



CHRIST THROUGH YOU
**AWARE &
AVAILABLE**



bent tree
experience Life

CHRIST THROUGH YOU: AWARE & AVAILABLE

A REFLECTIVE BIBLE STUDY
BENT TREE BIBLE FELLOWSHIP

Written by Matt Smith and Jonathan Deatherage
Edited by Jonathan Deatherage

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

John 7:37

Bent Tree Bible Fellowship

At Bent Tree our tagline is “experience Life” – lower case ‘e’ for experience, because *experiences* are important, but, contrary to what our culture today tells us, “an experience” is not the only thing we pursue; upper case ‘L’ for Life because the *Life of Jesus* is our, well . . . *Life!* We believe that Jesus came not only to save us through his death on the cross, but also to live within us because of his resurrection. We want people to experience that abundant Life, which is sourced in our union with Christ.

You’ll find that throughout this study, whenever we refer to the Life that Jesus gives, it is upper case. We want to emphasize how unique and important that Life is for all believers!

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How to use this study

You were made for something eternal — eternal work, eternal purpose, eternal impact. God, in the curious mystery of his gospel, has engineered history so that we don't have to wait until the afterlife to engage in this eternal reality! Because the Holy Spirit dwells inside everyone who believes in Jesus as their Savior, God is at work not only *in* us but also *through* us. As we learn the life of dependence on Jesus, it will naturally result in his Life flowing through us. As we bear fruit from this abiding life, we will engage in the eternal work of God in the world.

As you go through this study, you'll find the layout to be broken up into three sections made up of two chapters each. Each section is designed specifically to encourage you in a life of total dependence on Jesus, so that he not only lives in you but also expresses his Life through you.

SECTION 1: SOURCE

The first section (chapters 1-2) is written to remind us of our *source* for Life — Jesus, the True Vine. Any endeavor into outward expressions of the Christian life must begin with a foray into the inner life of abiding in Christ. Although we looked into this in our previous study, *Christ in You: Alive & Free*, we now consider it in the context of bearing fruit.

SECTION 2: BLOCKS

The second section (chapters 3-4) is intended to help us to see places in our lives where we *block* the outflow of his Spirit. The ideal is nice to talk about, that Christ wants to express his Life through us, but we all struggle to see that reality in our daily lives. Why is that? How do we address these blocks? This section will help us to become aware of those blocks and to delve into the root causes.

SECTION 3: CONDUITS

The final section (chapters 5-6) is designed to show us some key features of Christ expressing his Life through us — freedom and family. Jesus has set us free not only *from* sin, but also *to* himself and *for* serving one another in love. And, as his children, he has set us in his very own family. So how do we let him do his work through us in that context? We'll learn more in these chapters.

When you finish this study, may you discover the beautiful, empowering, full Life that God has given to you in him, continuing to learn dependence on him in every breath, every thought, and every decision.

Our focus in this study is how you were made to express the divine Life of Christ. After having studied about Christ's Life *in* you in our previous study, *Christ in You: Alive & Free*, we now turn to the outward work of God in our lives as he bears fruit *through* us to the glory of the Father.

This study can be done on your own, but it is designed to be used in a one-on-one context or in groups of three to four people. We encourage you to be intentional about your time with this study. Each lesson has questions for you to process through on your own (Journal) and questions for you to process with others (Discuss). The memory verses for each week will help you capture the main idea and direct your thoughts on truth from God's Word. The prayer section will help give you ideas for talking with God about the things discussed in each lesson.

All Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (all rights reserved), unless otherwise noted.

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Table of Contents

Life after Forgiveness

page 7

Preface

page 9

1: LIFE

page 13

2: FRUIT

page 20

3: WARNINGS

page 26

4: WEEDS

page 32

5: FREE

page 40

6: FAMILY

page 48

What's Next?

page 55

Appendix 1: Centering Prayer Exercise

Appendix 2: Signs of Coping in the Flesh

Appendix 3: What do you do after you've failed?

Life after Forgiveness

Jesus gave his life for us, so that he could give his life to us, in order that he might live his life through us.

For many, what is known of the “good news” is that Christ died for their sins – and that most certainly is good news! The reality for all of humanity is that we are born sinners. We could not do enough good, make enough right decisions, refrain from enough bad, to be counted as righteous.

In Romans 3:23, it is clearly stated, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

All includes *everyone*, and removes the ability for any of us to be able to boast about how good we are or what we’ve done in order to be saved. As Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”

All have sinned and *all* need to find salvation. The root of sin is denying that God is good and knows what is best; and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Here, “death” is not merely physical, but refers to the state of being spiritually separated from God, the author of Life. Without Life, heaven is out of the question, and life on earth will ultimately be empty (1 John 5:12).

If you trust in him to be your source of forgiveness before God, then your sins – past, present, and future – are completely paid for (Romans 3:25), and you are reconciled to God. Trusting in him is an act of faith. If you’ve never prayed before, simply praying something like this may be helpful:

Jesus, thank you for paying for my sins on the cross. I recognize that I am a sinner in need of your forgiveness. I believe in you to be my source of Life and salvation. I admit that I could never do anything to make myself right before you. I receive the free gift of your forgiveness that you’ve given and your perfect Life for mine. In Jesus’s name I pray. Amen.

My friend, you are forgiven! And that’s not all...

The “good news” is good because it is what every person was created for – to be made new in Christ, fully forgiven ...and given a *new identity*. We read about this in 2 Corinthians 5:17, and 20b-21.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

At salvation, by grace through faith, our sins are dealt with and we became forgiven. And, at the exact same time, our identity is dealt with we “become the righteousness of God” in Christ. It’s why believers are referred to as saints so often in the Bible (see Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1).

We didn’t just have a sin problem, we had a Life problem. Our sins separated us from God, and he alone is Life. Through the perfect life, death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus not only makes it possible for us to be redeemed and forgiven, but also to be fully alive in the core of our being – in our human spirits. It is there that he has chosen to dwell in spiritual union with every believer.

And this, my friend, is the “good news.” We have become fully forgiven and fully alive by the Holy Spirit. His Life is the source for all believers, and we were made to live in total dependence on God. As you go through this study, our prayer is that you would fully realize the power of this truth and embrace the reality of your new Life in him and all that means for you in this moment.

If you have place your faith in Jesus’ finished work on your behalf, then he lives in you, by his Spirit, in union with your spirit. And you’re invited to let him live through you to put him on display to the world around you...*aware* and *available* to all he is and all he wants to do. We hope you’ll experience the Life you were made to live!

Preface

By Matt Smith

For many of us, what we hoped we would experience in Christianity — freedom, joy, meaning, impact on the world — has been replaced with the burden of feeling like we can never *do* enough, *be* enough, *care* enough, *serve* enough, *read* enough, *pray* enough, or *whatever* enough to please God. When you arrive at this place, you either decide to give up on your faith or simply settle for the idea that this is “just the way it is.”

But what if there is a way to experience that freedom, joy, meaning, and impact on the world?

In his book “*The Indwelling Life of Christ*,” Major W. Ian Thomas begins with this compelling premise:

To be entirely honest, I know of nothing quite so boring as Christianity without Christ (...) I know of nothing so utterly exciting as being a Christian, sharing the very Life of Jesus Christ on earth right here and now, being caught up with him into the relentless, invincible purposes of the almighty God, and having available to us all the limitless resources of Deity for accomplishing those purposes.
(pg. 7)

“Christianity without Christ” — have you ever experienced that? Have you found yourself doing “Christian things” like reading your Bible, praying, serving in church, going into missions, and so on, but you still feel empty in your spiritual life? Or maybe you feel tired by all the effort, but you’re haunted with the sense that nothing will get you where you need to be with God. He seems fickle or distant. You want him close, but feel like you’re not devoted enough or committed enough. “Maybe I should get more serious about my relationship with God,” you tell yourself.

Countless Christians know they needed Jesus as their Savior when they first came to Christ, but then mistakenly go about the rest of their lives believing it’s up to them to be good enough, to show they’re faithful enough, to prove their sincerity, and measure up to the standard they believe God has set for them. They attempt to live the Christian life in their own strength and abilities. And if you’ve experienced that (or are experiencing that), then you know what it’s like — it’s exhausting!

Deep down, you know there has to be more. And there is! Consider this liberating fact of the gospel:

Jesus gave his Life *for* us, so that he could give his Life *to* us, so that he could live his Life *through* us.

Take a minute to work through the meaning of those prepositions for a minute.

Jesus did indeed give his Life *for* us. He died a criminal's death to deal with our sin, for "the wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) In this one act, the Perfect One willingly gave himself so that we could be forgiven and made right with him "by grace through faith" (Ephesians 2:8), which means "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12).

