

Fulfil The Greatest Commandment

LOVE *the* LORD

20 STEPS TO BECOMING A DISCIPLE THAT GOD SEEKS

JENNIFER SUM



Lord, please use this book to bless



whom You love so much that You shed
Your own blood to redeem and give an
abundant life through Jesus Christ.



Love the Lord

Fulfil the greatest commandment

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Love The Lord presents a collection of answers to common obstacles that prevent Christians from fulfilling the greatest commandment of all: to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Once we are able to do this, we will become the true worshippers that our Heavenly Father seeks. This engaging study book packs biblical insights and practical tips in twenty succinct chapters that will transform the way you relate with God.

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John 4:23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

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All Bible references are from the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible,
unless otherwise stated.

INTRODUCTION

Love The Lord provides biblical insight and practical answers to four key questions that every believer asks:

- What does it really mean to love God?
- What does it take to become a new creation in Christ?
- How can I have the fullness of joy, peace and hope that God promises?
- How can I overcome sin and live victoriously?

Our relationship with God is truly a multifaceted one. It takes all of our heart, soul, strength and mind to love Him well.

Luke 10:27 He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' ...

There is little point in deciding to follow God and still hold on to idols in our lives (soul). We will succumb to temptations easily if we lack the determination to withstand them (strength) and knowledge of God's Word (mind). We may want to serve God yet act out of selfish intentions (heart). It is only when we turn over all of our heart, soul, strength and mind over to God that we can follow Him regardless of our tendencies, fears and past. This is the process of putting off our old selves described in Ephesians 4 and being renewed to become more like Jesus.

Ephesians 4:22-24 ... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

May this book be a blessing to you and your family, as you embark on a journey of learning to renew yourself in Jesus Christ. He is worthy of all our love and devotion!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A big thank you for everyone who encouraged me to compile and publish our Father's wonderful teachings and who tirelessly volunteered your time to get this book off the ground. You truly exemplify the sacrificial love of Christ. Special thanks go to
Andrew Sum, Ang Sze Wei, Chan Foon Yan,
Olivia Lau and Elaine Wong.

PREFACE FROM THE AUTHOR

I'm a little embarrassed to admit that I never intended this book to be published for circulation beyond the groups that I have had the privilege to teach and share life journeys with. It all began when I was asked to mentor a group of young leaders at church for 18 weeks. I realised I had so much to say but no structure with which I could say it. With many ideas and questions still buzzing in my mind, I turned to God and asked, "I'm lost, how do I do this?" Immediately, the verse Luke 10:27 came to mind.

Luke 10:27 And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind..."

Still not much wiser, I admitted, "I don't think I understand, Father." He then showed me that the abundant and victorious Christian life is built on loving Him well – with all our hearts, souls, strength and minds. After that "aha" moment, I began putting thought to paper. I am so glad that the Holy Spirit has inspired this writing because I have witnessed how lives have been touched and transformed over the years. All credit goes to Father! This book is now in your hands because of His guidance, as well as the unfailing encouragement of my dear husband and friends who have read the book. I pray that you will be inspired too.

If you will allow me to, I would like to invite the Holy Spirit to guide you as you go through this book.

*"Heavenly Father,
How immense is Your power, wisdom and works, yet You delight in our humble prayers. In Your presence, we remember how little and insignificant we are, but yet how greatly loved. We are in awe. You alone are worthy of all praise, worship and thanksgiving! Thank you for my friend who is reading this book. Holy Spirit, please help us understand how to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and worship You in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name, amen."*

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Love The Lord is best used for small group discussions within a community of believers who desire to be transformed to become more like Jesus Christ. Each chapter comes with a list of practical steps and discussion questions. Please find someone to go through this book with you and be blessed as you apply what you learn on your journey together.

More resources are available for free at teachinghumblehearts.com.

A PRAYER TO DEDICATE OUR LIVES TO JESUS CHRIST

“I, (your name), acknowledge that I have sinned against God. Today, I choose to turn away from my own ways and invite Jesus Christ to be my Lord, Saviour and Friend. Thank you, Jesus, for dying on the cross for my sins and rising again after three days by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank You that Your blood cleanses me from the penalty of my sins. I commit to following You for the rest of my life and invite Your Holy Spirit to restore my heart, soul, strength and mind to fullness through Your instruction and cleansing each day. I choose to die to my old self and receive the future and hope that You have prepared and planned for me. I bring all of the work of Jesus on the cross directly against Satan's workings in my life. Thank You, God, for Your unfailing Love. Teach me Your ways and make me a new creation for Your glory. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

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CHAPTER 1



GOD LOVED US FIRST

All Christian prayers end “*in Jesus’ name*” but this doesn’t mean we all pray to the same God. Since the time of the apostles, people have heard different teachings and ideas about God that have been confusing and misleading. Over time, we can adopt broken images of God and pray to “*another Jesus*”, as the apostle Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 11.

2 Corinthians 11:4 For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.

Often, God the Father is viewed as powerful, mysterious, and distant. On the other hand, Jesus is compassionate, kind and caring. Finally, the Holy Spirit is supernatural, close and helpful. Somehow, we have split God’s image into at least three different caricatures. God does not suffer from a multiple personality disorder.

Instead, we worship a God who is One: the Heavenly Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not divided in their personalities. Jesus is the “exact imprint” of God the Father and can only do what He sees the Father do and the Holy Spirit is God manifested in us. The original Hebrew word for the Holy Spirit is “*Ruach*”, which refers to the breath of God that disperses His life-force and intentions. The Holy Spirit is therefore not a separate

person, but the very essence of God himself. Let us not believe in the lie that God is confusing because that can stand in the way of true worship. God is far more than we can imagine.

Hebrews 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high

God is mind-blowingly majestic, sacred and fearsome. He reigns supreme in this entire universe. His thoughts cannot be understood by billions of human beings. He alone is unique and holy. He is infinitely above humanity and worthy of absolute awe, fear and reverence. The Bible shows that both spiritual and human beings would fall flat on their faces in terror whenever God was present.

Exodus 15:11 "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

God is also a wonderful Father and holy Judge who desires to delight over His children. When we repent of our sins and draw close to Him, there is great rejoicing in heaven. The Creator Himself will gladly sing loudly over us. This is an incredible picture of the Ruler of our universe who delights in us when we choose to obey Him.

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

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF PERFECT LOVE

God is not nonchalant when we seek Him; He gladly welcomes us. God is not unresponsive when we sin; He is grieved. He is not unsympathetic when we suffer; He empathises with us. God is not unaffected when we kill and destroy; He is angry. Far and above all of God's emotions is His perfect love for His children.

Our Heavenly Father is kind, gentle, patient, compassionate

and faithful. He will never forsake us. Yet every one of us has had a broken image of God at one time or other. How can we know God's love in our hearts, and not just in our heads?

Psalms 145:8 NLT The LORD is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

Deuteronomy 31:6 NLT So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you."

Here is what the Bible also says about God:

- God is not ashamed to be called our God | *Hebrews 11:16 NLT But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*
- God rejoices over us when we repent | *Luke 15:7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*
- God delights in us, He sings over us | *Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*
- God remains faithful to us regardless of how often we mess up | *2 Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*
- God loves us with an everlasting love | *Jeremiah 31:3 the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.*
- God gives good and perfect gifts to us | *James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*
- God's plans are for us to thrive and flourish | *Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*
- God will never let anyone snatch us out of His hand | *John 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.*

- God will never let anything separate us from His love | *Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

When God speaks in such absolute terms, He means it absolutely. We only find it hard to completely believe His Word because we tend to see God through our own experiences with other people, religious organisations and what the world tells us. If we decide to put away all the bias we have accumulated over the years, we will be able to rest in God's absolute love and never have to feel depressed, accused, condemned, alone, afraid, abandoned or unprotected again. Does this sound too good to be true?

THE SUBTLE ASSAULT OF UNBELIEF

What is it that blocks us from believing and basking in God's perfect love? The simple answer is unbelief. Unbelief can be very subtle and innocuous. We do not have to reject God outright to be a victim of unbelief. Unbelief can be as innocent as:

- placing more weight on how we feel rather than what God says,
- believing what others say rather than what God says, or
- only partially trusting what God says.

When we grow up hearing worldly phrases such as, "there is no such thing as a free lunch", "you have to prove yourself" or "you've got to earn it", we can't help but believe that in order to deserve God's love:

"I must always perform well."

"I must do more."

"I must be perfect."

As ironic as it may sound, people find it hard to believe that God isn't as calculative and judgmental as the rest of the world. He accepts

our imperfections, because He knows how weak we are. This is why He has given us the power to be transformed to be more like Him through His Holy Spirit. We do not realise that when we work to feel worthy of Him, we have ignored the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Psalm 103:13-14 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Equally destructive to our belief in God's love are sayings such as, "What goes around comes around", "that's karma" or "you got what you deserve." When we listen to such sayings, we end up believing we don't deserve God's love once we fall into sin:

"I am defiled."

"I am hopeless."

"I am bad."

The truth is, the reality or intensity of God's love doesn't depend on how good or bad we've been. This is the meaning of grace. God will always love us and forgive us lavishly when we seek Him with all our hearts. He loves to be generous. In His grace, Jesus said that He came to call us to repentance, and not to perfection.

Luke 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

THE SOURCE OF OUR UNBELIEF: LIES

We tend to forget that God is not of this world.

John 18:36 NLT Jesus answered, "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom... But my Kingdom is not of this world."

This world is imperfect because of “*the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire*” (2 Peter 1:4). God, who is sinless and inhabits eternity, is far above the ways of this temporary world.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

When God created this world, it was “very good.” In fact, everything God creates is good and perfect. This world only became corrupted when man decided to buy into Satan’s deceptions and rebel against their Creator.

Genesis 1:31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good...

One of the biggest obstacles to faith in God’s unfailing love is our tendency to use this world as a standard or benchmark to “measure” God’s love. We find it hard to imagine God’s immense love for us when we have only experienced faulty, conditional, and selfish human love; we confuse God’s love with this kind of corrupted love.

Isaiah 55:8-9 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Satan works hard to corrupt our understanding of God’s love. Sadly, Satan continues to be called the “god of this world” because too many people have fallen for and believe his deceptions. We continue to live as if Satan’s corrupt form of love is the only form of love that exists.

2 Corinthians 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Here are a few examples of how we have often been confused and duped.

1. “He is not with me.” | God’s Spirit is everywhere, it is impossible to escape His presence. | *Psalm 139:7-8 Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*
2. “He doesn’t notice me.” | God constantly watches over us and keeps us from harm. | *Psalm 121:7 NLT The LORD keeps you from all harm and watches over your life.*
3. “He won’t bother to show Himself to me.” | God wants to reveal Himself and great and hidden things to us. | *Jeremiah 33:3 Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.*
4. “He’s not listening to me.” | God is neither deaf nor powerless. He is majestic and awe-inspiring. | *Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear;*
5. “He is angry with me.” | God is not spiteful. He is gentle and full of compassion. | *Isaiah 54:9-10 “... I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*
6. “He holds my sins against me.” | God is not petty. He readily forgives and forgets our sins. | *Isaiah 43:25 “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.*
7. “He is ashamed of me.” | God takes no pleasure in disgracing us. He wants to help us. | *Isaiah 50:7 But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*

Satan tempts us to model our misguided beliefs about God on weak and fallen human beings instead of Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life. Our unbelief can be so nuanced and subtle that most of us don’t even realise that we harbour unbelief in our hearts.

Let us therefore begin this book by first repenting any unbelief in His perfect love. God is worthy of our love because He is always faithful and good towards us, regardless of what we have done.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. In what ways has your understanding of God's love been corrupted by this world? Please list the lies you have believed.
- Q2. What struggles do you wish to overcome the most through this book study?

CHAPTER 2



THE NEW HEART, SOUL, STRENGTH AND MIND

The word, Christian, is derived from the Hebrew term “mashiach”, which refers to those who are anointed or who have a divine presence. It does not refer to people who merely attend church services or participate in Bible studies. To be a Christian involves much more. We are “Christian” when we bring God’s divine blessings, goodness, wisdom, and empowerment everywhere we go.

2 Peter 1:4 NLT And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to share in His divine nature and spiritual anointing. But first, we must consciously invite Jesus to restore all the parts that are stained with sin: our hearts, souls, strength and minds. Only when we do so, can we truly reflect more and more of God’s glory and live as Jesus would in our modern times.

2 Corinthians 3:16,18 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

1 John 2:6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

A JOURNEY TOWARDS FULLNESS IN CHRIST

The twelve apostles had the incredible privilege of becoming intimately acquainted with Jesus for three years, before the Son of God ascended into heaven. Yet, right up to the day that Jesus was to be crucified for their sins, the apostles showed themselves to suffer from spiritual blindness, greed, self-righteousness and pride.

Doesn't being in the presence of God day in and day out help to transform people into godly disciples? Apparently not! In 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul said that we become new creations when we place our faith in Jesus Christ. The apostles' lives are evidence that this transformation is not automatic.

In Ephesians, the apostle Paul elaborated on how we become new creations – we have to put on our new selves. To “put on” is an intentional conscious act, not an accidental or passive one. We become new creations by intentionally renewing our hearts, souls, strength and minds in Jesus Christ, so we can be gradually restored back into God's perfect image.

Ephesians 4:22-24 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

God knows human beings inside out. He knows our complexity and our frailty. Therefore, He specifically called us to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind – knowing that we need to conquer each of these parts in order for us to love and honour Him well, and leave sin behind us completely.

Luke 10:27 He answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind”...

For example, we should not just persevere outwardly in hardship (strength) only to secretly indulge in our lustful appetites (soul) inwardly to compensate for the suffering we experience. We cannot just understand (mind) that emotions shouldn't rule us, and then allow the pain of our trauma (soul) drive us to judge and slander

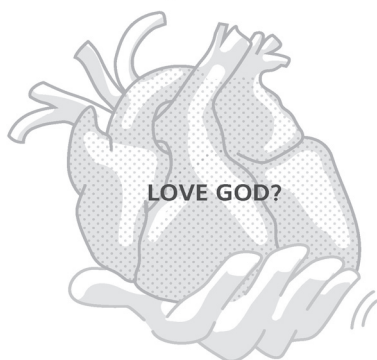
others. Here is a very brief look at how our hearts, souls, strength and minds work.

PURIFYING OUR HEARTS: CHOOSING GOD FIRST

Our heart is our moral centre. It is the source of our conscience, motivations and inclinations. The heart can be righteous or unrighteous; from our hearts spring evil or good.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

God weighs our hearts



God examines our hearts, not just our actions. He delights in those who desire to follow His will and bring Him glory. Even as believers, we can be driven by the fear or pride in our hearts more than we are by God's love for others. We may fool ourselves about our personal motives and motivations when we serve in church, but we can't hide the truth from God. He will weigh our hearts on His scales of justice.

1 Samuel 16:7 ... For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Job 31:6 NLT "Have I lied to anyone or deceived anyone? Let God weigh me on the scales of justice, for he knows my integrity."

A believer with an impure heart may think like this:

- "I prefer things to go my way, what's wrong with that? Can't God just bless me anyway?"

- “People should respect me because I serve in church and help so many others.”
- “I don’t believe God always has good plans. What if He gives me something I don’t want?”
- “This is taking too long. I will just go ahead and do what I think is right.”
- “Look at them, they don’t know the right things to do (like I do).”
- “Next time I see that person, I will make sure he / she feels bad about the offence I have felt.”

Like King David who repeatedly sang in the Psalms, we need to pause and invite God to test our hearts and purify us from our sins.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Psalm 51:7,9,10 NLT Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Don’t keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Psalm 40:8 I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

We can choose to purify our hearts as we:

- a. Study God’s Word and know His will and spiritual laws;
- b. Ask God to examine our hearts and reveal anything that is offensive to His Holiness;
- c. Be open and humble to receive correction and admonishment from the Holy Spirit as well as god-fearing believers in Christ;
- d. Be ready to confess our sins to God and reconcile with people; and
- e. Consciously choose to honour God first in our hearts so as to inherit His blessings, and not curses.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD your God...”

To learn how to choose God first in everything, it is helpful to study the Bible, undergo discipleship training, and be surrounded by godly role models.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...

RESTORING OUR SOULS: BEING SPIRITUALLY CLEANSED

Our soul is closely tied to our fleshly human nature, which includes our fleshly passions, emotions, desires and memories.

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

It is these passions that drive us to sin. The soul that sins against God is spiritually dead and condemned to eternal suffering and separation from our Heavenly Father. To be set free from the sinful nature of our fallen souls, we must accept the free gift of eternal life in Jesus and “become slaves of God” by submitting all our ways to His sovereign rule and guidance.

Ephesians 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

Romans 6:22-23 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We fall into sin when we choose to live outside of God’s design for the world. As a result of knowingly or unknowingly rebelling against God’s will, we end up hurting ourselves and others. Many people are

unaware that they go through life with hurting, wounded souls as a result of sin, both their own as well as other people's sins against them. These invisible "trauma" wounds to our souls desperately need God's deep spiritual cleansing and healing.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines trauma as "a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems, usually for a long time." Traumatic events such as an unexpected death, divorce, bullying, parental neglect, betrayal, verbal abuse, rape or rejection can have a negative impact on our thought processes and emotional health for a long time.

The resulting guilt, grief or shame from sin can then continue to manifest as anger, anxiety, heartaches, restlessness or stress and last a lifetime if left unaddressed. There is a high emotional, psychological and even physical cost for sin. Research by the Boston Children's Hospital has shown that children who have been bullied when young tend to suffer from poorer mental and physical health, increased symptoms of depression and lower self-esteem, even as adults.

Other research has shown that pent-up negative emotions will harm our health and shorten our lifespans. Chronic stress severely affects the neurotransmitters in our brains and nervous systems, which are responsible for our emotional and physical reactions to external circumstances, and go on to change the chemical composition in many parts of our brains.

We only need to look at the effects of hurt, trauma and wounds to realise that sin has serious, unwanted negative effects. Emotions that are freely experienced and expressed without judgment or attachment tend to flow fluidly. Suppressed fear and other negative emotions in our souls however, deplete us of mental energy and hope, which in turn, can lead to hypertension, hormonal imbalances, digestive disorders, and high blood pressure. They even damage our immune systems. Over time, repressed negative emotions will shorten the "end caps" of our DNA strands that influence ageing and shorten our life expectancies.

As a result of invisible emotional wounds from sin and trauma in the past, we may experience a lack of inner peace, deep joy, patience, and self-control – essentially, the effects of sin robs us of the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The Bible states that Jesus came to save the world from our sins and heal the brokenhearted. Everyone has suffered the effects of sin and trauma in some form or other, and we are told not to “keep going and pay the penalty” for covering them up. God invites us to go to Him with our pain because He wants to heal our souls.

Psalms 147:3 He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

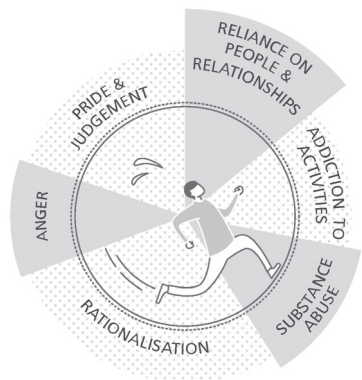
Proverbs 22:3 The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

When people do not know how to bring their unresolved emotional pains and past sins to God, they will usually resort to covering them up through a variety of unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Some indications that may possibly suggest a wounded soul include:

- Anxiety (constant)
- Binge eating, drinking or shopping
- Crying for no reason
- Depression
- Escapism
- Fear
- Lack of self-control
- Lying and self-delusion
- Materialism
- Obsessions with sex, sports, people etc.

Unhealthy coping mechanisms



- Perfectionism
- Tendency to please people all the time
- Pride
- Self-hatred
- Selfishness
- Workaholism

We can never heal our own wounded souls without the help of the One who created us. God will restore our souls to full spiritual health, if we choose to:

- a. Bring our emotional wounds to Jesus for healing;
- b. Release forgiveness to those who have hurt us;
- c. Repent of our sinful nature and self-destructive inner vows;
- d. Make a covenant to follow God 100%;
- e. Demolish spiritual strongholds and lies from Satan that we have believed;
- f. Command any spirits that have built strongholds in the darkness of our sins and pain to leave in Jesus' name;
- g. Invite Jesus to heal us and shine His light into our past darkness;
- h. Ask to be released from the impact of our parents' and ancestors' sins in Jesus' name;
- i. Learn what it means to turn away from our past bondage to sin;
- j. Train ourselves to build our faith and strength in God alone;
- k. Learn to comfort our souls by speaking God's Word; and
- l. Learn to put on our spiritual armour every day.

We need Jesus to shine His light into our wounded souls and drive away the darkness of our shame and guilt. Jesus died to take on our guilt so that we never have to feel ashamed again. He promises He is near us and will never forsake us. Jesus will personally comfort us and turn our darkness, mourning and despair into something beautiful. What a privilege to be redeemed and restored by God Himself who personally comes to heal us.

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Isaiah 42:16 And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them.

BUILDING OUR STRENGTH: GROWING IN FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Strength is not only a physical attribute; it is an important personality trait. Every athlete is familiar with the concept of strength training. It involves exerting our muscles against an external resistance in order to build muscle strength, endurance and size. Similarly, spiritual strength training involves learning to resist the corruption of this world, so that our “spiritual muscles” become stronger and more resilient, and we grow in godly endurance and perseverance over time.

It takes discipline to develop personal strength and resolve. Human beings have an inborn tendency to escape discipline. We have very limited resolve and determination of our own. True spiritual strength and training comes from following God’s Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

1 Timothy 4:8 NLT “Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.”

How long it takes to form
new habits by repetition



Endurance is critical if we wish to be transformed as a Christian because learning new habits takes time. It normally takes a human being anywhere between one to eight months to develop a new habit. This is one reason why many new year resolutions don’t work. People cannot just resolve to do something. We need to put our resolutions into action and practice them over and over again until they become second nature.

The apostle Paul is an exceptional example of godly endurance. In his zeal for the Lord, he experienced whipping, beating, stoning, shipwreck, hunger and many dangers. If it were not for Paul’s strength in the Lord, we would not be blessed by his large number of writings in the New Testament today. Paul was able to

endure because he had a clear heavenly goal in mind and exercised much faith, patience, love and steadfastness. He trusted the promises of God and never lost hope. We may never have to bear the sufferings that Paul did, but we do live in a world that is still fallen. Nonetheless, we called to grow in spiritual strength, endurance and self-control because a true follower of Jesus will have to turn away from many of the world's temptations.

2 Corinthians 11:24-27 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

1 Corinthians 9:25 Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.

We can build our spiritual strength as we:

- a. Put our hope in God, not in people or our circumstances;
- b. Choose to thank God and praise Him in all circumstances, both good and bad;
- c. Submit to His will and rely on Him to carry us through difficult times;
- d. Actively follow the Holy Spirit as He guides and leads us in our walk with God;
- e. Engage in a godly community that will pray for and encourage us in our spiritual development;
- f. Pray with fellow believers regularly for mutual edification, protection and blessing;
- g. Remind ourselves to be patient and not to forfeit our spiritual blessings because of a moment of spiritual weakness; and
- h. Choose to always testify how God always delivers us from difficult times.

To build spiritual strength and endurance, all of us need the encouragement and accountability from a godly community. Being

able to observe godly role models and testimonies of how Jesus rescues those who endure is also very beneficial.

Lastly, serving in ministry is a real test and exercise of our love, faith and hope, which in turn helps to train us in our spiritual strength.

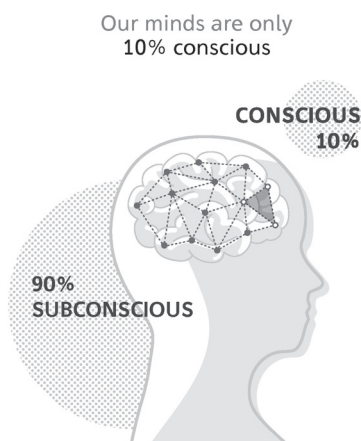
TRANSFORMING OUR MINDS: GROWING IN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL

Our minds give us the ability to assess, discern, imagine, remember, meditate, judge, choose and decide. It is the filter for the motivations of our hearts and souls, and determines our actions.

Many people use their minds to merely acquire technical knowledge of things that are temporal. The promise for believers is so much more. We can acquire amazing eternal spiritual understanding and wisdom from God's Word and His Holy Spirit. Growing in wisdom and knowledge of God however, takes great conscious effort in a world filled with distracting, insubstantial and meaningless noise.

Most of us are unaware that we are passively (subconsciously) learning all the time. Our brains act like sponges and constantly soak up information and signals from our environment. These are then organised and "filed" to form building blocks for our mindset, which make up how we subconsciously see the world. Our mindsets eventually form the basis for how we react to real-life circumstances,

as if we are operating on "auto pilot."



In 2011, researchers from Yale and Good Think, Inc. showed different videos about the effects of stress to two groups of managers from UBS, a financial services firm. The first group watched a video that detailed scientific findings about how stress is debilitating, while the second group was shown a video about how stress enhances the human brain and body. As a result, the second group subsequently used stress to their

advantage, feeling more productive and energetic. They reported significantly fewer physical symptoms associated with distress (such as headaches, backaches, fatigue) and scored higher on life satisfaction. All this was the result of watching one video, which goes to show that what we expose our minds to has the power to influence our lives.

As followers of Jesus, we are to make 100% of our minds obedient to Christ. The challenge is that only 10% of our minds are conscious. We need to use this 10% to consciously decide what gets stored in the 90% that is subconscious.

The good news is that God created man to have the ability to literally “rewire” our brains’ pathways, by training ourselves to focus on the types of thoughts and beliefs we want to store in our minds. This is the renewal of our mind as mentioned in Romans 12:2. Hence, we can truly overcome old ways of thinking that go “against the knowledge of God” and renew our minds in Christ at any age, even in our nineties. Not too long ago, scientists uncovered neuroplasticity, which refers to the way our brain physically changes its thought “pathways” through repetition. The more we reinforce certain new thoughts or emotions, the more we change the way our brains work and how we react. This neuroplasticity lasts a lifetime.

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

2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

Thank God that we can transform our minds when we:

- a. Study God’s Word and everything He has done and plans to do in the near future;
- b. Meditate on God’s Word and memorise Bible verses;
- c. Learn about spiritual realities and how to defend our minds against spiritual attacks;
- d. Learn to recognise Satan’s lies and deceptions; and
- e. Learn to overcome ungodly patterns of thinking, and our “old self” when it tries to resurrect itself, by remembering God’s Word.

To grow in wisdom and knowledge of God's will, we should make an effort to study the Bible, serve others in church or other ministries, and undergo discipleship training.

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

RESTORATION WITHIN A GODLY COMMUNITY

Restoration to fullness in Christ is best done within a community of god-fearing believers. After all, we are called to encourage and lift one another up.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Choosing to be involved with a godly community will:

- a. Provide a good platform for studying God's Word with others and putting it into practice;
- b. Provide godly influences over our lives, in contrast to the other secular influences in our lives;
- c. Reveal our own issues to us as we encounter new people and new challenges in relationships;
- d. Provide us with much needed emotional, practical and spiritual support;
- e. Help us grow in our understanding of people as we share our burdens with each other;
- f. Teach us to see others the way God sees them, and learn to put others before ourselves;
- g. Make us more aware of other people's needs and nudge us to be less self-centred;
- h. Teach us how to work through conflict;
- i. Give us the opportunity to meet others' practical needs;
- j. Give us opportunities to forgive others and demonstrate God's grace;

- k. Provide a good platform to confess our sins and seek inner healing;
- l. Provide us with good role models and testimonies to build our faith and understanding of our Father in heaven;
- m. Witness God's work in others;
- n. Help us discover our spiritual gifts and talents; and
- o. Provide opportunities for us to serve and encourage others.

The Bible warns us to choose our friends carefully. The company we keep greatly influences the direction of our lives. Our companions invariably impact the way we think, feel and behave. They also influence us to either follow wicked or righteous ways of living. Learning to live like Jesus Christ is a community effort.

Proverbs 12:26 One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Which of these areas, the heart, soul, strength or mind, do you think is most difficult to change? Why?
- Q2. Refer to the five lists of bullet points (a. b. c.) and discuss the ones you personally need help with. Identify someone to keep you accountable.

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OUR HEART

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CHAPTER 3



SUBMITTING TO GOD

No one likes to acknowledge that we are weak, blind and helpless without God. Yet the truth is we are unable to tolerate rejection, ascertain the future or even guarantee that we can take our next breath.

Revelation 3:17 For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

WE ARE DRIVEN BY DIFFERENT FEARS

This lack of control over our destinies creates a lot of fear and anxiety. Over time, we develop inner scripts in response to our fears, which drive many of our lifestyles and choices. Our inner scripts reveal the insecurities that run through many hearts.

It is all too easy to fall into this trap when we are soaked in a culture that idolises those who appear to “have it all” in terms of earthly desires, such as wealth, fitness, popularity, and the latest gadget. We are forced to live in a state of constant discontentment and to keep striving for more. The Bible calls this “chasing after the wind.”

Ecclesiastes 1:14 NIV I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

WE FEAR BECAUSE WE HAVEN'T ACCEPTED GOD'S REASSURANCES

Fear is the opposite of faith in God. Every fear we entertain is because we don't trust God on some level. Time and time again, God reminds us that He is good, and that He has a purpose and plan for each one of us.

God will always protect us and never leave us. He has even graciously provided an answer to each of our common fears to reassure, comfort and encourage us. It is up to us to accept or reject His reassurances in our hearts.

