**Lesson 1: Spiritual Warfare**

**Prayer and Fasting**

The real intent of fasting and praying is to set the oppressed free. Breaking the cycle of condemnation is the victory in spiritual warfare.  Look at Isaiah 58:6 - 9:

*[Rather] is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every [enslaving] yoke?*  ***7****Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house—when you see the naked, that you cover him, and that you hide not yourself from [the needs of] your own flesh and blood?****8****Then shall your light break forth like the morning, and your healing (your restoration and the power of a new life) shall spring forth speedily; your righteousness (your rightness, your justice, and your right relationship with God) shall go before you [conducting you to peace and prosperity], and the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.****9****Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, Here I am. If you take away from your midst yokes of oppression [wherever you find them], the finger pointed in scorn [toward the oppressed or the godly], and every form of false, harsh, unjust, and wicked speaking...*The blame game is an easy game to play when facing broken relationships.  "He did this. Why can't he stop that?"  Or "I can't believe she said that! That person is such a problem!"  The person is not the problem.  The problem is the problem.  And you are not your diagnosis.  Being depressed does not label you 'depression'.  Just because you have a problem does not mean you are the problem.  If you are depressed, oppressed or know someone who is, then there is a problem.  Blaming a person including blaming yourself is what the devil wants you to do.  Then he can oppress that person or yourself by keeping you in the box of condemnation.  Pointing the finger is what the devil does.  Feeding and healing the broken heart, mind and body is what Jesus does.  He is bringing into freedom.  He is bringing you into a place of joyful freedom!

***10****And if you pour out that with which you sustain your own life for the hungry and satisfy the need of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in darkness, and your obscurity and gloom become like the noonday.****11****And the Lord shall guide you continually and satisfy you in drought and in dry places and make strong your bones. And you shall be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters fail not.****12****And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of [buildings that have laid waste for] many generations; and you shall be called Repairer of the Breach, Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.****13****If you turn away your foot from [traveling unduly on] the Sabbath, from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a [spiritual] delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor Him and it, not going your own way or seeking or finding your own pleasure or speaking with your own [idle] words,****14****Then will you delight yourself in the Lord, and I will make you to ride on the high places of the earth, and I will feed you with the heritage [promised for you] of Jacob your father; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.*

**What are you filled with?**

What you are filled with in the midst of the battle determines your breakthrough. What you are filled with determines the outcome of the battle. When you are filled with the Word, your may be stripped of a lot of peripheral qualities, but the essence of who you are will remain intact because of His Word in your heart.

Jesus said, “It is enough.” The word enough here in the Greek is *hikanos* (hik-an-os’) meaning to arrive or competent (as if coming in season), able + content, enough, good, great, large, long (while) many, meet, much, security, sore, sufficient, worth.

In 1 Chronicles 21, the word “enough” is the Hebrew word *rab* meaning (abundant in quantity, size, age, number, rank, quality); abound as in abundance, captain, elder, enough, exceedingly, full, great, increase, long enough as in time, mighty, too much, multiply, plenteous, populous, suffice.

In both accounts, God is saying, enough is enough. All spiritual warfare has an end. It does not go on forever. Only the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God goes on forever. This is why when you are filled with His Word, the breakthrough comes and you will still stand. Eph 6: 13

Be filled with the knowledge of the Lord’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding! Col 1:9 Do this by staying in the Word. Look at Psalm 56: *What time I am afraid, I will have confidence in and put my trust and reliance in You. ~ You number and record my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle—are they not in Your book?* ***9****Then shall my enemies turn back in the day that I cry out; this I know, for God is for me.* ***10****In God, Whose word I praise, in the Lord, Whose word I praise,* ***11****In God have I put my trust and confident reliance; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?* ***12****Your vows are upon me, O God; I will render praise to You and give You thank offerings.* ***13****For You have delivered my life from death, yes, and my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life and of the living. Psa 56:3, 8-13*

Don’t despair. It’s normal to have despair, but destructive to stay in it. Despair is only a storm cloud of emotion that covers the sun. Keep pushing through the storm of despair. It will end and you will see the sun! The only way I know how to get through despair is to face whatever strongholds are going on in my heart that cause so much pain, cry and work through it, talk with God first, then with safe friends and pray pray pray pray pray.

Jesus knows your every tear. He stores them in a bottle! They are precious to Him. He knows what you are going through. You are more broken than you’ll ever know, yet more loved by Him than you can possible imagine!!! In John 1:1 Jesus is the Word. When you substitute in v 13 You for the Word, His Word delivers you from death, His Word keeps your feet from falling so that you may walk before Him in the light of life and of the living.