And that's not all — he gave his Life *to* us when his Spirit came to live inside us. The writers of the New Testament speak of this reality often. We have union with Christ, having been mystically crucified with him, buried with him, and raised with him (Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:1-4, Romans 6:3-4). In this way, he has given life to our human spirits by means of his Holy Spirit, and we "participate in the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Not that we are ourselves God, but we are his children — not born of flesh but of the spirit (John 1:12, 3:6) — and we have his life within us, as broken jars of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7). It has altered our identity from the moment we first put our trust in him. (This is the topic of our previous study, *Christ in You: Alive & Free.*)

Paul summarizes this in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What if Jesus desired more for you than a life of trying to measure up? What if he had already provided you with everything you would ever need, in order for you to live the life you were created to live?

But there's more! Why did he give his Life *to* us? So he could live his Life *through* us. Jesus himself points to this reality before he went to the cross:

"Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me **will do the works I have been doing**, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

"Because I live, **you also will live**. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. (John 14:12, 19b-20, emphasis added).

And again, as he spoke of our dependence on him, the True Vine, Jesus points out that his goal is for us to express his Life to the world around us:

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, **you will bear much fruit**; apart from me you can do nothing.

“This is to my Father’s glory, that **you bear much fruit**, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:5, 8, emphasis added)

He wants to bear his fruit through us as we abide (live, remain) in him! The Christian life isn’t about *trying harder* to bear more fruit; it’s about *yielding more and more* to his divine supply as he does his work in us and through us. If you find yourself caught in a life trying your best to be the best you can be in our own strength and willpower, this should be a breath of fresh air!

That means that what you do in the body is very important for his spiritual representation in the world. God’s design all along was that believers would be inhabited by him — to be indwelt by his Spirit — and carry his presence to the world. In Acts, Luke wrote, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands” (Acts 17:24). But then in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Paul writes, “Do you not know that your bodies are *temples* of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” In Christ, God made you to be a physical home for his spiritual presence!

We were designed to have his Life *in* us that he could express that Life *through* us as we trust and depend on him. Living with our hands wide open to him, allowing him access to every part of our lives — including our bodies — we begin to experience the life we were made to live. This is living by faith, so that we become physical representatives (ambassadors) for God in a world that desperately needs to know him.

And that’s exactly why we wrote this study — for all believers in Jesus to come to a deep knowing not only of his Life *in* them, but also his power that flows *through* them — *into* every soul like “rivers of living water” (John 7:38) and out *through* our bodies to the world around us.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

SOURCE

“Jesus gave his Life for us, so he could give his Life to us, so he could live his Life through us.”

Major Ian Thomas

1: LIFE

Bottom Line: Jesus wants to continue his earthly ministry through you today, as you make yourself available to him.

Even as an old man, Joe still missed his father deeply. He had grown up in a loving home, where his mom tried to be all she could be for the kids, but it wasn't the same. When Joe was in preschool, his dad had died in military service, and Joe had very few living memories he could draw from.

When Joe was ten, he was playing in his mom's room when he stumbled on a ragged, well-worn box in the top drawer of her bedside table. When he pulled out the box, he discovered letter after letter that his dad had written to his mom before he died.

With tears streaming down his face, Joe read every letter. Some of the letters mentioned Joe and his brothers and how proud his dad was to have such a beautiful family. When Joe's mom discovered him reading the letters, she gently sat beside him and wept with him. From that day on, Joe was always welcomed to come and read the letters and remember his dad.

As he grew into a man, he was surprised at how what was written in the letters took on new meaning, and he understood his father in a new light. The words marked his life, as Joe grew and recognized traits of his father in himself. Joe kept that ragged box next to his bedside table when his own mother passed on.

In our Christian life, some have looked to God's Word as the list of do's and don'ts for how to live. As meaningful as that may be, the Bible is much more. It's God's love letter to his beloved creation. And inside the cover, we find so much about who God is, who we are, and what his desire is for us. Like Joe's letters from his dad, these letters from God to us have the power to shape us, to show us what it means to be his children, and to bring deep meaning to our lives.

For all of us who have received the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf and accepted his gracious salvation by faith, then we have the Holy Spirit alive inside each one of us. As many as are in Christ, each has been given a completely new identity on the basis of the indwelling Spirit – child of God, and heir to the riches of Christ!

Birth determines who we are, so it's critical to know who you are.

When Nicodemus came to Jesus, he was intrigued by the things Jesus was able to do. Jesus revealed how new life in the Kingdom of God begins.

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” (John 3:1-8)

Who you are is determined by whose you are.

If you are born of the Spirit, you belong to Christ, and your entire purpose centers on Life in him. He wants to do his work of healing and restoring *in* your soul. What’s more, he has given to everyone who is born of his Spirit the high calling of bearing Christ’s Life to the world around them. As we offer our physical bodies to him, we become the hands, feet, arms, voice, face of Christ, manifesting spiritual realities as he leads us along. The New Testament speaks of this reality often, and we’ll look at three metaphors used to describe it: temples, rivers, and fruit.

LIVING TEMPLES

Although Christians don’t worship in temples anymore, these places were known in biblical times to be a physical location where a spiritual deity lived and received worship. God’s plan all along was that his ‘temples’ — the physical location for his dwelling and his worship — would not be a building but his people. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, she asked him about which physical location was the right place to worship God — Jerusalem, where the Jews worshipped, or Mount Gerizim, where the Samaritans worshipped. Jesus answered and said to her:

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.” (John 4:21-24)

Of course, your first response might be to feel uncomfortable with this idea, wondering, “How could God live in me? I’m so dirty and sinful!” Before we came to Christ, that would be a true

statement. But remember, Jesus' sacrifice was enough — he took care of our sin problem and our identity when he conquered death and rose again that our new life could begin in him.

In Romans, Paul describes it like this:

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:4)

For the believer, eternal life isn't starting at some point in the future; it has already begun!

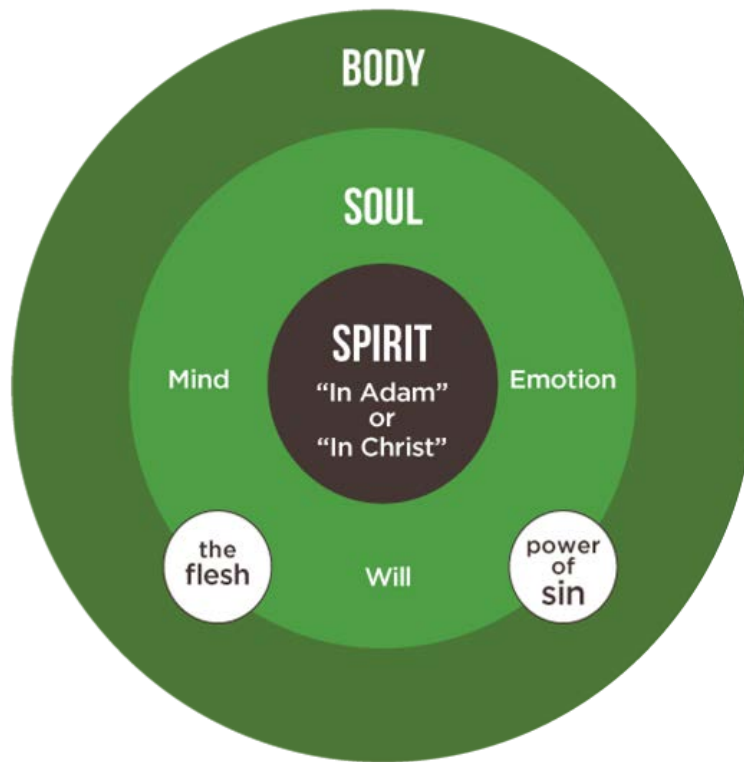
In Ephesians 2:4-7, Paul writes,

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And **God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus**, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (emphasis added)

We've been raised up with Christ, hidden in him, and seated with him in the heavenly places. Though we were once dead in our sins, we've been made alive with him. Just as we have been made new in our spirits, we are being renewed in our souls, and our physical bodies have been once again given God's original purpose for them:

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

When God originally designed humanity, he made us to have his Life flowing through us — our spirits in union with his Spirit, in order that we might experience his Life in our *souls* (mind, will, emotions, personality), that he would then express his Life through our *bodies* in this world.



In Christ, God is restoring humanity to that original design. Even though we live today in mortal bodies, God has ordained that we become physical carriers of his spiritual Life. In addition to that, we look forward to the day when God will complete his work of redemption, raising us up in Christ into bodies that are like his: immortal, incorruptible, and glorious.