Our inner scripts	Our fears and God's reassurance
"I don't like to look bad in front of others."	<p>Fear of abandonment</p> <p><i>Deuteronomy 31:8 It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."</i></p>
"I can't decide now."	<p>Fear of failure</p> <p><i>James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.</i></p>
"I have to preserve my youth and strength."	<p>Fear of getting old</p> <p><i>Isaiah 40:31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.</i></p>
"I would like to be in a relationship."	<p>Fear of loneliness</p> <p><i>Matthew 28:20 ... And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."</i></p>

“I had better join in. I want what they have.”	<p>Fear of losing out</p> <p><i>Matthew 6:34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.</i></p>
“I don't want to follow any guidelines.”	<p>Fear of loss of freedom</p> <p><i>Galatians 5:13 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.</i></p>
“I don’t like meeting new people.”	<p>Fear of not fitting in</p> <p><i>2 Corinthians 10:18 NLT When people commend themselves, it doesn't count for much. The important thing is for the Lord to commend them.</i></p>
“I have to fit in and not speak the truth.”	<p>Fear of rejection</p> <p><i>Psalms 27:10 NLT Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close.</i></p>
“I need this in order to secure happiness.”	<p>Fear of suffering</p> <p><i>1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.</i></p>
“I need to do what I can to secure my future.”	<p>Fear of uncertainty</p> <p><i>James 4:13-15 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”</i></p>
“I don’t rely on or trust anyone.”	<p>Fear of vulnerability</p> <p><i>2 Corinthians 4:7 NLT We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.</i></p>

FEAR IS THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE

Some people say the most powerful thing on earth is love. Indeed it is. If we love someone or something, it will drive us to step outside our comfort zones and do what is normally unnatural to us. Love pulls down the walls of our fear. The Bible says that we live with fear because we have not fully sought God's perfect love.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

FEAR AND INSECURITY ARE DRIVEN BY PRIDE

Most fears are a direct result of our own pride. Pride says, "My reputation and feelings are the most important." It seeks to compare ourselves with other human beings and ensure we are positioned above them. When our need to impress, control and dominate others is threatened, we experience stress and fear.

The reality is that when we compare ourselves with anyone, we are actually looking at the wrong person. As believers, we are all called to compare ourselves with Jesus and become more like Him. God never calls us to benchmark ourselves against people. He calls us to look to Jesus, our High Priest, Saviour and Friend.

Let us be honest with ourselves. Compared to God, what is there that we can boast of? Can we change the direction of the oceans or create butterflies just by speaking them into being? Will we die for someone who has offended us over and over again, in order to save his or her life? Nothing we can do, achieve or say will ever compare to Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross and everything He has given to us as a result.

Ephesians 5:1-2 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

SATAN'S HEART IS PROUD

Pride prevents us from admitting our need for God. It forms an obstacle that stops us from turning humbly to God and following Him with all our heart. Pride says three main things:

- “I control my own destiny.”
- “I can achieve my own glory.”
- “I’m above all else.”

It is precisely this type of attitude that Satan loves believers to fall for, because he is full of pride. When we set our mind on our own selfish interests, we become like Satan, whose pride would not allow him to submit to God. We become slaves to Satan when we choose pride over humility.

Romans 8:7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

GOD'S HEART IS HUMBLE

God is so mighty and so high above us that He has every right to look down His nose at us. Yet He shows Himself to be just the opposite. Numerous times in the Bible, God reminds us that He is humble.

1. He humbles Himself to notice us | *Psalm 113:5-6 NASB Who is like the LORD our God, Who is enthroned on high, who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth?*
2. He humbled Himself to live a simple life on earth | *Luke 9:58 And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”*
3. He humbled Himself to serve us | *Mark 10:45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

4. He humbled Himself to be tortured in our place, so we can enjoy a full life | *Philippians 2:8-9 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross...*
5. He humbled Himself to die falsely accused | *Isaiah 53:9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.*
6. He humbles Himself to gently carry our burdens | *Matthew 11:29 NASB 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.*

It is precisely because God is humble that He mocks and opposes those who are proud.

Proverbs 3:34 NIV He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble and oppressed.

James 4:6 ... Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

LET'S STOP FOLLOWING SATAN

The first and most critical step in becoming a true follower of Jesus is to put down all our fears and pride.

God knows we resist submitting everything to Him because we are fearful. That is why He has repeatedly told us throughout the Bible to not fear. The phrase "do not fear" and its equivalent appear 137 times in the English Standard Version Bible. But on the other hand, we must understand that our fears are driven by our pride - and to be proud is to follow Satan's example. Let us contrast Satan's attitude with King David's. David is a man whom God described as "a man after my heart, who will do all my will" in Acts 13:22.

Satan's heart said, "I will set up my own throne." *Isaiah 14:13 You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God, I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'*

David's heart said, "Who am I that my God and King even cares for me?" *Psalm 8:3-4 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?*

When we place ourselves on the throne in our hearts to glorify ourselves and "rule" our own lives, we are behaving just like Satan.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN SUBMITTING TO GOD

Unfortunately, there is no on-and-off button for pride. Where we have built up walls of pride and fears over years or even decades, we must actively tear them down and unlearn ingrained patterns of thinking.

This following is a quick checklist of some ways we can practice submitting ourselves before God. We cannot be transformed on our own strength. We all need the Holy Spirit's gentle guidance to give up our fears and submit to God. He is forever patient and kind, and always answers us when we ask for His help. No one is transformed overnight. Even the apostles, who spent three years with Jesus, struggled with some of these areas.

1. Acknowledge God for who He is and worship Him

First, we must take time to bow our hearts to our magnificent, awe-inspiring and fearsome God. There are no human words that can describe who He is and what He has blessed us with.

Job 26:11,14 The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke. Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?"

2. Confess and repent

We are only telling the truth when we confess that we are and have nothing without God. If we wish to follow Jesus, we should repent of all the times we have tried to control our own lives in the false belief that we have the power to do so. In addition, we must repent of the

times we have judged God and slandered Him. On a daily basis, we should stop and say sorry to God whenever our hearts start to believe anything that is close to the following:

- “I control my own destiny.”
- “I can achieve my own glory.”
- “I’m above all else.”

Pride only brings strife. It blinds us and leads us to foolish decisions. Our pride also blocks Jesus’ blood from washing us clean from our sins, because it won’t allow God to sit on the throne in our hearts to rule over and redeem our past, present and future.

Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.

3. Thank God every day

God says it is His will that we thank Him in any circumstance, because He knows this helps us keep our hearts in check. We are to focus on His power and providence and not on our own insecurities.

We can start by thanking God for one thing each day and as the days pass, we can add new things to this list. One will be surprised by how long our lists can be if we truly are thankful.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

4. Stop coveting

A sure sign of pride is covetousness. Pride tells us we deserve more. We compare, envy, crave, copy or even steal. It blinds us to our blessings and raises our levels of discontentment and stress. We all need to stop and repent of coveting and desiring what others have. Such greed is explicitly forbidden in The Ten Commandments. God sets out such laws for our own good; to prevent us from destroying ourselves with toxic envy.

Exodus 20:17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”

5. Stop grumbling

To grumble is to complain, whine and protest. Anyone who is a constant grumbler is highly unattractive. Such people are a killjoy. Any form of grumbling stems from a spirit of pride and entitlement that seeks to pollute others with our bitterness. When we truly have Christ in our hearts, we will be positive shining lights in our world.

Philippians 2:14-15 Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

6. Stop passing judgment

Many believe that the “freedom of speech” is the right of every human being. We are all entitled to our own views and opinions. When we assess and conclude anything about other people however, we judge them in our hearts. Things get worse when we follow up with thoughts like, “They will never change” or “They are beyond hope.” Then we not only judge them, but also curse them!

Such behaviour comes from a form of pride that assumes we are all knowing and entitled to pass judgment on others. It also implies that God cannot work a miracle in their lives. This slanders and offends our all-powerful and merciful Father in heaven.

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

7. Stop boasting

Pride tells us that our achievements and sacrifices should be glorified, neglecting that God alone deserves all glory and worship. Let us wait on God’s personal praises instead and not crave the recognition and praises of other people. Our Heavenly Father’s rewards are worth infinitely more than earthly rewards and they last forever.

Matthew 6:1,4 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven ... so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

8. Stop seeking attention

People can seek attention in negative ways by being loud, crude, dramatic, inappropriate or antagonistic. They may use emotional blackmail, lies, seduction, self-victimisation and other forms of manipulation to draw attention to themselves. Such people demand our time and resources, and ignore what we feel or think.

All this behaviour is driven by the innate belief that other people should listen to or follow us. It is yet another form of pride where we place our needs above others.

Philippians 2:4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

9. Deflect all praise and glory to God

You often hear godly believers say, “I couldn't have done it without God's help” when someone praises them. This is something we can practise saying too, whether we feel it or not at that point of time. We need to speak out the truth for our own hearts to listen to and eventually be aligned with. We should not be tempted to steal God's glory for ourselves.

Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

10. Don't be afraid to admit mistakes and weaknesses

The fear of admitting our faults and vulnerabilities is driven by a desire to protect some personal image that we have carefully curated for ourselves. We idolise ourselves at the expense of our relationship with God. Our fear becomes our weakness.

The apostle Paul broke this mould by saying that he would boast of his personal weaknesses so that people would see Jesus Christ working in Him. Paul was no ordinary man. He came from a prominent, noble and wealthy family, and was respected and highly learned from an early age. Yet this distinguished and influential man wasn't afraid to admit his frailties. This took true strength and true submission to God. We too need to give up our fear (of others) and idol worship (of ourselves), so that we can be fully transformed into God's image.

2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

11. Seek God's opinion first, don't assume anything

Only God has all of life's answers. When we fail to seek God first and jump ahead of Him, we presume we know what's right. The Bible calls such presumption idolatry, as it sets us above God's will.

1 Samuel 15:23 ... and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry...

Before jumping to any opinion or decision, let's make it a point to slow down and ask God for His opinion first. It is dangerous to rely on our (lack of) understanding or ability to see the future. In the Old Testament, the Bible records the great wars that the kings of Judah and Israel won because they sought God's counsel before going to war. Those who went to war on their own capabilities would fail and bring disaster to their own country.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

12. Consider others as more important

The thought of considering others first is most unnatural to human beings. Even as children, we loathe to share our candy and toys. True humility is demonstrated when we do just the opposite. It shows our hearts to be free of fears and selfish intentions.

We consider others more important than us because God loves them too. Because of this, we ought to be kind and generous to them. This is how we submit to God's views of other people rather than our own. We love those whom God loves, regardless of how they behave.

Philippians 2:3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves...

13. Forgive others

As we love God more and more, we will also lean towards forgiving people for the offences they commit against our loved ones and us – because ultimately any sort of sin offends our Father in heaven. People don't realise that when they sin against us, they are first and foremost sinning against God. His judgment is much more terrifying than anything we can conjure up. When we withhold forgiveness, we forget that we only bring the same fierce judgment that God has reserved for our offenders onto ourselves as well.

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

Matthew 6:14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,

14. Pray to bless our enemies

This is a true test of our humility and submission to God. The Bible tells us to pray for and bless others, especially those whom we see as our enemies. It doesn't tell us to *try* to bless our abusers, it simply tells us to "just do it." Unforgiveness is a form of pride that implies we are better than other people. This pride keeps us from being good representatives of a humble God who sent His Son to die for us. In contrast, we are to repent and actively bless those we are inclined to hate, resent or find intolerable.

Luke 6:27-28 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

15. Forsake our prejudices

Every ethnic group has its own prejudices against other groups. Such influences are subtle but can be deeply ingrained. Hence, we are to also regularly check our hearts for status, racial, cultural or gender prejudices. We are to be kind and generous towards the less privileged or oppressed, such as orphans, widows, refugees or foreign domestic workers that are often treated like modern day slaves.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

16. Seek accountability

It can be extremely challenging for some people to submit fully to God. We cannot do it all on our own. If we choose God first, we need to humbly seek accountability and support from godly mentors and fellow believers. Being part of a larger community also forces us to put into practice the full list described here.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

17. Be water baptised

God calls us to be water baptised as a symbol of us being “raised” to new life through Jesus Christ, after being “buried” and dead in our sins (in the water). Even Jesus Himself sought John the Baptist to baptise Him before He officially began His ministry on earth. As Jesus’ followers, we should not stubbornly put off baptism. God Himself asks us, “Why do you wait?”

Romans 6:4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Acts 22:16 And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

18. Be faithful in tithing

God has given us the privilege to contribute financially to His Kingdom on earth. In giving with a cheerful heart to bless others, we will become unrestrained by worldly bondages and experience God’s power in meeting our every need. Satan works hard to stop believers from being faithful in our financial offerings by constantly reminding us about our worldly needs. The enemy knows that when we hold back our tithes, we rob God and bring on a curse upon ourselves. When we contribute generously, over and above the norm, we receive greater blessings and favour from our Father.

Malachi 3:8-9 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.

19. Stay determined to obey God

Jesus is a role model for staying obedient to His Father's will. He stood up against Satan's persistent temptations in the desert and chose to go to the cross to be crucified in spite of his own sorrow. We would not be guaranteed complete forgiveness for our sins if Jesus had refused to submit to His Father's will. Just as Satan persisted in tempting Jesus to forsake God, our enemy will also relentlessly tempt us to follow him instead. We must be determined not to follow our defeated foe.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Do any of the fears listed in the box apply to you? Please explain how you developed your inner scripts and fears.
- Q2. In the 19 practical steps listed above, which ones are the most difficult for you? How can you ensure you have someone to encourage you and keep you accountable in submitting to God?

CHAPTER 4

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REPENTING FROM THE HEART

To repent is to feel remorseful for something we have done – and to be so conscience-stricken that we choose not to do it again.

When Jesus was on earth, He repeatedly called all people to repent from their sins. He didn't preach much about God's love, blessings or prosperity. Jesus' central message was “*repent!*” God places so much importance on repentance that Jesus endured the immense shame and torture of death on the cross to make repentance possible.

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Luke 24:46-47 ... “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

Without real repentance and obedience in following God’s Word, there can be no real salvation. The Bible has a frightening warning for Christians who do not repent but “*who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth.*” Such believers can only expect to meet God's terrible punishment, anger and wrath one day and perish.

Luke 13:3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.

Romans 2:5-8 NLT But because you are stubborn and refuse to turn from your sin, you are storing up terrible punishment for yourself. For a day of anger is coming, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will judge everyone according to what they have done. He will give eternal life to those who keep on doing good, seeking after the glory and honor and immortality that God offers. But he will pour out his anger and wrath on those who live for themselves, who refuse to obey the truth and instead live lives of wickedness.

Sadly, the message of repentance is lost in many “feel good” Christian teachings today. Many Christians falsely believe that they can define life on their own terms and still go to heaven. Others may even look righteous and perform “mighty works” in God’s name, but harbour unrepentant hearts. Sadly, Jesus denounces such people and promises to reject them.

Matthew 11:20 Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.

Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Someone who has not fully repented before God may show signs of:

- Anger
- Addictions, lust
- Arrogance, pride
- Confusion, lying, divisiveness
- Discouragement, depression
- Guilt and shame
- Fear, anxiety
- Irritability, frustration
- Insensitivity, selfishness
- Sarcasm and slander
- Resentments and unforgiveness

DYING TO OUR SINFUL NATURE

Godly repentance does not involve:

- Blame/excuses: “I know I sinned, but it is because of ...”
- Comparisons: “I know I have sinned, but she/he is worse than me.”
- Shame: “I have sinned. I can’t face God, I feel unworthy.”
- Self-accusation/self-condemnation: “I am condemned. I am bad. I am incorrigible.”
- Self-inflicted punishment: “I must punish/renounce myself on God’s behalf so I feel better.”
- Remorse/regret: “I feel sad / bad that my sin has been exposed.”

You will notice that none of the previous statements points to God’s grace and love. Instead, we turn the focus on ourselves or other people.

True repentance is a matter of being so conscience stricken by godly sorrow (Joel 2:13... “*tear your hearts*”) that our thoughts, words and actions have offended God that we can’t go back to doing it again. It says, “Father in Heaven, I am so sorry that I have sinned against You. I ask that You please forgive me in Jesus name. I will do everything in my power to not let this happen again. I invite the Holy Spirit to renew me.” This is the type of repentance that leads to spiritual life.

2 Corinthians 7:10 NLT For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death.

Joel 2:13 NLT Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate...

God is not honoured by empty words and actions (Joel 2:13... “*don't tear your clothing*”), where:

- Our hearts are hard and unrepentant e.g. blame, comparisons

- We mock the power of the cross and Jesus' promise to wash us clean e.g. shame
- We self-righteously take over God's seat as Judge e.g. self-condemnation, self-punishment
- We love our sins more than God and are unwilling to let them go e.g. regret

Intimacy with God involves our hearts, not only our words. What comes out of our mouths can be an indication of what's going on in our hearts.

When our hearts aren't repentant, God says our worship is meaningless and worthless i.e. in vain. Someone who has truly repented is not likely to go on sinning. Otherwise, such a person would be guilty of crucifying Christ once again and mocking His sacrifice on the cross for our sakes.

Matthew 15:8-9 NIV "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain..."

Hebrews 6:4,6 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, ... and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

Most times, the real reason we continue sinning is because of some hidden pain or shame we are trying to avoid or cover up. When we turn to other things to cover up our innate fears and insecurities, instead of turning to the Holy Spirit for help, we will end up sinning. Someone who continues to sin will eventually extinguish the Holy Spirit and is at risk of losing the guarantee of his or her redemption and salvation.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

GOD REWARDS TRUE REPENTANCE

God is generous and gracious. He promises to reward us when we turn our hearts back to Him in repentance. Not only will He hear and answer our prayers, He promises to prosper us and our families in numerous ways.

2 Chronicles 7:14-15 if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.

Deuteronomy 28:11-13 NLT ‘The Lord will give you prosperity in the land he swore to your ancestors to give you, blessing you with many children, numerous livestock, and abundant crops. The Lord will send rain at the proper time from his rich treasury in the heavens and will bless all the work you do. You will lend to many nations, but you will never need to borrow from them. If you listen to these commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today, and if you carefully obey them, the Lord will make you the head and not the tail, and you will always be on top and never at the bottom.

We will also experience the entire fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is the type of “fruit” that comes with repentance.

Matthew 3:8 Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Galatians 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

On the other hand, He has stern warnings for those who refuse to repent and continue to sin. It is terrifying to read all His decrees for the disobedient in Deuteronomy 28:15-67. Just as He is exceedingly generous to those who humbly follow Him, He also has exceedingly stern consequences for those who reject His loving guidance, in the hope that the distress we undergo will turn us away from sin.

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

Too many people today see church as a “personal development centre” and miss seeing God for who He truly is. We were never meant to live life on our own terms with a bit of self-help from the Bible, but to live the full, transformed life that God had planned for us long ago.

In order to way to live that radical new life from Jesus, we must first repent of our old selves. Without repentance, there is only spiritual death, both on earth and in heaven.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN REPENTING FROM THE HEART

1. Be humble

Before we can truly repent, we must first humble ourselves. To sin is basically to choose our own way over and above God’s will for us. People who hold on to their pride and believe they know what’s best are not truly repentant.

1 Corinthians 8:2 If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.

Proverbs 16:5 Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

2. Acknowledge and confess

Full repentance requires us to acknowledge our depravity and surrender everything to God. We must be ready to be humble and vulnerable, and confess our sins to someone we can trust and pray with*. Only when we confess our sins to someone else can we be free of shame, because we bring what was once locked in a dark prison of shame and exchange it for the “light of life” through Jesus.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

John 8:12 Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

* Be sure to choose to confess to a mature, god-fearing Christian who also practices repentance, rather than a hypocritical believer.

3. Seek God first at all cost

We must be willing to seek God first and turn away from things He considers wicked, even things that we used to see as normal, cool, helpful or wise. This includes even "harmless" things like grumbling, gossiping, showing off, putting others down, using curse words, taking part in fortune telling etc. Fearing what people say or think of us leads us into a trap or a snare, because we make other sinners' opinions more important than God's. Pleasing God has to become more important than the ridicule and persecution we receive if we are to demonstrate that we truly follow Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

2 Timothy 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

4. Renew our thinking

We need to consciously peel off years of worldly corrupted thinking – like the way we burn unhealthy fat off our bodies through exercise. This requires us to study the Bible so diligently that God's values and commandments become second nature to us. Only then will we prosper and succeed in all that we do.

Joshua 1:8 NLT Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

Satan works very hard to keep us from repenting by planting lies about God and His character. If we doubt God's intentions, like Eve did, we can be easily manipulated to sin and stray away from God. The enemy's ultimate goal is to make sure:

- We see a false image of God
- We are confused about His intentions
- We can't decipher what is good from evil

Thankfully, God has provided a counter answer in the Bible for every lie that Satan plants into our imaginations. Here are some common ones.

1. "God doesn't help sinners." | *Romans 5:8 NIV But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
2. "I haven't done enough to deserve God's forgiveness." | *Titus 3:4-5 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,*
3. "God doesn't care for or love me." | *Romans 8:35-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
4. "God has abandoned me." | *Isaiah 41:10 Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*
5. "God doesn't want good things for me" | *Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*
6. "God is far away." | *Psalms 145:18-19 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.*
7. "I am sure God will let me get away with this rebellious act." | *Proverbs 11:20-21 NIV The LORD detests those whose hearts are perverse, but he delights in those whose ways are blameless. Be sure of this: The wicked will not go unpunished, but those who are righteous will go free.*

Let us watch out for Satan's lies by filtering our thoughts according to the Bible. We are to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" and stay pure in our hearts before God.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

5. Clean out our influences

We live in a world that promotes self-gratification. Our culture tells us:

- "Do what you think is best for you."
- "If it feels good, do it."
- "You only live once. / Life is too short. Try it!"
- "Everything is worth trying. / You should try it to know how it feels. / There is no harm trying this once just for fun."
- "You can't help yourself. It feels too good."
- "Only this can satisfy you. Nothing else can."
- "You don't have to answer to anyone for your life."

When our senses are constantly bombarded by such hedonistic, self-centred messages, we will subconsciously buy into them. It will be incredibly hard for us to humbly bow down before God and submit everything to Him. We don't even recognise when we rebel against God and choose our will over His.

Let us beware how we are being influenced by the world around us. Here are some subtle ways a spirit of self-will and rebellion sneaks into our thinking as Christians. You may notice how prevalent this sort of thinking has infiltrated our own church circles.

- "This makes perfect sense to me. I will do it. (There's no need to ask God first.)"
- "I really like this teaching because it helps me achieve my goals. (I'll choose this over God's hard truths.)"
- "I don't understand parts of the Bible so I'll reject it (even though my highest wisdom is still foolish, compared to God's.)"
- "Other Christians are doing this (sinful thing), so it must be okay."
- "I haven't heard from God yet, but I will just go ahead. (I won't wait on God.)"

- “I couldn’t help myself. There’s no one who can help / understand me. (I’ll ignore God’s presence and only put my faith in what I can see.)”

2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

6. Develop a healthy love for and *fear* of God

The more we learn about the heart of God, the more we find ourselves falling in love with Him. At the same time, we must keep in mind that God is Holy, He is not just our Friend but also our Judge. God is gentle and forgiving but if we keep rejecting His love, we can only expect His fearsome wrath and impartial judgment. Let us not test God’s patience and mercy, and repent quickly. We need to hate any sin that keeps us separated from our Heavenly Father.

Romans 2:4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Psalms 7:11-12 God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow;

7. Invite the Holy Spirit to check our hearts regularly

No one in this world will be able to guide and protect us like God’s Holy Spirit can. He will help us distinguish what is false wisdom from the world and what is God’s true wisdom and will for us. The Holy Spirit will also convict our hearts when we fall into sin, so we become aware of the need to repent. Yet too often, we listen to Satan and people, and drown out the Holy Spirit’s prompting. We do this to our own destruction.

John 16:8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment

As sinful people, we inherently like to believe we are good. The biggest lies we tell ourselves include:

- “I’m doing fine.”
- “Look at how well I am doing. God must be pleased with me.”
- “I can handle this on my own.”
- “I’m doing what (I assume) God wants me to do.”
- “This good opportunity came along so I assume it must be from God.”

King David knew better than that, he regularly made time to be quiet before God and wait on Him. He prayed for God to search his heart and reveal anything that was offensive in Him and asked God to lead him down the right path again. Let us also make self-reflection, confession and repentance an ongoing habit.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? “I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

Psalms 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. How has this chapter affected your thinking about repentance? What aspects might you have missed in the past?
- Q2. In the practical steps listed above, which is the most difficult for you? What can you do about it?

CHAPTER 5

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CHOOSING TO BE STILL

Have you ever tried to hold a conversation with someone who seemed more interested in their mobile device than they were in you? The subtle but unintended message they send is that you are less important than a video, game, conversation or social media. You hope to get their attention but they are simply too distracted. That's probably how God feels when He tries to communicate with us.

Our hearts, souls and minds are constantly distracted by the things of this world that will not last: work, family, children, church, school, friends, entertainment, financial issues, what we will wear, what we will eat and the list goes on. Our attachments to this world can dominate our prayers. There are things that are important now but they are all temporal. Even those who love us the most will die one day and leave us. When we pray, we simply end up babbling, telling God about our needs and everything that He already knows about us.

Matthew 6:31-33 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.

Deep down, we don't really expect God to say anything back to us. We view God as we would an inanimate object, a wall, or maybe at

best, microphone or telephone speaker. We simply don't expect Him to respond to us through inaudible messages, visions, and scripture etc. From His eternal glorious throne, God calls us to stop talking at Him and to be still, so we can experience Him.

Matthew 6:7-8 And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

DON'T MISS WHAT GOD WANTS TO REVEAL

Whenever God has something important to reveal to His people, He chooses times when we are still and attentive, not when we are frantic, distracted or talking at God as if He had nothing to say in return.

Over and over again, we see in the Bible that God speaks in times of quietness. God led Elijah into the mountain to speak with him alone and called Moses when he was in the wilderness. Jesus called Simon and Andrew to follow Him after they finished working. The Holy Spirit came powerfully upon the disciples as they were praying in the upper room. We too need to be still or we may miss what God wants to reveal to us.

1 Samuel 12:16 Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes.

THE BENEFITS OF BEING STILL

1. Time to remember God's goodness

When God set out various laws for His people in the Old Testament, Many festivals by which we can remember Him, such as the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost and Day of Atonement, forced people to stop whatever they were doing to just focus on God's goodness and blessings.

Psalm 103:2 NLT Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things he does for me.

Why did God do this? Because He knows that we have a tendency to forget Him. When He calls us to be still, He is giving us an opportunity to remember all our blessings and to fill our hearts with His love, joy and hope. When we are constantly distracted or busy, we can even forget that God is in the same room with us - just like Martha did in the book of Luke. Jesus commended Mary for choosing to simply be still and enjoy Him. For a start, let us remember that God's Spirit is with us as we read this book and thank Him for His presence.

Luke 10:40-42 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

2. Time to rest and be restored

The stresses of the world can wear us down. When God created us, He set a time-out mechanism to ensure that we can remain spiritually healthy and alive. It is called the Sabbath rest. Yet many of us stubbornly refuse to honour the Sabbath and choose to be busy all the time.

King David said in Psalm 23 that God restored him when He made time to be still. It is impossible for anyone to experience God's restoration if we don't first stop and cut out our daily distractions. Just as top runners must stop to rest, recharge, and check on their physical conditions, taking regular time off is necessary for all believers. God promises to renew our body, mind, and soul when we slow down and invite Him to work in us.

Isaiah 40:31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

3. Time to listen for revelations

The Bible records how God spoke to the prophet Elijah in a still and quiet voice. If we constantly allow the noise of this world to flood our lives, we drown out God's quiet voice. When God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, He will gently reveal spiritual truths, wisdom and knowledge. He will even show us what to pray and what to ask. This enables us to live in His divine anointing and power, and not rely on our own strength or ideas about what should happen next. Who would not want God's anointing for a more fulfilling life?

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

4. Time to reflect and recalibrate

Any driver who navigates mindlessly and doesn't pause to check if he is heading in the right direction is unwise. It is the same with our own lives. God is like the master Navigator who will keep us out of trouble and lead us towards His good path. When we fail to stop before God to ask, "Father, am I heading in a direction that pleases You? Do I need to change directions?", we do ourselves a great dis-service.

Job 6:24 "Teach me, and I will be silent; make me understand how I have gone astray.

5. Time to practice self-control

Choosing to be still is a great test of our ability to focus and control the restlessness of our minds and bodies. Even a dog can be trained to be calm and still. Human beings can undergo similar training too. The benefits of such training will spill over into other aspects of our lives as we find ourselves becoming gentler, more patient and kinder towards others. We are less likely to become quickly agitated or say inappropriate things.

6. Time to seek His deliverance

There will be times when we will feel overwhelmed and in need of deliverance from our personal struggles, pain and sorrows. We can be so afraid of confronting our long-suppressed negative emotions that

we subconsciously keep busy and occupied so we don't have to face them. We must, however, stop and call out to God so that He can help us and heal us in all these instances.

Taking time to be still and meditate on God's character and promises also builds our faith and spiritual vitality. This, in turn, prepares us to stand up against spiritual attacks.

Psalm 91:9-10 Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place— the Most High, who is my refuge—no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

Psalm 62:1 For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation.

7. Time to detoxify from worldly distractions

We also ought to develop the discipline to abstain from the things of this world that corrupt our spiritual life. Taking time away to be still is a way to detox from all the distractions of this world.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

8. Time to honour God

Most importantly, the reason we make time to be still before God is to submit our hearts before Him and acknowledge that He is more important than all that this world can offer. We should, in fact, make this a priority – instead of giving God the leftover bits of each day. It is disrespectful to give anyone our leftovers, let alone God!

PRACTICAL STEPS IN BEING STILL BEFORE GOD

Being still before God is not just a matter of not moving physically, it is a stilling of our hearts and our thoughts. It requires discipline and practice to shut down all our “internal noise” to focus intentionally on God Almighty.

1. Call a regular time out

First, let us set a regular quiet time with God and mark it in our diaries, protecting it as we would a date with any important person. Get away from our daily routines and spend time in a peaceful environment, whether it is out in nature, in a cafe or in a favourite window sill etc.

2. Put away all distractions

We should set aside anything that might distract us from being still. This includes all mobile devices, appointments and even one's own children. Here, we can follow King David's example. God declared David to be a man after His own heart and designated him to be king. Despite having to attend to many matters regarding the kingdom, King David often chose to set aside those earthly issues and quieted himself down to seek God first. We see this in many of the psalms he wrote, including Psalm 63. This was a key reason for his blessings and success.

Psalm 63:1-4 O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

3. Spend some time in reverent worship

We bask in God's presence as we worship Him and acknowledge His sovereignty. Even though we cannot see Him, we should remember whose presence we are in and be mindful of our posture before God. Our hearts need to remain reverent and bowed down before God. At the same time, we can give thanks and acknowledge all of God's goodness in our lives.