**Jesus will always be enough when you are filled with Him.**

Jesus is the I AM.. In John 8:58: *Jesus replied, I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, before Abraham was born, I Am.* Greek: ego – I (only expressed when emphatic) –eimi – I exist – ( used only when emphatic). In Exodus 3:14 God spoke to Moses: I AM THAT I AM - Hayah (haw-yaw) “to breathe” is a Hebrew verb meaning ‘to exist’, to become, to come to pass, to be done to happen, to be finished. It literally means ‘I am He Who Is’ or ‘I am He Who exists’. The Septuagint – the oldest Greek version of the OT said to have been translated by Jewish scholars - translates to ego eimi – the same words Jesus used in describing Who He Is.

In John 18:6 *When Jesus said to them, I am He, they went backwards (drew back, lurched backward) and fell to the ground.* Jesus said, “Ego eimi” – I exist. The people are literally being blown away by the Breath of Life!

What did we see today in Romans 9:5? Amen. So let it be. The first recorded words of Jesus in the NT are let it be. It is proper to fulfill for us to fulfill all righteousness, when John hesitated to baptized Him. So be it! Like when Jesus breathed His last, It is finished. Amen. So be it. Jesus is God. From Ex 3:14 to Rev 3:14!! *And to the angel (messenger) of the assembly (church) in Laodicea write: These are the words of the* ***Amen****, the trusty and faithful and true Witness, the Origin and* ***Beginning*** *and Author of God’s creation.*

B ecause

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E very Time!!!

**Lesson 2: Fear**

**Fear God Not Man**

Fearing God will prove to be a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord is kept safe! Proverbs 29:5 was one of the most significant Scriptures I ever memorized. Probably because I am such a people pleaser. Every time I go to plan my study notes, do you know what happens? I end up having to live it out. And it is a painful process. Another Scripture I memorized probably 30 years ago was Psalm 119:71: It was good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes. When I was probably in the fifth grades some of my friends used to think I was so nice it might not be real. Oh you’re not REALLY that nice! You’re a fake! You’re fakey. No one is THAT nice!!! I’m not always nice, but I do love people and I wanted to please everyone. Wanted to be teacher’s pet, which my daughter laughs at because she is so independent. But I also grew up in an alcoholic family system and being “nice” was survival. Speaking my mind was not tolerated. It was through my relationship with Jesus that I finally felt safe enough to start addressing childhood issues that were no longer serving me well. Good therapy, Al Anon and wonderful friends who knew the Lord were the support I needed to heal, be set free, grow and mature.

In this week's lesson on Fear, I had to ask myself, am I letting go of all worldly fear and replacing it with Godly fear that brings life?  Worldly fear or fear of man for me has been like an old thin worn blanket filled with so many holes it no longer keeps me warm in a cold world.  It may have worked, helping me to survive a dysfunctional relationship as a child, but has since lost its effectiveness. It is now a familiar spirit that I have to face and say, "No more!"  When I replace fear of man for a Godly fear, God not only gives me a new soft warm blanket, but He places me a welcoming room that fills my heart with joy, hope and freedom, meeting my every need with confidence. Worldly fear blows in from the outside while Godly fear is born in your spirit. As you trust Jesus, nothing can take it away.

*The reverent and worshipful fear of the Lord is the beginning (the chief and choice part of Wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight and understanding.*

*Prov 9:10*

When we fear the One Who has power over life and death, we are held safe in the merciful hands of a loving God Who protects us.  I was so excited to share with you the October 12 devotional "Hearing God" by Lory Basham Jones. She takes it a step further. It’s not just fear of man that’s a snare. It’s fear itself.

***Fear Is A Snare***

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.  2 Tim 1:7

*Oh Lord, help me to serve You with a clear conscience, casting down all fear: I know that Your gifts are power, love and sound-mindedness.*

The spirit of fear brings with it a characteristic which causes one to rise up in pride to defend it or excuse it.  Be not deceived!  Fear of people is a snare; fear of fear is a snare.  Only godly awe is freeing and liberating.  Therefore, let Me persuade you to commit everything, every care, to Me.  Then hold fast, not by fleshly grit, but by Holy Spirit free access to your spirit.  Break through into a new, wide place.  Trust Me.  I make everything work together for good for those who love andy trust Me.  I have said it, and it is so!  (Read 2 Timothy 1:6-12; Romans 8:28)