FLOWING RIVERS

Another metaphor we find in the New Testament to describe the reality of Christ’s life flowing in every believer and through us is that of a river. In John 7:37-39, we read,

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, **rivers of living water will flow from within them.**” By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. (emphasis added)

Again, we see the idea that Christ’s Life is at work inside anyone who has been given the Holy Spirit to live in them (i.e. every believer in Jesus). As he does his work, that Life will naturally begin to show up in our physical expressions — the words we say, the things we do, the places we go, even our countenance.

For example, when we make ourselves available to Christ, focusing on the area of how we serve others, we would first begin with putting our thoughts before God to become aware of his presence. As we do that, we see a shift in our understanding of the needs around us (mind), which would affect how we feel about situations where a need is revealed (emotions), which would then influence how we chose to act (will). From that decision to act, our physical bodies take on the impulse of Christ to serve another person and meet their need. The river of living water — Christ’s Life — has flowed from your spiritual union with him into your soul and out through your body.

We can not be who we were fully meant to be in this world without God living in us, for we were designed to be his. When he moves in, we come to life! As we continue to grow spiritually, we pursue deepening dependence on him. In this way, we allow him to do his will *in* and *through* us — reaching into every sphere of influence, every relationship, and every decision we make.

The Christian daily experience is infused with Christ, who is our Life (Colossians 3:3). Our goal is to know this Life so that we live *from* him, and express his Life in word and deed.

LIFE AND PURPOSE

You were made for more than living day-to-day, merely hoping that tomorrow is better than today, trapped by your circumstances and the demands of this world. You were made for more than living according to your own resources, building your own little empire, or existing for pleasure. You were made to be filled with the Life of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, because you’re loved by God the Father. It’s in this place where we find our life and our purpose in this life.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:8-10, emphasis added)

As we live aware of God’s presence and available to him, what flows out of our lives is what the Bible considers to be “good works.” But contrary to how many of us have heard that term before, this goes way beyond good behavior; what we’re looking at is supernatural. Before Jesus finished his time on earth, he said, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me **will do the works I have been doing**, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12, emphasis added).

Do greater deeds than Jesus did? How is that even possible?

In John 5, Jesus shares a very important truth about the deeds he performed while on the earth: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does” (v. 19). When Jesus stepped into humanity, he entered into our reality, and modeled the principle we are discussing here. Through his spiritual union with his heavenly Father, Jesus perceived what the Father wanted him to do, and in surrender to that will Jesus revealed to us the character of God. That is why toward the end of his earthly ministry, Jesus could say to his disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (...) The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work” (John 14:9,10).

As we imagine this reality in our own lives, we are likely expecting that we will be doing the work. That if we’re good enough, we’ll do some pretty amazing things *for* Jesus. But that’s not the idea!

We cannot do this in our own strength, effort, or inner resources!

We’re not talking about performing a list of good deeds; rather, it’s about living each moment before God so that every deed we do becomes an expression of his Life at work in us.

“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). This isn’t about the branch pushing out fruit. No, as we’ll see later, it’s about each one of us resting in Christ as our source of Life, and allowing him to do his work *in* us and *through* us.

Jesus was telling his disciples that the earthly ministry they watched him do, they would also do as his Life flowed *in* and *through* them. “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples” (John 15:8).

As we live aware of God’s presence and available to him, the same is true of each one of us today, each branch that is connected to the Vine: Jesus lives *in* you, and he wants to continue his earthly ministry *through* you today! Your life this very day has the capacity to tangibly express the intangible spiritual realities of the gospel. Because Christ lives in you, you have become the physical hands, feet, mouth, face, arms, and even voice of Christ to the world around you!

Journal

Which of the three metaphors described in this chapter — temple, river, and fruit — speak to an area of need in your life?

Take an inventory of your words and your actions. How might God be inviting you to express his Life through you today?

What area(s) of your life do you need to offer to him right now?

Discuss

How does knowing God's purpose for your life affect how you structure your time throughout the day?

In what areas of your life do you tend to keep closed off to God?

What would it mean for you to live fully available to him in every area of your life?

Memory Verse

For we are God's handiwork, **created in Christ Jesus to do good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added)

Prayer

Triune God, you have pursued me with the love of the Father, bought me with the blood of Christ, and made me alive with him by your Spirit. Just as you have given of yourself for my restoration, so I give myself to you in a response of delight. I am wholly yours — even my body is yours — that I may in word and deed share with the world the Life of Christ, as you do your work in me and through me. Amen.

2: FRUIT

Bottom Line: Fruit is experienced and expressed only by trusting in Christ each moment.

Pregnant. *Oh no, my dad is going to kill me!* Thought Mikele as she stared at the positive pregnancy test in her hand. As a pastor's kid, Mikele had always lived under the high expectations of her family and her community to keep it together and live a good life.

But here it is: Nineteen, alone, and pregnant. As she sat on the bathroom floor, the weight of it all came down strong. There were so many emotions and fears to sift through. What seemed like an hour later, she acknowledged to herself that she couldn't wear the mask of "good Christian girl" anymore. The life of a single mom lay before her, and her best hope for finding her family's support was coming clean, owning her mistakes, and asking for their help.

Mikele's dad was crushed. His first response was, "Well, I guess I'm done as a pastor! I might as well start looking for a new job!" The next night, Mikele overheard him saying to her mom, "How could God do this to me, after all I've done for him?" Mikele wondered if her actions would loom over her family forever and if God would ever be happy with her again.

It's not just pastors and their families who feel the pressure to measure up, trying to *be* enough or *do* enough to feel like they are pleasing God. Many of us have understood the Christian life in this way, as well. But if our starting point in life is Christ, then there has to be a better way to go through this life than crippled by the pressure of performance, insecure of how God sees us.

After all, the Christian life is impossible. Even if we think we can manage to *not* do all the things prohibited in Scripture, there's the lists of things we *are* to do that is beyond us. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes the Ten Commandments and ups the ante at every turn, taking it from external behavior to internal obedience. He sums it up with this: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48).

The bar is impossibly high. How could any of us ever live up to such a standard?

CHRIST ALONE

The good news of gospel is that **we weren't saved to try to live a better life**, we were saved so that we could have Life — *Christ in you, you in Christ*. Since our life is hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:1-4), we live by dependence on him, not by effort for him. We live just as we've received Christ — by grace through faith in total dependence on him as our Source.

Since Christ was the only one who could ever live the perfect Christian life, the role of the believer is to trust him, not only for salvation, but also for every moment. We are incapable of living the Christian life apart from Christ himself. As some have said, “It’s about Jesus doing the doing.”

We can be tempted to believe that the Christian life is up to us, up to our own sense of personal devotion or public commitment. How many church functions do we attend? How much money do we give to charitable causes? How many people are we kind to? But when we put ourselves on this kind of religious scale, we drift from the freedom of the gospel. Salvation is in Christ alone; and the on-going work to bring glory to God from our lives is also Christ alone.

So how *do you* produce fruit in our lives? **You don’t; you bear it.**

Jesus puts it this way in John 15:4-6:

“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; **apart from me you can do nothing**. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” (emphasis added)

You can’t live the life you were created to live apart from him. You can’t fulfill the purpose of your life in your own abilities, independent of Christ. You won’t experience the life you long to live unless you choose to live dependent on him. As branches connected to the vine, your role is to trust and receive. Jesus, the vine, flows his Life *into* you and *through* you so that you would *experience* Christ and that he would *express* his Life to those around you.

This is what God wants for your life! As a master gardener, the Father has grafted you in to Christ, so that you receive his nourishment in your inmost being. As you do that, you grow. From that growth comes the fruit that God through his Spirit is crafting in your life. It alters your words and your deeds as your heart gets warmed with his presence. You make choices that reflect this Life at work inside you, and you say yes to his impulse flowing in your life. That is how we bear fruit, which comes from Christ and gives honor and praise to the Father.

SOURCE AND MOTIVATION

God made humanity to be dependent beings. We were always intended to live in total dependence upon God. But often we settle for independence from God, relying instead on our talents, education, personality, heritage, social network, and successes to get us what we believe we need out of life. It's what Paul referred to as 'the flesh' – not the skin-and-bones kind, but a particular mindset that ignores our need for God and tries to live life on your own.

One of the ways we can think about this is to look at the fruit – or the outward expressions – of our lives. Paul clearly contrasts a life controlled by the flesh (independence from God) with a life controlled by the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-25.