Psalm 46:10 "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"

4. Meditate on God's Word and wait on God

Reading God's Word, contemplating its meaning, and waiting on His Holy Spirit to test the conditions of our hearts, convict us of our sins,

and teach us how to follow Him, are very important disciplines. When we are still and meditate on God's Word, we should expect the Holy Spirit to speak to us. God loves to teach His children something new if we quietly seek Him, not when we try to rush Him.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. What are some ways you make time to be still before God?
- Q2. Please share any experience of being still and hearing from God.

CHAPTER 6

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CONFESSING OUR SINS

God is orderly and perfect in all His ways. He designed all the laws for our planet with such infinite detail that everything works and thrives together. One just needs to examine our physical, chemical, biological, geological, astrological and mathematical laws to see the extent to which God lovingly prepared for our existence. Everything is balanced flawlessly. In the same way, God also designed spiritual laws for His people so that we would be able to thrive on this planet. These laws were instituted to protect and enrich us.

People prosper when there is law and order. Laws keep communities safe. Nonetheless, we are prone to try to bend the law to benefit ourselves, even in small ways. We are tempted to jaywalk, understate our income tax, misuse public facilities or park illegally. Some people resort to outright crime. We have the same attitude toward sin. Sin is the desire to run our lives without regard for God's spiritual laws. Sin is not unique to anyone. Even the most righteous people have harboured some envy, pride, greed or lust in their hearts.

There is only one way to overcome the guilt, shame, and negative effects of sin, and that is to invite Jesus Christ into our lives. Being fully God, He is the only One pure and righteous enough to pay the absolute penalty for all of our sins for all time. By dying on the cross and then overcoming death through His Resurrection, He has full authority to remove our death sentences as a result of the “guilty charges” for our sins. In exchange, He gives us His Holy Spirit who will empower us to live faultlessly before God.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.

1 John 3:4 NLT Everyone who sins is breaking God's law, for all sin is contrary to the law of God.

THREE TYPES OF SIN IN THIS WORLD

1. Our attitude

Some sinful attitudes are evident, while others are not. We can even appear to do all the right things, but with the wrong motives. Examples of sinful attitudes include:

- Blasphemy against God
- Rebellion against God
- Unbelief about God's truths
- Covetousness
- Hatred
- Impatience
- Jealousy
- Judgment
- Pride
- Selfish ambition
- Self-judgment
- Self-condemnation
- Self-pity
- Sexual immorality
- Unforgiveness etc.

Mark 7:20-23 And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

If we trace the direction these attitudes will lead us, we see that they ultimately lead us to hardened hearts and joyless lives. This is simply the result of living outside of God's perfect design for us.

Zechariah 7:12 NLT They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the instructions or the messages that the Lord of Heaven's Armies had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. That is why the Lord of Heaven's Armies was so angry with them.

2. Our actions

The sinful attitudes in our hearts will lead us to act in ways that harm others and ourselves. Examples of sinful actions include:

- Adultery
- Cursing others
- Drunkenness
- Gambling
- Idol worship
- Lying
- Murder
- Slander
- Sorcery / fortune telling
- Stealing etc.

3. Our neglect

There is also a type of sin that is related to neglect. We sin when we dishonour God and His spiritual laws, and neglect to do the things He has told us to do. Some examples include:

- Neglecting to bear each other's burdens
- Neglecting to love others
- Neglecting to testify for Jesus
- Neglecting to stand up for the oppressed
- Neglecting to care for the needy

James 4:17 So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Romans 13:10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

It is humanly impossible not to sin. Human beings are instinctively prone to sin from birth. As infants, we envy, lie and manipulate others. We hold on to grudges and despise others. We also do and say things that break God's Law which we are unaware of. How discouraging if we didn't have Jesus Christ as our Saviour! Praise God that He is willing to forgive us for all our sins, even those we find hard to forgive others for. But we should note that there is one sin that He will not forgive anyone for, and that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

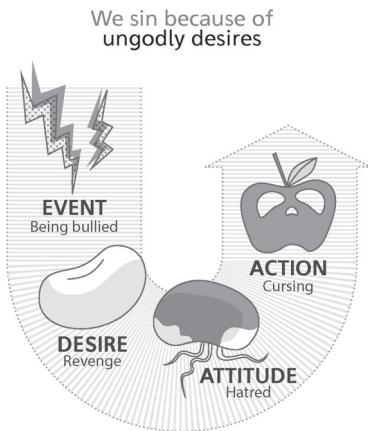
Romans 10:2-3 ... For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Matthew 12:31 Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

SIN IS CONCEIVED THROUGH THE DESIRES IN OUR HEARTS

Sin is driven by desires in our hearts that oppose God's will for us. These desires are often focused on profiting ourselves at the expense of other people.

Matthew 15:17-20 ... But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person...



Let's say that someone has been bullied by his peers and neglected at home by his family. This may create a desire to avoid further emotional pain, leading to a hardened heart. This deep desire, once it has taken root or "conceived", gives rise to sinful attitudes and actions such as pride, selfish ambition and seeking to control one's own future through sorcery (fortune telling).

James 1:14-15 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Not all of our desires are bad or sinful. We can desire to do well, resolve conflict, help others or correct human error - but it is *how* we do it that may be sinful. Both good and evil intentions can give birth to sinful attitudes and actions. The core issue is whether our hearts

are spiritually healthy. This will determine whether our desires lead us to bear good or bad fruit.

Matthew 7:18-20 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Going back to our example above, let's say the person who has been bullied or neglected at home chooses to forgive his offenders and not resort to revenge. He turns to God to confess all his pain and asks Jesus Christ to fill his heart with love so that he can be gracious towards his offenders and pray to bless them. In this instance, there is "good fruit" that comes from the same desire to overcome emotional pain.

The Bible teaches us that the healthy way to react to emotional pain is to have the wisdom to overlook an offence, rather than to lash out in anger, curse others or suppress how we feel. Anger is a legitimate emotional response, but we are not called to be easily provoked. When we readily forgive others and respond in love, we demonstrate the same love that Jesus Christ shows us. This is the evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. In contrast, "bad fruit" is the result of sin. In the long run, sin has costly consequences, even if it makes us feel good when we initially fall for it.

Proverbs 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR SINS

1. Separation from God

When we choose to follow our own ways instead of God's, we are in reality, rejecting Him. Sin causes a separation between God and us.

Isaiah 59:1-2 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

2. Pain, dishonour and shame

Sin always ends up in spiritual death. When people who have broken the law are caught red-handed, they react with denial, fear, regret and shame. This is the same with sin, except that we don't need to "get caught." God already knows everything. Even as we sin, God is right next to us as our grieving Father, righteous Judge, and holy Witness.

1 Timothy 6:10 NLT ...And some people... have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

3. Enslavement to sin

When we give in to sinful attitudes and actions, we submit ourselves to our fleshly desires and the world's corruption. Whatever we submit to becomes our master. The Bible calls this slavery to sin.

John 8:34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.

4. Sin brings curses

The Bible explicitly says we invite curses upon ourselves when we rebel against God's laws. A curse stops us from prospering spiritually, relationally, mentally, physically or financially. The effects of sin are not the act of a cruel God. They are the natural consequences of what happens when we live outside of His good and perfect design for human life. It is not too different from people who ignore traffic rules. Their disobedience can cause vehicle collisions and painful accidents, bringing physical, financial, relational and mental pain upon themselves and other people.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God...

5. Eternal condemnation for deliberate rebellion

God never stops loving us, but if we deliberately choose to keep sinning, it is as if we crucify Jesus Christ over and over again (Hebrews 6:6). If we continue to rebel and consciously insult God's sacrifice on the cross, the blood of Christ will no longer cover us.

Hebrews 10:26-27 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

THE WORLDLY LIES THAT ENSNARE US

All too often, we give into sin because we believe the world's lies that we might as well do whatever we want. These lies keep us locked into cycles of sinful behaviour.

Lies and excuses	The truth
"No one will get hurt."	Our sins hurt God and ultimately ourselves. <i>See Ephesians 4:30.</i>
"You only live once."	Our lives don't end with physical death. There is a second spiritual life or death that will stretch into eternity. <i>See 2 Thessalonians 1:9.</i>
"No one is watching."	God sees and knows everything. <i>See Hebrews 4:13.</i>
"God will forgive me anyway."	God will not forgive those who continue to deliberately sin against Him. <i>See Hebrews 10:26.</i>
"Everyone else is doing it."	Everyone else could be doing the wrong thing. As Christians, we are not meant to blindly follow the masses. We are to follow God's Word, no matter how unpopular it may be. <i>See Matthew 7:13-14.</i>
"I can't stop myself."	We can't stop ourselves from sinning on our own strength. It is only possible when we turn to God. <i>See Matthew 19:26.</i>
"Other people forced me to do it."	We all have to give an account for our own actions, no matter why we did them. <i>See Romans 14:12.</i>

“My family does things this way.”	We are to follow Christ first, and our family second. <i>See Matthew 10:37.</i>
“They don’t deserve my love.”	God loves all of us even though we don’t deserve His love. We should follow His example in gratitude. <i>See 1 John 4:10-11.</i>

GOD DESIRES TO RESTORE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and:

- Restore our spiritual blessings
- Restore our authority over evil
- Restore our ability to spread God’s goodness
- Give us unrestricted access to God

God is gracious and kind. He does not deal with our sins as we deserve. Here is what the Bible says.

God and sin	What the Bible says
God grieves when we sin	<i>Ephesians 4:30-31 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.</i>
God takes no pleasure in the fate of those who sin	<i>Ezekiel 33:11 Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?</i>
God pursues our repentance for our sake	<i>2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.</i>
God corrects us because He loves us	<i>Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.</i>

God is merciful and lenient towards those who repent	<i>Job 11:6 ... Know then that God exacts of you less than your guilt deserves.</i>
God calls us to no longer be ignorant	<i>Acts 17:30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,</i>
God forgives and forgets our sins when we confess	<i>Isaiah 43:25 'I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.</i>
God will cleanse us from our sins	<i>Acts 3:19-20 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.</i>
God will give us a fresh new start	<i>2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.</i>

PRACTICAL STEPS IN OVERCOMING SINFUL DESIRES

1. Don't be ignorant, study the Word

God is our eternal and majestic King. If we are serious about getting to know Him, we would invest time in studying the Bible and getting to know His Law. Ignorance is no excuse for sinning. We would still be penalised for driving down the wrong side of the road even if we were ignorant of the rules. We cannot escape the Law.

Acts 17:30 The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

Psalms 119:11 I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

2. Invite God to reveal our desires

It is good to give our hearts a regular spiritual check-up. This is why spending quiet time with God is important. When we quiet ourselves

down and wait on God, He will lovingly show us our blind-spots, teach and correct us, and help us in our struggles.

Genesis 4:7 ... And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

3. Don't try to hide our sins

It is unhealthy for any relationship for people to "sweep things under the carpet" and pretend that issues don't exist. So it is with our sins. The Bible warns us that we don't flourish when we try to ignore or conceal our sins.

Proverbs 28:13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

4. Don't grieve the past, celebrate redemption

God calls us not to judge others – and that includes not judging ourselves. God does not condemn us, neither should we condemn ourselves. Just as God extends His grace to us, we too need to exercise grace towards ourselves and not go on grieving our past mistakes.

Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged.

Psalms 34:22 The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

A more appropriate way to respond to our past sins is to humbly thank God for His priceless forgiveness. There is a place for godly regret but to continue to live in regret is a form of pride; where we focus on ourselves rather than glorify God for His wonderful grace. God can turn every form of evil into good if we invite Him to.

5. Seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit

Our sinful desires pull us in the opposite direction of God, and will try to drown out the truth about sin with lies, confusion, excuses, fleshly lusts etc. We must ask the Holy Spirit to do His work in us each day. He will prompt us with gentle warnings against corrupting ourselves with sin.

Galatians 5:17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

6. Be trained in discernment

Practice makes perfect. No one learns to run well overnight. We may misjudge our steps, trip and fall over. We all need consistent training in growing strong in our knowledge of God's Word and our desire to please God more than ourselves.

We should not shun the training needed to build our faith and character, because we are the ones who reap the most benefit from it. If we trip and fall, we simply need to get back up, brush off the dust of our sin through prayer, and continue walking with greater spiritual awareness and wisdom afterwards. Every mistake is a lesson learnt.

Hebrews 5:14 ... for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

7. Choose our inner circle with care

We need to actively take steps to stay away from unhealthy influences. The company we keep greatly impacts the way we think, feel and behave. If we love ourselves well, we would gravitate towards an inner circle of friends that will help us in our Christian walk. We should always remain in a healthy Christian community, whatever our circumstances may be.

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

8. Don't blindly follow the world

We are surrounded by thousands of "sound bites" each day from advertisements, social media, family, friends, work, society and so forth – each with their own ideas of what choices we should make.

Any influence outside of the eternal Word of God is considered of "this world." Most of them will not lead us closer to God. We are surrounded by catchy lines such as "work hard, play hard", "strive harder and you will get what you deserve", "I will survive on my own" or "words will not hurt me." Many of these are in direct opposition to what the Bible says.

We have to be careful not to blindly follow this world's patterns. They will only lead us down the path to sin and self-destruction. Instead, we need to renew our thinking on what God says is good, acceptable and perfect for us.

James 4:4 ... Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

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

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. In what ways do we commit the three different types of sin?
- Q2. Using the diagram in this chapter as a reference, draw out three of your own experiences.
- Q3. How will the following worldly sound bites lead us into sin?
 - “Work hard, play hard.”
 - “Strive hard and you will get what you deserve.”
 - “I will survive on my own.”
 - “Words will not hurt me.”

CHAPTER 7



GUARDING OUR MOUTHS

Words are powerful. God spoke our entire creation into existence. Without God speaking, nothing would exist. God doesn't talk carelessly or thoughtlessly. Every word He speaks is intentional and powerful, it is delivered with love and accomplishes His purposes.

Indeed, God's words have the power of life or death. And because we are all made in the image of God, that rings true for us too. With our words, we can build others up (life) or destroy them (death). We can ruin reputations, families, relationships and even national security by our words.

Psalm 33:9 For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

God hears every word we speak and records them for eternity. He pays careful attention to what we say and remembers if our words honour or dishonour His name. This should cause us to pause and reflect on our own words. How will we feel when all our words are eventually replayed back in heaven when we meet God face to face? Will we cringe and be horrified, or will we be thankful that our words esteemed God?

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name.

WORLDLY INFLUENCES ON OUR WORDS

Our modern culture is littered with discriminating phrases, mockery, self-glorifying words and expletives. You just have to listen to any secular conversation, pop song or movie to pick up numerous examples. As consumers, we can mindlessly pick up empty phrases and destructive words, and repeat them like a mimic, without giving much thought to them.

As a result, thoughtless Christians gossip, criticise others, slander their leaders at work and in church, curse their governments, tell demeaning jokes, withhold praise and make careless remarks - bringing death rather than life through their words.

1 Timothy 2:1-4 ... I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

THE ETERNAL SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF OUR WORDS

The phrase, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me", couldn't be further from the truth. Words can hurt, and hurt badly. They can pierce hearts and leave open wounds, tear families apart, destroy reputations and also bring down entire governments. Let's look at some spiritual consequences of our words.

1. Blessings for speaking life

When we use our words in God honouring ways, we are promised a good life. God even goes so far as saying that He will bless us when we bless those who do evil against us.

1 Peter 3:9-10 NIV ... repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech."

2. Destruction for using words for evil

On the other hand, when we openly or secretly use our words in defiling ways, we are told that we have no inheritance in heaven, our religion is worthless and we will be destroyed!

Ephesians 5:4-5 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone... has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

James 1:26 If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Psalms 101:5 Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy. Whoever has a naughty look and an arrogant heart I will not endure.

3. Reaping whatever evil we sow

Like our Creator, whatever and whomever we curse will be cursed. Our words can be deadly if we are not careful. Moreover, we have no right to curse any of God's creations, especially people who are also made in His image. We will always reap what we sow. God will not let us off when we curse others. There will be consequences for our sins.

Numbers 22:6 ... he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed."

Job 4:8 As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same.

It's hard to imagine that our words can have such grave spiritual consequences, especially when most times, we don't really think about what we are saying.

DO NOT RETURN INSULT FOR INSULT

Human nature is inclined towards revenge, seeking personal justice and “getting even”, so it is particularly hard to stay quiet when we feel as if we are being maligned or insulted. Malicious words can make us feel as if we are literally being physically jabbed or attacked.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Unfortunately, we are not let off easily here because the Bible specifically asks us not to repay “insult for insult” but to ignore them instead. Otherwise, we will respond foolishly.

1 Peter 3:9 NIV Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult...

Proverbs 12:16 The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.

Moreover, let us remember that when people insult us, they are really insulting God, and not us. The Bible calls us to trust God to judge others fairly, just as Jesus did when He was also insulted and reviled.

1 Peter 2:23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

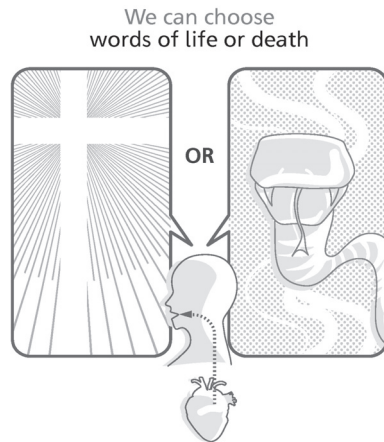
Let God fight our battles for us and only respond in kindness, so we will continue to be blessed. Why compromise our spiritual blessings because of the foolishness of other people?

Exodus 14:14 The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

BIBLICAL GUIDANCE FOR OUR TONGUES

We can't simply "take our words back" once they leave the door of our lips. All of us need God to help us set a guard over our mouths. God loves us too much to leave us stumbling and second-guessing about how we are to use our words.

He knows that we will not know how to tame our tongues, which are restless and potentially poisonous. Hence, God has given us many tips on how we are to use our words, because He is a God who prioritises relationships. Wise words build healthy relationships but thoughtless words can bring lasting harm.



Psalms 141:3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!

James 3:8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

God honouring speech	Encouragements from the Bible
Do speak the truth	<i>Ephesians 4:15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.</i>
Do be gracious to others in our words	<i>Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.</i>
Do encourage others	<i>1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.</i>
Do always give thanks	<i>1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.</i>

Do avoid quarreling	<i>Titus 3:2 To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.</i>
Do speak peaceably	<i>Psalms 34:13-14 Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.</i>
Do teach and advise one another based on God's Word	<i>Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.</i>
Do share the gospel with others	<i>Romans 10:13-15 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"</i>
Do not break others' confidences	<i>Proverbs 11:13 Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.</i>
Do not break our promises	<i>1 John 2:5 But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected...</i>
Do not speak evil against others	<i>James 4:11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge.</i>
Do not gossip	<i>Proverbs 16:28 A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.</i>
Do not tell lies	<i>Exodus 23:1 "You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness.</i>
Do not corrupt others with our words	<i>Ephesians 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.</i>

Do not curse others	<i>Psalm 109:17 He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him!</i>
Do not assert ourselves for no good reason	<i>Proverbs 3:30 Do not contend with a man for no reason, when he has done you no harm.</i>
Do not resort to backstabbing	<i>Proverbs 25:23 The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.</i>
Do not use obscene language	<i>Colossians 3:8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.</i>
Do not engage in foolish talk	<i>Ephesians 5:4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.</i>
Do not use false flattery	<i>Proverbs 26:28 A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin.</i>
Do not use "just kidding" to cover up wrongful words	<i>Proverbs 26:18-19 Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, "I am only joking!"</i>
Do not engage in disrespectful and nonsensical talk	<i>2 Timothy 2:16 But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness,</i>
Do not speak vaguely	<i>Matthew 5:37 Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.</i>

PRACTICAL STEPS IN GUARDING OUR MOUTHS

1. Repent of misusing our words and tarnishing God's name

First, let us clean up by repenting before God for how we have used our words in the past in "defiling ways." This includes telling crude jokes, cursing people, swearing, lying, oppressing and manipulating others and so forth.

If we have ever taken God's name lightly or even used it as an expletive, including casually exclaiming "Jesus Christ", "Oh my God" "holy cow" or "holy crap", we certainly need to say sorry to our

Heavenly Father. Other catchphrases that dishonour God include “Go to hell”, “I may as well die” or “May lightning strike me if I don’t keep my promise” – these are commonly said curses we throw around much too casually. We may have also said phrases such as “give me my mojo” or “namaste” without considering their true spiritual significance. Such phrases originate from witchcraft and idol worship.

Psalm 10:7 His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.

Exodus 20:7 “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

2. Clean up our vocabulary

No longer should we spice our words with colourful expletives, sarcasm, snide tones and unloving facial expressions etc. Let us set aside all perversions in our vocabulary and communications.

Proverbs 15:4 A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

3. Learn to slow down our verbal responses

Whenever we are motivated by fear or pride, we tend to rush to speak. It is imperative that we slow down and examine our hearts before we say anything. A “time-out” is especially critical when we are emotional. We have to be careful not to let any words slip out when we are upset or angry. If our motivations are driven by love, reconciliation and the benefit of others, our words will always be filled with grace and wisdom. Sometimes, this may mean that we delay for a day or more before we respond to someone. If this is not possible, we can even consider asking for a time out to pray and think things through.

James 1:19-20 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Proverbs 10:19 When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

4. Ask God for wisdom and guidance

God will inspire our words and responses to people when we ask the Holy Spirit for help if we are stuck. Silently send Him an “SOS” signal and expect to receive words and ideas on what to say. The more we ask the Holy Spirit for help, the more we will experience His guidance.

Luke 21:14-15 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

Once in a while, we can spend an extended time in self-reflection and heart detoxification. When our hearts are cleansed before God, so will our words.

5. Offer all our words as a fragrant sacrifice to God

Finally, one way to watch our words is to dedicate everything we say to God. Once we do that, it is hard to go too far off from pleasing Him and blessing others. Thank God that we can learn to ensure that our words will be appropriate for any occasion, like a lovely display of God's beauty.

Proverbs 25:11 A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Refer to the table in this chapter. Which one/s do you struggle with? What can you do about this?
- Q2. Share how someone used life-giving words or careless hurtful words in a way that impacted your life.

CHAPTER 8



RELEASING FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is not about letting people off for the wrongs they have committed and conceding that their offences are acceptable. It is about acknowledging that we have received great and undeserved redemption from Jesus, in spite of our own sins and wrongs, and choosing to pass on the same forgiveness that Jesus has given us to other imperfect human beings. It is about being thankful to Jesus for His torturous sacrifice on the cross for our sakes and choosing to be living testimonies of His love.

Forgiveness is also vital to our own well-being. Scientific research also shows that the act of forgiving has numerous mental and physical health benefits. In some countries, forgiveness therapy is even being used to help treat cancer patients. Research at the Cancer Treatment Centers of America found that 61% of all cancer patients have unforgiveness issues. Other findings show that people who forgive have better immune systems, lower blood pressure and fewer stress-related health issues, among other health benefits.

Unfortunately, most of us are not naturally “programmed” to instinctually extend forgiveness to others. Our minds need renewing in this area. If we are to follow Jesus, forgiving others is a non-negotiable in God’s eyes.

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be

transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

WHY WE STRUGGLE TO FORGIVE OTHER PEOPLE

1. Poor role models in our upbringing

We are products of our upbringings and experiences. When we grow up in environments where family feuds are not quickly reconciled, minor faults are harshly punished, and “forgiveness” is grudgingly and joylessly extended, it will be hard for us to understand true forgiveness simply because it has not been demonstrated to us properly.

Growing up in “an eye for an eye” environment does not cultivate a spirit of forgiveness. Even the Bible says in Luke 7:47 that “*whoever has been forgiven little loves little.*” Nonetheless, God calls us to turn to Him as our Father and live as His children, no longer as mere mirrors of our biological parents or families.

Matthew 23:9-10 And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.

2. Worldly pressure to be invincible

We live in a world that tells us to “take charge” or “don’t lose out” and in Asian cultures, “don’t lose face.” Most secular movies revolve around well-planned retaliations to make things “right.” Action heroes are thirsty for revenge, regardless of the cost, all in the name of manmade justice. In such societies, we might feel ridiculed for being kind and forgiving like Jesus.

Forgiveness doesn’t sit well with us as a result. It feels as if we are releasing control over our lives and giving someone else the right to disrupt our worlds. We form a habit of hanging on to our past offences and recounting our grudges, waiting for the day to “make

things right.” We become blind to the fact that true justice only comes from God who is the fearsome Judge of all human beings.

The reality is that unforgiveness keeps us weak and vulnerable to being easily tempted away from God by anything that looks as if it will bring us quick comfort or justice. Our unforgiveness clouds our thoughts and emotions and we are unable to live fully in the present. We become spiritually stuck, unable to move on from our past negative experiences. Unforgiveness seldom gives us any real closure or deep satisfaction. It simply saps us of energy, vitality and health.

Real forgiveness takes personal strength, wisdom, and maturity. Our dignity and peace of mind are kept intact and we can experience deep joy and peace if we keep ourselves free from being chained to others’ offences.

The ill-informed choose not to forgive, the wise do.

Proverbs 19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

3. Past disappointments

We have all heard of the saying, “Once bitten, twice shy.” Some people may have been disappointed when they extended forgiveness in the past, and decided it is not worth the effort. This disappointment misses the point, because true forgiveness is unconditional.

God asks us to release forgiveness with no pre-set criteria, just like He has done for you and me. He challenges us to keep forgiving just like He does. When other people ask us why we keep forgiving others and put up with their offences, we can take the opportunity to humbly explain that we are not condoning their offences but are choosing not to let their offences to overcome us through the power and grace of God. We become walking testimonies for Jesus Christ.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

4. Offender is unrepentant

What if the offender doesn't repent, change or even acknowledge that he or she has done something wrong? It is important to remember that ultimately, forgiveness is something that is between God and us. We release forgiveness to clean our slate before God. It should not be swayed by what others do or do not do.

We will all answer to God for our actions one day, long after those who once offended us are out of our lives. We are the only ones who have to give an account of our own unforgiveness to God on Judgement Day. Unfortunately, our offenders will not be there to stand on trial beside us.

Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

5. Unreleased emotions

Some of us want to forgive, but feel like we have no power to do so and don't understand why. We feel stuck. No matter how many times we think we have forgiven our offenders, hot and familiar emotions still bubble up inside us whenever we think of them. This is a symptom of suppressed emotions that are related to past hurts and offences which we have not dealt with properly.

We have to keep in mind that unfortunately, negative emotions don't go away, no matter how hard we suppress them. They only become a barrier to real forgiveness and healing.

The Bible teaches us that God has given us appropriate times to express all our emotions to Him. We simply need to pick a time to express the negative ones so that He can heal us. This is something King David did very well, as seen by all the numerous times he vented in agony to God in the book of Psalms. David did not hold back his emotions before God. He even wrote about them. He was authentic and real before His Heavenly Father.

Ecclesiastes 3:1,3-4 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ... a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

Whenever we deny our feelings, we are in essence, playing the devil's game of lies – except that the ones we are deceiving are ourselves. That gives Satan a foothold in our lives. If we don't submit our fleshly emotions to God, the enemy will use our unseen but very real suppressed emotions to torment and influence us. To medicate or avoid the torment, we react in ungodly ways. The Bible describes this as being captured by the devil to do his will.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

2 Timothy 2:26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

WHY WE STRUGGLE TO FORGIVE OURSELVES

Sometimes when we sin, we find it hard to forgive ourselves. We feel as if we need to continue to condemn and accuse ourselves for our own mistakes. Here are some reasons why.

1. Others won't forgive us

If the persons we have offended won't forgive us, we may feel bad and decide we should wait until later to “release” ourselves from the guilt of the wrongdoing. However, God calls us to be merciful to ourselves, just as He is always merciful to us. Even though other people judge us, we should not judge ourselves.

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

2. Shame culture

Shame is a big part of some cultures. Children are taught to behave well, so that they are not a disgrace to the family. People openly avoid relatives whom they are ashamed to be seen with. Social media shows us what we should have and how we should look like. Under such a culture, Christians can find it hard to truly believe that God forgives

and accepts them, with no strings attached, because the world keeps reminding us that we are not good enough for them.

Let us remember that Jesus felt the full weight of our shame laid onto Him. He was stripped naked in front of crowds of strangers, spat at, brutalised, mocked and paraded around like an object – in order to remove the shame and guilt of our sins from us. We dishonour His sacrifice if we still cling on to shame and don't forgive ourselves.

Hebrews 12:1-2 ... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame...

3. Ruled by emotions

The Bible says we are to die to our flesh, which includes emotional reactions that want to rule over us. When we commit an offence, we may feel grief, regret, shame, pain, anger and frustration. Such responses are healthy if they help us to recognise our sins. But we sin when we don't put them away once we have confessed.

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

4. Falling for Satan's accusations

Jesus has defeated Satan and the accuser wants us to join him in eternal condemnation. Even after we have received complete forgiveness from God, he will continue to taunt and accuse us – until we agree with him and walk away from God. Satan will plant thoughts into our minds such as:

- “I'm hopeless and condemned.”
- “I'm not worthy of God.”
- “I have caused too much damage.”
- “I keep on doing the things I don't want to do.”

We should not fall for such false accusations. All things are possible with God and our hope is always in Him, not in ourselves. We are no longer condemned when we put our faith in Jesus.

When we don't forgive ourselves, it is as if Jesus personally came to escort us out of prison but we choose to follow Satan back

to jail and lock the door for ourselves. Because we belong to Jesus, Satan can't lock us in jail – but we can. By doing so, we join our accuser, Satan, in darkness rather than walk free with the Light of the World, Jesus Christ. Sadly, we inadvertently spurn the grace that God extends to us every moment of every day.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

1 John 3:20 For whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.

PRIDE IS THE ROOT OF ALL UNFORGIVENESS

At the heart of any unforgiveness is pride. Pride says:

- “What they have done is unforgivable. I, lord and judge of their fate, have decided that they are to be condemned.”
- “I'm taking the higher moral ground on this issue, and what they have done is wrong. I am good and they are bad.”
- “No one else decides my fate. I am my own lord and I find myself guilty.”
- “I can't believe I could be so foolish that I could make that mistake. I should be invincible and infallible like God. I can't forgive myself.”

Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

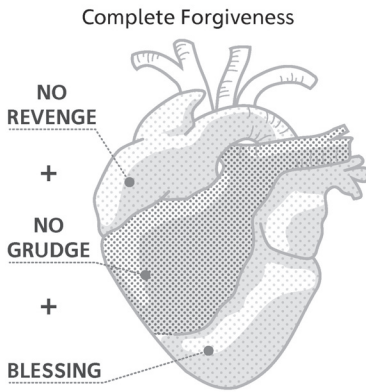
Here are some effects of our unforgiveness:

- Insults God by telling Him that we can do a better job at judging others than He does.
- Makes us slaves to our emotions and past – and the very people whom we haven't forgiven.
- Distorts our mental ability to make sound decisions.
- Brings on toxic effects on our health and bodies.

Our pride makes us think we have the right to hold others or ourselves in contempt. The worst form of pride is spiritual pride, where we take the higher moral ground because we falsely believe we are more righteous than other people. The ironic fact is that God does not see us as good people, but as broken sinners whom He humbled Himself to forgive. Both offender and victim should have been doomed to total destruction, if it were not for His grace. Therefore, God sees human pride as an abomination – a disgusting disgrace.

Proverbs 16:5 Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF FORGIVENESS



Forgiveness is truly a conscious choice. Moving from a place of hurt and offence to a place of peace in our hearts and minds is not always easy. But we need to forgive our offenders both in our hearts and minds so that we ourselves can be healed and recover from pain.

The Bible calls us to have both clean hands and pure hearts. Forgiving only on an intellectual level is like having clean hands; we do not actively seek to harm the person we have chosen to forgive. However, our hearts will remain unclean because we find it hard to go beyond that and to extend God's grace and "love our enemies."

Psalms 24:3-4 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...

1. It's not about forgetting the offence, it's about forgetting the effects of the offence

We have all heard the saying that, "one can forgive, but one cannot

forget.” To forgive someone for an offence is not to deny or forget that the offence ever happened. It is simply choosing not to remember or hold on to the effects of that offence in our hearts. That's quite different from forgetting or pretending that offences and wrongs never happened. To do that would be to deny the power of forgiveness over the offender's life.

2. It's not about how people will view us, it's about how people get to see God

True forgiveness looks something like this; “We both know you have committed some offence in the past that has affected me, but I will not allow it to affect how I am towards you - because God, whom I love, loves you too. How I behave towards you is not dependent on how you behave towards me, it is only dependent on how God has behaved towards me - which has been tremendously generous and unconditional.”

Luke 6:32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

1 John 4:20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

John 13:35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

3. It's not about holding on to the right for justice, it's about letting go of the need for justice

Have you ever seen anyone who holds a grudge and is truly joyful? Unforgiveness is a poison that robs us of our joy and peace. Some people may even hang on to their unforgiveness to justify their desire to seek attention or to emotionally blackmail other people.

Forgiving someone does not mean we continue to allow others to be unkind or to take advantage of us. As Christians, we are called to be shrewd as snakes and innocent like doves. It does not mean becoming like those who offend us. We should remain innocent and peace-making like doves, instead of taking on the nature of snakes.

Matthew 10:16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."

Forgiveness simply means we have chosen to release ourselves from the shackles of the offence - and allow God's true love, peace, and joy to fill us. We are no longer under the "burden" of someone else's offence or desperate for justice, revenge or attention.

The irony is we tend to think that forgiveness will make us appear weak - but it is actually unforgiveness that turns us into weak and tormented souls.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN RELEASING TRUE FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness begins with a humble heart that acknowledges that we are not the world's judges. There is a Judge who is far more fearsome and fair than we could ever be – that is Jesus Christ. Even our Father in heaven has left judgment to Jesus alone. There will always be consequences for sin, such as anxiety, disease, fractured relationships, curses or eternal judgment from God. We can leave it to Jesus Christ to mete out His just punishment. When we try to take over Jesus' seat as Judge, we bring His judgment upon ourselves. Unforgiveness ultimately harms us more than those who have offended us.

John 5:22 For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son,

1. Acknowledge our hurt emotions

Our pride can keep us from acknowledging that we have been hurt or offended. We can lock ourselves in self-denial so we don't have to deal with the pain and the need to forgive someone. Some people turn to anger, addiction, revenge or violence, or they may suffer from anxiety and depression when they refuse to deal with their hurt.

2. Release our suppressed emotions to God

It is ungodly to suppress our emotions. When King David, arguably the mightiest of God's warriors, came back from fighting to find his city ransacked and his loved ones kidnapped, he did not immediately

rush out to fight and rescue his people as you might typically see in a Hollywood, Bollywood, or Korean action movie. Instead, David took the time to weep and mourn at his loss before he humbly consulted God for his next steps. Only then did he rally his troops to rescue their families.

1 Samuel 30:3-4 And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.

Too often, we get the order of things wrong. Unlike David, we might lash out at the world or get on with our lives as if nothing happened. Instead, we should let out our emotions to God, and then ask God to guide our next steps. It is important that we grieve when we have been wronged or abused. If Jesus grieved, what more us? By His example, God shows us that He understands our pain and is close to the brokenhearted.

Psalms 34:17-20 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

We ought to take the time to tell God all our griefs and wrongs, like David did, and not be afraid to cry or weep as loudly as necessary. Even the noblest men in the Bible let out their sorrows until they had “no more strength to weep.”

3. Find trustworthy confidants

Next, let us set aside our pride and fear, and confess our inner pains and struggles to godly friends or counselors. Jesus calls us to share our burdens with each other, just as He offers to carry our heavy emotional burdens for us.

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

When doing so, be careful to choose confidants who will not gossip or judge us, but who will sincerely empathise with, comfort and encourage us. They should be able to stay neutral and not end up judging and speaking against our offenders. In some Christian circles, the need to confide in others has become an excuse for gossiping and slandering those whom we hold a grudge against. This is ungodly behaviour and should be avoided at all cost. Such “confession” does not bring healing, it only causes greater damage.

4. Pray with someone and confess to God

We should ask our confidants to pray with us as we confess our judgments and grudges to God.

- Confess and repent of any bitterness, anger, slander, gossip and other self-righteous thoughts, feelings and behaviour to God;
- Tell God all that we truly feel about what has happened and how hurt we have been;
- Ask Jesus to cleanse our memories and remove the sharp sting of the pain from the offences;
- Revoke any curses that we have spoken against our offenders or brought upon ourselves;
- Forgive and release the offenders to God and ask Him to bless them and draw them to Him;
- Pray that they will come to repentance before God; and
- Invite the Holy Spirit to renew us and help us heal.

Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

5. Release the offences to God and forgive unconditionally

As we pray, we must let go of any offence that we still feel and release any resentment. On a scale of zero to 10, with 10 being severe, the pain that we feel from an offence may not immediately drop to nil, but we can celebrate that it drops a few notches. Let us continue to work at it until we reach a score of zero and experience full spiritual freedom.

Regarding our words, we must choose not to speak ill of our offenders anymore nor dwell on the past. This will need to be a conscious choice because it will not come naturally to us. But no

matter how difficult it is, we do not need to let sinful ways cling onto us.

The Bible says we will experience “times of refreshing” from God when we turn back from un-forgiveness.

Acts 3:19-20 Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.

6. Invite the Holy Spirit to search our hearts for anything else that is unclean

Next, we can invite the Holy Spirit to check our hearts for other sins that we need to confess and cleanse from our lives. He may even reveal things that we were unaware that are offensive to God.

For instance, our offenders might have only hurt us because we had hurt them first. Satan can also stir up unnecessary animosity between believers when God has plans for them to do great work for Him as a team. Other times, Satan will give us reasons to grudge other people instead of love them, because he seeks to prevent us from witnessing to them about Jesus Christ. Unforgiveness gives Satan lots of leeway into God’s Kingdom through God’s own people.

Psalms 139:23-24 NLT Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

2 Corinthians 2:11 NLT ... And when I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes.

7. Reconcile when it is healthy to do so

Where it is healthy to do so, we should make an effort to reconcile broken relationships, particularly with fellow believers. God never celebrates any division in the Body of Christ, only Satan does.

Matthew 5:23-24 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

8. Take steps to protect ourselves

Even though we may have forgiven someone for the hurt they have caused, we should not be naïve and allow them to continue to hurt us. It is always healthy to draw emotional and physical boundaries with people who continue to be vicious and toxic.

For example, we might want to avoid being alone with them and have someone we trust by our side. This helps to diffuse their ill intentions and provides a witness if they ever choose to falsely accuse or abuse us again. We can also limit the time spent together so that we do not fall into sin as our patience and energy wear out. Never be afraid to draw clear boundaries around our identity and integrity.

Proverbs 14:15 The simple believes everything, but the prudent gives thought to his steps.

9. Testify of God's power to forgive through us

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we should share the testimonies of forgiveness that have been made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit to bring our gracious loving Father the glory He deserves.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Do you struggle with unforgiveness? What do you find most difficult about forgiveness?
- Q2. What steps can you take to walk away from your “dark prison”?
- Q3. What are some healthy ways to draw boundaries with people who will continue to behave offensively towards us?

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OUR SOUL

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CHAPTER 9

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RENOUNCING INNER VOWS AND CURSES

God's words are powerful, and so are ours. His Word is binding and will always accomplish what He sets out to do. God's spoken Word is like a contract. In the gospels, we see an instance where Jesus cursed a fig tree and it withered within 24 hours. The Son of God explained to His surprised disciples that anyone who says anything and truly believes it will make it eventually come true, similar to a contract.

Psalm 89:34 I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

Mark 11:23 And Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him.

THE BINDING POWER OF WORD CONTRACTS

Before the legal profession was formed, man's word was his binding contract. The Bible points out that words can bring spiritual life (blessings) or spiritual death (curse) – and they are binding.

Proverbs 18:21 Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.

Similarly, research has shown that a single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress. Positive words such as “peace” and “love” promote the brain’s cognitive functioning and resilience, while negative words stimulate stress and the brain’s fear centre, interrupting its functioning. Hurtful words may not literally break our bones but they can affect us physiologically and crush our spirits.

Notice that every time something is said about a person in the Bible, it will come to pass. Consider the Israelites whom Moses helped escape from Egypt and leave for the Promised Land. They all died in the desert after wandering around for 40 years. The reason? It wasn’t because God is wicked – but primarily because they kept grumbling and declaring again and again that they would die in the wilderness. God never intended to leave their bodies in the desert but eventually their own words overturned His intent. Because God respects our freedom to choose, our invisible spoken words can bring about changes in the visible, physical realm.

Numbers 14:2,26,28-29 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron... would that we had died in this wilderness! And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron... Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness...

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Declarations over our souls will come to pass – whether they were intentional or not, remembered or not, and voiced out or not. Declarations include pledges, covenants, oaths, wishes, promises and vows, all of which have an impact on our future. By the nature of our words, we are either saved or condemned. Like it or not, we will invariably “eat the fruit” of our words.

God knows that we are incapable of always making godly choices with regards to our words and declarations. Therefore, to keep us safe from our own demise, God warns us not to make any

oath of any sort, except to swear allegiance to Him alone. To illustrate, let us suppose a believer is in hospital for cancer treatment. He vows to God to follow Him for the rest of his life when he is completely healed. This is a vow that man should keep. If however, he vows to himself that he will study medicine and become a doctor when he gets out of hospital, without confirming if this is God's will for him, he has made an ungodly vow. In spite of his good intentions, the cancer patient needs to repent of and renounce his inner vow.

Matthew 12: 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

James 5:12 But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

ALL INNER VOWS ARE DESTRUCTIVE

In the midst of pain and suffering however, we may make declarations about ourselves in an effort to avoid suffering in the future. Such inner vows, even the ones that sound positive, will stop us from submitting to God's greater plans and blessings for us. We end up setting a trap for our souls through our own vows.

Proverbs 20:25 NIV It is a trap to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider one's vows.

1. Sinful reaction to pain

An inner vow is usually the result of unhealthy or fleshly responses to hurts, unfulfilled expectations and unmet needs. Only God can shield us and show us how to stand up against life's disappointments and pain. When we fail to turn to God, we end up relying on our own limited strength. This creates a lot of stress and strife. Human beings have no hope of becoming their own personal saviours.

2. A form of idolatry

An inner vow is a form of self-determination and idolatry because we place our desires above God's desires for us. We decide to rule the direction of our futures by vowing to make what we want to come to pass, even though we can't even predict or control the future. This seems foolish. Even positive-sounding inner vows, such as "I will be the most respected sibling in my family," are idolatrous, because they seek to control our own destiny, rather than joyfully follow God's plans. We lack the freedom to become all we were created to be, because our one-dimensional and superficial inner vows will keep holding us back. In the example, we will form a competitive spirit with our siblings and keep ourselves from being vulnerable and authentic with them.

James 4:13-15 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

3. Passing judgment

Inner vows are also often made in response to our condemnation or judgment of others. Vows such as "I will never be like her / him" or "When I have my own children, I will make sure they listen to me, unlike those parents at school" are a result of us judging the actions of other people.

Romans 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

4. Hardens hearts

Inner vows form walls around our hearts. Our hardened hearts alienate us from the life that God has planned for us. They keep us ignorant and darkened in our understanding of His blessings.

Ephesians 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

5. Hostages

Inner vows cause our hearts to become hostages to our past, even if our circumstances have changed drastically. Our souls cannot truly be free to follow Christ. There is only one vow we should make, and that is to follow God all the days of our lives.

Deuteronomy 28:1 “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.”

SIGNS OF INNER VOWS

Inner vows continue to work in our subconscious minds, long after our conscious minds have stopped thinking about them. They typically bring stress and block peace. If we notice that we feel “torn” and our souls struggle to follow God, it might be worth asking the Holy Spirit to reveal if we have ever made inner vows that shut God out of some areas of our lives.

Inner vows made as children are still binding and follow us into adulthood. Childhood inner vows are often made in response to intrinsic emotional needs that we have felt. Growing up, we have all instinctively needed and desired to feel:

1. Unconditionally loved;
2. Validated and accepted;
3. Valued for who we are;
4. Part of a family;
5. Safe and secure;
6. Forgiven for our mistakes;
7. Guided and taught lovingly;
8. Little or no shame;
9. Happy with our looks;
10. Happy with our genders; and
11. That we had a voice, our opinions mattered.

Some possible symptoms of inner vows include anger, anxiety, compulsive behaviour, unrealistic expectations, hatred, stubbornness

and generally strong reactions to certain triggers.

Let's look at an example of a man whose mother kept telling him that he was "good for nothing" because he did not excel in his academic results, despite his A grades in music and art. God blessed him with incredible creative talents, but his mother was too fearful that he would not have a rewarding career in these fields. As a result, she pushed him to study mathematics and science instead. In his pain and frustration, he made an inner vow as a boy to *"prove to the world that he will become successful in the future."*

He dedicated himself to working hard and eventually became an investment banker. To keep up with the inner vow he made as a child, he spends the money he earns on expensive cars and apartments he can't really afford, to show the world that he "has made it." All the while, he struggles with high levels of anxiety and stress, but his hardened heart and pride keep him from being honest with himself. He also finds it hard to maintain healthy relationships with women. Subconsciously, his mother's harsh words and curses haunt him. He is fearful of marriage because he is afraid his wife will find out that he is "good for nothing" and leave him.

This man's story began not at his birth, but at his mother's. She grew up in severe poverty and had previously made her own inner vow to *"never allow my children to suffer poverty and disgrace like I have."* Her inner vow blinded her to the blessed creative gifts that God had endowed on her son, and brought unexpected suffering to the one she wanted so badly to protect. Sadly, this is not an unusual scenario.

Here are sample inner vows and their crippling spiritual consequences.

"I will never ..."	This person will struggle to:
trust anyone."	Fully trust God.
trust Christians."	Fully trust Christian community.
trust authority figures."	Trust pastors. Will tend to revolt against them in their hearts.
let anyone hurt me."	Be authentic with people.
let another man/woman hurt me." (same gender)	Be authentic within same-gender accountability groups.

let another man/woman hurt me.” (opposite gender)	Trust one’s spouse and enjoy the intimacy in marriage that God intended. May end up in homosexual relationships.
let anyone into my heart.”	Invite Jesus in one’s heart.
let anyone take anything from me.”	Surrender harmful things to our loving God.
let anyone control me.”	Submit to God’s will and plans.
let anyone look down on me.”	Be humble.
be as successful as my dad.”	Find one’s identity in God alone.
be good enough.”	Accept God’s unconditional love. May resort to lots of joyless church activities.
be loved.”	Believe God loves him/her.
be financially secure enough.”	Be content with what God has given. Will keep wanting more.
be weak, vulnerable, cry.”	Release pain and receive healing.
be honest about how I feel.”	Seek help for personal struggles.
be like my mother.”	Truly forgive one’s mother. Accept God fully since God is also a parent figure.
be like my father.”	Truly forgive one’s father. Accept God fully since God is also a father figure.
be sick.”	Not panic when ill. May turn to new age healing and medicine.
be successful.”	Be confident in Christ and stay faithful to God.
matter to anyone.”	Celebrate life. May consider suicide and thoughts of death.
stand out again.”	Take on ministry opportunities
make much of my life.”	Embrace God’s plans.
live in a messy environment.”	Volunteer to help in messy situations or go on mission trips to alleviate poverty.

"I will ...	This person will struggle to:
make sure people like me."	Love others unconditionally. Will try to please or manipulate people.
overcome the lack of my mother's/father's love." (same gender)	Overcome same-sex attraction.
be as successful as ____."	Follow God's definition of success and prosperity.
be a self-made person."	Be thankful to God.
stay young for a long time."	Focus on the heart and instead focus on physical appearances.
always look perfect."	Be authentic and real.
do anything to protect myself."	Practice integrity and be vulnerable.
do anything to win love."	Practice sexual purity.
always live in this country."	Accept that God may have other plans in another country.

Notice that all the vows in the table above may seem good, but they will ultimately become stumbling blocks that stop us from submitting to God's love and his plans for us fully. They become like our own personal self-made life commandments that obstruct us from following God's Commandments.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN RENOUNCING INNER VOWS

In our earlier story, the man struggled with both the words of death his mother spoke over him (curse) as well as the declarations he made for his future (inner vow). Both need to be broken in Jesus' name. Only God can wipe our spiritual slate clean and give us a fresh start.

In the Bible, Jabez was a man whose mother also did not give him the best start in life. Because of her labour pains, she gave him the name, Jabez, which means "he makes sorrowful" in Hebrew. Jabez knew that he had to cancel out the effects of his mother's curse

on his life by calling out to God for help.

The key thing to note is that Jabez is described as being “*more honourable than his brothers.*” He submitted his life to God and sought his Heavenly Father first, before he asked God for His blessings and protection. We too can ask God to replace the mistakes of our past by seeking Him first.

1 Chronicles 4:9-10 Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!” And God granted what he asked.

1. Acknowledge God as our King

First, we need to ask Jesus to rule over our minds, wills and emotions and invite the Holy Spirit to fill us. We need to take ourselves off the thrones of our lives and invite God to take His rightful place, so that we can enjoy all the benefits of our spiritual inheritance.

2. Ask the Holy Spirit to help us remember all our inner vows

God always answers our requests for help when we ask, particularly when it comes to restoring us spiritually. We can ask the Source of all wisdom and truth, the Holy Spirit, to show us what inner vows we need to renounce.

3. Repent of following our fleshly desires

There are various reasons why we resort to inner vows, and none of them pure. We need to repent of obeying any fleshly desire, such as pride, greed, or the need for control, that led us to make inner vows.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.

4. Forgive those who have hurt us

Importantly, we also need to forgive those who caused us any pain that resulted in us making our inner vows – before we seek God’s forgiveness. God calls us to come to Him with our hearts free of any unforgiveness.

Matthew 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

5. Break curses in Jesus' name

There will be people who can't help themselves but pass their misery and insecurities on to others through words of bitterness and curses. We must be cautious not to allow their curses and the resulting effects to take root in our souls and harden our hearts.

In the case of our example, the young man made his inner vows as a result of his mother's curses. Let us break and reject the curses spoken over us in Jesus' name, invite God to heal our wounds and release us into His full favour. Remember we are to also bless those who curse us and not curse them back.

Romans 3:14-17 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known."

Luke 6:28 Bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

6. Repent and renounce all inner vows in Jesus' name

After these steps, we should repent of choosing our own destinies and foolishly making inner vows, and release ourselves from the bonds we put our own souls under, in Jesus' name.

Psalms 2:3 "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."

7. Ask God to transform our hearts

Where our hearts have been hardened towards God's will, we can invite Jesus to give us a new heart and spirit so that we can be free in Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

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

8. Replace the inner declarations with God's declarations

A crucial aspect of revoking inner vows is replacing our harmful self-promises with the promises of God. We can ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to the riches of His blessings so we are not tempted to follow our fleshly desires.

Ephesians 1: 18 ... having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints

For example, someone who used to believe “I will never be good enough” can overturn this inner vow with the truth that is based on the Bible. He or she can say, “I celebrate all my strengths and weaknesses, because God has a purpose and a plan (*Jeremiah 29:11*) in making me this way. I will not be afraid to admit my weaknesses (*2 Corinthians 12:9*), so that people will see that it is God who helped me attain everything. With God as my Helper, I never need to fear (*Hebrews 13:6*). My sufficiency is from God (*2 Corinthians 3:5*).”

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Have you made inner vows? We may need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us remember.
- Q2. What led you to make your inner vows? Please confess to someone in your group and pray together to repent and replace your past declarations with God's declarations. Remember to forgive those who hurt you and bless them and their families.

CHAPTER 10



HEALING EMOTIONAL WOUNDS

Anyone who has been in a car accident will hurry to see a doctor, even if they only bumped their head. On the other hand, some of us neglect emotional hurts because they cannot be seen. But when left alone, these invisible wounds can slowly become infected with sin.

1. Trauma is justified

This is more common in family situations where we might be more willing to overlook the pain our relatives cause in our lives. People who have been constantly neglected, belittled, cursed, or abused by their own family may try to find reasons for such behaviour out of love, respect or deference. For example, if a man is verbally abusive to his wife or children, they may justify it by blaming themselves for offending him. That however, does not make the hurt go away. Instead, our emotional wounds get buried deeper together with broken self-esteem.

2. Trauma is “normalised”

When one is exposed to a lot of trauma or bad news, it is possible that we start to have a skewed view of what is “normal” in the world.

For example, someone who is surrounded by broken marriages will find it hard to believe that healthy marriages are possible, no matter what the Bible teaches about God's original intent for marriage. Another person who lives with abusive people may learn to accept the daily abuse and suppress his true feelings, and

neglect the pain in his soul.

3. Trauma is trivialised

One way that we may cope with traumatic events is to minimise it. We may say things like “it's okay”, “everyone goes through the same thing”, or “it's not a big deal.” When we don't have the tools or knowledge for dealing with and processing the effects of emotional trauma, we are left stuck. For example, young children who are told not to let the loss of a parent unduly affect them will suppress their emotions and carry their unexpressed grief with them for the rest of their lives.

4. Trauma is too painful

The human body is equipped with a fight-or-flight mechanism, which is our protective physiological reaction to things we consider harmful, painful or threatening. Experiences of extreme or repeated trauma can leave us in a state of hyper-vigilance against more trauma and pain. This can prevent us from dealing with our emotional wounds because of the potential pain of remembering them. Unfortunately, even if our minds want to avoid the pain of remembering, our bodies continue to carry the stress of such avoidance.

SOME SIGNS OF EMOTIONAL WOUNDS

No matter how much we try to suppress our past emotional traumas, the resulting anguish, grief, pain and sorrows will still creep to the surface in one form or another. To illustrate, here are some patterns that could result from past emotional trauma.

HEART Reactional patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antagonistic, stubborn • Apathetic • Bitter • Desperate • Domineering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fearful • Frustrated • Hateful • Impatient • Proud • Resentful
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SOUL Emotional patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accused • Alienated, rejected • Angry • Anxious • Abandoned • Blocked memories • Bored • Depressed • Fatigued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling cut off • Hopeless • Inadequate • Independent • Insecure • Paranoid • Shameful • Sorrowful
STRENGTH Behavioural patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoidance of intimacy • Binge eating, drinking or shopping • Crying for no reason • Eating disorders • Frequent provocation or agitation • Hyper-vigilance • Insomnia • Lack of self-control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materialism • Obsessive compulsions • Perfectionism • Pleasing people (chronic) • Procrastination (chronic) • Restlessness • Substance abuse • Workaholism
MIND Thought patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blaming or doubting God • Cynicism • Daydreaming or fantasising • Escapism • Pessimism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-condemnation • Self-delusions • Self-hatred • Self-victimisation • Thoughts of death and suicide

EMOTIONAL PAIN AFFECTS OUR SOULS

When we experience trauma, it can feel as if we have been punched in the chest and someone poured acid into our emotions, desires and memories. Emotional trauma can leave deep invisible but lingering lacerations on our soul.

1. Our souls continue to be haunted by the memories | *Lamentations 3:20 My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.*
2. Our souls struggle to feel peace and joy | *Lamentations 3:17 my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is;*
3. Our souls will feel heavy and sorrowful | *Mark 14:34 And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death..."*
4. We can be affected physically as well | *Isaiah 38:15 ... I walk slowly all my years because of the bitterness of my soul.*



When we try to cope on our own strength, we invariably turn to sinful coping mechanisms to deal with our pain, whether intentionally or otherwise. Even the most faithful follower of Jesus can react unwisely and sinfully under stress. No one is immune to the physiological effects of stress and negative emotions.

Research has shown that emotional stress causes erratic and disordered patterns in our hearts which in turn, affect the signals sent

to our brains from our hearts. These signals inhibit our brains' cognitive functions.

As a result, our abilities to think clearly, remember, learn, reason, and make effective decisions are severely reduced. This is how emotional pain increases compulsive and unwise behaviour.

The Bible warns us against following the impulsive passions of our flesh that “*wage war against our souls.*”

1 Peter 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Romans 8:6-7 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

SINFUL WAYS WE COPE WITH EMOTIONAL PAIN

1. Turning to idols

When we turn to things other than God to bring us temporary comfort and some sense of security, we can create idols in our lives. Some people turn to self-worship; building up their earthly reputations, status and possessions in order to feel more “complete.” Other people turn to food binges, sexual gratifications, cigarettes, day-dreaming or addiction to online games etc.

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

All types of idols require us to give up something personal in exchange for short-term relief. We may give up our time with God, our sense of purity and dignity, our freedom from strongholds or other valuable things. Idols provide temporary “false comforts” that don’t really satisfy us at the deepest levels in the long run. Only God is the Source of all comfort for all time.

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

2. Self-reliance and independence

We may decide that we cannot trust other people, after being repeatedly hurt or let down by others. We learn to take things into our own hands and develop a hard, independent shell. Unfortunately, this shell will also make it difficult for us to turn to God 100%. We build great walls around our hearts and wonder why it is so difficult for us to love God and other people.

3. Avoiding intimacy

People with unhealed hurts tend to avoid community. We may feel that we have “nothing left to give” in our hearts, preferring to manage our relationships logistically and keep people at arm’s length to avoid disappointments. We are afraid to show our true selves. Intimacy becomes a foreign concept to us and we struggle to accept God as a Father who desires to be close to us.

4. Unforgiveness

This is perhaps one of the most common consequences of trauma, where we turn from being hurt to being indignant and unforgiving. Forgiveness can be very difficult; particularly when those who caused the trauma have not apologised or changed. Yet we must forgive others for the sake of our own souls. As described earlier in this book, it removes the emotional weights we carry as a result of other people's sins against us.

5. Pride

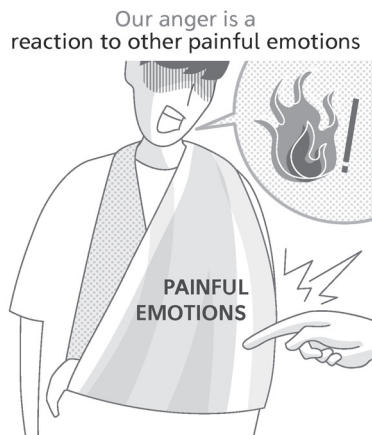
Pride is like a throne that we build for ourselves that says, "I know better than others" or "I am superior", so we feel good about ourselves in response to a subconscious desire to compensate for the hurt we have felt in the past. We turn to pride because it is a way to avoid feeling insecure and fearful.

When we experience traumatic events, we may decide that we can't trust others and need to dictate our lives on our own terms. Pride might help us feel in control, but it makes us trust in ourselves, over and above God. Pride is actually a way of finding strength through broken and limited human ways. Instead, God offers us limitless strength if we would only seek Him. Moreover, the Bible warns us against pride because it comes with a curse and separates us from God's intended blessings.

Jeremiah 17:5,7 Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord."

6. Latent anger

Frustration with unresolved issues from past trauma can lead us to bottle up our anger. This can lead us to all sorts of sin. Anger is a secondary emotion, one that we use as a cover for other vulnerable feelings. No one is born as an angry person. Anger is a response we learn to use to protect ourselves. We need to be careful not to sin when we are



angry but instead, learn to surrender the vulnerable feelings we feel inside us to God for His comfort, healing and restoration. People with explosive temperaments often suffer from unresolved trauma, and will inadvertently pass on their trauma to those around them.

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

7. Being mistrusting and judgmental

When we have been deeply hurt in the past, we may develop a fear of people. We may find it hard to trust others and to feel for others in a genuine, loving manner. Because of this, we spend a lot of energy trying to decipher other peoples' intentions and motives so that we will not be hurt. We instinctively judge and stereotype them. This attitude towards people makes it impossible for us to follow God's commandment to love others as we love ourselves.

8. Controlling

Fear can also lead us to try to control our environment, children, relationships and workplace etc. "Control freaks" are not pleasant to be around. Unfortunately, control freaks do not see themselves that way because they have deep-seated fears they feel they need to legitimately overcome. To them, their behaviour is fully justified. You will hear control freaks explain their behaviour by saying things like, "I'm simply a perfectionist" or "things must be done the right way (i.e. my way)."

To heal, we actually need to release our fears and trust God completely. God does not just see what is coming up on the road ahead of us, but an entire network of past, present and future paths.

9. Blaming God

Many of us have asked at one point in time; "If God is good, why do bad things happen to me?" and doubt His goodness. We forget that we live in a fallen world where our enemy is prowling around like a lion to devour God's loved ones. Instead of trying to uncover our enemy's schemes and defeat him in the name of Jesus Christ, we may end up shaking our fist at God instead. Unfortunately, that is the wrong target. We make God our enemy, instead of recognising that it is Satan that is the enemy.