*That is why I would remind you to stir up (rekindle the embers of, fan the flame of, and keep burning) the [gracious] gift of God, [the inner fire] that is in you by means of the laying on of my hands [with those of the elders at your ordination].**For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.**Do not blush or be ashamed then, to testify to and for our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for His sake, but [with me] take your share of the suffering [to which the preaching] of the Gospel [may expose you, and do it] in the power of God.**[For it is He] Who delivered and saved us and called us with a calling in itself holy and leading to holiness [to a life of consecration, a vocation of holiness]; [He did it] not because of anything of merit that we have done, but because of and to further His own purpose and grace (unmerited favor) which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began [eternal ages ago].**[It is that purpose and grace] which He now has made known and has fully disclosed and made real [to us] through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, Who annulled death and made it of no effect and brought life and immortality (immunity from eternal death) to light through the Gospel.**For [the proclaiming of] this [Gospel] I was appointed a herald (preacher) and an apostle (special messenger) and a teacher of the Gentiles.**And this is why I am suffering as I do. Still I am not ashamed, for I know (perceive, have knowledge of, and am acquainted with) Him Whom I have believed (adhered to and trusted in and relied on), and I am [positively] persuaded that He is able to guard and keep that which has been entrusted to me and which I have committed [to Him] until that day.  ~   We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor] all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to and for those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose.  2 Tim 1:6-12; Rom 8:28 Amp*

This study's focus was more on how to love God rather than fear God.  If you had a bad dad concept, you may need healing in order to have a good God concept. As I experienced firsthand over and over God's faithfulness, trusting Him even when I was afraid, my God concept, my idea of Who God is, changed from thinking of God as a mean person to thinking of God as a good, kind Father.  Fearing God is the premise of all reverence toward our heavenly Father. *“You shall have no other gods before me.  “You shall not make for yourselves an idol, nor any image of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:  you shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them, for I, Yahweh your God, am a jealous God..."  Exodus 20:3-5a*

Yet loving God is the premise of God's yearning that our hearts might turn toward Him.  *Jesus said to him,  “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’   This is the first and great commandment.  A second likewise is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’   The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40*

**BIG God Big Strength**

How many here today feel like you are under attack? So many of us are feeling attack! Let me tell you something, it’s not the attack that counts. Do you know what God’s Words says? *If you falter in a time of trouble,     how small is your strength! Prov 24:10*  It’s the push that matters!!! Trials are going to happen. We live in a fallen world. Pushing back is what makes you strong!!! If you feel sorry for the little caterpillar and open the cocoon for him, he will die. He has to fight to get out in order to become a butterfly.

Sometimes you have to fight not just to work through your trial, but more importantly, overcome your attitude. Your attitude can be your best friend or your worst enemy. What will it be? It’s up to you! We serve a BIG God Who is BIGGER than anything we are facing today. Go on and LIVE. CONFESS His Word out loud. Start stomping around: Proverbs 14:26: ***Whoever fears the Lord has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge!!!!*** Deu 3:22 ***You shall not fear them, for the Lord your God shall fight for you.*** Do you think I practiced this last night for today?! The reason I do it so well is because I have done this for years and years!!! I believe this for myself, for my children, for my husband, for my loved ones, for my friends, for my pastor, for my church, for each of you!!!! The devil is a defeated and conquered foe.

**Lesson 3: Relationships**

**God First in Good Relationships**

There are 3 priorities in good relationships. God first. Friend second. Circumstances last. When these priorities are out of whack, there will be contention. Putting God first is the premise of all healthy relationships because everything else will follow. I learned to put God first this week by living out this lesson.

Once again, in preparing for this lesson, God had me doing more living it out than studying it.  When I asked Him why, He responded, *"Have you learned your lesson?*"  God is so smart!  He knows good lessons in life are better caught than taught.  You've got to live out the lesson if you truly want to learn it.

God showed me how to put Him first by facing my own inventory list to keep my relationship healthy. Upset by what seemed to be a confusing issue, I really felt like I was right.  But I stopped my own little agenda justification long enough to pray and seek God’s perspective.  The Holy Spirit brought to light some character defects in my own heart that I had to take responsibility for.  So I repented, asked God for forgiveness and the other person.  He brought freedom to me, to our relationship and the issue.  I learned at a deeper level that sometimes I need a little reality check because often my offense is misunderstanding rather than a valid wrong.

My pastor shared years ago, “Sometimes I need to say I’m sorry even when I am not wrong to maintain relationship.” How wise that he understood that relationship is more important than the issue. As I learned in Al Anon, is it more important to be right… or to be happy? Take the blame, get the blessing! Put God first. Good relationship will follow.