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Before we move to thinking about our actions, notice that Paul goes below the surface of our deeds into the heart, revealing that the fruit of the Spirit isn't first and foremost outward deeds performed, but inward fruit that nourishes our soul. Remember what Jesus said in John 7:38, "Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."

As we make ourselves aware of his presence in our lives through prayer, Jesus floods our souls with his **love**, so that we might know we are loved and lovable. He floods our souls with his **joy**, because he's with us and for us and has overcome the grave that we could have his Life. ...with his **peace**, that the inner critic would be silenced by the reminder of who we are and whose we are. ...with his **patience** that we would see from his perspective. ...with his **kindness, goodness, faithfulness** and **gentleness**, because it's who he is and how he lives –always. ...and with **self-control**, because we weren't made to be given to our fleshly desires but intentionally living from our new self that is in union with Christ.

Our actions do matter in this life; but *the source and motivation* of our actions matters most to God. The goal *isn't* behavior modification, so that we simply "act" more Christian; the goal is that we pay attention to Christ's presence and make ourselves available to his work in the moment. This will

result in the fruit described in Galatians 5. We first look inward and upward to see God, not outward to our circumstances.

THE CORE

The key to experiencing and expressing Christ's life is *trust*. In this relationship with him, that begins with trust in him to save us by grace through faith, in the power of forgiveness which was ushered in on the cross. Yet we are invited to continue to trust him as our Source of Life.

From that place we're able to live with confidence. Not the type of confidence that comes from arrogance, but the confidence that comes from belonging to Christ, safe in his presence (Hebrews 4:16). We're able to live with Christ-confidence, that he's in control, loving and kind, and always doing what's best and what's right.

Putting our trust in him in each moment isn't a denial of what's going on around us, but rather an acknowledgment that he's in control regardless of what's going on around us, and that our life's starting point is him. Actively trusting in him is the by-product of recognizing who's doing the doing. It's his work in us and through us, not our own efforts at "good behavior."

In all things, he is the source, the vine, and he is producing his fruit in us and through us. It's a completely different way of life as we remain aware of his presence and make ourselves available to move with him.

But sometimes we have blocks to the fruit coming through... We'll look at that in-depth next chapter.

Journal

When you think about your daily life, what are the areas where you are living independent of God?

How different would your life look if you chose dependence on Jesus in each of those areas?

Write a prayer to God about your motivations — where do you struggle to align them with his desires for your life?

Discuss

In what situations do you find it easier to trust Christ to be your source for life? Why do you think that is?

What 'fruit' do you see in your life today from trusting in him?

Memory Verse

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit — fruit that will last — and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” (John 15:16)

Prayer

Father, I thank you that you are the Gardener and you are taking care of your vineyard. You want my life to bear fruit that points people back to Jesus. Thank you that you give my life purpose and meaning. I offer myself to you. Search me, O God, and reveal to me places that I hide from your healing hand, and move fresh in my heart today, that my life might bear even more fruit for your glory. Amen.

BLOCKS

“Whether at work or at home, self-deception obscures the truth about ourselves, corrupts our view of others and our circumstances, and inhibits our ability to make wise and helpful decisions.”

The Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception*

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”

1 John 3:8b

3: WARNINGS

Bottom Line: Our actions reveal our source for living, whether the Spirit or the flesh.

Driving around, minding his own business, Cameron noticed a little “check engine” light flash on his dashboard of his 1992 Chevy Cavalier. He drove around, hoping it would turn off, but it remained on. He took it in to an auto repair shop hoping for an easy answer, but he found out there was a significant problem.

The repairs were going to be costly, so Cameron asked what his options were. One option was to pay to get it fixed. Another option was to drive around with it on until it wouldn’t drive any more — and then pay to get it fixed. The third option was similar to the second — to continue driving around but to turn the light off. The mechanic offered to disconnect the light so he couldn’t see it anymore. But the problem still wouldn’t be fixed, so Cameron would eventually have to bring it back in to get repaired once the car no longer worked. In any case, the car needed to be fixed, whether it was now or later.

While it may sound a bit ridiculous to simply unplug the light and continue to drive around, many of us do just that in our lives. We know there’s a problem — we’ve seen the warning signs — but instead of dealing with it, we try to ignore it. We don’t want to invest the time it will require to work on the issue; we’d rather keep running and not pay that price. Meanwhile, the problem persists and we continue to hurt ourselves and others with our behavior.

FAR FROM HIDDEN

In Galatians 5, Paul describes the works of the flesh as “obvious.” Have you ever thought about the fact that all the ways we live independent from God are obvious to the people close to us? All of us could scroll through our lives and remember times when a best friend, a parent, a co-worker, or a spouse said something that was hard to hear but true. Or what about the time you sensed God nudging you to do something hard or scary or outside your comfort zone?

What we do with that feedback determines whether we drive around with the “check engine” light on or if we invest time to address the issue. The biggest danger comes when we turn off the light, and we begin to ignore the feedback that God and the people in our lives are giving us.

- What would you identify as a “check engine” light in your life? Have people in your life expressed concern about a particular issue that’s hurtful to them, others, or yourself?

- When have you experienced God in the reading of his Word and listening for what he was saying to you?

When we're faced with "check engine" lights in our own lives, it's valuable to know what to do and how to address them. One of the best ways we can begin to address the issue is to spend some time in God's Word.

CHILDREN OF LIGHT

Paul, the author of much of the New Testament, wrote about the practical aspects of living in Christ. Read the passages below and list the behaviors and attitudes that a believer should exhibit, as well as those actions and characteristics that are not suitable to a child of God.

Colossians 3:5-17

Colossians 4:2, 5-6

Galatians 5:13-26

Ephesians 4:1-3, 22-32

Ephesians 5:1-7

These lists are daunting. It can seem difficult to live consistently the way Paul describes a believer should live. Sometimes it can feel impossible to refrain from things that don't belong in the life of a believer, especially when they are established behaviors we use to cope with our world (what are called "flesh patterns").

But these lists present us with "check engine lights" for our thoughts, emotions, and actions. They encourage us to deal with our world through the lens of Christ's faithfulness on our behalf.

They are not written to condemn us – God makes it clear through his Word that Christ is our Source for Life (John 15), and that we are fully forgiven in him (Ephesians 1). Our sins have already been completely dealt with, forever (Hebrews 9). No, these are written to reveal.

The "check engine light" each passage represents reveals truth to us and allows us to set our feet onto God's good way – love, rightly sourced.

Go back through the characteristics that describe a believer. Notice that these attributes also describe who Jesus *was* and *is* and *will* forever be.

So, what do we do when we realize we aren't experiencing what the Bible says is true of us?

Many of us try harder to do better. We continue to use our own resources, skills and ingenuity to live the Christian life: We tell ourselves, "Plan better. Be more disciplined. Stop, stop, stop!"

This results in frustration, disappointment, and shame. Or worse, if you succeed at some level, it can result in pride, self-sufficiency, and self-righteousness. Neither extreme reflects fruit from living connected to the vine.

When we reach for the deeds of the flesh, we are seeking to satisfy a legitimate need in an illegitimate way. We turn away from God as our Source, our care-taker, our provider, and we turn to our own resources of charisma, education, heritage, social network, intellect, etc. We have believed the most enduring lie of Satan, that God is holding out on us (Genesis 3:4-5).

But there is a better way. We can trust that God our Father has our best interest in mind, and that he has given us what we need for life and godliness in Christ. Believe that his Life is better. He's not holding out on you, even if in his love he is waiting to supply it.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) (Ephesians 5:9)

If you are in Christ, you are “light in the Lord” and a child of light. Your truest self, the essence of who you are, loves the light and has no desire for darkness. When you choose to live contrary to this, you’re choosing to live contrary to who God has made you in Christ. This doesn’t change the fact that you are in union with him, but it does directly affect the Life you experience and the degree to which you express the character of Christ.

SOULICAL REPAIR

The lights on the dashboard of your soul aren’t the problem. When the warning light of pride pops up, for example, it does no good to just ignore the problem. While it may be helpful to *learn about* pride and the different ways it can be manifested, the way to address it is to *offer it* to Christ and ask him to renew your mind with truth (Romans 12:1-2).

We were designed to start with him, to find our Life in him, and to live *from* him. As we do, we will experience the life we were created to live — his Life *in* us and *through* us.

Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:1-2, 17-20)

What if, instead of seeing the lists we find in scripture as “to do” lists filled with condemnation and shame over the areas where you haven’t been able to make it work, we began to see them as reminders, as check engine lights for our soul, directing us into the Spirit’s expressions of Christ’s Life?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, **let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.** And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. (Hebrews 12:1-2a, emphasis added)

As we pay attention to these warning signs, offer up to Jesus these areas of resistance, and fix our eyes on him. Then we begin to keep pace with his Spirit as he seeks to express the Life of Christ through us.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25)

Jesus is alive in us, and he's inviting us to trust him deeply in ever-increasing areas of our lives. Maybe these check engine lights are areas where we haven't let him reign yet. Perhaps there are habitual thoughts and behaviors where we've settled for living according to the flesh instead of learning to depend on him. Could it be time to let him address these parts of your life? Is it time to allow yourselves to more fully experience and express his Life today?

But the reality that the problem often lies deeper below the surface. Where is the root? We'll look at that in-depth next chapter...

Journal

What would you identify as “check engine” lights in your life? What feedback are you getting — from the people in your life or your circumstances — that you need to start paying attention to?

How does God want you to deal honestly with those warning lights? What will it cost you to not deal honestly with those lights?

What truth might God want to use in your life to repair the problem and bring healing to you? Write down the verses or consult a friend to help you find verses that speak to each warning light.

Discuss

How does allowing others to “speak the truth in love” to you (Ephesians 4:15) create opportunities for personal spiritual growth?

What is at stake spiritually to live with superficial relationships? What do we lose when we are never fully honest with those close to us?

What has God been putting before you lately that you've been tempted to ignore?

Memory Verse

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:24-25)

Prayer

God, I confess there have been so many times that you've tried to nudge me to see my actions and observe that I am not in step with you. Help me to see what I have ignored. I give to you now the areas I have kept to myself, so that you might express your Life more fully through me. Teach me to attend to your Spirit moment by moment. In Jesus' name, amen.

4. WEEDS

Bottom Line: God invites us to co-labor with him as he stirs up the soil of our souls, replacing lies with truth.

Alicia loves mowing the lawn on a warm Saturday morning. It always reminds her of doing yard work with her dad when she was a girl. They would mow, edge, trim the bushes, fertilize, plant flowers, and spend hours pulling weeds by hand. Many Saturdays, Alicia and her dad would work outside for the better part of the day, trying to make theirs the neighborhood's "Yard of the Month." They never got the award, but the two of them always treasured their time together and the beauty they were able to create for their home and their neighborhood.

Yard work is hard but rewarding, and it requires consistent attention to keep weeds from growing and spreading. If you think about it, weeds are simply plants that we don't want to grow in a specific area — often because they will choke out what we actually want to grow there. They detract from the beauty of a garden, because they don't fit with the design of the gardener.

It's amazing how much faster weeds grow than anything else. Pulling weeds when they're little, especially in moist soil, typically isn't all that hard, even if it is time consuming. However, once you've decided to mow over them a few times, or you've just snapped the top off of them but left the roots, they can become quite difficult to remove. What would have taken a little tug previously now requires a spade or a shovel to be unearthed and put out of commission.

SOIL OF OUR SOULS

In each of our lives, there are areas that we've continued to hold onto, even though they are contrary to the design of the Gardener (John 15:1). If you've spent much time in church, in small groups or Bible studies, you may have a lot of knowledge *about* God and how he cares, but it's time to look deeper — beyond our intellectual body of knowledge. Even if you haven't spent much time in church, you know that there are things that hold you back from having the life you've hoped you would have. It's time to look at our belief systems, in order to see the weeds that have populated the soil of our souls.

What we *believe to be true* and what we *intellectually know* aren't always the same thing. We can study the Scriptures and know them by memory but still live as if they are not true in our lives. *Information* does not equate to *transformation*. More often than we might realize, what we believe to be true of God, ourselves, and our world show up in our behavior — in our side comments or our

body language or our tone of voice that reflects our expectations or in what we choose to overlook. It leaks out of us in ways we may not realize.

- Can you see some weeds growing in the soil of your soul?
- How do the weeds in your life reveal what you believe about yourself, your circumstances or God?

Before we begin to look for the answer to that question, it will be helpful to see how our belief system is formed. Our belief system is the collection of all of our beliefs and how they work together. You can think of it as a garden. To create a garden, you plant each individual plant in its place. As the gardener, you know what's in each section, intentionally planting everything where it needs to be. Stepping back to get a glimpse of the whole, each individual plant, flower, bush, and shrub work together to make a beautiful picture.

Through your life experiences, influences, and personality, you've developed a way of living according to beliefs you've determined are true. Stepping back, we can see how each of the individual beliefs come together to form your belief system and impact every area of your life.

THE DAMAGE OF WEEDS

Do you remember the parable of the sower? Jesus likened our hearts to soil in that parable, too. He described the truth of God's Word like seeds scattered on that soil. One of those soils had a weed problem, too:

“Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain.”

“The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown (...) Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”
(Mark 4:7, 14-15, 18-19)

Such weeds do serious damage, because they choke out the truth that God desires to sow in our lives. He earnestly desires our lives to be soil that receives his word and bears fruit for him — “some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown” (Mark 4:20). As the master gardener, he is constantly working to this end.

Meanwhile, the enemy has been at work in our circumstances to get as many weeds as he can into the garden of souls, so that we would live crippled, defeated, and afraid. As Jesus put it in John 10, “the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10a).

The enemy isn’t creative. He’s been doing the same thing since his interaction with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden — trying to convince humanity that they can be good enough without God, that you can’t trust God to be good, and that you can do better without him. The father of lies repeats the same fallacies today, trying to convince us that they are true. Before long, our belief system is filled with weeds, and we live like God isn’t good, perfect, kind, compassionate, or caring.

These lies choke out the truth in subtle ways. Some of your beliefs that you hold as true are actually lies that you’ve accepted as truth because of things people have said to you, things you have experienced or that have happened to you, and what you’ve thought of yourself. These lies are like weeds.

For instance, how would you describe your relationship with your earthly father?

Now describe your relationship with your heavenly Father. Don’t answer according to what you *intellectually* know; think about how you practically live each day. What do you actually believe about God as your heavenly Father?

SUPPLANTING WITH TRUTH

Spend a few moments looking at what the Bible actually says about God as our heavenly Father.

Ephesians 1:3-7; 2:4-5	John 16:27; 17:23	Zephaniah 3:17	Romans 15:7
Colossians 1:22	Romans 8:29	Philippians 1:6	John 14:6-10
1 John 4:7-10	John 1:18	Psalms 37:4	Matthew 6:26; 10:29-31
John 10:28-30	Psalms 103:12-13	Job 19:25	Isaiah 63:16

2 Corinthians 4:16	Nehemiah 9:31	Psalms 24:8	Revelation 1:8
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Do you see anything in what you wrote that aligns with what Scripture teaches is true about God the Father?

Do you see anything that you wrote that *doesn't* align with what Scripture teaches is true of him?

How do these false beliefs show up in your outlook on life (hint: think about what you say and how you respond to people)?

The truth revealed in Scripture is that God, our Father, is loving, caring, forgiving, compassionate, understanding, accepting, pursuing, righteous, and sovereign.

For God so **loved** the world that he **gave** his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal **life**. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to **save** the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (Jn 3:16-18, emphasis added)

God doesn't just love *the world*, he loves *you!* His love is on full display in and through Jesus, the only one who has ever been both fully God and fully man — the one sent by the Father to save us, that we would be delivered from condemnation, death, guilt, and bondage to sin.

CO-LABORING IN THE GARDEN

How do we pull the weeds out of the garden? How do we replace the lies with truth from God's Word?

We start by asking the Spirit to reveal the lies, then replace them with his truth. Often the lies we believe become apparent in our initial responses to situations, people, and adversity. Defensiveness, pride, fear, doubt, anger, resentment are all tell-tale signs that weeds are flourishing in our souls. They work against the teachability, humility, courage, faith, peace, and forgiveness that are marks of life in the Spirit.

God desires “truth in the innermost being” (Psalm 51:6, NASB), and he is in the business of revealing his wisdom to the deep places of our souls. God has several tools for unearthing these weeds in our lives. His sharpest and most skilled tool is the Bible.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
(Hebrews 4:12)

Learning more of God through his Word is vital for the believer. Instead of seeing this as a chore to do, it’s actually an invitation into deeper intimacy with our Creator. For some, reading big chunks of Scripture at a time is helpful; for others, reflecting for a while on a verse each day is most meaningful. Regardless of how you best process, as we read Scripture we’re engaging with a vibrant, living, everlasting God who has always been, always is, and always will be.

Another way to address these lies is in prayer.

Learning to pause, reflect, and talk with Jesus is a part of a vital relationship with the one who delights in us deeply. If you’d like to utilize a helpful tool for prayer, especially when you’re facing difficulties, uncovering lies in your belief system, and/or experiencing conflict in a relationship, there is a prayer guideline in **Appendix 1**.