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

10. Victim mentality / Pessimism / Depression

Someone with a victim mentality will think, “why do other people get all the good things, and not me?” It is based on jealousy and envy. We may always find someone else to blame, instead of considering our own shortcomings and weaknesses. Such an outlook can evolve into a general pessimism about life, which in turn, can lead to thoughts of suicide. We become incapable of grasping the future and hope that God has promised us.

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Bad things do happen, but we can praise God that He walks with us through them all. God promises us that He will never forsake nor forget us. We simply need to seek God's higher purpose and intent in our sufferings.

11. Restlessness

Restlessness is often a sign of someone who is trying to escape from deep emotional wounds. Many people are simply unable to be still and rest. They spend disproportionate amounts of time on the Internet, at work or in ministry work. Life becomes about non-stop entertainment, labour and toil. It draws us away from resting and enjoying God.

Psalms 62:5 For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.

BURIED EMOTIONS STIFLE SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Any doctor will tell you that infected wounds must be drained of pus before they can heal. If the opening of the wound closes before the pus is drained completely, the infection will not heal and may even spread. Similarly, we too must acknowledge and release any buried

toxic emotions, before our emotional trauma wounds can heal properly or worse, spread.

In an effort to block out emotional pain however, most people have learnt to bury negative feelings from their past with unhealthy coping mechanisms such as:

- Avoidance – “I don’t mind talking about anything, but not about how I truly feel.” “It was so long ago, there is no point in talking about it.”
- Denial – “Everything is fine. I am fine.”
- Escapism – “Let’s only talk about things that make me feel happy.”
- Idealisation – “My abuser is a good person, I don’t want to talk about his/her offensive behaviour.”
- Intellectualisation – “We can talk about the facts, but we cannot talk about the emotions.”
- Philosophical – “Life is pain. Everyone feels pain. It was no big deal.”
- Rationalisation – “My abuser had valid reasons.” “I cannot infringe on my abusers' privacy.”
- Withdrawal – “I don't feel anything. I am numb.”

We may have learnt to suppress and numb our own emotions over time, but will not be able to escape the dull heartache and anguish we still feel. When there is an unforeseen trigger and our defenses are low, this anguish and pain will rush to the surface, even decades later. These are symptoms of a wounded soul with unhealed emotional trauma.

Whether we like it or not, suppressed negative emotions will eventually interrupt our lives. Our heads want to follow God, but our hearts and flesh lead us in another direction. It appears as if there is a subconscious emotional “auto-pilot” that leads us towards ungodly behaviour.

Wounded souls are unable to fully experience the fruit of the Holy Spirit, because part of us is still “broken” and held captive. Thankfully, with Jesus Christ as our Lord, we can receive real and lasting healing. Jesus came to set us free from spiritual bondage and prison chambers of pain. He is still doing this work today.

Isaiah 61:2 NLT He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed.

God created us to express our grief and pain. Many times in the Old Testament, great men and strong warriors of war were recorded as “letting it all out” and weeping loudly and extensively. They were not afraid to deal with their emotions or to let them show.

Genesis 45:1-2 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him... And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

1 Samuel 30:4 Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep.

Many of us have been taught just the opposite with bad advice such as “don’t let your true feelings show”, “don’t cry”, “just don’t think about it and be happy” or “men don’t get emotional.” Even if we succeed in suppressing our emotions, our bodies will suffer from the subconscious stress and energy needed to push our emotions down.

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit’s work as “living water” that flows from our hearts. This is in essence, a nice imagery of what crying does for us. It purifies our hearts as we invite the Holy Spirit to flush out the toxins from the wounds that this world has pierced us with. Otherwise, our spiritual health will also be compromised. Our defence mechanisms are ungodly because we rely on our own strength instead of God’s. The Bible warns us that this brings a curse and we will not prosper. We must surrender old buried emotions to Jesus to heal and make us whole. Only then we can become “a new creation” because the old tank of toxic emotions has *truly* “passed away.”

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength...

2 Corinthians 5:17-18 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

PRACTICAL STEPS IN HEALING INNER WOUNDS

There are numerous testimonies of people whose lives have been turned around from wretchedness to peaceful victory. It always starts with inviting Jesus into their woundedness and experiencing His personal and very real healing first hand. This inner healing is available for every believer in Christ.

Psalm 107:14 NLT He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; he snapped their chains.

1. Decide to confront the past and deal with it for good

One cannot escape the past; it defines why we are who we are today. Inner healing is not about forgetting hurtful events, but about freeing ourselves from the poison that continues to seep out from unhealed emotional wounds.

Confronting a painful past can be terrifying, but Jesus promises us that He is gentle and humble in heart. Jesus, who also suffered like us, wants to save us from self-destruction. He understands and empathises with our pain completely because of what He went through on the cross. No amount of psychiatric counseling will comfort us and help us heal like the Son of God can.

Psalm 107:19-20 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

2. Correct our wrong thinking

First, God is gentle and loving. When people do heinous things against us, Jesus grieves along with us. He is personally familiar with our shame, grief, oppression, physical pain, rejection, torture and suffering. Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be brutalised and traumatised, so He can tell us, “My child, I know your pain and suffering. I understand your pain and grief because I have suffered trauma just like you.”

Jesus wants more than anything for us to live in the victory that He bought for us with His own blood. He desires to heal our broken hearts and restore our broken souls.

Isaiah 53:3-4 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief... Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

Second, sin and evil come from Satan. All forms of abuse, trauma, hurt and pain are from Satan. Many times, people have mistakenly turned to God and asked, “Why me? Why did You allow this to happen? Aren’t You supposed to protect the innocent?” The better question is, “God, how can I overcome Satan and his works in my life?”

Third, it is better to leave judgment to God. All the sins that people commit against us, such as betrayal, cursing, neglect, lying, rape, rejection, and violence, are ultimately sins against God because their offences are committed against people made in His image. God will not let anyone off for destroying His holy temple in us. Their sins bring His fierce judgment and destruction.

It is much better to leave God to judge our offenders – He’ll do a supremely better job than us. We must not fall for the temptation to harden our hearts towards God and other people – and bring calamity and trouble unto ourselves.

1 Corinthians 3:17 If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.

3. Invite God to be Lord over our past, present and future
To experience God fully, complete submission to Him is critical. When we give Him full control over our past, present and future, truly amazing things can happen. His love will drive out the fear and pain that has gripped us in the past. He will give us a spirit of power, love and self-control for the future. Expect Jesus to do new things in our lives. The old things will pass away. He will open new roads for us that we could not have humanly imagined or planned. It may not be what we expected, but it will be much more rewarding and meaningful.

2 Timothy 1:7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Isaiah 43:18-19 "Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

4. Invite a Spirit-led believer to pray with us

No redeemed son or daughter of God should be left to suffer alone. We are to bear each other's burdens. This is part of God's Law. The Bible talks about confessing our sins to one another so that we can be healed.

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

Talking to and praying with others about our past hurts and wounds help us release the emotions and hurts that have stained our souls. Where possible, seek the prayers of a Spirit-led believer who will humbly follow the Holy Spirit's promptings to guide you in the areas that need healing.

5. Bring our emotional wounds to Jesus for healing

Jesus told us He came to bind and heal our broken hearts. He is not a distant or unfeeling Healer. Jesus also experienced times of very real grief, dismay, sorrow, frustration and excruciating pain. We can trust Him to empathise with our emotional wounds.

To start, we should close our eyes and invite Jesus to be with us as we pray with our friend. Next, with our eyes still closed, we can envisage the people who have hurt us before us, and begin to express how they made us feel. We may describe emotions such as feeling abandoned, afraid, belittled, ridiculed, rejected, lonely, worthless etc. We may hear ourselves crying, sobbing or wailing as the darkest pains are released. This is a sign that our souls are being cleansed of pent-up pain and our souls are being restored to health. It is normal to feel as if a huge weight has been lifted off our shoulders and chests. Our traumatic memories will not disappear but the sharp sting of their pain will be removed. We find ourselves being able to move from a place of defeated sorrow to a victorious position of grace.

Then we should ask the Holy Spirit to comfort and minister

to us and show us how God sees us, our past and our futures. Listen to what God has to say. Sometimes, He will also reveal other trauma wounds that we need healing for. He may surprise us with names and events we could have long forgotten, including offences we encountered as toddlers, in school, at work and even in church.

Psalm 40:2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.

6. Repent of sinful ways of coping with pain

Once we have released our emotions, we need to repent of our wrong sinful responses to trauma, whether they were intentional or not. This may include cursing people, making ungodly inner vows, seeing fortune tellers, resenting others, developing sexual addictions and so forth, as the Holy Spirit leads us.

Psalm 73:21-22 When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

7. Release forgiveness

The world promotes the idea that forgiveness must be earned or deserved. But as discussed earlier in this book, forgiveness is ultimately for our own benefit, regardless of what others do. Unconditional forgiveness breaks the fortresses around our hearts and allows the Holy Spirit to do a deeper cleansing and renewal of our souls.

Moreover, unforgiveness is an insult to a God who sent His Son to purchase our pardon with His own blood before we even knew how to ask for His forgiveness. Jesus taught a parable of a king who asked his servant, “*I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?*” Unforgiveness opens various routes to demonic oppression, particularly from spirits that will torment us with thoughts of revenge and death. The Bible says that we will lose our ability to see things clearly and eventually lose our way.

Matthew 18:32-35 Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I

had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

1 John 2:11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

8. Close the doors to Satan

Our precious healing needs to be protected because Satan will try to steal it. He will try to slowly introduce doubts, lies and fleshly ideas in an attempt to re-open new doors of pain, such as:

- "Was the healing real? Was it just my imagination?"
- "Is prayer really so powerful? Maybe I need to do more to ensure my healing is real."
- "Is my healing permanent?"
- "I'm not worthy of healing. I deserve condemnation."
- "I miss using my pain to gain attention from other people."
- "My healing may mean that the people who hurt me will not receive just punishment. Maybe I should not be healed."
- "The people who have hurt me haven't changed. My healing was for nothing."
- "This different circumstance is giving me very similar feelings as before. My pain must be back."

We must be alert and not let Satan use doubt, fear, condemnation and confusion to ruin the healing we have experienced in Christ. Once our souls have been healed from emotional wounds, we also need to shut the doors for good to Satan's subtle attacks on our thinking.

9. Start a spiritual "rehab" programme

Inner healing is not just a one-off occurrence because a broken soul that has been restored still needs to be supported and protected - much like physical trauma patients who undergo rehab therapy to strengthen their joints and muscles. We ought to gather with a community of brothers and sisters who will support us as we

continue our journey of trauma recovery.

Believers also need to devote ourselves to learning the truth about who we are and strengthen our mental muscles based on God's Word. Whenever we feel defeated by our past pains or ongoing emotional attacks, we need to declare God's truths over our souls. These are some sample statements:

- “Jesus who healed people over 2,000 years ago is the same Jesus who has healed me today. He never changes and His power to remove my pain is never diminished.” | *Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*
- “I can release my pain to God for good because He is just and will judge everyone accordingly, including those who have hurt me or who keep hurting me. They may never say sorry to me but they will have to bow down before my God's fearsome judgment one day. I need not judge them nor hold them in contempt.” | *Romans 14:10-11 NIV You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. for it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”*
- “I sinned in the past because of ignorance. I praise God that His forgiveness covers all my sins. I will not allow myself to sit on His heavenly throne and pour guilt over myself, because God does not do that.” | *Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”*

10. Testify

God can turn our painful experiences around into testimonies that help others. A story of redemption from the depths of hopelessness through the Holy Spirit is very powerful, and we should not let our experiences “go to waste.” Once we have experienced God's immeasurable power to heal us on the deepest levels, we have the privilege to fully know the glorious hope that God has for those of us who need comforting. We should not keep the knowledge of God's glory to ourselves.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Everyone has experienced trauma of some sort. What are some examples of traumatic experiences you have witnessed?
- Q2. Please pray and ask God to bring you to an understanding of how to release your own traumatic experiences to Jesus.

Author's note:

For more teachings about our emotions as well as testimonies of people who have been healed, please refer to the TESTIMONIES section of the website teachinghumblehearts.com.

CHAPTER 11

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CUTTING UNGODLY SOUL TIES

The Bible calls us to love God with all our souls. The implication is that it is possible for our souls to become filled with things other than God Himself. This is not to say that we should not love people or enjoy the things of this world. Rather, it becomes very dangerous when we become so attached to other human beings, things or even spirits, that the pure love we ought to have for God in our souls is compromised. Our loyalty to Him will erode and if we are not careful, we will forfeit our souls.

Matthew 16:26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

UNGODLY SOUL ATTACHMENTS

Take King Solomon for example. Despite all his God-given wisdom, God's appointed king failed to recognise when the loyalty of his soul to his Creator was slowly being eroded and compromised. He sinned greatly against God by marrying women who worshipped idols and evil spirits. He built them idolatrous temples and even bowed down to their demonic idols, including one that involved child sacrifices. This brought dire consequences to the kingdom of Israel and was the beginning of its downfall. Solomon formed ungodly soul ties with

pagan women that blinded him to his own folly. Eventually, his life's work and family were destroyed. (See 1 Kings 11:4-11). This is the reason why it is extremely dangerous to be "unequally yoked" with non-believers or people with demonic influence in their lives.

2 Corinthians 6:14,16-17 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said... Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you,



The idea of being “yoked” is to be unequivocally attached together. One may say, “The Hong Kong dollar is yoked to the American dollar.” When the American dollar drops in value, so does the Hong Kong dollar. They cannot be separated or move in opposite directions. The only One we are to be yoked to is Jesus Christ, who invites us to take His yoke upon us. When we continue to be “yoked” to human beings, we will feel as if we are being torn in different directions,

unable to love God with all our souls. The desires, words, and behaviour of other people inadvertently influence us. We may not notice it but our complete devotion to God could be slowly eroded. This is possibly what happened with King Solomon.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

We form soul or spiritual ties and become yoked with other people through a few ways.

1. Sexual connections

God created man and woman to become one flesh, to be bonded together like glue, when they enter into a sexual relationship. In a

godly marriage, we form godly soul ties that celebrate the intimacy that God intended for us. It ties spouses together in a strong union where two souls become intertwined.

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Similarly, we can also form ungodly soul ties through immoral sex, which destroys us spiritually. The Bible says that sexual immorality and intercourse outside marriage only leads to spiritual death. Having sex with a prostitute, for instance, joins a person's soul with the prostitute – as well as all of his or her previous clients' souls.

Proverbs 5:3-5 NLT For the lips of an immoral woman are as sweet as honey... But in the end she is as bitter as poison, as dangerous as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.

2. Emotional connections

We can also form ungodly soul ties with people with whom we have developed strong emotional ties from childhood, such as our parents and family members, where we end up doing whatever they want. They can become as close “as our own soul” and their desires can become as powerful as our own. At times, it can be so overpowering that it is hard to obey God and love Him with all our souls.

The same can happen when it comes to soul ties between friends. Take, for example, the soul tie that King Saul's son, Jonathan, had with the king's attendant, David. The Bible says Jonathan's soul was “knit to” or joined with David's. Jonathan risked his own life and even disobeyed his own father in order to save David. Jonathan's soul tie with David was stronger than the one he had with his own father.

Another type of soul tie that we can form is with objects that we turn to for emotional comfort rather than God. Such objects, which includes toys, blankets or lucky charms, become our idols. We know we have formed ungodly soul ties with these objects when we form such strong emotional bonds that we never want to part with them.

Deuteronomy 13:6 “If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ ...

1 Samuel 18:1 As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

3. Mental connections

The Bible calls us to have the mind of Jesus Christ, who focused on pleasing His Heavenly Father and fulfilling His will. We are called to renew our minds so that we can discern and follow God’s perfect will.

1 Corinthians 2:16 “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

Our patterns of thinking are influenced by different sources, and if we are not careful, we will start to follow other people’s thoughts, wills and ideas instead. Some examples could include philosophers, doctors, scientists, the media, supervisors, and people we idolise. Other ungodly soul ties include those we form with worldly doctrines such as consumerism, materialism, secularism, socialism and so forth. All these form the basis of ungodly soul ties through their influence on our minds.

4. Spiritual connections

We can also form soul ties with people either by praying for them and sharing testimonies that release them from spiritual bondage. These are ways we come alongside people spiritually. This does not mean we stop ministering to others. It just means we must remember to pray to cut off ungodly soul ties after prayer, particularly when it comes to deliverance from evil spirits.

1 Corinthians 14:15 ... I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also...

Another form of ungodly soul ties includes those that we form with idolatrous or religious organisations that propagate half-truths and false teachings. We need to test everything that claims to be from God and not come under ungodly influences. These include religious

cults, schools, fraternities, clubs and communities that claim to be Christian but encourage its members to do ungodly things. Not everything that is done in God's name is godly.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN CUTTING UNGODLY SOUL TIES

The soul that sins dies spiritually. Being joined with a sinful soul that is rotting with spiritual death is certainly not healthy for us. We should cut ungodly soul ties that we have formed with other sinners and renew the allegiance of our souls to God alone. By doing so, we disallow any spiritual darkness from other sinners to become knitted to our souls.

Ezekiel 18:20 The soul who sins shall die...

This does not mean we must end all our relationships. It just means we practice saying a prayer to cut off ungodly soul ties after each interaction that is spiritual in nature. For example, we may need to cut off soul ties with people we have ministered to, but don't need to do so if we simply had a meal with them. There are, however, ungodly relationships with the occult that we must end forever. This means we must cut all contact with sorcerers, fengshui masters, and fortune-tellers, occult godfathers and never be in touch with them again etc.

If we think we have formed ungodly soul ties with anyone, we must ask God to restore our souls and lead us in paths of righteousness once again.

Psalms 23:3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

1. Repent of ungodly relationships

Any time we make a person's words or relationship more important to us than God, we need to repent. These may include unhealthy submissions or ungodly emotional ties to our parents, spouses, teachers, pastors etc. Ungodly soul ties also form through sex outside of marriage. We need to repent of the fornication itself before we cut off soul ties with premarital sex partners.

2. Forgive

Next, it is important to examine our hearts for people we need to forgive. Those with whom we have formed ungodly soul ties may be amongst the hardest to forgive or let go of.

3. Cut all ungodly soul ties

We can then pray like this, *“In the name of Jesus, I cut off ungodly soul ties with (name the persons) and all curses related to them.”* Examples of people whom we may form ungodly soul ties with include:

- Family members who practice idol worship and any form of witchcraft.
- Relatives, friends, business associates and medical professionals who have spoken curses over us.
- People who have had undue influence over our thinking.
- Practitioners of witchcraft, such as fengshui masters, new age teachers, meditation gurus etc.
- Celebrities, toys and fictional characters that we idolise etc.
- Anyone with whom we have committed fornication with, including ex-lovers, one-night stands, prostitutes, masseurs who performed sexual acts on us, cyber-sex partners and so forth.

4. Remove soul-tie objects

Another important step is to discard or destroy anything that is sentimental or symbolic of ungodly relationships through sexual immorality, witchcraft and idol worship. This can include souvenirs, messages, letters and photos etc. related to ex-lovers, temples, horoscopes, mystical beings or creatures and so forth. Do not hold onto such items. If we struggle to let such items go, it is a sign that the soul ties already supersedes our relationship with God.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. How do ungodly soul ties affect people?
- Q2. What ungodly soul ties affect you? Please pray to break them.

CHAPTER 12



BREAKING OFF GENERATIONAL CURSES

Every family is defined by its roots. There are several books in the Bible which trace genealogies back many generations, because people valued understanding their spiritual lineage. Nowadays, we don't make much effort to examine our family trees or try to understand our spiritual heritage. Many of us may not even know who our great grandparents are, let alone what they did. If we did make the effort to draw out our family trees, it may surprise us to find many linkages between the generations. People with histories of adultery, idol worship, witchcraft and sibling hatred will find similar patterns scattered throughout the branches in their family trees across the generations. You can often tell the type of family a person comes from by the fruit in his or her life.

Luke 6:43-44 'For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.'

OUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE

As children, we learn a lot through observing the adults around us.

For better or for worse, they form the foundation of our worldviews as adults. Such beliefs are so deeply ingrained that they propel our behaviours even if we are unable to specifically spell out why we do what we do. We may not want to, but we can end up thinking, talking and reacting like our parents. Besides what we pick up from our families by observation, there is also a lot that we pick up through our biological DNA and our spiritual heritage.

What happens in one generation inadvertently gets passed down to the next. Scientific epigenetics research has shown that one generation's trauma can alter the genes of their children and their children's ability to bounce back from trauma. The prolonged terror that Holocaust victims endured, for example, altered the genes of their children, making the next generation more susceptible to fear and anxiety as well. A variety of studies, many using long-term medical records from large populations, have found that certain experiences can also affect future descendants' health risks.

Our spiritual heritage has greater implications on our lives than we like to admit. The Bible leaves no room for doubt that what our forefathers experienced has effects on us; we even continue to endure the curses that Adam's and Eve's sin brought about on this earth. Neither will we escape the consequences of our ancestors' sins, as shown in the example of King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 34. All the suffering endured in the kingdom during his reign was a result of the evil committed by previous generations of kings.

Genesis 3:17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

2 Chronicles 34:19-21 And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes... saying, "... For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

On four occasions in the Bible, God warns that our sins have consequences on future generations, specifically down to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 20:4-6, Exodus 34:6-7, Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9). Clearly, this warning should not be taken

lightly. And it is not just our parents' sins that will have a lingering effect on us, but our great-grandparents' sins too.

To illustrate how generational curses can play out, here are a few real-life stories. A person whose grandparents were devoted fengshui masters found that he became fascinated with magic and "played" with different forms of the dark arts from an early age. When he became a Christian, he seemed to face more than the usual invisible obstacles whenever he made an effort to study God's Word. His efforts were usually met with unexplainable stomach cramps or mental blocks. Once these were broken through prayer in Jesus' name, he could focus on reading God's Word and experience pure worship from his heart. The generational curse was broken.

Another person is unable to hold a normal conversation with her sister for long before there is some severe misunderstanding. When she reviewed her family tree, she noticed her parents had ongoing disputes or disagreements with her uncles and aunties, as did her grandparents with her grand aunts and uncles. Unforgiveness was rife in her generational chart. Becoming more aware of these generational patterns helped the lady avoid the same relationships curses with her own sister.

A lady who served in church was struggling to break off an adulterous relationship she had with a married colleague. When she examined her family tree, she noticed generations of adulterous affairs, including that of her own father's. As much as she hated her father's betrayal, she somehow ended up in the same cycle of sin and destruction, until she prayed to repent and break off her generational curses in Jesus' name. She was able to turn away from the affair for good afterwards.

GENERATIONAL BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Some people's lives seem to be blessed: things go smoothly, there are no major diseases, and families are closely knit and loving. Generally, whatever they do seems to go well and prosper. It would appear that events and circumstances around them set them off in the right direction. Take a closer look and it is likely that such families are descendants of a line of faithful believers. Such is the promised legacy

of those whose forefathers obeyed all the commandments of the Lord. They enjoy generational blessings for a thousand generations. (See Deuteronomy 28:11-14)

Conversely, there are those who have a family history of relatives who die early, suffer sicknesses or mental disorders, fight each other or slip into bankruptcy. It is not surprising to find that their forefathers had turned to idol worship, unforgiveness, greed or defied God's other commandments.

Exodus 34:6-7 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

From the beginning, God laid out clear warnings about the consequences of our choices that would fall on both our offspring and us. Blessings and curses get passed on through the generations. God promises wonderful blessings to those who follow Him joyfully and wholeheartedly – and warns us that He will not bless those who turn against Him.

Genesis 22:18 and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

The Bible lists some curses to alert us to what we should avoid. A just God cannot bless anyone who rebels against Him and brings suffering to others. Our potential to wreak destruction must be kept in check.

Curses listed in the Bible	
Stinginess towards God	<i>Malachi 3:9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.</i>
Cursing Israel	<i>Numbers 24:9 GNT Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed, And whoever curses Israel will be cursed."</i>

Idol worship	<i>Deuteronomy 28:14-15</i> and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them. “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.
Crafting idolatrous images	<i>Deuteronomy 27:15</i> “Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the Lord, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ ...
Dishonouring parents	<i>Deuteronomy 27:16</i> “Cursed be anyone who dishonours his father or his mother.’ ...
Dishonesty, perversion of justice	<i>Deuteronomy 27:17</i> “Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor’s landmark.’ ... <i>Deuteronomy 27:19</i> “Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.’ ...
Murder and violence	<i>Deuteronomy 27:24</i> “Cursed be anyone who strikes down his neighbor in secret.’ ...
Trusting in man more than God	<i>Jeremiah 17:5</i> Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord.
Not giving to those in need	<i>Proverbs 28:27</i> Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.
Sexual perversion, incest	<i>Deuteronomy 27:20</i> “Cursed be anyone who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s nakedness.’ ... <i>Deuteronomy 27:21</i> “Cursed be anyone who lies with any kind of animal.’ ... <i>Deuteronomy 27:22</i> “Cursed be anyone who lies with his sister, whether the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother.’ ...
Disobeying God Dishonouring God	<i>Deuteronomy 28:15</i> “But if you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

POSSIBLE SIGNS OF GENERATIONAL CURSES

God's spiritual laws are consistent and unchangeable. The principle of cause and effect follows our choices. Just as blessings can flow through our families, curses (effect) will infect our family tree as seeds of sin are planted (cause). When one or more of these patterns below are evident in our extended families, we may need to consider the possibility of generational curses. Here are some possible examples.

1. Broken family relationships and constant conflict

Uncles and aunties don't get along. Grandparents are distrusted or abandoned. Siblings don't speak with each other. Figuratively speaking, family members will tend to set themselves up on opposite sides of the fence and see each other as enemies. Hatred and unforgiveness are rife.

2. Early deaths, recurring sicknesses

In each generation will be at least one relative who died early because of sickness, suicide or murder.

Deuteronomy 28:59 the Lord will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting.

3. Mental illnesses

A pattern of mental confusion, depression and illnesses flows through the family tree.

Deuteronomy 28:20 "The Lord will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.

4. Difficulty in child-bearing and multiplying in number

Miscarriages, barrenness and difficulty in having children appear in one or more families in each generation.

Deuteronomy 28:62 Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God.

5. Difficulty in prospering financially or materially

Wealth is not accumulated for long. Business failures, bad loans, betrayal by business partners, bad investments and bankruptcy dry up the bank account.

Deuteronomy 28:18 Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN BREAKING GENERATIONAL CURSES

Generational curses are not an excuse to continue sinning. Jesus came to die a cursed death on the cross so that He could remove our curses, and we would dishonour His sacrifice for us if we continue to sin. Once we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we can revoke our generational curses in His name. When we are ready to honour Him in all that we do, we can invite Him to make us into a new creation, regardless of the condition of our DNA and our spiritual heritage. This is something we need to declare over ourselves, and pronounce blessings that are opposite to the curses in the name of Jesus.

Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

1. Draw up a detailed family tree

First, we can start by drawing up a family tree as far back as we can, preferably to our great-grandparents. It is not necessary to name all the relatives but it might be helpful. Do include godparents, mistresses, second or third spouses and stepchildren. Try to find out as much as possible. The more we can describe, the better. For example, we should try to identify:

- Interpersonal relationships with each other.
- Broken marriages, divorce etc.
- Beliefs and practices e.g. God fearing Christians, superstitions, communism, ancestor worship, idol worship etc.
- Baby dedication to idols, choice of baby names based on ancestor manuals, superstitions, witchcraft etc.
- Practice of witchcraft and sorcery etc.
- Curses spoken over the family, against each other or the children etc.
- Sexual immorality, prostitution, incest, marital infidelity, pedophilia, involvement in pornography and the sex industry etc.
- Early deaths, sicknesses, suicide, murder, abortion, child sacrifice etc.
- Violence, verbal abuse, human trafficking, enslavement etc.
- Miscarriages or reproduction issues etc.
- Mental problems e.g. paranoia, schizophrenia, depression etc.
- Involvement in wars, political uprisings, revolution, genocide or persecution etc.
- Prejudices, favouritism, unforgiveness, slander, gossip etc.
- Criminal activity, perversion of justice etc.
- Unbelief, cursing God and His people
- Financial debts, losses, bankruptcy etc.
- Secret societies, freemasons, cults, clubs, temples and any group that involves ungodly allegiances and vows etc.
- Idolatrous heirlooms that have been passed down etc.
- Anything that may be described as immoral.

2. Identify patterns and generation curses

Next, try to identify any patterns of sin and curses.

3. Proclaim the blood of Jesus to redeem us, ask God to turn a curse into a blessing

Once we have identified the curses, pray to revoke them in the name of Jesus before we proclaim the exact opposite of the curses as a blessing over our future generations and ourselves.

Nehemiah 13:2 for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Do you know your family tree well? Please elaborate.
- Q2. Please draw up your family tree. What patterns do you notice? Are there any possible generational curses you need to cut off in Jesus' name? Please pray with someone as you do so.

CHAPTER 13

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BREAKING OFF FROM THE OCCULT

Almost every magazine and newspaper today has a section on horoscopes. Witches and wizards are promoted as heroes in movies. Online games feature magic wands, spells and supernatural weapons. Comic characters are given supernatural powers from hell. Pagan cultures sell objects of spiritualism and witchcraft as tourist souvenirs. Occult symbols are used in jewelry and tattoos.

Music celebrities mimic satanic or pagan rituals in concerts. Students are made to make ungodly oaths before idolatrous altars in sororities and fraternities. Children are given mystical toys as presents or asked to make dream-catchers at school.

Worship postures originating from ancient temples are accepted as “stretching” exercises. New age meditation techniques are promoted by companies as staff benefits. Good luck charms adorn many businesses.

The occult has infiltrated mainstream media and everyday life to the point that we have accepted them as the norm. Astrology, fortune telling, magic, witchcraft, spiritualism, para-psychology, ancestor worship and idol worship are just some occult practices that have been disguised as “harmless”, “entertainment”, “family tradition”, “good for health” or “fun and cute.” Such practices, however, make us a “*stench in God’s nostrils*.”

Isaiah 65:1-5 NLT The Lord says, “... I was ready to be found, but no one was looking for me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am!’ to a nation that did

not call on my name. All day long I opened my arms to a rebellious people. But they follow their own evil paths and their own crooked schemes. All day long they insult me to my face by worshipping idols in their sacred gardens. They burn incense on pagan altars. At night they go out among the graves, worshipping the dead... Yet they say to each other, 'Don't come too close or you will defile me! I am holier than you!' These people are a stench in my nostrils, an acrid smell that never goes away.