Relationship is more important than activity, sports, church or business or any other circumstance. Stay honest, listen, be kind, have fun, be consistent, learn to let offense roll off your back. Freely give what God freely gave you – forgiveness! R T Kendell says 90% of all people you will forgive don’t even know they did something wrong.

**The Problem is The Problem**

The truth from a friend may feel miserable at first, but it sets you free if you are willing to let it. It’s about the problem, not about the person. The problem is the problem. Putting principles above personalities sets you free from the problem and free to enjoy the wonderful relationships God gives you.

When I put myself first, 2 things happen. I become a problem, and my world starts to get smaller. Like the Russian doll, it gets bigger or smaller depending on whether you go inside yourself and get smaller or go outside yourself and get bigger. When I love God and put Him first, I will learn to love myself because I am filled with His love. As I learn to love myself, God’s love in me naturally reaches out to others desiring loving connection.

I learned in Al Anon, I am the problem and I am the solution. Some say, well God is the solution. Yes He is, but that puts everything on God which opens the door to saying God is the problem and not taking personal responsibility. This is about self control. God is already in control. He won’t ever ride over your will or do for you what He’s given you to do. He is not co dependent!

**Good God Good Relationships**

Good relationships reflect God’s nature. This is why I love 1 Peter 4:7-11 *But the end and culmination of all things has now come near; keep sound minded and self-restrained and alert therefore for [the practice of] prayer.*

***8****Above all things have intense and unfailing love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins [forgives and disregards the offenses of others].*

***9****Practice hospitality to one another (those of the household of faith). [Be hospitable, be a lover of strangers, with brotherly affection for the unknown guests, the foreigners, the poor, and all others who come your way who are of Christ’s body.] And [in each instance] do it ungrudgingly (cordially and graciously, without complaining but as representing Him).*

***10****As each of you has received a gift (a particular spiritual talent, a gracious divine endowment), employ it for one another as [befits] good trustees of God’s many-sided grace [faithful stewards of the extremely diverse powers and gifts granted to Christians by unmerited favor].*

***11****Whoever speaks, [let him do it as one who utters] oracles of God; whoever renders service, [let him do it] as with the strength which God furnishes abundantly, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ (the Messiah). To Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever (through endless ages). Amen (so be it).*

Verse 7 says be sober minded, use self control or take personal responsibility and pray. Verse 8 have the kind of committed love that is unwavering regardless of how you feel or what your circumstances are. Forget the self love business!!

Verse 9 says be hospitable. Hospitable means to be favorable to life and growth. Be open minded. Be friendly, welcoming, generous. These are all God’s attributes anyway!! I sure do like God!!! ☺

**Lesson 4: The Meaning of Life**

**Identity in Jesus Holds the Meaning of Life**

If you know Jesus, but you feel like your life does not have meaning, then you are not living for Jesus.  What are you filling your life with?  I love shopping.  It fills a void for me.  But now as I walk with Jesus, unless I am anointed to shop, it's not going to be a good shopping day!  Because of growing up with alcoholism, i bonded with things rather than people because people were not safe.  One of the biggest things the Lord has changed in my life is bonding with people instead of things.  It used to hurt to be social.  I dreaded conflict.  But because I faced my past, let Jesus heal me and learned to obediently follow Him I now have wonderful healthy relationships that fill a void that shopping never will.  If I am shopping out of His will, it is meaningless.  Did you know you can shop and it can be meaningful when you are in the center of God's will?

Riches or exhibiting a life filled with things is deceptive and meaningless. *Listen, my beloved brethren: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and in their position as believers and to inherit the kingdom which He has promised to those who love Him? James 2:5* God looks at your heart.  It is better to use things to get people rather than use people to get things.

The meaning of life is found in the heart of God in Genesis:  *God said, Let Us [Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] make mankind in Our image, after Our likeness, and let them have complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the [tame] beasts, and over all of the earth, and over everything that creeps upon the earth.* *So God created man in His own image, in the image and likeness of God He created him; male and female He created them.**And God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it [using all its vast resources in the service of God and man]; ~  Now the Lord God said, It is not good (sufficient, satisfactory) that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper (suitable, adapted, complementary) for him. 1:16-28; 2:18 Amp*

God found meaning in life by creating you.  He created you to walk with Him!  You are made in His image, His likeness.  The innate desire to loved and be loved was put in you by God.  He does not like being alone.  You were not created to be an island unto yourself.  You were created to have fellowship with God.  Your meaning is what defines you.  Your meaning is found in your identity in Christ.  Everything gets filtered through your identity in Him.  Your life has meaning just because God made you! He created a life filled with meaning!