As we cooperate with the Spirit’s revealing work, we begin to experience the freedom we were made for in Christ. As the weeds are removed, the garden of our belief system begins to flourish with Life. Lies leave us in bondage, but the truth sets us free.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

For many of us, we want all of the weeds removed immediately, but God our Father is a masterful, skilled, and brilliant gardener who is faithfully working in your life. You may not be experiencing everything you’ve hoped to experience in Christ today and you may feel like it’s taking forever to change, but God is faithful and he’s at work. He’s the one who began this work in you and he’s the

one who will carry it out to completion (Philippians 1:6). You can trust him. You can follow where he leads.

It's worth the time and attention to discover any lies you're holding onto in your belief system, because you weren't made to live enslaved to those lies. Even though it can be a difficult process that doesn't feel great, it's God's kindness and grace that you would recognize the lies you believe because he cares for you and didn't create you to live according to lies but according to truth.

Journal

Ask the Spirit which parts of your belief system are formed more out of your experiences (positive and negative) than out of God's Word. Write down the things that come to mind.

Where have you experienced freedom from lies as the Spirit has renewed your mind with truth?

Discuss

How would you describe your relationship with God our Father?

Lies often create blindspots our lives. How comfortable are you with other believers point these out to you if you know they have your best interest in mind?

What makes it difficult to let go of lies we've believed?

Memory Verse

"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

Prayer

O Lord, you have searched me and have known me. You desire truth in my inmost being. You know my deepest longings and all the ways I try to cope when I feel unsatisfied. By your Holy Spirit, do your deep work in my soul to uproot lies that I have believed about you, about myself, and about others, so that my life might be free to bear fruit. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bottom Line

God invites us to work with him as he stirs up the soil of our souls, replacing lies with truth.

CONDUITS

“Because God is love, the one who lives in love reaps the fruit of life from God. While still in this world, he even now breathes the air of resurrection.”

Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies* 46

5: FREE

Bottom Line: Through his work of salvation, Christ has freed us from sin, unto himself, and for Life in him.

Every summer during his college career, Kyle would travel to Southeast Asia and spend several weeks teaching English to a group of people who were oppressed, ostracized, and struggling to make it. In this specific location, they were disrespected simply because of who they were. Even the government treated them poorly. Many couldn't dream of a future that had any other possibilities beyond continued oppression.

As a part of Kyle's job, he wasn't merely teaching English in the classroom. They would have time outside of the class to teach English in a conversational manner, so the students would be able to learn academically and socially. Kyle developed some wonderful friendships that lasted for years.

During these conversational moments, Kyle and his team were often asked about their beliefs. He was blown away at their receptivity to the gospel, as soon as they heard him share about freedom in Christ.

For people who live with political freedom, it can be easy to take for granted the spiritual freedom that comes through Christ. But all of us have seen and known at one point in our lives the oppression that comes from being under sin. To be mastered by sin is to live under a cruel master, indeed.

There's something about freedom that draws us, because it's how humanity was designed to live: *Free*. That's why the redeeming work of Jesus is so important for our daily lives. Paul writes this truth like this, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1a). What Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection is powerful and dynamic. The freedom we have in him is complete, enduring, and it reaches to the deep places of our souls.

But freedom can mean so many different things. What exactly have we been freed *from*? What does that freedom *from* mean we are free *to do in its place*? Are we free unto ourselves, to be our own masters, or do we belong to another?

The truth is that through his work of salvation, Christ has freed us *from* sin, *unto* himself, and *for* Life in him.

Each aspect is important to keep in tension. Consider these extremes:

- If we forget we are free *from* sin, we will let it rule us.

- If we forget we are free *unto* Christ, we will seek to live independent of him (i.e. the flesh).
- If we forget we are free *for* Life in him, we will abuse our freedom and fall into slavery to new habits and vices that were never meant to rule us.

When we have all three components operating in our lives, we find the right balance that keeps us from falling back into slavery.

FREED FROM SIN

As Paul wrote in Galatians 1:4, Jesus has “rescued us from this present evil age,” liberating us when he gave himself for us. Before we are made new in Christ, we are slaves to sin and can choose no other path for our lives. But when Christ accomplished forgiveness on the cross, he broke the power of sin. The moment we come to Christ for the first time and put our trust in him, we become united with him spiritually. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, our human spirits become joined with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Here’s how the Apostle Paul explains it:

Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. (Romans 6:3-7)

Every day, every breath, and every thought we are invited to live free in Christ from the power of sin. The freedom we have in Christ actually gives us the ability to choose him over that which once “hampered and held [us] ensnared” (Galatians 5:1, Amplified Version).

In order to see a little of what we’ve been set free *from*, take some time to read the following passages and write down what you see about freedom:

Acts 13:38-39

1 John 4:10

Romans 8:1

Colossians 2:13-14

Romans 8:1

John 5:24

What joy we experience in our faith when we fully realize we've been set free from guilt, condemnation, the law of sin and death as well as the requirements of the Law of Moses, and the penalty of sin and eternal death. It's like being able to breathe for the first time!

And as we live in this freedom *from* sin, our lives become a testimony to the power of Christ at work in us. No other name, no other power, no other source can bring us freedom from the power of sin and death. Only Jesus can do that. When we experience his freeing power at work in our lives, the change is evident to the people around us. Your life is a testimony to the power of the gospel! This is your story of Christ's rescue, and it's worth sharing! God can use your story to bring more people to trust in his love and the freedom Christ offers.

FREE UNTO CHRIST

We weren't only set free *from* sin and death, we are also set free *unto* Christ! In Romans 6:8-11, we read this truth:

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. **The death he**

died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (emphasis added)

We count ourselves *dead to sin* because we've been made alive in Christ! We are free *from* sin and free *unto* Christ. Paul says this truth like this in his letter to the Galatians:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!
(Galatians 2:20)

We have been made "alive to God in Christ Jesus" so that we now live each moment in the reality of the indwelling Christ. We are free to delight in God as he delights in us.

Think about how much God has given to make you his own! God the Father gave his Son, the most special person to him. God the Son gave his very life unto death, and was raised back to life. God the Spirit gives his constant presence, having been united in some mystical way with our own human spirits. This giving, loving God leads us tenderly and humbly, so that we might experience that which is true freedom: Responding to the Lord of Life and giving him all that we are.

Read the following verses and write out what you read about living unto God:

Romans 6:13

1 Peter 1:8-9

Colossians 3:15-17

Our life begins in Christ and he is our source. This Jesus, the Lover of our souls, accomplished freedom for us because he did what we could never do. You've been set free to delight in the one who knows you perfectly and loves you perfectly. He's the one you were made for and in him you can fully realize your purpose.

As we live in a place where we are aware of the love of our God, we begin to see that his rule in our lives is caring and intimate; and he desires that which is ultimately our highest good.

In this way, we are liberated unto a life that is entirely available to God, open to him, and ready to respond as he leads. No other way of living can begin to compare. Nothing else can bring freedom of this kind.

FREED FOR LIFE IN HIM

In Christ we are free not only from sin and unto Christ, but also for Life in him. Contrary to what the world will tell us, there is great freedom in walking in God's way. He is the one who designed life, and he knows what is best for how we should live. In his love, he has made an overwhelming provision for us to walk in his way — his indwelling Holy Spirit. Because of our union with him and our availability to him moment by moment, we have inner power to live according to what is good and right.

Obedying God leads to a life of freedom. For example, speaking truth frees us from the confusion and pain of living lies. Forgiving others frees us from the weight of resentment. Giving thanks for his provision frees us from doubt and fear. Worshipping him above all else frees us from co-dependence on people and things that can't fill our heart's deepest longings. The list could go on...

One of the clearest expressions of this freedom is a heartfelt desire to serve others. It flows from the Life of Christ within, who was himself the divine model of servanthood.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. (Galatians 5:13)

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Being set free *unto* Christ means we've also been set free *for* obedience, just as Christ himself obeyed (see Philippians 2:8-10). This service does not lead to works *for* God as if we are trying to measure up or become pleasing to him. This service is the natural outworking of what God has already worked in us (Ephesians 2:12-13).

As you read the following verses, see what God says about being free to walk in his way and to serve others.

John 13:12-17; 34-35

1 Peter 1:3, 13-15

Philippians 2:12

While this isn't an exhaustive list of what Jesus accomplished for us and what has happened to us through salvation, the picture is clear: We aren't who we used to be, and the freedom we were made to enjoy is bigger and more powerful than the lure of sin trying to hook us back into bondage.