Occult practices usually feature one or more of the following:

- A sophisticated belief system that is contrary to the Bible.
- Prophecies, signs and wonders.
- Some form of offering or exchange.
- Superstitious, religious or decorative objects, as well as spells and potions.
- Blood sacrifices e.g. cutting self, food sacrifice, child sacrifice etc.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,

We become “participants with demons” every time we take part in any form of occult practice and open entry points for demons to oppress us. It only takes one occasion to give the enemy a foothold.

1 Corinthians 10:20-21 No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Most people fall for the occult because of the sinful desires in our souls. Satan will lure us with promises of power, money, recognition, glory and so forth, as a means to fulfil ourselves through any means other than God Himself. Some examples include:

- “I can become prosperous and popular.”
- “I will find love.”
- “I can secretly find my justice.”
- “I can improve my health.”
- “I am not concerned if this offends God.”
- “I am afraid of rejection if I don't join in.”

- “I want more control over life and people.”
- “I will prevent harm to myself.”

Those who follow occult practices usually do so because they have been taught by family or friends that it is harmless or even good. They may be driven by boredom, curiosity, fear, anxiety, greed or a desire for control, none of which are godly motivations.

EXAMPLES OF OCCULT PRACTICES TODAY

Below is a sample list of occult practices we can come across today. Many can be traced back to similar occult practices mentioned in the Old Testament.

<p>Divination: Seeking to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by interpreting omens or through supernatural powers. <i>Jeremiah 27:9 do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your fortune-tellers, or your sorcerers...</i></p>	<p>Fortune telling, belief in fortune cookies, horoscopes, palm reading, face reading, handwriting reading, birthdate fortune telling, séances, tarot cards etc.</p>
<p>Necromancy: Communicating with the “dead” to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge, to bring someone back from the dead, or to use the deceased as a weapon. (Involves evil spirits that disguise themselves as deceased people.) <i>Leviticus 19:31 “Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.</i></p>	<p>Temple mediums, sending gifts to the dead, worshiping ancestors, talking to dead people / relatives as a ritual, grave sweeping as an act of worship etc.</p>

<p>Worship of idols / evil spirits: Worship of and deference to anything other than Father, Jesus and Holy Spirit. <i>Deuteronomy 32:16–17 They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded.</i></p>	<p>Belief in divine creatures or gods, Confucianism, Marxism / Communism, Guan yin, trances or possession by spirits, prosperity deities, offering food at idolatrous altars, Satanism, spirit guides, worship of people, nature or secret societies.</p>
<p>Magic, sorcery and witchcraft: Ways to exercise or glorify supernatural powers. <i>Deuteronomy 18:10-12 ... And do not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord...</i></p>	<p>Baby ghost, playing Bloody Mary, belief in fairies and mythical beings, chants, crystal balls, casting spells and curses, games such as Dungeon & Dragons, Hell Girl or Magic the Gathering, dream-catchers, fengshui, Halloween, Japanese charms, magic dolls, psychics, new age meditation, spiritual rituals, trances, voodoo, witchdoctors, using needles for health purposes etc.</p>
<p>Astrology: Study of the planets as having an influence on human affairs and the natural world. <i>Deuteronomy 4:19 And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.</i></p>	<p>Horoscopes, zodiac signs, consulting the lunar calendar, moon worship, sun worship, star worship, worship of heavenly bodies as deities etc.</p>

Superstition: Belief in supernatural causality, that one event causes another without any natural process linking the two events. | *1 Timothy 4:7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;*

Good luck charms, myths, things that bring “bad luck” or “good luck” etc.

EFFECTS OF THE OCCULT ON BELIEVERS

Occult practices tend to promote self-sufficiency and control over one's life. They will always be presented as alluring, beneficial and harmless, but the principles behind occult practices inadvertently harden our hearts towards God and block child-like faith in Him. One will notice some common traits of people who are under the influence of the occult.

1. Proud, manipulative and quarrelsome nature

People who use the occult to control what they want will often be full of pride. They have a manipulative and quarrelsome nature towards their family members, friends and fellow believers.

2 Timothy 2:23,25-26 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels... God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

2. Vanity and seduction

The occult encourages people to idolise themselves and become their own gods. It creates the deception that human beings have the power to command the supernatural or evil spirits. But demons eventually steal from and destroy those who try to control them. They may appear to be “summoned” to do our will but ultimately, they are the ones who end up controlling and manipulating us.

People who participate in the dark arts will be inclined to use

manipulation or seduction to try to control other people. Queen Jezebel was from a country that was deeply steeped in witchcraft. There are numerous occasions in the book of 2 Kings that record how Jezebel overstepped her boundaries and manipulated circumstances and people for her own evil desires. In her vanity, she even dressed up and taunted Jehu, the military commander who came to destroy her.

When people with similar traits become Christians and do not renounce ties with their occult past for good, they will be influenced by Satan to try to influence God's people and church ministries to suit their personal agendas.

2 Kings 9:30 When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window...

3. Out-of-control temper

Those who dabble in the occult will also be easily provoked to anger, especially when things don't go according to their own will and efforts.

4. Insecurity, anxiety, lack of peace

The desire to always be in control breeds a sense of insecurity and lack of peace about the future. Jehu, the commander who destroyed the pagan queen Jezebel, declared that there was no peace in the land because of the sorcery the queen had been practicing. As a person starts practising the occult, they can be drawn deeper and deeper into it as they try to find more answers to their anxieties. This only keeps them in a state of insecurity and spiritual bondage.

2 Kings 9:22 And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" He answered, "What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?"

5. Lying, greed, dishonouring God

The desire for control will also lure us into telling half-truths or "white lies" in order to get our way. We begin to deceive ourselves about the gravity of our rebellion against God and quench the Holy Spirit in us. This will give way to a lying and self-deceiving spirit that will oppress and enslave us, until we confess and humbly ask God for

forgiveness. Such a spirit can cause much damage within a Christian community.

Acts 5:3-5 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God." When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.

6. Health problems, physical ailments, untimely deaths

Ultimately, occult practices bring curses upon those who follow Satan. The most visible of these are physical or health problems. One may also notice a history of untimely deaths and prolonged sicknesses within their families.

Luke 13:16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

7. Sexual enslavement

The Bible states that those who follow idols are filled with a spirit of whoredom that will lead them to sexual sin and fornication. All other sins we commit are outside our bodies but sexual fornication is against our bodies, temples of the Holy Spirit. Demons love to deface and destroy God's beloved temples. Demons will also use sex to form ungodly soul ties between sinners, in order to influence more people and their families.

Hosea 4:12-14 My people inquire of a piece of wood, and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray... Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery... for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin.

8. Deathly hue, lack of radiance

When people are heavily oppressed by demons, there may be a slightly deathly grey hue over their faces. They will lack the radiance that comes from full submission to God's plans and blessings.

Psalm 34:5 Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN BREAKING OFF OCCULT INFLUENCES

1. Repent and stop all occult practices

Occult practices put us under the direct influence of demons and curses. To break free, we must be genuinely repentant in saying sorry to God and stop all our affections for and dedication to occult objects and practices.

2 Kings 22:17,19 Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands... because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the Lord, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the Lord.

One of the commonly overlooked occult practices is new age meditation or hypnotism of any kind. Evil spirits can enter our souls when we “surrender our will”, “clear our minds” or “let go of control.” Proverbs 25:28 suggests that this is how evil spirits will break in to exert their influence over us. We must not be like a city without walls that is easily broken into. This, for instance, is how demons operate through mediums.

Brain scans by neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Newberg showed an increased flow of incoming sensory information to many parts of the brains of Brazilian mediums as they channelled messages from the “spirits of the dead” through handwriting. Their messages were indeed coming from something beyond the mediums themselves.

*Proverbs 25:28 NASB Like a city that is broken into and without walls
Is a man who has no control over his spirit.*

2. Cleanse our homes

Next, we must remove and destroy all items related to the occult from our homes and workplaces, regardless of how much they cost. They will never be as valuable as our souls. We should not be tied down to their monetary or sentimental value, because such fleshly desires will only tie us to demonic influences. Let us cleanse our homes as soon as possible and destroy items such as:

- Idolatrous altars for spirits and ancestor worship etc.
- Religious writing, mantras, scrolls etc.
- Objects used for new age or spiritual practices, such meditation mats, automatic writing, hypnotism, séances, psychic reading, mind control, mind reading etc.
- Objects related to witchcraft, such as fengshui, spells, potions, written curses or “blessings” etc.
- Objects related to superstitions etc.
- Anything related to fortune-telling (tarot cards, ouija boards, horoscopes, zodiac signs), western or Chinese astrology, numerology, birthdate readings etc.
- Anything related to political or religious leaders or regimes that are worshipped etc.
- “Cultural” souvenirs with spiritual significance, such as voodoo dolls, dreamcatchers, totem poles, Native American art, swords and spears with spiritual meaning, carpets and cloths used in idol worship, temple souvenirs, amulets, talisman, Nepalese eye and spiritism, African masks, temple lions or guardian creatures, Egyptian objects, Mardi Gras masks etc.
- Good luck charms, such as fengshui items, prosperity symbols, gods of fortune, prosperity and longevity, temple writings, crystals, wind chimes, maneki-neko (Japanese money cat) etc.
- Games that make people enter into mysticism e.g. cosplay, Pokemon, Dungeons and dragons, Magic the Gathering etc.
- Music with ungodly lyrics, mind numbing beats, chanting, music used for hypnotic spiritual meditation etc.

- Books, stories and movies that promote fascination with the occult and witchcraft such as Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, Twilight etc.
- Carvings, sculptures and anything related to fantasy fairy tales, mystical creatures and stories, such as Santa Claus, fairies, goblins, monkey god, Cupid, Greek and Roman mythology, unicorns etc.

If we are unsure if anything is spiritually unclean, we can simply ask ourselves if we would feel comfortable if Jesus were to pay us a visit and come across the object/s. Should we find ourselves feeling too attached to and offended at having to give up these objects, it is likely we have already become bonded to some ungodly influences.

3. Renounce ties with demons and occult masters

God likens our involvement with the occult to “*whorings with lovers.*” This is how much ungodly spiritual practices offend our holy God. Just as any adulteress who turns back to her husband must unconditionally cut off all ties with her old lovers, we too must pray in Jesus’ name to repent, renounce and break our ties with evil spirits and occult masters we had subjected ourselves to in the past.

Ezekiel 16:36,58 Thus says the Lord God, Because your lust was poured out and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them... You bear the penalty of your lewdness and your abominations...

4. Renew our minds in God’s Word

Some cultures try to incorporate occult ideologies into teachings from the Bible. This is blasphemous. We must obey God’s law fully and not dilute it in any way. This is because the Bible warns us that deceitful spirits will try to mislead believers with various teachings that appear to be biblical in nature, but only draw us away from God and put us under the influence of demons.

It is therefore critical to study God's Word for ourselves and base our thinking on sound biblical truths, and align every thought to Jesus Christ's teachings. In this way, we will be able to test the spirits accurately.

1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

5. Submit fully to God

It is absolutely critical that we first submit to God, before we resist demons. When we submit ourselves to God, Jesus will deliver us from darkness to His Kingdom.

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

6. Defend ourselves from recurring occult influence

As we turn away from the occult, we may also find that Satan will try to deceive us into becoming enslaved back to our old practices. We may decide to repent and stop practising one type of spiritual discipline for “stretching”, but then turn to another form the next day. Or we may remove our fengshui items but suddenly be given a family heirloom that represents ancestor worship. We must stay alert against the enemy’s schemes. Satan will sometimes also disguise himself as God’s messenger to mislead us into believing false teachings or consulting dead “saints” or family members. Hence, we must test all teachings and prophecies to see if they are truly from God or from deceiving spirits.

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...

Galatians 4:8-9 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

7. Use our gifts in spiritual discernment to help others under demonic influence

People who have been involved in the occult will continue to be sensitive to the spiritual realm. We can use our spiritual awareness to help others identify demonic influence in their lives. People have been able to identify places where idol worship had previously taken place, as the Holy Spirit guides them. The idolatrous altars may have been removed but He will show us areas that continue to be spiritually defiled. Other times, the Holy Spirit may help us become aware of a presence or solemn heaviness in the environment due to the presence of evil spirits or give us the name of the spirit oppressing a person.

In the occult, such discernment is referred to as psychic ability. Once someone turns to Christ, the Holy Spirit can use this spiritual ability to further God's Kingdom. This gift can be very helpful to the Body of Christ, particularly in identifying false prophets and prophecies, casting out demons and deliverance prayers.

We need to be very cautious, however, not to return to old patterns of control and manipulation and attempt to use such gifts for our own benefit or glory.

1 Corinthians 12:10 NLT He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit...

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Please give some examples of occult practices in your country and your family.
- Q2. Have you unknowingly participated in occult practices? Please elaborate and pray with someone to repent.

Author's note:

For more teachings on the occult, as well as testimonies of people who have broken free from the occult, please refer to the TESTIMONIES section of the website teachinghumblehearts.com.

CHAPTER 14



OVERCOMING DEMONIC INFLUENCES

We give Satan freedom and license to bring the all forms of mental, emotional and physical misery into our lives through sin. This is because sin separates us from God and His powerful protective covering. In other words, the consequence of sin is spiritual death. Satan will actively use sin to work against whatever is good and righteous in us, so as to stymie God's love, hope, joy, and peace in us. Satan is a deceiver and a thief. Praise God that Jesus came to give us the power to overcome *all* of Satan's schemes.

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

John 10:7,10 So Jesus again said to them... The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Whether we like it or not, Satan is an enemy that we will continue to come up against until Jesus appears again to establish His Kingdom on earth. The good news is that our enemy is already defeated and God has given us every weapon we need to deflect demonic attempts to drag us into spiritual self-destruction. You and I have all spiritual authority on earth in the name of Jesus as well as a living and active Sword that "pierces to the division of soul and spirit", God's Word.

Ephesians 6:17 ... take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

All Satan has are lies and his abilities to perform signs and wonders to influence and captivate people. With the odds stacked up against him, our enemy knows he has little time left and will actively deceive, manipulate and steal from believers. The Bible warns that his lawless activities will increase over time and if we are not careful, our love for God will turn cold.

Revelation 12:12 NLT ... terror will come on the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great anger, knowing that he has little time."

Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

VICTORY AND NEW LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

Jesus came to earth to defeat the devil and to give us new life in all its abundance. What a wonderful Saviour we have.

1 John 3:8 ... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

God promises to guard us against our enemy and his demonic influences. Jesus' victory on the cross brings great power to you and me, because every demon will submit to us once we command them to do so in the name of Jesus. God also poured His Holy Spirit into us to provide the wisdom, discernment and truth we need, so we don't fall into the enemy's traps.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

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

John 16:13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

RECOGNISING DEMONIC INFLUENCES

No believer begins his or her day deciding to sin. We are only lured into sin by our enemy who consistently places circumstances, people and suggestions in our way to tempt and deceive us into turning away from our Heavenly Father.

As followers of Jesus, we need to know how to distinguish between our own fleshly responses and demonic influence. We must not blame everything on evil spirits or shirk our personal responsibility for overcoming any temptation to sin. We do have the power to choose to die to our flesh and train our bodies to become "instruments for righteousness" when we learn how to turn to God for help.

Romans 6:12-13 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.

Let us use an illustration to distinguish between the influence of our flesh and of evil spirits. Suppose you unexpectedly bump into someone who was the cause of a lot of hurt and trauma in your past. It is a person you had recently prayed to God to forgive. Our initial reaction may be one of surprise and dread. This is a fleshly reaction. Such initial emotions are normal and to be expected. They will quickly die down once we remember that we have already forgiven that person.

But then slowly and subtly, we might start to have thoughts that say, “He looks so happy. He really doesn’t deserve any good in his life. How can he get away with all the hurt he has caused my family and me?” Such thoughts are demonic temptations from evil spirits. We should not fall for their influences, but submit ourselves to God and choose to extend His grace and love. We can either follow Satan to hate or curse or obey God to bless.

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Typically, one can recognise demonic influences by certain patterns. Just as the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual knowledge in our minds, demons will try to steer our thoughts through one of the following ways.

- In the first person – Demons will use deceptions said in the first person. We will think thoughts based on “I”, “my” or “me.”
- Emotional - Demonic influences stir up uncharacteristically high levels of ungodly emotions, such as fear, judgment, pride, shame, sorrow and guilt to tempt us to respond in unloving ways.
- Constant dissatisfaction – We will think along the lines of “what if ...?” or “if only ...” etc.
- Accusing and condemning – Demons will entice to judge and curse others. We will think “she only...”, “he will never ...”, “she deserves...” etc.
- Doubtful of God – Demonic influences will make us question God’s Word and His good character. Our thoughts will sound like “what if God won’t...” “why didn’t God...” etc.

Here are some further examples of how demons work to create strongholds in our minds, hearts and souls.

1. Our minds are enticed by falsehood

The Bible warns us that deceitful spirits and teachings of demons will try to lure us into rebellion against God. Let us be careful not to depart from the faith by falling for lies such as:

- “The Bible says I can do anything as long as I don’t cause anyone’s faith to stumble.”
- “I can continue to sin endlessly and God will still forgive me.”

- “God won’t come through for me.”
- “What if this isn’t really against God’s will?”
- “The Bible doesn’t explicitly say that this is wrong.”

1 Timothy 4:1-2 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,

2. Our hearts are enticed by worldly desires

Demons will keep us focused on temporal worldly desires. We place our faith in the things of this world and chase after its temporary comforts or security. We think thoughts such as:

- “I want more money for my future. I better put off tithing.”
- “I want to build my reputation at work so I won’t tell people I follow Jesus in case this hinders my career.”
- “I won’t give up smoking and drinking because it’s the only thing I have in common with my mates.”
- “I’m too busy to be still before God and pray. I have too many commitments to other people that I have to keep up.”
- “If only God would give me all that I want.”

3. Our souls are enticed by spiritual bondages

Demons love to keep our souls in spiritual bondage by enticing us to form strong emotional attachments to ungodly things, so we find it hard to repent and to release them to God.

- “I don’t need to forgive until he or she has said sorry. It’s not fair to me.”
- “I can’t let go of this piece of jewelry because it is the only thing left from the man I committed adultery with. Let me keep this one thing.”
- “There is nothing wrong with using Hindu worship poses to stretch. I won’t give it up.”
- “I can’t love this person. I still clearly recall every offence he or she has committed against me.”
- “This is my private life. I won’t confess my sexual addictions to anyone. I can handle it on my own.”

The Bible says that sin brings spiritual corruption and enslavement to demons. If we are not careful, we end up straying after Satan and becoming “of the devil” instead of God.

1 John 3:8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning...

THE WORK OF EVIL SPIRITS

Satan and evil spirits are corrupt angels who rebelled against their Creator that are doomed for complete destruction. Their original role was to convey God’s messages, deliver the law, minister to people and in general, watch over His children.

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Each type of evil spirit specialises in a specific area of darkness. In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul outlines a spiritual dimension where evil forces have different roles and hierarchy.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Both the Old and New Testaments include many examples of different spirits that inflict physical infirmities, mental problems, ungodly emotions, supernatural deceptions and sinful temptations. None of these come from the Holy Spirit, who only gives us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Spirit of betrayal / treachery	<i>Judges 9:23 And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem, and the leaders of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,</i>
Spirit of blindness	<i>Matthew 12:22 Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.</i>
Spirit of confusion / mental blocks	<i>Isaiah 19:14 The Lord has mingled within her a spirit of confusion, and they will make Egypt stagger in all its deeds...</i>
Spirit of disability	<i>Luke 13:11 And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.</i>
Spirit of deafness / muteness	<i>Mark 9:25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."</i>
Spirit of deep sleep	<i>Isaiah 29:10 For the Lord has poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes (the prophets), and covered your heads (the seers).</i>
Spirit of despair / sorrow	<i>Isaiah 61:3 NIV ... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair...</i>
Spirit of divination / fortune telling	<i>Acts 16:16 As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune-telling.</i>
Spirit of epilepsy	<i>Matthew 17:14-15,18 And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, kneeling before him, said, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly. For often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly.</i>
Spirit of error	<i>1 John 4:6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.</i>
Spirit of fear	<i>2 Timothy 1:7 for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.</i>

Spirit of impure worship	<i>Zecbariah 13:2 “And on that day, declares the LORD of hosts, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they shall be remembered no more. And also I will remove from the land the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness.</i>
Spirit of jealousy	<i>Numbers 5:14 and if the spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife who has defiled herself, or if the spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife, though she has not defiled herself,</i>
Spirit of lies / deceit	<i>1 Kings 22:22 And the Lord said to him, ‘By what means?’ And he said, ‘I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ And he said, ‘You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.’ 1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,</i>
Spirit of prostitution / whoredom / sexual debauchery	<i>Hosea 5:4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the Lord.</i>
Spirit of false signs and wonders (deceiving)	<i>Revelation 16:14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.</i>
Spirit of supernatural strength	<i>Matthew 8:28 And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way.</i>
Spirit of torment	<i>1 Samuel 16:14-15 Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul’s servants said to him, “Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you.</i>
Spirit of violence	<i>1 Samuel 18:10-11 The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, “I will pin David to the wall.” But David evaded him twice.</i>

PRACTICAL STEPS IN CUTTING OFF DEMONIC INFLUENCES

Every disciple of Jesus needs to be aware of the spiritual forces of evil that are at work against us, so we are not outwitted by our enemy's schemes.

2 Corinthians 2:11 So that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

1. Understand the law

Any believer who seeks to thrive and have an abundant life must first know the principles and laws that God has set out for mankind. This knowledge should not merely be at an intellectual level, but planted so deeply into our psyches that it drives our motivations, understanding and actions.

When we know and understand God's laws in our hearts, we will not be inclined to break His laws and will be able to discern the influence of evil spirits. Our thinking will shift from focusing on the things of man to the things of God. Knowledge that is caught up in meaningless debates or philosophies, however, is a corrupted form of understanding. Instead, God promises a more fulfilling intellectual life than the human imagination allows. God doesn't ask us to stop thinking but our thought life can only flourish to its fullest when we trust in His laws and in His ways.

Matthew 13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart...

Matthew 16:23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

2. Know our God-given authority over demons

God is the absolute Ruler over this world. He will judge all things when the times comes. His authority is also absolute. It is this same authority that we pray with in Jesus' name. The Bible records the astonishment of the 72 followers of Jesus that demons would submit

to them when they commanded them in Jesus' name (Luke 10:17).

Demons are terrified of the authority that Jesus has given us and will try to stop us from using it by promoting ignorance, fear, doubt and unbelief. People tend to have a general curiosity or dread about the spiritual realm. Many believe that what they read about or watch in horror movies represent the truth, especially when they are based on "true life accounts." Some are even drawn to seek out spirits. Horror or paranormal stories are not from the Holy Spirit, they are from Satan who seeks to plant unfounded lies into our psyches.

Mark 3:11 And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God."

Let us first be aware that all paranormal hauntings and sightings are staged by Satan to tickle our curiosity, seduce us with the unknown, and then plant fear and terror into our hearts. As a result of subjecting our eyes and ears to such ungodly temptations and titillations, we fall for demonic seductions that corrupt our minds. We must never fall for demonic deceptions because Jesus paid an incredible price in order to restore mankind's authority on earth. We nullify the work of Jesus on the cross by staying blind to what He has given to us. It would be almost as if His death and resurrection did not make a difference if we continue to live in fear and enslavement to sin and demons.

3. Submit all our ways to God

We must lay our hearts, souls, strength and minds down before God and surrender fully to Him, so that He is able to work through any and every area of our lives. This involves everything in our past that might separate us from God, including our past hurts and pains, personal sins, inner vows, generational curses and so forth. God gave us free will and He will not do anything that we would resist or object to.

A person who is fully submitted to God will not question God's goodness, His ways, His intentions, His timing, His plans or His powers. Such a person will simply say, "Yes Lord" when He calls. Submission to God is a vital first step to resisting demonic influences and having victory over evil spirits.

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

4. Learn to ask, “Holy Spirit, is this from You?”

One way to test if the subtle ideas and suggestions we appear to be entertaining in our minds are from God is simply to ask the Spirit of Truth if they are from Him. The Holy Spirit will tell us if they are not and convince us if they are. He brings a very quiet conviction of what is right or wrong.

John 14:16-17 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth...

5. Be open to correction

People who are under the influence of evil spirits tend to be rebellious and reject godly counsel, because the demons that are influencing them want nothing to do with guidance from the Holy Spirit. If we find ourselves behaving this way, we must repent, humble ourselves and be open to correction, even if it feels painful and unpleasant at the beginning. All godly correction will lead to joy and righteousness.

Hebrews 12:11 For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

6. Repent of sin

Any area of sin in our lives that is not confessed and surrendered to God will act as a landing pad for more evil spirits to influence us. The Bible calls this “*giving the enemy a foothold*” (Ephesians 4:27). Demons cannot influence us if we do not give them a foothold. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit. God will not tolerate deliberate sin. If we keep on sinning, there will be no more sacrifice or forgiveness left for our sins because we would only be mocking and crucifying Jesus all over again.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

7. Repent of incorrect views of God

If we have ever thought of God as distant, mean, unapproachable, vengeful, merciless and cold, we need to repent of slandering God and renew our thinking. It is precisely because Satan was able to get Eve to question God's good character that she fell into sin.

This is another demonic foothold that we must remove from our lives. Make an effort to study the Bible and learn what God says about Himself and why He chooses to do the things He does. It is always because He loves us.

Ephesians 3:18-19 ... may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

8. Rebuke evil spirits in Jesus' name

There may be times when, out of the blue, we feel angry, lustful, offended or fearful etc. Or we may suddenly suffer from headaches and muscle pains. This could be the work of evil spirits that are trying to pitch our fleshly nature against the Holy Spirit in us.

If we suspect this to be the case, we simply need to command the spirit by its name e.g. spirit of lust, spirit of anger, spirit of infirmity, to leave in the name of Jesus Christ. Then seek to identify the foothold that the demon/s had used to attack us and promptly surrender that to God. We must speak out to rebuke evil spirits aloud and expose their dark hidden schemes, and not stay silent.

Luke 10:19-20 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

9. Pray with fellow believers who can keep us accountable

In Hebrews 10, the apostle Paul called believers not to neglect meeting together, stressing that this discipline is particularly important in the last days before Jesus' return.

As spiritual corruption and wickedness increase, so will the influence of demons over people. Every one of us faces demonic influences and will benefit greatly when we are in a community of fellow believers, as this allows us to:

- Encourage, pray for and counsel one another.
- Share uplifting testimonies.
- Alert each other to our blind spots and spiritual weaknesses.
- Learn from other people's experiences and how to build up our spiritual perseverance.

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

10. Watch out for bad influences

Demonic influences can come from various sources including what we see, read, watch, interact with and listen to. For instance, we should not watch movies that show explicit scenes of gore, bloody violence and sexual pervasion and think that it won't affect us. Fifty Shades of Grey may have been a best-selling book but the underlying message is a perversion of God's intention for love and sexual intimacy. Reading the explicit descriptions only leave ungodly marks in our subconscious memory. When we expose ourselves to such literature long enough, our defences against such sexual perversion are lowered.

Messages are implanted in our minds, both through conscious thought and subconscious exposure. Let us be wise in our lifestyle choices and protect our eyes, ears and minds.

Matthew 6:22-23 "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"

11. Overcome evil with good

If demons cannot quietly lure us to sin against God, they may turn to abuse, oppression, ill-treatment, discrimination and harassment to push us into reacting sinfully. The apostle Paul warned us to expect trials, persecution and troubles from Satan, the tempter.

It takes great discipline and wisdom not to be overcome by such pressures. In all the tests He faced from Satan and people, Jesus always considered his responses and reacted wisely. The Bible calls us to react just as Jesus did, and overcome evil with good. God allows trials to sharpen us and will never forsake us along the way, even if everyone else has. Anyone who overcomes affliction from evil spirits will always grow from the experience if we rely on God. The memory of the experience may remain, but the intense pain felt during the trial itself will be forgotten. What we will gain from the experience is greater wisdom, righteousness, and a testimony worth telling.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Do you know how to recognise demonic influences on your thoughts and emotions?
- Q2. How will you apply the lessons in this chapter to your own life?

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OUR STRENGTH

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CHAPTER 15

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CHOOSING TO OBEY

Imagine arriving at a traffic intersection where nobody obeys the traffic laws. Everyone does whatever he or she wants in the belief that they have the right to self-rule. Inevitably, someone gets hurt. Similarly, God created codes of conduct so that mankind can collectively prosper together. God's Law gives guidelines that help all people thrive.

OBEDIENCE BRINGS INCREDIBLE PROMISES

Obedying God's laws does not merely prevent mayhem; it brings blessings to our families. Let's look at how simple obedience to our Heavenly Father generates great “return on investment” for us.

1. Promise of blessing

Deuteronomy 28:1,11-12 “And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth... And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

2. Promise of protection

Exodus 23:22 "But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries."

3. Promise of joy

John 15:10-11 When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!

4. Promise of success

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

5. Promise of long life and peace

Proverbs 3:1-2 My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.

6. Promise of favour

Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

7. Promise of eternal life

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT OBEDIENCE

There are some common misunderstandings about our obedience to God. Within some circles, the idea of obedience brings up ideas of subjugation and servanthood. This is not what God wants from us. He doesn't need mindless slaves and robots. He desires joyful, abundant relationships with His sons and daughters.

1. Obedience is not just about what we do

Firstly, the opposite of obedience towards God is not simply our disobedience, but a stubborn self-will. It is impossible to obey God while we remain self-seeking.

Romans 2:8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Obedying God is not just a matter of grudgingly following our Father's commandments like a rigid set of rules, but following God's heart for His people. That means deferring to His will, plans and definition of what is best for us all. It requires us to die to our self-will and allow God to soften our hardened hearts to see this world as He does. Obedience is about the inward attitude of our hearts, not merely about our outward behaviour.

Hebrews 3:15 As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

2. Disobedience grieves God

God is grieved by our refusal to obey Him. Any loving father would be pained to watch his children make wrong choices that won't lead them home to him.