**Is Your Identity Meaningful?**

When you’re stuck feeling like life is meaningless, chances are you’ve veered off into the gravel of the road of life. What are you identifying with? Identifying with Jesus means putting Him first in your heart and mind. Clothes, friends, food, sex, money, marriage, prestige, vacations, ANYTHING that occupies first place in your mind is what you identify with. If it’s not God, it is idolatry. Identity is a word like mentoring. It is not found in the Bible. But its meaning is Biblical. Identity means sameness of essential or generic character in different instances or sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing. My favorite definition: the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.

Your identity determines your position. You become God oriented. Positioning as a CHILD of God is so important because its power drives your life. It is your PRIMAL force. Your identity drives your life. What defined us as child defines us as adults until the Holy Spirit sets us free. If we are still driven or motivated by what impacted us as children we will continue to be motivated by the same. I believe this is why God addresses us SO MANY TIMES as children in John’s epistles. He understands our need for Holy Spirit freedom. He addresses us as children 14 TIMES from 1 to 5 John!!!

I learned in Al Anon an alcoholic stops developing emotionally at the age he starts drinking. On soberrecovery.com one woman’s response to this: I asked the same question and my Al Anon sponsor told me that when they quit, they revert back to the age they started drinking. My ex started drinking at 17 and he just stopped at 33.....and believe me when I tell you I'm dealing with a 17 year old....hope this helps. ☺ Whether it’s alcohol, drugs, prescription pills, you stop developing coping skills needed in life at whatever age you have allowed emotions to overtake your ability to trust.

When you feel stuck in an emotion, follow the thread of the emotion with the help of the Holy Spirit. He will take you to your place of needed healing. He will reveal to you what you need to see to be set free. If you can’t face alone, find a safe friend. *These are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.**For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 1 Cor 2:10-11* *But when anything is exposed and reproved by the light, it is made visible and clear; and where everything is visible and clear there is light. Eph 5:13*

When you engraft your identity in Jesus as a child, you are in a position to mature in your faith to become the woman of God you are meant to be. What motivates you unconsciously is much more powerful than when you are conscious of it. Sometimes I feel like I’m acting like a baby about an issue. Well, it’s because it’s true. I am! Have you ever felt like this? If you have children or have been around them, do you remember discerning their cries? I could tell the difference between a hungry cry, a mad cry and a pick me up I want to be cuddled cry. Even now, I can tell when my cry is a sad or mad cry, a childish pity party cry or an adult compassionate cry.

Growing pains hurt, but that’s how you become an adult. Once your identity is established as a child of God, you grow into an adult. God addresses us as friends 6 times in John’s epistles. More children than adults. As you mature, you are entrusted with more. John 15:15: *I do not call you servants (slaves) any longer, for the servant does not know what his master is doing (working out). But I have called you My friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from My Father. [I have revealed to you everything that I have learned from Him.]*

Yet, love how God ends John’s Epistles as friends in the very last Scripture of 3 John!! *Peace be to you! (Good-bye!) The friends here send you greetings. Remember me to the friends there [to every one of them personally] by name. 3 John 15*  He sees how you are growing from a child to an adult, He loves you as His friend and He calls you by name? Remember your secret name He has given you!!!

**Founded and Grounded**

When your life is founded in Jesus, your life is grounded in meaning. Once you have the Spirit of God in you, you start to look different. Your identity is in Jesus. Look at Deu 14:2 *For you are a holy people [set apart] to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a peculiar people to Himself, above all the nations on the earth.* Mark 4:34 *He did not tell them anything without a parable; but privately to His disciples ( those who were peculiarly His own) He explained everything [fully].* Titus 2:14 *Who gave Himself on our behalf that He might redeem us (purchase our freedom) from all iniquity and purify for Himself a people [to be peculiarly His own, people who are] eager and enthusiastic about [living a life that is good and filled with] beneficial deeds.* You start to take on characteristics founded only in God. Your life is grounded in meaning.

These qualities are different from the usual or norm – sometimes special – maybe even kind of weird. Love that word peculiar. It is beyond or deviated from the usual or expected. What you feed grows. As you nurture your relationship with Jesus, you will grow in Him. Imagine seeing Him! I imagine often He is with me driving. 1 John 3:2 *Beloved, we are [even here and] now God’s children; it is not yet disclosed (made clear) what we shall be [hereafter], but we know that when He comes and is manifested, we shall [as God’s children] resemble and be like Him, for we shall see Him just as He [really] is.*

What you identify with is what occupies first place in your mind. If it’s not God, it is idolatry. Whatever is foremost in your mind is your god. And if you’re not keeping good company in your mind, then you are in trouble! 1 Cor 15:33 *Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”* People have an identity crisis because they’ve lost the thing they counted on to define them. Men who retire, or lose their youth – the proverbial mid life crisis!, women who lose their husbands, athletes who lose their ability to perform, empty nesters, and the list goes on! Your positioning as a woman of God is so important because its power drives your life. It is your PRIMARY force. Your identity drives your life.

