover your next steps
as you live in freedom every day!***

JOIN A GROUP

LEAD A GROUP

SERVE

CARE

MY FREEDOM



www.mybayside.church