The path to God's Kingdom is narrow and God wants to show us how to find it and stay on it. That is why He has given us "traffic rules" so we don't swerve off the narrow road that leads to His Kingdom by following misleading signposts and decoys. Ironically, some of us trust Google Maps more than we dare trust God for direction in life.

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

3. Disobedience against God is insubordination

God is Lord and King of this entire universe. When we choose not to follow God, it is not the same as refusing to listen to our parents or friends. Disobedience against God is willful and defiant

insubordination towards the King above all kings. Any form of insubordination and rebellion warrants punishment.

Isaiah 1:20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword...

4. Disobedience against God is idolatry

To refuse to obey God is to place oneself above God's Word and will. We make ourselves into our own gods and indulge in a form of self-idolatry. The Bible says that stubborn disobedience is as bad as performing witchcraft.

1 Samuel 15:23 NLT Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshipping idols...

5. Disobedience leads us to death alongside Satan

Ultimately, when we don't follow God's commandments, we will eventually follow a road that leads us to death and destruction, with Satan as our companion. The more we choose to disobey God, the deeper we fall into sin and Satan's traps.

Romans 6:16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Clearly, the rewards from obeying God far outweigh the temporary satisfaction we may derive from disobeying His commandments in order to gratify some seemingly urgent but fleeting need.

COMMON STRUGGLES IN OBEYING GOD

Trusting God to know what's best for us is difficult when we don't trust His heart for us. Here are some common objections to obeying God 100%.

What Satan tempts us to say	What God says
“I determine my own destiny.”	<i>James 4:13-14 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.</i>
“I have to give up too many things.”	<i>Matthew 16:25-26 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?</i>
“Only I know what’s best for me.”	<i>1 Corinthians 1:25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.</i>
“If I try hard enough, I will get what I want.”	<i>Psalms 127:2 NLT It is useless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, anxiously working for food to eat; for God gives rest to his loved ones.</i>
“I don’t have the ability to follow God’s path.”	<i>Isaiah 41:10 fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.</i>
“I should live life to the fullest first, and come back to God later.”	<i>Matthew 16:26 NIV What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?</i>
“I can’t fall behind my peers.”	<i>Psalms 49:16-17 Be not afraid when a man becomes rich, when the glory of his house increases. For when he dies he will carry nothing away; his glory will not go down after him.</i>
“I’m not sure God will bless me.”	<i>Psalms 37:4-6 Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.</i>

“I’m not sure God will protect me.”	<i>Psalm 121:7-8 The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.</i>
“I don’t want what God wants for me.”	<i>Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.</i>

PRACTICAL STEPS IN CHOOSING TO OBEY

Choosing to obey God takes strength and determination, as this glittering world will try to distract us and lure us off the path that leads to God’s Kingdom. It requires much discipline and conviction to do the right things before God.

1. Conduct a spring-cleaning of our lives

Few of us would invite people to our homes without first tidying up a little. It is the same when we are sincere about inviting God into our lives. We must take steps to clear out the things or relationships that are offensive to God or that might lead us to fall away from Him. It doesn’t seem right to invite our Holy Father into our lives – and then expect Him to live with a repulsive mess. Some spring cleaning would include:

- Music that promotes sex, hatred, self-glory, destruction and hell etc.
- Videos, books, magazines that glorify sin, materialism, debauchery, romance stories that idolise human heroes etc.
- Clothes that are too revealing or that showcase images of skulls, satanic signs, dragons, Buddhist monks etc.
- Idolatrous statues, paintings, media, altars, jewelry, souvenirs representing spiritualism etc.
- Religious writing, mantras, scrolls etc.
- Good luck charms, fengshui decorations and items representing superstitions etc.
- New age practices and spiritualism e.g. chanting, horoscopes etc.

- Friendships and social networks that are a bad influence on our spiritual walk and lead us astray etc.

Romans 6:12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

The list above is not exhaustive. We should be honest with ourselves and ask, “Will God be happy if I bring this with me to His Holy throne room?” With this simple question, we will probably be able to identify many other things we should remove from our lives.

2. Watch out for hindrances

As we choose to obey God, Satan will set himself up against us by countering our efforts with many distractions and deceptions. Our enemy will slip in many subliminal thoughts and suggestions into our minds. Some common ones include:

- “I’m missing out on late night drinks with my old drinking buddies on Saturday night... I guess there is no harm in joining them and see how the night turns out.”
- “I’m just too tired every Sunday... Maybe I should just skip going to church.”
- “Those believers didn’t seem very welcoming... I don’t want to go back to any fellowship meeting.”
- “That pastor hurt my feelings... I’m not sure I want to go back to any church at all.”
- “Reading the Bible is too difficult... I should just stop trying, it is useless.”
- “I wonder what is on social media... I’ll put off Bible study for now.”
- “My children need my full attention... God can wait.”
- “My spouse / fiancé / parents / friends seem to be unhappy when I go to church... Maybe I’ll just skip church this week.”

None of these statements is bad in themselves, but repeatedly following the direction of these thoughts will gradually lead us to minimise God’s importance in our lives. We should be honest with ourselves and ask, “Is this something the Holy Spirit would say to me?” to identify the hindrances that Satan is throwing at us. We can

always change the second parts of such statements to follow God.

Galatians 5:7 You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

For example, we may choose to say;

- “I’m missing out on late night drinks with my old drinking buddies on Saturday night... I pray that they will find true fulfillment in God and join me in following Jesus one day.”
- “I’m just too tired every Sunday... Thank God that He will revive me as I worship Him in church each Sunday.”
- “Those believers didn’t seem very welcoming... Perhaps I should engage them in conversation more often and give them a few more opportunities to get to know me.”
- “That pastor hurt my feelings... I will forgive him and release him from any judgment. Pastors already have so much to watch over.”
- “Reading the Bible is too difficult... I need to find a group study so I can learn from others as I go along.”
- “I wonder what is on social media... but that can wait, God is waiting for me to spend time with Him.”
- “My children need my full attention... but I know I can’t handle all their needs. I need to spend more time praying for them, rather than rely on my own strength.”
- “My spouse / fiancé / parents / friends seem to be unhappy when I go to church... God, please teach me how to remain faithful to You. You are the only One with whom I have a guaranteed eternal relationship.”

3. Watch out for temptations

Another way Satan leads us down the road to destruction is to entice us to fall for our former sinful passions. Satan will relentlessly tempt us when we are feeling vulnerable. He will present “valid reasons” that sound good or attack our weakest areas. Once we trip and fall for any temptation, he will return with accusations and condemnation to push us into removing ourselves from God more and more. At the end, we will feel as if we might as well give up on our walk with God altogether.

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,

Here are some common lies from Satan:

- “I need this to relieve my stress and pain. It’s good for me.”
- “No one understands me. I can’t help it.”
- “I don’t see what’s wrong with this. I refuse to listen to what other godly Christians are telling me.”
- “There are many grey areas in Christianity. As long as this doesn’t hurt anyone, I don’t see why I can’t continue.”
- “This depends on how one interprets the Bible. I think it is fine based on what (little) I have studied.”
- “This is not really sinning.”
- “I am strong enough to escape from temptation.”
- “This is only a small sin compared to the people around me. It’s not a big deal.”
- “My old sins are too strong for me to overcome.”
- “God will never forgive me for that.”
- “No one cares for me. I should just go ahead and sin.”
- “There is no hope for me. I keep doing what I promised to never do again. I’m not a true Christian. I’m such a fake. I might as well give up.”
- “I feel so ashamed of what I did. I can’t talk to anyone about this. People will judge me.”

All these are lies and misleading statements, and we must know how to identify and stand against them. Additionally, we should pray for God’s protective covering over the thoughts, people and activities we encounter and put on the armour of God every day.

Ephesians 6:11-12 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

4. Watch out for our thoughts

It is easy to disobey God when there is no filter for our thoughts. Fresh ideas and old memories can lead us down dangerous slippery slopes to sin. On the other hand, when we take every single thought and filter it through God's truth, we will find our instincts telling us to turn away from sin and obey God. When we are filled with so much of the truth, attempting to do anything that goes against God's Word will become repulsive to us at a very real emotional and sometimes, even a physical level.



2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

We should be honest with ourselves about every thought and ask, “Is this idea from God?” This will help us filter our thoughts.

5. Don't obey man above God

Building our Christian faith is not easy when it pits us against family and friends who were close to us before we turned to Jesus Christ. However, it is when we faithfully obey God that we are able to show them the reality of Jesus Christ by the godly transformation of our lives. When we pull back and choose to obey man rather than God, our faith becomes powerless, meaningless and empty. By such actions, we testify that the death that Jesus died for us doesn't matter to us after all and come under a curse for choosing people over God.

Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD.

God calls us to win over people to Christ and honour our parents. It takes great wisdom to know how to love and honour people without becoming slaves to them. The first step in checking how we are doing in terms of obeying God is to ask ourselves, “Am I valuing man's opinion over God's?” Following that, we can ask God, “How

can I obey You first and honour this person second, Heavenly Father? Can You please show me?"

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

6. Don't just follow rules, obey God joyfully

Religiosity promotes a set of rules, without a personal relationship with God. Obedience without love is hypocritical religion. We must avoid this at all cost. Seek to know God intimately as our constant and closest loving Companion and King. We do this by developing a relationship with His Holy Spirit.

Matthew 23:28 So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

Start each day by inviting the Holy Spirit to lead us as we seek to:

- Study the Bible | *1 Corinthians 2:14 NLT But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means.*
- Experience deeper, powerful prayers | *Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*
- Bring God's wisdom to all situations | *1 Corinthians 2:13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*
- Minister to others | *Matthew 10:20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Do you find following God completely with all your heart, soul, mind and strength difficult? Please explain why.
- Q2. Use three words to describe God's character. How do you think your perception of God affects your willingness to obey Him? Is there anything you need to renew your mind about?

CHAPTER 16



RESISTING SPIRITUAL ATTACKS

As we follow God's commandment to love Him and love others, the enemy will try to distract, discourage or disunite us. Some tactics include disturbing dreams, unexpected illnesses, sudden equipment failure, unforeseen work and stress, an onslaught of temptations, unnecessary miscommunications or feelings of weariness and discouragement. To a believer who knows his or her position as a protected child of God, all these are more annoying than alarming. God Himself protects us against spiritual attacks when we pray.

Deuteronomy 31:8 It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

2 Thessalonians 3:3 But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.

HOW TO RECOGNISE A SPIRITUAL ATTACK

Not everything is a spiritual attack, some things happen simply because we live in a fallen, corrupted world. Not every flu, flight delay or accident is because of an inconvenience caused by Satan. We can, however, suspect a spiritual attack if we notice certain patterns.

1. The end result

As a start, it is helpful to understand the enemy's goals. Satan is already defeated, so he cannot overcome us when we stand against him in the authority of Jesus Christ. In fact, demons tremble at the mention of Jesus! As pointed out in Matthew 8:29, they are terrified of the punishment and torture that the Judge of this world has in store for them.

1 John 3:8 ... The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

James 2:19 NLT You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

Matthew 8:28-29 ... two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"

Satan's campaigns against mankind are primarily aimed at obstructing us. Simply by asking if our experiences will lead to any of the following is already a good indication of a possible spiritual attack.

- “No” to God – Satan will do everything possible to stop, delay or sabotage God's message and ministry of love.
- “No” to intimacy with God – The enemy will tempt us to make idols for ourselves and separate us from drawing close to our Heavenly Father. He will try to make us disbelieve, blaspheme and even curse God.
- “No” to the Fruit of the Spirit – Satan will constantly sow doubt, unbelief and hopelessness in an effort to block our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- “No” to spiritual realities – One of the biggest victories that the enemy gains over believers is to deceive us into thinking that he is not real, he is hard to defeat or that there is no spiritual realm, because we should “only believe what we can see.” This is one of Satan's favorite tactics because when we choose to see ourselves as defeated, he can continue to steal, kill and destroy our spiritual blessings from God. Satan knows very well that he cannot win

against us when we confront him with the authority of Jesus Christ.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

2. Some typical tactics

There are a few common tactics the enemy uses against God's people, and we can recognise them by their symptoms.

- Discouragement / Disruption – These are things that occur unexpectedly without real cause e.g. feeling doubtful, discouraged or “spiritually dry” about God's work, sudden equipment failure or unforeseen delays for no good reason.

Nehemiah 4:11 And our enemies said, “They will not know or see till we come among them and ... stop the work.”

- Timing – Symptoms usually intensify just before a turning point in someone's spiritual life, an important time of ministry or even during ministry time itself. People have described a sudden onslaught of work, relationship problems, distracting thoughts, old temptations and body aches when trying to step up their efforts to follow God.
- Fleshly – The enemy will also try to work through our flesh and create emotions or thoughts that we usually have under control. He will incite anger, anxiety, fear, frustration and confusion. He will try to present old temptations and spiritual bondages for us to fall back into. Sometimes, Satan will interrupt our dreams with harrowing nightmares or immoral sexual dreams that leave us terrified, guilty, or ashamed of upon waking.

Galatians 5:17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

- Accusations – Satan will try to stop us in our tracks by suggesting to us that we are unworthy, unable, under-equipped, unloved, unappreciated or misunderstood. He will accuse us all day long in

the hope that he can isolate us from our community of fellow believers so that we become even easier targets.

- Disunity or isolation – A cunning tactic in war involves getting your opponents to turn upon themselves and attack one another. Satan will aim to incite disunity within the church bodies or try to isolate people from another by encouraging petty conflicts, different theological views, misunderstandings, unresolved hurts, miscommunication, etc.

Luke 11:17 ... Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.

- Old bondages – Satan will target areas where we have been weak in the past. Our enemy will attempt to make us re-visit areas where emotional wounds have been healed, thought patterns have been renewed and temptations have been overcome. In the process, he will quietly try to convince us that we are not really free and victorious and that we should just go back to our old ways. If we make one mistake, he will blind us to God's generous grace and tell us to condemn ourselves.

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

- People – If Satan cannot shake us, he will try to use other people to throw obstacles in our paths. We may find that we encounter more accusations, disagreements, misunderstandings or office politics than usual. The enemy will "recruit" non-believers, or even believers who are weaker in their faith, for his schemes. We must not retaliate against such people. Instead, we need to rebuke Satan and his schemes in Jesus' name. As followers of Jesus, we must be disciplined and choose to only respond to other people in love and grace, so as to defuse the enemy's schemes and take the sting out of his attacks. God Himself will fight for justice so we should not be alarmed or over-react.

Psalms 35:1 Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me!

SPIRITUAL ATTACKS DEMONSTRATE THE ENEMY'S DESPERATION

No enemy will bother to set his forces against a person whom he does not consider a threat. Spiritual attacks are usually an indication that God's favour is on us, and the enemy is trying to oppose God's good work and stop us from experiencing fullness in Christ. As ironic as it may sound, spiritual attacks are in fact, a sign that we are heading in the right direction. When under spiritual attack, we must put on our spiritual armour and persevere so that we can enjoy God's blessings that are now just within reach!

Satan cannot stay on his feet against his all-powerful Creator. As long as we are willing to resist him and lean on our Heavenly Father and Creator, nothing can be against us. God will always oppose Satan's goals and protect His faithful children.

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Psalms 55:18 He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.

Some Christians feel uncomfortable talking about spiritual realities and take a “see no evil, hear no evil” approach. Unfortunately, choosing to deny the reality of spiritual attacks is a form of willful disobedience against God's Word. Ignorance is not bliss; it only brings harm to the family of God. Such harm can and must be avoided. The apostle Peter told us to resist our enemy, not to ignore him (1 Peter 5:8-9). James also said the same thing; to submit everything to God and to resist the enemy so that he will flee from us (James 4:7).

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

The Bible states that “*at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.*” That includes Satan's knees. Moreover,

we have full authority to “*push down our foes*” when we pray in Jesus’ name. To try to ignore or run away from our enemy only makes a mockery of the all-powerful victory Jesus bought with His blood to give us.

Philippians 2:9-10 NLT Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Psalms 44:5,8 Through you we push down our foes; through your name we tread down those who rise up against us. In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever.

FEAR OF THE ENEMY’S ATTACKS IS UNGODLY

As children of the Most High God, we must not bow down to demons as a result of fear or unbelief. Otherwise, we grieve the Holy Spirit and separate ourselves from our Heavenly Father, the Ultimate Lord and Judge of demons. If we fear and dread spiritual attacks, we announce to the spiritual realm that we don’t believe that Jesus, the Son of God, defeated Satan for our sake. This is why the Bible says that we will face the same eternal destruction as “murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars.” We profane God’s name when we are cowardly and faithless before evil spirits that Jesus has defeated.

Revelation 21:8 But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Demons spread lies about their ability to control and destroy. Horror movies and “ghost” stories make them look powerful and hard to overcome. Over time, Satan has created false signs and wonders to capture people’s hearts through fear or fascination. We must be careful not to fall for demonic deceptions and “glorify” demonic

powers by reading, watching and talking about horror stories. Some people believe that such stories are true, especially when they are said to be based on real-life stories, but they could not be further from the truth. Demons have been disarmed and defeated. We profane God's holy name by flirting with Satan's web of lies!

Luke 11:34 Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.

The Bible warns us to be careful with what we use our eyes to "entertain" ourselves with, because we can become full of darkness as a result. Many people are unaware that they are bringing darkness into themselves, temples of the Holy Spirit, by watching or reading stories that sensationalise horror, shock, gore, death, murder, fear or demons. Those amongst us who are more imaginative in nature may be lured to use our gifts to explore ungodly spiritual things. Let us use our bodies as living sacrifices that testify of Jesus Christ alone.

All believers have God's angels guarding us, His Holy Spirit in us, and God holding us in His hand. Let us see this truth for ourselves, rather than entertain images provided by Satan to distract us. When our eyes are open to God's glory and presence around us, Satan's tricks seem quite desperate and laughable in comparison.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN RESISTING SPIRITUAL ATTACKS

1. Remember our authority and who we serve

When we become easily dismayed or discouraged as we experience spiritual attacks, we hand over an unnecessary victory to the thief, Satan. If we truly treasure all that God has done and given to us, we would not turn over our spiritual blessings to anyone, let alone a foe who has been soundly defeated. We are called to submit to God and resist the devil, not submit to Satan and forsake our blessings.

Let us remember that our position in the spiritual realm is "*more than conquerors through Christ*" and take up our authority in Jesus' name. The Holy Spirit who is in us is far greater than anything that the enemy throws at us.

Romans 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

1 John 4:4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

3. Stay alert

Our enemy will try to blind us to our victory in Christ by setting up obstacles or distractions in our way. He can try to keep us from seeing the Light, but he cannot manipulate or deceive us – unless we let him. All believers must stay aware of his schemes.

2 Corinthians 2:11 ... so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

3. Cover ourselves with the spiritual armour of God every day

Some people display crosses and Bibles in the hope that such things will drive away evil spirits and the possibility of spiritual attacks. Be careful not to do this as it amounts to superstition. Such things have no power in and of themselves. Our power to overcome spiritual attacks begins with the depth of our faith and knowledge of God's truths. In other words, we need to put on our armour of God, which is a metaphor for our spiritual protection and the areas in which we must grow strong. This comprises:

- Belt of truth – We will not fall for the enemy's lies when God's truth upholds our beliefs.
- Breastplate of righteousness – We will be protected by the righteousness that Jesus passed on to us through His death and resurrection.
- Sandals of peace of the gospel – We will walk forward in peace and love and not sin when we put our faith in God's good news.
- Shield of faith – We will fend off all attacks when we stand in the faith and knowledge that God is with us.
- Helmet of salvation – We will not allow any thoughts that lead us to sin to enter our minds because we remember that we have already been redeemed and are no longer enslaved to sin.

- Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word – We will refute all cunning lies and deceptions that Satan thrusts at us by quoting the Bible and destroying them.

Ephesians 6:14-18 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication...

4. Take up the sword of the Word

When Satan tried to tempt Jesus in the desert, Jesus rebuffed him three times using the Word of God. Each time, Jesus quoted from either Deuteronomy 6 or 8 and began with “For it is written...” He did this to set an example for us. Jesus could have easily silenced Satan without referring to the Bible, but He chose to do so, in order to demonstrate how we are to respond to our enemy. With the presentation of God’s Word, Satan had nothing left and eventually went away. Jesus was not outwitted by Satan’s deceptions because He knew the Word of God well. Neither can Satan defeat us when we have memorised the eternal truths from the Bible for ourselves.

Let us become skillful with the sword that fends off our enemy's lies and attacks. This sword is the Word of God.

Ephesians 6:17 and take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

5. Love exceptionally well

Love is one of the most powerful weapons of all. If we have love, we will readily forgive others and help them. We will go the extra mile to pray for and encourage our fellow brothers and sisters who are struggling under spiritual attacks. No one needs to persevere against the enemy's attacks alone. No offence is worth holding on to as it only brings us eternal condemnation and separation from the King of kings. In all our relationships, we should always try to foster peaceful mutual understanding and grace by speaking the truth in love.

1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

6. Always praise and worship

Another important strategy against the enemy's attacks is to keep praising and thanking God despite our circumstances. When we focus on God's power and goodness, we give our enemy fewer opportunities to slip in his crafty lies and attacks. It is a good principle to focus on the promise and hope that God can bring to a situation, rather than on the problem itself. We dishonour God when we think about our problems more than we think about Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

7. Ask others to pray for us

There is power when two or more believers are gathered in the name of Jesus and appeal for His help. There is tremendous power in group prayer to overcome all odds. We should never hesitate to ask our fellow followers of Christ to pray for us because whatever we bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever we ask for in unity will be accomplished if it brings God glory. Overcoming the enemy is a great testimony for God's power because we can only - and will always - overcome evil in the name and authority of Jesus, our Saviour.

Matthew 18:18-20 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

8. Always pray cleansing prayers after ministry

As we shower to clean ourselves after a day of work, , we benefit from saying a cleansing prayer over ourselves after we do the Lord's work, in order to prevent spiritual attacks over ourselves and our loved ones. Here is one such sample prayer:

“Thank you, Father God, for a great time of ministry and prayer. I dedicate every outcome to Your glory.

In the name of Jesus, I cut off anything unclean that I may have encountered during ministry time, and send it to Jesus Christ, my Saviour and Lord. I forbid any retaliation of any form from the enemy over me, my loved ones, my work, my possessions, my spiritual blessings and everything else that pertains to me.

I invite the Holy Spirit to sanctify me. Please show me anything that may hinder me from obeying You. I want only clean hands and a pure heart, so that You can continue to use me for Your kingdom work.

In Jesus' name, amen.”

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Are spiritual attacks part of a Christian's life? Please describe your own experience and how you overcame or learnt something.
- Q2. What are the dangers of not recognising spiritual attacks?

CHAPTER 17



EMBRACING SUFFERING

In a sense, suffering is like the chemotherapy to the cancer of sinfulness in our lives. We can emerge from the “treatment” free of a particular type of “cancer” such as pride, fear or rebellion, or we can fall back into the deathly sickness of sin when we don't learn the lessons intended for us.

No one welcomes suffering. Some Christians appear to think that God will miraculously remove all their suffering once they accept Jesus as their Saviour. In a sense, He does. He removes the harmful effects of our suffering, but not necessarily the suffering itself. We may still experience illness, heartbreak, wrongful accusations, fraud, humiliation and financial ruin - but if we remain true to God, we will still experience hope, peace and joy. By allowing us to “walk through fire”, God tests and strengthens our dedication to Him. Perseverance and self-control help tremendously in the pursuit of godliness.

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S HIGHER PURPOSE

God allows evil and suffering to persist for a period of time to accomplish His higher purposes. The Bible states that there is a purpose for everything, and He even allows the wicked to flourish. Let us look at a few real-life examples from the Bible of how God used suffering for His higher purpose.

Proverbs 16:4 The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

1. Wickedness from others

When Moses first asked the Pharaoh of Egypt to let the Jewish slaves go to the wilderness to worship God, Pharaoh not only refused, he made the slaves work even harder. Moses was very discouraged and argued with the Lord, as recorded in Exodus 6:30 (NLT), saying, “*I can't do it! I'm such a clumsy speaker! Why should Pharaoh listen to me?*”

God did not apologise to Moses nor promise to make things easier for him. In fact, He told him that things would only get much harder. In Exodus 7:3-4, God replied and said, “*But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you...*” God said in Exodus 9:16 that He is One who raised up the evil Pharaoh and hardened his heart so that God's name may be “*proclaimed in all the earth.*”

All this is not because God despised Moses. In Exodus 33:11, we see that the “*LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.*” It is because God had a higher purpose to accomplish through the suffering of His own chosen people. Moses had to learn to trust and obey God, because their freedom was at stake. Moses followed God's instructions step by step, and the Egyptians eventually came to a point that they “*urged the people of Israel to get out of the land as quickly as possible*” (Exodus 12:33) and even gave them all their valuables. Moses was seen as “*very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and in the sight of the people*” (Exodus 11:3).

2. Wickedness from Satan

The story of Job is a source of great comfort and encouragement for anyone who is enduring great suffering. God promises to protect those who love Him, but there may be times where He will allow spiritual attacks to come upon us, in order to achieve a higher purpose.

Job initially enjoyed a “*wall of protection around him and his home and his property*” that God had put around him. When God momentarily removed that “wall” and Satan was allowed to oppress him, Job still chose to stay faithful to the Lord. As a result, Job became one of the greatest examples of faithfulness and endurance amongst men.

Job 1:9-12 NLT Satan replied to the Lord, “Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!” “All right, you may test him,” the Lord said to Satan. “Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don’t harm him physically.” So Satan left the Lord’s presence.

3. Wickedness from our inner circle

God did not spare Himself from this very same principle. From Luke 6, we see that Jesus chose Judas Iscariot to be one of His 12 disciples, fully aware that Judas would betray Him to a horrific death. During the Last Supper, John 13:27 says that “*As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.”*” Jesus willingly chose someone who would turn to Satan and betray Him because He understood the importance of following God’s higher purpose, instead of His own will.

Luke 6:13,16 And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter... and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

THE GOOD THAT COMES OUT OF SUFFERING

1. A chance to become living testimonies

When the Bible promises that God works everything for our good, we must understand that “everything” may include suffering and affliction and that “our good” often involves the good of others and not just us. We are to be living testimonies for God’s power and love. The brutal truth is that there is no great testimony of God’s presence without great suffering.

Romans 8:28 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.

2. A test of who is genuine

If you were a king who had to choose those who will share all your wealth and glory forever, how would you pick them? Would you consciously choose people who sincerely appreciate you or be indiscriminate and reckless in your selection? Obviously, we would choose people who have shown themselves to be genuine in their attitudes! God is no different. He is not so insecure that He craves attention from many insincere believers who only pay Him lip service. After all, empty talk is the most worthless commodity on earth. God is only interested in the few who will stay true to Him “for better or for worse.” Even we don’t appreciate friends who forsake us during hard times.

It is easy to love and praise God when the times are good. Will we still praise Him even when things don’t go our way? We should not treat God like a supermarket. We must respect God’s higher purpose for our lives and not be self-centred “shoppers.”

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.”

3. Valuable training

Have you noticed how top athletes train the hardest? God allows us to go through hardship in order to train us in perseverance, resolve and strength. This “hardship training” is especially helpful when it comes to spiritual warfare. Those who crumble at the slightest threat from our enemy will never see victory. Withstanding strong push-backs or attacks from Satan takes perseverance and resolve. It also brings the greatest victories and blessings.

James 1:2-4 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

1 Corinthians 16:13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.

4. Turn the hearts of the rebellious back to God

Remember the story of the prodigal son who rebelled against his father and took his dad's money to squander it all away on a life of debauchery? Once the money ran out, the son was reduced to humiliating conditions. Where he was once treated like a prince, he now suffered great indignity, poverty and hunger. The young man humbly returned to his father's house, prepared for the worst reception. Instead, his father only received him with a joyous welcome feast. (See Luke 15:11-32)

This is a picture of how God allows those who rebel against Him to go through suffering, in the hope that they will wake up to their senses and realise what they have been missing out on in His house. Our good God will not bless those who rebel against Him, because that would only push us further into debauchery and ultimately, deeper into the arms of Satan and hell. He will not do anything so irresponsible nor stupid.

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

PRACTICAL STEPS IN EMBRACING SUFFERING

Some believers say they want to “personally experience God.” The truth is, many of us experience God through suffering. It is when we are brought to our lowest points that we can experience Him lift us to higher grounds - based on His strength and not our own.

The big question for us all is, “Are we willing to trust God and thank Him for our sufferings and embrace His higher purposes through what we have to endure?” When we are willing to endure hardship and suffering, we will be more equipped for God's Kingdom work.

1 Peter 5:10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Romans 5:3-5 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Spiritual warfare is real and it is those who develop the strength and resolve to stand against it who will prevail. No one is born with the endurance that the apostle Paul talks about in Romans 5:3-5, we need to develop it.

1. Submit to God's higher purpose

Times of suffering are great opportunities for us to check our own hearts. Will we doubt, curse and slander God? Or will we seek to know Him and the higher purpose He intends to accomplish through our lives? Let us choose the latter.

2. Ask for His guidance and comfort

It is imperative for us to cry out to God for help as well as for comfort. There is no shame in admitting that suffering is distressing. Jesus welcomes all of us to share our burdens with Him so that He can give us rest for our souls.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

3. Understand the enemy's game plan

It can be very helpful to ask ourselves, "If Satan were to steal my joy, hope and peace in this situation, how would he be tempting me to think, say and act?" This can help us gain a wider perspective of the warfare that goes on against God's children every day, rather than just focus on the suffering itself. Hopefully, our vision will be widened and we do not get stuck in our self-focus.

Sometimes the suffering we face is not even about us specifically. We may simply get caught in the crossfire of spiritual battles that we cannot see with our physical eyes. Are we actively serving in ministry? Is there something bold that we have been

praying for? The more we determine to grow closer to God, the more hardship we can expect to face. This is simply because Satan constantly works to discredit God's good name.

Rather than let Satan crush us, let us choose to use our sufferings to become such powerful testimonies for the gospel that our enemy's efforts are totally obliterated. We must overcome evil with good. When we submit to God's will and resist our enemy, Satan will eventually lose his grip over us and have to flee.