Your identity is in Jesus! It is based on how Jesus sees you, not how you see yourself. You will learn to see yourself in His eyes and this is what makes the difference. You are His beloved. You are His treasure. You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Your identity is in the One Who will be with you when your youth and beauty fades, your kids go, your husband abandons you, your pet dies, you lose your ability to exercise, your favorite tv show goes off the air, your eyes fade… He will NEVER leave you nor forsake you. He is with you always!!! Your identity is in Jesus. Your identity will still be in Jesus. Your identity will ALWAYS be in Jesus!!! Your life is RICH with meaning!!!

**Lesson 5: Direction and Guidance**

**Good Guidance, Good Direction**

Direction is predicated upon guidance. God will only take you as far as you can handle.

*I have still many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them or to take them upon you or to grasp them now. John 16:12* Don’t worry about going too far. Let the headlights take you as far as you need to go. It is wise to plan, but when your most well thought out plans are interrupted, trust God to bring you in safely. How you’re getting there is as important as where you’re going.

Let Jesus lift you up. A battered reed He will not break. A smoldering wick He will not put out. When you’re so beaten down you don’t know which way to go, look to Him first. You may need Him to heal your heart before He can guide you. Look at the context of this Scripture in Isaiah 42:

*Behold my Servant, Whom I uphold, My elect in Whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice and right and reveal truth to the nations.* ***2****He will not cry or shout aloud or cause His voice to be heard in the street.* ***3****A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not quench; He will bring forth justice in truth.* ***4****He will not fail or become weak or be crushed and discouraged till He has established justice in the earth; and the islands and coastal regions shall wait hopefully for Him and expect His direction and law.* ***5****Thus says God the Lord—He Who created the heavens and stretched them forth, He Who spread abroad the earth and that which comes out of it, He Who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it:* ***6****I the Lord have called You [the Messiah] for a righteous purpose and in righteousness; I will take You by the hand and will keep You; I will give You for a covenant to the people [Israel], for a light to the nations [Gentiles],*

***7****To open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness from the prison.* ***8****I am the Lord; that is My name! And My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images.* ***9****Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.* ***10****Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth! You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, the islands and coastal regions and the inhabitants of them [sing a song such as has never been heard in the heathen world]!*

God delights in His Son. He is not boisterous or in your face. He will not overwhelm you. He will not get discouraged or stop until He’s completed His good purpose in you. He will take you by the hand and keep you. He will open your eyes, deliver you from your hell and bring you out of your prison of darkness. He is declaring the new things He is doing in your life. Praise Him for this! He is bringing you into a spacious place!

Look at how God fulfilled His Word in Matthew 12:

*But being aware of this, Jesus went away from there. And many people joined and accompanied Him, and He cured all of them,* ***16****And strictly charged them and sharply warned them not to make Him publicly known.* ***17****This was in fulfillment of what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah,* ***18****Behold, My Servant Whom I have chosen, My Beloved in and with Whom My soul is well pleased and has found its delight. I will put My Spirit upon Him, and He shall proclaim and show forth justice to the nations.* ***19****He will not strive or wrangle or cry out loudly; nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets;* ***20****A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering (dimly burning) wick He will not quench, till He brings justice and a just cause to victory.* ***21****And in and on His name will the Gentiles (the peoples outside of Israel) set their hopes.* ***22****Then a blind and dumb man under the power of a demon was brought to Jesus, and He cured him, so that the blind and dumb man both spoke and saw.*

Jesus helped and healed every person who followed Him. He didn’t make a big deal about it. He gave glory to His Father. It wasn’t all about Him, but His Father. He was not about being in everyone’s face. Jesus did not get discouraged or faint but kept moving forward doing the will of the Father. He took the people by the hand and kept them close to His heart. He gave the people something to hope in. He brought deliverance, hope, healing, sight and a voice. Love how He gave the man a voice. He will give you a voice. He will give you respect. You are worthy because He is worthy!