This is what he's done in you and how he's called you to live: in full dependence on him, walking in Christ-confidence as he shines in you, flooding your soul with his Life that you would think, feel, and choose differently, shining through your body and the life you live into the darkness of this world. No longer controlled by the flesh or the sin around us, we are now free in Christ — empowered by the Spirit to live in alignment with who we are in him and who he is in us, that our outward lives would look more and more like the inward reality of our Life in Christ.

As Jesus continues his earthly ministry in and through us, he has freed us to love one another, that we may fully function as the family of God. We are free to offer the kind of love that is found in God and that can only come from him — a sacrificial love that seeks the good of another. It's the kind of love that motivates us to live differently with those whom he's placed in our lives.

This is freedom.

...Freedom from sin, freedom unto Christ, freedom for Life in him, expressed in righteousness, obedience, faithfulness, and holiness. And freedom to love — with God's love pouring in us and through us to the world around us, as light in the darkness. As Kyle discovered in Southeast Asia, this kind of freedom draws in the unbelieving world as they see in us the light of Christ.

Friends, it truly is for freedom that we've been set free!

Journal

What part(s) of your life do you want to offer to God, as one who is free unto Christ?

What section of this chapter is the most challenging for you to embrace? Why?

How does freedom in Christ differ from what the world defines as freedom? How is it better?

Discuss

Why is knowing our freedom in Christ so critical for our daily lives? How does it change relationships, work, or leisure time?

How might you now describe freedom in Christ to those around you, that his light would shine into the darkness?

Memory Verse

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. (Galatians 5:13)

Prayer

God, you have set me free! Thank you that you have freed me from sin and from finding my righteousness in the Law. Thank you that I am free to live unto you. Thank you that you have freed me for serving others in love. Help me to experience your joy as I lay down my own agenda to care for the needs of the people you've placed in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

6: FAMILY

Bottom Line: As God's beloved children, we are in union with Jesus and called to live in unity with one another.

One of the best sights to see at the park are those big families, all wearing the same shirts that say "Family Reunion" with their family name and year on them. It's so fun to see a family that is intentional about getting together, deepening their relationship with one another, and encouraging one another no matter what the previous year held for them or what the upcoming year might bring. There's so much history between them and a deep love that compels them to gather together.

It's beautiful because they clearly belong to each other. They're so fond of each other that they want to identify with one another in public. Even though it may be a bit cheesy, it's family. And family matters.

When they get together, all dressed in the same shirts, they are not only making sure everyone knows they belong, they are making a statement to everyone around them — they know who they are and they're happy everyone to know who they are, as well.

For many of us, family is an incredible picture of stability, love, unity, faithfulness, and joy. For many of us, family is an incredibly painful picture of conflict, instability, hurts, disappointments, and division.

How would you describe your family?

By grace through faith, we are adopted into God's family (Ephesians 1:5, Ephesians 2:8). We may not have received t-shirts to wear, but we are made new on the inside and his Life now connects us, not only with God but with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We belong to him and are deeply connected to one another.

To drive this truth home, God gave these words to Paul, that he would write them to the churches in Corinth, Rome, and Philippi:

I appeal to you, **brothers and sisters**, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

So, my **brothers and sisters**, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:4)

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

Further, my **brothers and sisters**, rejoice in the Lord!! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. (Philippians 3:1)

Paul is writing that, as believers, we are in union with Christ and in unity with one another. We belong in God's family as adopted children — dearly loved.

- What has been your experience with your brothers and sisters in Christ?
- How has unity and disunity in God's family affected your sense of spiritual stability?

TEARING DOWN DIVISIONS

Jesus declared that love and unity among believers would serve as proof to the outside world that the gospel is true (John 13:34-35; 17:20-23). If you've ever heard a message that elevates one group of Christians over another, describing it as superior (whether it's a culture, a race, a political party, or a nation), then you've heard a different gospel than the gospel of grace. Christ came to tear down divisions and make us one spiritual temple where God is worshiped.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups [Jews and Gentiles] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:14-18)

Jesus brings peace, because he is our peace. His peace is a soulful peace that quiets the attacks of the enemy in our minds where he replays lies as the Spirit whispers the truth to remind us of who we are in him. His peace is a physical peace that removes division, hatred, bigotry, and arrogance.

It is vital for us, as believers, to ask God to show us our blindspots and to lead us into the truth in every area of our lives. As Christ lives in us, he wants to express his Life through us with other believers. This requires grace, forgiveness, and humility.

- Is there any person that you see differently than how God sees them?
- Is there any groups of people that you see differently than how God sees them?
- Would you be willing to ask God for his perspective?

COMING TOGETHER

When we realize that our life begins in Christ, that he is our Source for Life, and we begin to live from him in our daily lives, we will begin to experience a different way of living that leads to a different way of interacting with one another. We will begin to experience the continuation of Jesus' earthly ministry in our own lives, through our lives in our relationships with the family of God and the world around us.

In Hebrews, God teaches us not only that we are brothers and sisters, but we belong to him and with him, and that affects our relationships with one another.

Therefore, **brothers and sisters**, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up on meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

After reading those verses, consider these questions:

- What would it look like if we, as brothers and sisters, asked Jesus to continue his ministry through us by leading us to act and speak for the benefit of those around us?
- Why do you think it's important to not give up on meeting together?

Many of Paul's letters to churches give us insight into what this will look like when we begin to choose to start with Christ in our relationship with one another.

Take a few moments to look up the following verses and write out what you see in how we would live differently as we allow Jesus to flow through us to one another.

Ephesians 2:11-22

Ephesians 4:17-32

Colossians 3:9-17

Romans 13:11-13

The picture painted through Scripture is one of love, honor, unity, understanding, boldness, patience, kindness, faithfulness, peace, and harmony – a lot like the fruit of the Spirit on display within the family of God.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, **serve one another humbly in love**. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (Galatians 5:13-15)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. **Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit**. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (Galatians 5:22-26)

HUMILITY AND SERVICE

We are unified with one another because we've been united with Christ in the core of our beings and it's his desire to lovingly serve others humbly through us. There's a beautiful passage in Philippians 2 where Jesus is described as being humble and obedient and we are encouraged to treat one another with the same mindset as Christ.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, **he made himself nothing** by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he **humbled himself by becoming obedient to death** – even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Paul, after describing Jesus in such a powerfully beautiful way, connects who Jesus is to how we are called to live together in the family of God.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed - not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence - continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is **God who works in you to will and to act** in order to fulfill his good purpose. (Philippians 2:12-13)

As we move with the work of Christ within us, we will see him leading us into humility and service that leads to peace. God's will in each one of us is that we love one another and strive for unity. Unity is not easy, but it is always worth it – Jesus prayed that we would be one. The result, as he said to the Father in John 17, “that the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (17:23).

There is a larger implication on our unity with the family of God beyond our own relational peace. If we can walk in unity, communing with one another in the other-worldly love of Christ, the on-looking world will have proof positive that Jesus was who he said he was! Because the love of Christ leads us into service and humility that produces peace, and as we express this love it creates a sharp contrast to the pride and power-grab the world employs to get ahead in life.

This is the work Christ wants to do in us and through us as he carries out his earthly ministry among his people. In word and deed we bridge discord, tear down pride, and “consider others as more important” (Philippians 2:4) in a way that brings the reign of Christ to the earth. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45). This is the love of Christ: giving, humble, seeking the good of the other. It is a love unlike anything the world can produce.

But Christ alone is our source, even when it comes to humility, service, and peace. Even here, the goal isn't fruit that we squeeze out of ourselves through our own self-discipline or religious devotion. No, it must be an overflow of the Life of Christ in us. Streams of living water, remember? The key isn't taking a rule and smashing it in your soul until you act this way; it's about an inner yielding to the presence of Christ in union with your own human spirit. He is leading each one of us into this... The question is, are you available to him?

Take a minute now to pay attention to his Spirit, who is at work within you. Be still and become aware of his presence in your life. How does he want to lead you into humility, service, and the pathway of peace?

At salvation, we have peace with God and peace in God. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) As we continue to discover that he's trustworthy and learn the life of dependence, we begin to see others differently. We begin to see that what we actually desire is to live at peace with one another.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:17-18)

In the family of God, we are deeply united together because we are in union with Jesus. He is still doing what he did during his earthly ministry — reconciling the world to himself, and he's chosen to continue his ministry through you (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). In this way, we together bear fruit unto the renown of Jesus, becoming a physical proof that the Father sent the Son.