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

4. Thank God in the midst of our suffering

Let us not allow our momentary sufferings to stop us from praising and thanking God for all His goodness. Even in the midst of our sufferings, we will notice God's hand on our lives, in both the major and minor details.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

5. Pray to bless our enemies

Lastly and perhaps most critically, we need to pray for ourselves as well as our enemies. We are to love and bless our enemies and do good to those who hate us. That is when our proclamations about the gospel become truly credible.

Luke 6:28 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Here is a sample prayer.

"Dear Heavenly Father,

I seek to honour You in every area of my life and offer myself as a living sacrifice to You.

I confess that the challenges I face are painful and daunting - and I desperately need Your love and strength in order to have the wisdom, grace and endurance to

behave in a way that glorifies You.

I submit to You first and foremost, and choose not to yield to my emotions, thoughts and fleshly reactions. I choose self-control over my tongue and my body language. I choose to die to myself and listen to the Holy Spirit's conviction and guidance.

I choose to love the people who are the source of my suffering and ask that You please bless them and their families. In the name of Jesus, I bind the spirit of hatred or error that has a hold of them or the spiritual blindness that may be keeping them from seeing Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

If there is any area of unconfessed sin that has given Satan a foothold to oppress me, Holy Spirit, please reveal it to me! I am ready to confess anything that has removed God's hand and favour upon my life. Please show me what lesson I have to learn.

However, if my circumstances are meant to bring about God's higher purpose for myself or other people, I will obediently walk on this journey. I invite Jesus to walk this journey with me. You have promised to share my burden and give me rest for my weary soul. Thank you, Jesus.

Father God, I praise You for my circumstances, knowing that You are always fully in control. Use my life to testify of Your truth, power and love. Thank you for the privilege to be Your ambassador on earth. There is no greater joy and fulfillment than to invest in Your eternal Kingdom.

In Jesus' name I pray, amen!"

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Has there been a time you felt that you had really suffered? How do you see it now?
- Q2. How have you asked God to turn your suffering into a testimony? If not, please consider doing so.

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OUR MIND

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CHAPTER 18



STUDYING THE BIBLE

The Bible is like no other book. It contains eternal truths and has transformed millions of lives. It has existed for thousands of years and continues to bring hope, joy and peace to people all over the world today. It is one of God's most precious gifts for mankind.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE AND SUCCESS

God's Word represents God Himself and the roadmap He has set for all of creation and mankind for eternity.

Studying the Bible is a fundamental part of life because it is the foundation for everything. If we wish to find the path to peace and success, we need to understand how God's roadmap works and the dangers along the way. In addition to showing us the dangers that lead to spiritual death, the Bible also provides answers to finding joy and spiritual riches in life, family, marriage, relationships, work,

money, government, church leadership, discipleship and more. It equips us for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Once we know what God says about His undying love for us and who we are destined to be through His Word, we will not be easily overcome by life's challenges, but will be free to experience the abundant life that God promises every believer.

God's Spirit will also become even more alive in us, as we consume more of the Bible and become familiar with His ways. The Holy Spirit and God's Word work together to bring us this new spiritual life, even as our physical bodies decline. As we begin to develop a closer relationship with God, we will pray powerful prayers that God answers.

John 6:63 It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

John 15:7-8 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

When we worship Him in spirit and in the truths that are found in the Bible, we will become the type of believers that God seeks. Jesus said that we are truly His disciples when we uphold and follow what is written in the Bible.

We can't truly follow Jesus if we fail to study His Word and follow what He teaches us.

John 4:23-24 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

PRACTICAL STEPS IN STUDYING GOD'S WORD

It is almost impossible for any Christian to say they follow Jesus Christ and yet not be able to quote several Bible verses accurately - just as a legal advisor who hardly knows anything substantial about the law isn't a credible lawyer. True disciples must learn God's Word and know it like "the back of our hands."

1. Prioritise "consuming" God's Word over earthly concerns

Learning God's Word may initially seem forced and labourious at first, because we have all been choked and polluted with corrupted thoughts and ideas since childhood.

Our brains need time to build new pathways neurologically in order for the good news of God's Word to be permanently implanted in and become part of our subconscious minds. Just like any new habit we pick up, we must have the discipline to keep reading and "consuming" God's truths every day for at least three to six months before it will start to feel "natural." Reading the Bible and meditating on God's Word should become a part of our normal daily routine, just like brushing our teeth or eating our meals.

Food and drink may fuel our physical bodies but God's Word is the nourishment that we need for our souls. It can give us strength when our muscles fail and comfort us in a way that no medicine can provide. God's Word feeds and quenches us spiritually, and those who neglect it starve themselves of great hope, joy and peace. We must make the consumption of God's Word a vital part of our lives. Our aim should be to read the Bible from front to back cover several times in our lifetime.

How long it takes to form
new habits by repetition



Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.

2. Find ways that work for us individually

We are all created differently. Some of us are introverts, while others are extroverts. Some learn better through discussing or visualising, while others prefer structured studies. Some people absorb God's Word faster through listening to an audio Bible, while others have to sit down and read it or copy it into a journal, word for word. Some prefer short bursts of learning throughout the day, while others prefer to meditate on just one verse for hours. This is a celebration of God's diversity in His Kingdom. It doesn't matter how we study the Bible, it simply matters that we do study it daily.

3. Ask God to open our eyes

The deeper messages in God's Word need to be spiritually discerned. In order to gain more out of our Bible reading, we can:

- Start with prayer and ask God to clear away all distractions in our minds.
- Celebrate it as a joyful activity.
- Pick a time and place that we can quiet ourselves down and focus.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts and give us deeper understanding.
- Read only as much as we can absorb, stop and then re-read the passages again. We may find that a few things will start to stand out to us.
- Ask God why He put those verses in the Bible and what implications they have for us personally.
- Close in prayer, asking God to use His Words to transform our hearts and minds in Christ.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

4. Seek true understanding, not mere reading

Many young Christians say they find the Bible tedious and difficult to understand, when they read it on their own. To truly understand the essence of all the wisdom and blessing that can be found in the Bible, it is important to understand the setting in which it was written.

Let's put this in a modern-day context. Suppose you were tasked to explain a Chinese report on World War II to a French person. A direct translation will miss many subtle nuances if we lack a

thorough understanding of Chinese history, culture, views and psyche. To truly understand any event, we need to understand the reporter, his or her personal agenda as well as the place, environment and times in which he was writing. Otherwise, we will never arrive at true understanding and knowledge. To help us in our understanding the Bible as we read it, we can:

- Start by reading the gospels or other narrative books in the New Testament.
- Pick a Bible version that is more contemporary in language, such as The Message or the New Living Translation.
- Do some research about the book before actually reading it. A helpful tool is the Life Application Bible, which includes an explanation of the history, context, people and purpose of each book.
- Conduct cross references to other parts of the Bible on the same topic as the one we are reading. There are many free online tools that can list Bible verses by topic, which we can readily use. This helps us in having a more complete picture of God's Word on the subject.
- Try to imagine living in that time. Ask ourselves what it would be like to be one of the people described. How would we feel and react? If what is being described happened today, what would it look like? What parallels can we draw with our modern-day lives?

5. Seek a personal relationship with God

We have to be careful not to read the Bible as if it is separate from our lives and times. The Bible is not a book of dull archaic text that mysteriously survived against all the odds. God gave us the Bible because He wants to speak to us in real and personal ways. When we read the Bible with our hearts and minds, we will discover that the words of the Bible have life-giving power.

Consider it a personal letter from our Heavenly Father that's in a format that needs some time and effort to decipher and decode. Sometimes when the text is hard to understand, it may simply mean we need to wait until God brings revelation.

John 5:39-40 You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

Like a good Father, God loves to read His Word with His children. He will personally open our minds and eyes to His spiritual truths when we invite Him to. When Jesus was on earth, He opened the minds of His disciples to understand God's written word in the Scriptures. In fact, it is only through God's Spirit that we can hope to understand spiritual truths. Human wisdom can only reveal what our limited minds can perceive, God's Spirit will reveal His mind to us.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.

Luke 24:36,45 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ... Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

6. Commit to scripture memory

We memorise information that is important to us; addresses, identity numbers, birthdays or even the scores of certain sports teams. Some of us are extremely familiar with our favourite restaurant menus, or we may even be able to repeat quotes from other people, word for word. When we value our relationship with God, we will also commit His messages to our memory. We can focus on memorising a different verse each week as a start.

Psalm 119:10-11 With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

7. Learn to meditate on God's Word

Meditating on God's Word is like chewing on our food more slowly and for a longer period of time than normal.

Psalm 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

We can meditate on God's Word throughout a normal day. It can be a Bible verse we have picked or a story that we have read about. We can also spend some time at a quiet retreat and meditate on a passage for a few hours, as we wait on God's Spirit to speak to us when we

quiet our souls before His Throne. Science has shown that if we meditate on life-giving words, our physical health and mood levels will also do better. Faith in God's promises can bring healing.

Proverbs 4:21-22 My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh.

8. Learn to handle God's Word correctly

Words are powerful. They can tear nations apart, wreak families, break hearts and plant the seeds of depression. They can also bring tremendous healing, hope, joy, peace, reassurance and life. Words spoken out of context can bring more harm than good. If we repeat God's Word to other people, we have to be very careful to represent Him correctly. We should not misquote God.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

9. Use the Word to examine ourselves

There are Christians who use God's word to judge the world, and to use it like a stick to beat others on the head. Instead, we are to use it to examine our own lives. Christians can study God's Word for decades, but not be transformed into shining representations of Jesus Christ because they fail to put much of it into practice. Such faith is dead. We are simply being hypocritical. Jesus says that only those who obey His Word and follow Him will eventually enter heaven.

Matthew 7:3,5 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven

10. Live abundantly by using God's Word

Every Christian who walks in joy and confidence is one who knows the Bible very well. It is impossible to sincerely study and meditate on God's Word without being transformed. Here are a few ways that we can apply God's Word powerfully in our daily lives.

- Live without fear | Even if we are unable to see the future and what lies ahead, we can be confident of God's guidance from the Bible for all our choices and decisions. There is no need to live in fear or anxiety when we can be confident that God's Word inspires our thinking.

Psalm 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

- Overcome sin | If we allow God's Word to penetrate deep into our hearts over time, it will stop us in our tracks when any temptation to sin comes along.

Psalm 119:9,11 How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

- Prosper in all we do | By knowing and avoiding things that bring spiritual death, we will be able to follow God closely. God says in his Word that we will prosper and have good success, because we have the best advantage.

Joshua 1:8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

- Avoid what brings curses, walk in blessings | Everything that we do has implications for our family members and us. We can avoid things that bring curses to everyone when we know what they are.

Deuteronomy 30:19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,

- Receive miraculous help when needed | God will also use our knowledge of His Word to alert us or provide answers when we need them. People have reported suddenly remembering key Bible verses when they faced life's challenges and how these saved them from dangerous situations.

John 14:26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

- Use it in spiritual warfare | The Word of God is our spiritual sword, the weapon that we can use against Satan's schemes against us. When we know the Word, we will have victory over Satan.

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord."

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. What tends to distract people from studying God's Word?
- Q2. What steps can we take or how can we encourage each other to consume God's Word every day?

CHAPTER 19



TRAINING THE MIND

As disciples of Jesus, we must stand firm and strong in what we know about God, because Satan, our enemy, is always on the lookout for any weakness in our thoughts. The Bible says that we should be careful how we think because our thoughts run our lives. Satan knows this and will try to ruin our lives by influencing the way we think.

1 Peter 5:8-9 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...

Proverbs 4:23 Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life.

OUR SUBCONSCIOUS PROGRAMMING BY THIS WORLD

Satan is cunning and subtle. He simply needs to steer us off the path of salvation by a few degrees. As we continue down the alternative road that has been paved by Satan, we will eventually find ourselves completely off-track and lost.

How does he do this? First, he will present lots of titillating forms of alternative entertainment, grand-sounding philosophies,

new age ideologies, emotionally charged ideas and online temptations – all in an attempt to make believers fixate on things that are temporary, and not the things that are eternal. If possible, he will make these distractions so emotionally appealing that they capture our minds and eventually, our hearts and souls as well. Over time, these trigger us into automatically doing certain things before we are consciously aware of our thoughts and actions.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The world is filled with subtle influences that try to determine how we behave without us consciously being aware of it. Today, companies combine lessons from behavioural science and human psychology into their products in order to “get people to do things they might not otherwise do”, according to a report from the Persuasive Tech Lab at Stanford University. On his website, Lab Director BJ Fogg says his “expertise is creating systems to change human behavior”, through “methods for creating habits, showing what causes behavior, automating behavior change, and persuading people via mobile phones.” He says that his work helps online apps succeed by meeting “the user’s most basic emotional needs even before she has become consciously aware of them.”

Similarly, Satan will subtly use a series of these seemingly “harmless” distractions and triggers to slowly harden our hearts towards God, until our love for God turns cold. We find ourselves “dry” and distant from God. By then, we would have become so accustomed to pandering to our own fleshly desires that we don’t know how to find our way back to God. Throughout all this, we grieve the Holy Spirit and drown out His voice.

Romans 8:5-7 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.

It’s hard to notice when the light of our lives starts to dim if we are

not paying attention, until it is too late. Most times, the darkness would have overtaken us and we no longer know where we are and how we got there, in spite of our sincere intentions to “grow in our faith.”

John 12:35 So Jesus said to them, “... Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.

It's not in our fallen human nature to train our minds to focus on God, because we have spent years or perhaps decades thinking about ourselves; what we will eat, what we will wear, where we will go and what we will do. Once we ask God to be Lord of our lives, we need not focus on such thoughts but simply need to seek His Kingdom and righteousness first. All this requires disciplined training and re-programming of our minds for holy righteousness based on God's Word.

Matthew 6:31-33 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.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable ... for training in righteousness,

PRACTICAL STEPS IN TRAINING OUR MINDS

We can think of our brains as sophisticated “mental factories.” The output will depend on the input as well as the processing methods. It is impossible for our brains to focus on thoughts that are true, honourable, just, pure, lovely and excellent, if we only shovel junk in and do not upgrade our processing methods. Higher quality products come from hyper-hygienic, superior factories, not filthy, messy places. Thank God that our brains can be re-programmed with some training.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

1. Guard against ungodly influences

First, we need to put a tall fence around our “mental factories” and conduct security checks on things that get past the entry points into our minds. This means we need to place a filter for the books, movies, music, television shows, radio, internet sites, videos and people that we allow ourselves to be influenced by. Remember that most demonic influences are so subtle that we are not immediately aware of them. It is therefore wise not to play music from any random radio station or leave the television on for the whole day. Our subconscious minds continue to absorb influences from around us even if we are not consciously thinking of them.

An influence that may be harder for most people to control is Facebook, because we have no control over the advertisements, newsfeeds and things our friends associate themselves with. For example, if we are determined to give up looking at pornography, we must also be determined to change the controls over what we see, even if it means “unfriending” or removing some Facebook friends. If we don’t, we may still end up seeing some porn-related feeds from friends of our friends. Satan will use such an opportunity to entice us, “No one will know, just click the button. It’s okay to have some fun once in a while. It’s no big deal.” If our minds are vulnerable at any point in time, we may fall into temptation and go back into viewing pornography, deepening our struggles with the spirits of fornication and lust.

Our choices are often ruled more by our subconscious mind than our conscious. Science has shown that we can unintentionally open our subconscious minds to all sorts of unhealthy worldly influences. Our subconscious, which is the uncontrolled “auto-pilot” part of our brains, absorbs information without our own knowledge, and even when we are asleep under general anaesthesia! And it has more direct influence on our behaviour than we think.

Cognitive scientist Mark Changizi of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute has said that “Repeated visual exposure to an object can rapidly increase an observer’s preference for it. These preferences are

enhanced when visual exposure occurs without conscious recognition by the observer.”

Every computer has a “firewall” to protect against viruses. We should do something similar for our own brains. A computer virus usually attaches itself to a legitimate computing program and enters a computer in disguise or incognito. A good firewall will catch all viruses, though it may sometimes also block a few suspicious but non-threatening programmes. It is always better to be safe than sorry with it comes to honouring God.

We must take every one of our thoughts, both conscious and subconscious, captive and make it obedient to Jesus Christ. We are responsible for the influences on our thoughts and how we think.

2 Corinthians 10:5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,

2. Practise self-control over our thoughts

God calls us to practise self-control because He knows that this will help us develop good character and bring greater success across all aspects of life.

To illustrate, consider a lady who has fought with her sister all her life. One day, she notices a pattern of sibling rivalry and animosity that runs through both parents’ family lines. She decides to confess her own hatred towards her sister and forgives her parents for their favouritism towards her sibling. During prayer, she commands the spirit of bitterness to leave her and breaks the generational curse of sibling rivalry in Jesus’ name. Her circumstances however, don’t change and she has to make a choice. The next time her parents take her sister’s side, her first reflex reaction is likely to be anger and resentment. She may get thoughts such as, “Here they go again; always siding with my sister and putting me down. They will never change. I am so sick of this. I really hate them!”

At this point, she can either give in those old subconscious thoughts and fall into feelings of anger and bitterness, re-opening the door to sin and spiritual oppression, or choose to respond with grace and forgiveness, thereby ending the curse of sibling rivalry. In other words, she can decide to consciously think, “No, with Christ all things are possible. I may never be able to change them, but God can. I will celebrate who God has made me to be, and not allow their

spoken words to land on my spirit, in Jesus' name. God, help me to love my parents like Christ does, just as You have commanded me to love my neighbours, and even my enemies. I have decided to close the door to sibling rivalry and hatred, and I will not re-open that door to Satan. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."

Only when this lady is able to practise some control over her thoughts and reactions, will her relationship with her family improve as well as all her other relationships with colleagues, friends, relatives and fellow believers.

3. Don't give in to lies and fleshly emotions

Satan will use circumstances to plant ungodly ideas in our minds, so that we are tempted to respond sinfully. Here are some common examples and the alternative responses that honour God.

Emotion	Sinful response	Godly response
Accused	"I feel wrongly accused, I will do anything to prove them wrong."	"My identity is in Christ. What they say doesn't change who I am in Christ." See <i>1 Peter 2:9</i> .
Abandonment	"No one cares for or loves me."	"Even if people forsake me, God is always with me. He will never let anyone snatch me out of His Hand." See <i>Deuteronomy 31:8</i> .
Anxiety / Fear	"I'm worried. I should do what I can to make this fear go away."	"I trust God to help provide a solution for me because He loves me. I will not be driven by anxiety." See <i>1 John 4:18</i> .
Antagonism	"I must prove I'm smarter than others."	"I shall seek to bless others." See <i>2 Corinthians 9:8-11</i> .
Apathy	"I don't care about anyone or anything."	"I care about people because God loves us all." See <i>1 John 4:19</i> .

Anger	“I feel so angry because of what they have done. I will seek justice for myself.”	“What they have done is not right, but I will forgive them because Jesus has forgiven my sins. Jesus is the rightful Judge of the world, not me.” See <i>2 Timothy 4:1</i> .
Bitterness	“I feel justified for feeling bitter for what they have done.”	“I will not let any root of bitterness grow in my heart. Bitterness is bad for me.” See <i>Hebrews 12:15</i> .
Boredom	“I’m so bored. I have nothing meaningful to do.”	“I will seek to know God and honour Him all the days of my life.” See <i>Psalms 27:4</i> .
Cowardice	“I can’t stand up against intimidation.”	“I know fear is not from God. He has given me a spirit of power, love and self-control.” See <i>2 Timothy 1:7</i> .
Desperation	“I am desperate to have this.”	“I will not allow anything to become an idol and dominate my thoughts.” See <i>1 John 2:15-16</i> .
Discouragement	“I can’t continue.”	“God will give me strength and make all things possible, when it is impossible for me.” See <i>Matthew 19:26</i> .
Domination	“I must take control of the situation.”	“I trust God to lead the situation because I don’t know the best answer. I only know the little I can see.” See <i>Proverbs 19:21</i> .
Hopelessness	“There is no hope for me.”	“I don’t know the future but I know God is working everything for my good. I just have to be patient.” See <i>Romans 8:28</i> .

Impatience	"I can't wait any longer."	"It's hard to wait, God please help me to stay faithful. I don't want to run ahead of You." See <i>Psalms 27:14</i> .
Impoverishment	"I lack what I need and want."	"I will be thankful for everything God has given me and choose to be content in my circumstances. God has a plan for me." See <i>Jeremiah 29:11</i> .
Inadequacy	"I am not as good as other people."	"God has created me for a specific purpose and I will glorify Him in whatever I do." See <i>Exodus 9:16</i> .
Irritability	"I find these people so irritating."	"I must repent of my pride and see these people as God sees them. My Saviour, Jesus, died for them too." See <i>Romans 5:8</i> .
Misery	"I feel so miserable in my situation."	"I will use my energy to look at the good things that God has for me in all this." See <i>2 Corinthians 1:3-5</i> .
Loneliness	"I feel so alone and doomed."	"I am never alone with the Holy Spirit in me. Holy Spirit, I am sorry, please help me honour Your presence." See <i>2 Timothy 1:14</i> .
Paranoia	"What if ..."	"I will not allow Satan to plant unjustified fears into my heart. God has given me a spirit of power, love and self-control." See <i>Proverbs 19:21</i> .

Pride	“I am better than other people.”	“I am sorry God, for putting myself on a throne. You are the One who has given me everything I have. You alone are worthy to be on the throne of my life.” See <i>Proverbs 16:18</i> .
Resentment	“Why do they get to enjoy while I suffer?”	“I repent of being proud and resentful. I am nothing without God. He is my fulfillment.” See <i>1 Corinthians 3:3</i> .
Self-destruction	“No one can guarantee the future. I might as well live dangerously.”	“I am the temple of the Holy Spirit. I will honour my body because Jesus bought my body with His own life.” See <i>1 Corinthians 6:20</i> .
Self-hatred	“There is nothing lovable about me. I don’t like myself.”	“I repent of my self-hatred. It is Satan who hates me and I should not follow his evil ways. I am wonderfully made in God’s image.” See <i>Genesis 1:27</i> .
Self-pity	“I feel so sorry for myself.”	“I must repent of making myself an idol and seek God’s purpose for me.” See <i>1 Thessalonians 5:18</i> .
Self-victimisation	“I feel miserable that people have done this to me. My life will never be good again.”	“God, I celebrate that I am more than a victor in Christ. Help me to live victoriously, in spite of what has happened to me.” See <i>Romans 8:37</i> .
Shame	“I feel so ashamed for what I have done.”	“God, I am sorry for the wrong I have done. I know You welcome me warmly into Your arms. I should not condemn myself.” See <i>Isaiah 43:25</i> .

Stubbornness	“I won’t give in, no matter how it hurts others.”	“I repent of my stubbornness and invite correction. I know stubbornness will only lead me away from God.” See <i>Acts 7:51</i> .
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Questions for group discussion

- Q1. Please take a piece of paper and draw a pie chart to illustrate a breakdown of your thought patterns by %. What percentage of time do you spend thinking of yourself, your work, your family, your hobbies, God, serving others etc.? Do you think your pie chart honours God?
- Q2. Please give examples of titillating forms of alternative entertainment, worldly philosophies, new age ideologies, emotionally charged ideas and online temptations. How will you protect your mind against such things?

CHAPTER 20

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PRACTISING WISDOM

We can acquire vast amounts of knowledge but still make the wrong choices in life. It takes wisdom to decipher what is constructive, timely and appropriate according to God's will. For believers, wisdom is not just the well-advised application of factual knowledge. Our wisdom comes from the ultimate Source of all wisdom, understanding, and counsel, God Himself. In God's opinion, "whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool."

Proverbs 21:30 No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.

Proverbs 28:26 Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.

GODLY VS. WORLDLY WISDOM

The Bible contrasts two types of wisdom, God's and the world's. Jesus calls us to be as wise and shrewd as serpents, but this shrewd wisdom is very unlike the world's wisdom, which is often selfish. Godly wisdom is innocent, gentle, reasonable, peace-loving, impartial and sincere. It is full of mercy and willing to yield to others. It leads to a life that honours God first and peaceful relationships with others.

Matthew 10:16 “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

James 3:17-18 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Worldly secular wisdom tends to be self-centred. It exalts ourselves. When our hearts are not submitted to God, we will harbour pride, jealousy and selfish ambitions and use our wisdom to get ahead or to put others down. God’s Word calls such wisdom “earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” Jesus pointed out that Satan fosters such thinking and gets people to focus on things from a human point of view, rather than from God’s.

James 3:14-16 But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Matthew 16:23 ... “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

WE SEE THE CIRCUMSTANCES, GOD SEES THE DESTINATION

Our lives are the result of all the choices we make over time. It takes wisdom to ensure that our choices come together so that we end up at the narrow gate of eternal life, not the wide gate to eternal destruction. To find the path to the narrow gate, we need to seek wisdom and guidance from God. He will show us the way.

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

Psalm 32:8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Godly wisdom could even result in us bringing many others with us to the narrow gate. Worldly wisdom often tends to result in destruction.

QUALITIES OF GODLY WISDOM

You can recognise wise people in your life. They bring a sense of calm and peace wherever they go. They are not cowardly, petty or arrogant. Neither are they easily fazed by challenging situations. and are quick to go to God for wisdom. The good news is that godly wisdom can be gained and learnt.

Proverbs 4:5 Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth.

Here are some descriptions of the wise from the Bible.

Qualities	God's advice
1. Revere God	<i>Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!</i>
2. Submit to God's will	<i>Colossians 1:9 ... we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,</i>
3. Carefully consider their ways	<i>Ephesians 5:15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.</i>
4. Are humble	<i>Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.</i>

5. Acknowledge ignorance	<i>1 Corinthians 3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.</i>
6. Practice self-control	<i>Proverbs 16:32 Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.</i>
7. On the watch for deception	<i>1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.</i>
8. Are open to advice	<i>Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.</i>
9. Edify and correct others for their own good	<i>Ecclesiastes 7:5 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.</i>

PRACTICAL STEPS IN PRACTISING WISDOM

1. Patiently wait and trust God's intention

We receive the greatest wisdom from God's Spirit. The Holy Spirit communicates through our spirit and inner conscience. As we pray and quiet down to listen to Him, He will give us an "inner knowing" and plant insights into our minds.

Isaiah 11:2 And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Job 38:36 Who has put wisdom in the inward parts or given understanding to the mind?

Job 32:8-9 But it is the spirit in man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old who are wise, nor the aged who understand what is right.

2. Begin with humility and turn towards God

Reverence and humility before God are crucial to gaining godly wisdom. The humble will listen, observe, accept correction and grow wiser. The proud only collect more knowledge. God calls this folly and futile.

Proverbs 27:5-6 Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

1 Corinthians 3:19-20 For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."

3. Turn away from worldly wisdom

The world is also filled with sayings that sound like great wisdom, but will ultimately, lead us away from God.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Worldly wisdom will lead us to gratify our desires, rather than submit to God. The Bible calls us to "set the mind on the Spirit" so we will experience God's "life and peace." We need to put away or repent of relying on our own understanding or logic as to how things work based on the world's "teachings." Instead, we ought to renew our minds with God's Word. This is how we will be able to follow His ultimate wisdom.

Romans 8:6-8 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

4. Slow down, quiet our thoughts and ask God

It takes discipline to quiet our minds and wait on God. When we fix our thoughts on Him, He will reveal the path forward. He even promises to be generous with His limitless wisdom when we ask Him with simple faith.

Isaiah 26:3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

James 1:5-8 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

The temptation is always to ruminate on the “what ifs” in life but such thinking will prove to be futile because with God, there is only one way, and that is His good and perfect will. We need to beware not to let some inner unspoken fear or personal insecurity drive us to “look at all the possibilities” in life. Such fears are not from God.

5. Test our thoughts

Some thing can sound 95% right and still be wrong. Just as the Holy Spirit will give us godly wisdom, Satan can also give us worldly wisdom. It is important to ask the Holy Spirit to help us examine and test the direction of our thoughts so that we follow His voice, instead of the enemy's. This is one way we “*test the spirits to see whether they are from God.*”

Lamentations 3:40 Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...

6. Stay away from ungodly influences

Ungodly influences come from many different sources, from family traditions, the media, society, pop culture, songs etc. Ultimately, they will fill our minds with insecurity, pride, doubt, and worldly human logic. We are to keep our thoughts pure, uncorrupted and innocent

so our thoughts don't get swayed away from God's will.

Romans 16:19 For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

Proverbs 3:7 Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil.

If we feel as if we are “tossed *to and fro by the waves and carried about*” in our thoughts, then we need to examine if we are being blown about by ungodly teaching or lies that sound like the truth.

Ephesians 4:14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

7. Choose our counselors wisely

It is wise to listen to good advice. Even so, we need to be selective about who we turn to for advice. Seeking wisdom from prudent God-fearing people is good but seeking God's ultimate wisdom is best. No one knows what tomorrow holds as clearly as God does, and no detail is too insignificant to bring before God.

Proverbs 13:20 Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

8. Know God's Word well

Nothing beats studying God's Word. This is how we will be able to decipher His ways, His will, and His character. The wise know that God will never do anything that's out of His character nor will He change His Word.

Psalms 19:7 The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;

1 Samuel 15:29 And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”

9. Make use of our wisdom for God's glory

The wise will choose the right time to speak up for what is right, stand up against injustice, and correct those who are heading towards destruction – all because they consider others more highly than themselves and love them as God loves them. When we take this loving attitude to counsel, advise and correct others, the wisdom we bring will be appreciated because it will prevent more damage. At the end of the day, when we combine wisdom with God's grace, He is glorified and praised.

Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouths of fools pour out folly.

Questions for group discussion

- Q1. What is some wise advice you have received that has impacted you?
- Q2. What qualities of the wise do you lack in your life? How do you apply the wisdom found in God's Word for yourself?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Sum combines over a decade of experience in discipleship, inner healing, deliverance and professional writing to bring followers of Jesus highly practical books that answer questions that most people are unaware to ask. Her books are filled with scriptural teaching and insights from discipling hundreds of believers over the years. Jennifer lives in Asia with her family.

LOVE THE LORD

Drawn from over a decade of experience in discipleship, inner healing and deliverance, Love The Lord provides biblical insight and practical answers to four key questions.

- What does it really mean to love God?
- What does it take to become a new creation in Christ?
- How can I have the abundant life that God promises?
- How can I completely overcome sin and live victoriously?

Our relationship with God is truly a multifaceted one. It takes all of our heart, soul, strength and mind to love Him well. With 20 short succinct chapters, this study book will transform the way you relate with God.

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