**For God’s Goodness’ Sake**

God will guide you for His sake. It is all about Jesus. It is all about His infinite love that will direct and guide you. In Psalm 25: *Remember not the sins (the lapses and frailties) of my youth or my transgressions; according to Your mercy and steadfast love remember me, for Your goodness’ sake, O Lord.* ***8****Good and upright is the Lord; therefore will He instruct sinners in [His] way.* God guides you because He is good!

Even when your heart is right before God, there is still trouble living in a fallen world. All that matters is walking with Jesus in v14. This verse is the mother lode of this Psalm. Notice how God will reveal the meaning of His covenant relationship with you, NOT the meaning of evil in the world. We won’t know why bad things happen until we get to heaven. I believe this is why Jesus said in John 16:12 *I have still many things to say to you, but you are not able to bear them or to take them upon you or to grasp them now.* Some things you can’t bear to hear right now.

We just couldn’t bear to know. What do you say to someone rotting in prison in a Godless country for their faith? This is how Watchman Nee died, one of the most prolific Christian writers who ever lived. What do you say to an innocent person robbed of life when they did nothing wrong? This is why David ends this Psalm asking God for deliverance. This is why we help each other. We are Jesus’ deliverance and lovingkindness to each other.

**Lesson 6: Wisdom**

**Process for Promise**

Wisdom is the process for the promise. It is a way of thinking ordained by God that brings you to the promise. Sometimes I am in a situation that is so perplexing I don’t know which way to turn. So I start praying for wisdom. My wisdom prayer may be as simple as, “Jesus help me.” I need sapience or God’s ability to apply the knowledge, experience and understanding He’s given me to head in a constructive healthy direction. His common sense and insight leads you on the path of promise.

Sometimes Jesus will tell you what to do. More often than not, wisdom doesn’t tell you what to do, but how to do it. As you implement the principles of wisdom God gives you, will bring you to a positive solution. Wisdom is God’s nature. Wisdom is God’s daily delight because it brings forth peace, creativity and goodness.

Wisdom offers a way of living that brings peaceful consistency and good fruits in your life and those around you. It brings a sense of completeness where you are so full of its goodness you lose the desire for deconstructive ways of living. When they would ask for candy and potato chips, I would tell my kids, you can eat as much junk food as you like… after you eat your good food first!!! When you are filled with the good, there’s not much room left over for things that aren’t as beneficial for you.

Wisdom contains humility – a lack of false pride. It is a modest opinion of one's own importance and rank; a meekness. Meekness is strength under self control. We can know who we are in Christ without parading our own righteousness. Once we do that it becomes self righteousness. Pray for God’s wisdom that will bring you to the promise He has for you.

What the Holy Spirit is saying about this lesson:  "Wisdom is the process for the promise."  In other words, it is the process that is part of the promise because it is part of God's nature!  The promise is already yours.  As long as we use His wisdom, He will always lead us to His promises.  *For as many as are the promises of God, they all find their Yes [answer] in Him [Christ]. For this reason we also utter the Amen (so be it) to God through Him [in His Person and by His agency] to the glory of God. 2 Cor 1:20*  All the promises of of God are yes in Christ Jesus!

**Wordly vs Godly Wisdom**

Worldly verses Godly wisdom are discerned by their attributes. Worldly wisdom reflects earthly judgment and pride. Godly wisdom reflects peace and common sense. *My child, don't lose sight of common sense and discernment. Hang on to them. Prov 3:21 NLT* Let God’s Word be your wisdom filter.

All arguments have their end in God: *There is no [human] wisdom or understanding or counsel [that can prevail] against the Lord. ~ He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Prov 21:30; Rev 22:13 Amp* These Scriptures give me great comfort especially when I hear my children process the ways of the world through their precious minds. Or when I hear others do the same. I share God’s wisdom, standing on His Word for their sound minds.

The devil and his pride rob you of wisdom. Superficial worldly wisdom comes from the devil. *Who is there among you who is wise and intelligent? Then let him by his noble living show forth his [good] works with the [unobtrusive] humility [which is the proper attribute] of true wisdom.* ***14****But if you have bitter jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry, selfish ambition) in your hearts, do not pride yourselves on it and thus be in defiance of and false to the Truth.* ***15****This [superficial] wisdom is not such as comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual (animal), even devilish (demoniacal).* ***16****For wherever there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition), there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil and vile practices. James 3:13-16* Pride gives glory to self. Let the Holy Spirit bring to light any hidden agenda or motives that hindering His wisdom from prevailing in your heart. Humility gives glory to God.