Brothers and sisters, live *aware* of him — his Life in you — and *available* to him that you would experience his Life through you — for the benefit of the family of God and to the world around you.

Journal

How is the life of Christian unity opposite of the ways the world tells us to live life?

How is Christ leading you into unity with other believers? Do you need to pursue reconciliation with any one person or a group of people?

What would it mean for you to live fully aware of Christ in you and available for him to live through you in your daily life?

Discuss

Why do you think it's important to recognize we are not just in union with Christ but in unity with one another in Christ?

What was your family of origin like? How does it inform — for better and for worse — what it looks like for you to be part of the family of God?

Think of some specific people in your life, or consider people groups with whom you may have experienced disunity. How would seeing other believers as brothers and sisters in Christ change how you relate with them?

Memory Verse

I appeal to you, **brothers and sisters**, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Prayer

God, I confess that too often I get sideways and look for what's wrong with other believers; too often I get distracted on the things that divide us and miss the One that unites us. By your Spirit, lead me into heartfelt unity with my fellow believers. Teach me to walk in Christ's love so that our unity presents a strong testimony of your goodness to the unbelieving world around us. For your glory and our good, amen.

What's Next?

You did it! As you've been working through this devotional, our prayer is that God has revealed himself to you throughout the process. What you've studied is valuable information, but the Spirit is the one who transforms by renewing your mind with truth (Romans 12:2). And that is exactly why we were so excited to write this and for you to walk through it — so the Spirit could use this to remind you of the truth and lead you to a life of increasing dependence on him.

Hopefully, you've done this study with someone. If you didn't, we strongly encourage you to do so, because God often uses others to reveal more of himself to us, as well as to reveal lies we believe that we may be blind to ourselves.

Regardless of how you went through the study this time, take a few moments to ask God whom he would like you to invite to go through this study. Can you imagine how wonderful it would be if everyone invited a friend or loved one to do this study with them? The conversations could lead to life transformation as you both discover more about your life in Christ.

So please ask the Spirit to open your eyes to those he is prompting you to reach out to, to connect with through this study. Then, in dependence on him, invite them and see what he does!

Appendix 1: Centering Prayer Exercise

Prayer tool for specific situational or relational struggles.

In a Quiet Moment

When you have time to get alone with God:

1. **Write out** everything you're thinking and feeling about the situation or person. Don't hold back — it doesn't need to be polished, just honest.

2. **Look over** everything you just wrote down and ask God to show you the deeper issues, the root of the problem.

3. **Offer** it all to God and ask him for his perspective about:

- Yourself
- The other person/people
- The situation

4. **Stop.** Ask the Spirit to speak into your thoughts, renewing your mind with Truth. Once you begin to have new thoughts, write them down. It's a great way to learn the voice of the Spirit!

5. **Walk** in the truth he reveals!

On the Go

If you don't have time to get alone:

1. **Ask** God to give you his perspective about:

- Yourself
- The other person/people
- The situation

2. **Breathe** before you speak. Be reminded that he is your source – your breath of Life.

3. **Ask** him to speak through you, and to hold your tongue from saying things that aren't from him.

As soon as you have the time, choose to spend it with God and get to the root of the problem.

Appendix 2: Coping in the Flesh

When we choose to live independent of God in our daily lives, we give control over to the flesh, in order to cope or deal with life and the successes and failures that we experience. Simply defined, the flesh is living independent of God. When we choose to try to find our life, worth, identity, and value in our gifts, abilities, personality, strengths, weaknesses, heritage, accomplishments, failures, popularity, or any other thing apart from Christ, we are choosing the flesh. It's the temptation for all who believe to go back to living independent of Christ, to be lord of our own lives.

In Galatians 5:1, Paul said it like this, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1).

Depending on our upbringing and the experiences that we've had in our lives, we tend to gravitate to one of two types of flesh. The 1) positively-influenced flesh, or 2) negatively-influenced flesh. Even in merely reading the two types, you might already have a feeling of which you would relate with more.

Positively-influenced flesh is difficult to spot because it's socially acceptable flesh and seems to be good. In fact, it is good. But we must remember that, in the Garden, there was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Even "good" was on the wrong tree — the tree from which God informed Adam and Eve to not eat.

Positively-influenced flesh operates under the belief that "I can." Many churches are filled with positively-influenced fleshers signing up to serve because they can do it and they can do it well. There could even be great energy and excitement around their activities, but they are not operating out of a place of dependence and trust on God, but rather on themselves and what they hope to experience through their activity is acceptance, respect, love, and soul-satisfying praise that they are good enough.

Negatively-influenced flesh is a little easier to identify. People with a propensity for this type of flesh are a bit more difficult to be around, are quick to point out the problems in their life, and are more readily at the place of "giving up." Negatively-influenced flesh operates under the belief that "I can't."

The main thing to remember as you process through each flesh pattern, is that both are ultimately bankrupt and are not how you were intended to live. Whether it looks good or not, capable or incapable, acceptable or rejectable — the reality is that both are void of the Life you were intended to experience and are a way the enemy tries to keep you trapped even though you're free.

The following are a few lists that may help you better identify which type of flesh you might favor in your life. Whether you recognize more negatively-influenced flesh patterns in your life or positively-influenced flesh patterns, the end result for operating in the flesh is conflict and frustration in your life and relationships.

Remember, this list isn't identifying who you are, but rather the flesh pattern you gravitate to so that you can better recognize, by the enlightenment of the Spirit, when you are operating independently of God and offer that to him quicker than you have before.

You were made for a life of total dependence on Jesus, where you are experiencing his abundant Life in this world, in the mundane, ordinary, and spectacular. You belong to him. As you read through the following beliefs, circle what you recognize most in your life.

Negatively-Influenced Flesh Pattern Beliefs:

- I'm not as good as others.
- I don't fit in.
- I'll never find where I belong.
- Nobody likes me.
- God is displeased with me.
- God doesn't care about me.
- I can't find happiness.
- Others are better than me.
- I'm left out.
- You can't trust anyone.
- God is out to get me.
- I'll never measure up.

Negatively-Influenced Flesh Pattern Common Emotions:

- Anxiety
- Worthlessness
- Unlovable
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Insecure
- Inadequate
- Inferior
- Anger

Negatively-Influenced Flesh Pattern**Expression:**

- Self-pity
- Depression
- Escapism
- Passivity
- Indulgence
- Denial
- Complacency
- Overly Responsible
- Hypersensitivity
- Sulking
- Revenge
- Fear
- Distrust
- Expect the worst
- Perfectionism
- Controlling
- Pride
- Anxiety
- Codependency

Positively-Influenced Flesh Pattern Beliefs:

- I am important.
- I am special.
- People need me.
- I deserve all that life has to offer.
- Life is promising.
- I am loved and accepted.
- I can please God and others.
- God helps those who help themselves.
- I need to be strong and perform well.
- Others need me.
- God needs me.
- I am competent.
- I can handle it.
- I can do it.
- It's not that hard.
- Things aren't that bad, they could be worse.

Positively-Influenced Flesh Pattern Common Emotions*

- Strong
- Confident
- Respected
- Loved
- Appreciated
- Encouraged
- Worthy
- Secure
- Competent
- Happy

*These emotions prevail **only to the degree** that circumstances and relationships support them.

Positively-Influenced Flesh Pattern Expression:

- Pride
- Self-righteous
- Overly responsible
- Workaholism
- Controlling
- Intolerance
- Perfectionism
- Independence
- Conceited
- Legalism
- Performing

Appendix 3:

What do you do after you've failed?

Take every thought captive.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

PRAYER

Father, I have failed and I am sorry. Please take my feelings and my thoughts and replace them with your feelings and thoughts about this and about me. Please guard my mind and heart from the slideshow of failure that runs to keep me condemned. Reveal to me any blindspots and lies that I'm believing and renew my mind with Truth.

Turn to Scripture to fill your mind with truth.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:1-3)

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. (Philippians 4:8)

PRAYER

I am yours, including my mind. Please move my thoughts off of me and onto you. I look to you and want to be consumed with thoughts of you.

Trust that you are known and loved by God.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you[a] free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1)

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

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:12-13)

PRAYER

Father, I believe that you know me and love me and that everything has changed because of that reality. I choose to believe that I don't have it all figured out right now, and never will until I'm with you, face-to-face. Thank you for your love and thank you for changing me.

Choose to believe him and walk in victory.

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:6-7)

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, you are my Source of Life, and I belong to you. Remind me, today, to start with you and keep my heart and mind focused on you today. Thank you for your unfailing love for me and for making me new. I choose you and will walk by faith, trusting you more than I trust anything or anyone else.