*I [the Lord] will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.* ***9****Be not like the horse or the mule, which lack understanding, which must have their mouths held firm with bit and bridle, or else they will not come with you. Psalm 32:8-9*

Worldly foolishness displays itself through deconstructive talk, anger, disdain, condescension. God keeps His eye on you!  Don't worry about the “third eye”, the eye on the pyramid or any of the world's ideas about the eye in a way that represents worldly wisdom.  Sometimes it is better to keep silent, holding on to your wisdom. There is no arguing with a fool because the fool believes he is right. Those who are truly humble and wise see their human weakness.

Your admission of weakness is honesty that opens the door to God’s strength and power. Do you want to be filled with yourself or with God as the source of power? *So for the sake of Christ, I am well pleased and take pleasure in infirmities, insults, hardships, persecutions, perplexities and distresses; for when I am weak [in human strength], then am I [truly] strong (able, powerful in divine strength). ~ For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He goes on living by the power of God. And though we too are weak in Him [as He was humanly weak], yet in dealing with you [we shall show ourselves] alive and strong in [fellowship with] Him by the power of God. ~ … let the weak say, I am strong [a warrior]! ~ In Him Who is the Source of my strength I have strength for everything. 2 Cor 10:12; 13:4; Joel 3:10 Amp; Phil 4;13 NAB* If our precious Savior Jesus was crucified in weakness, dare we do less? Let the Lord be your strength for everything!

*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ~ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Heb 12:14; 2 Cor 13:11 NIV* Do not be ruled by how people in the world view you or your beliefs. God gives you the power to stay strong and at peace in the wisdom He gives you from heaven. It will last. There is Holy Spirit power in the wisdom of God. God doesn’t let the world’s way rule His judgments. As our memory verse says, wisdom is justified by her children or proved right by her actions! Your actions are the offspring of your wisdom!

*Therefore thus says the Lord [to Jeremiah]: If you return [and give up this mistaken tone of distrust and despair], then I will give you again a settled place of quiet and safety, and you will be My minister; and if you separate the precious from the vile [cleansing your own heart from unworthy and unwarranted suspicions concerning God’s faithfulness], you shall be My mouthpiece. [But do not yield to them.] Let them return to you—not you to [the people].* ***20****And I will make you to this people a fortified, bronze wall; they will fight against you, but they will not prevail over you, for I am with you to save and deliver you, says the Lord. Jeremiah 15:19-20*

What Jeremiah is saying here: Being led by God’s wisdom instead of the world’s way, means turning to God, not to the world. As you stay turned to God, His ways will prevail. God reveals to you the wisdom you need as you pray and through His Word. You grow in wisdom by trusting in Jesus. Keep your face turned to Him, the Author and Finisher of your faith so you can be filled with all the wisdom you need to live a healthy life in joyful freedom!!!

**Lesson 7: Witnessing**

**It’s not what you say. It’s how you live.**

More people will be attracted to Jesus in you by how you live than by what you say. In Luke 10:9 Jesus said, “Heal the sick, and tell them, ‘the kingdom of God is near you now.’ Jesus wants you to live out His will, then talk about it. In Acts 26: 16, He exhorted Paul, ‘Now get to your feet! I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and a witness.’ 1 John 3:18 God confirms this by telling us to love not just with our words but with our actions. Have you ever noticed you watch more than you listen? Sometimes someone has said, “ooo, I wish I could pray like you! You say the BEST prayers.” Well that’s silly. A long flowery prayer means less to God than a simple, “Jesus help me!” from your heart. Most of you are watching my actions more anyway because it is my actions that give weight to my words. Your actions make your words count. Live sincerely and you will speak sincerely.

**Formula Thinking Limits God**

I used to think I had to carry a little salvation trac and say certain words like a formula to every new person I met. But formula thinking limits God. When I learned to live the life Jesus called me to and share my love for Jesus in the most random circumstances, I saw fruit. Yes I talked to the man fixing the windows at the house or the woman at the check out counter at the grocery store. You’re seed planting and when you share in love, God honors that love. But the most fruit I’ve seen is through pouring my life into the lives of others, even when it’s inconvenient.

**Be Purposeful Be Proactive**

He wants you to be purposeful and proactive in how you live. I wake up with a little attitude that says, “My life counts! I am going to make it count! Now I wonder how God is going to make my life count today?” When you are living a life that is congruent with what Jesus says, when you’re acting in loving kindness, thinking about how other people feel and not just yourself, keeping your words to yourself when offended, then people will be attracted to you. My sister was a living witness to me. She became purposeful and proactive and still lives this way today! She came to know the Lord at a Young Life camp when she was 14 and came home a changed person. I was in college, questioning everything. There was something different about my sister and she was living out her new commitment to Jesus. What you say is important too, but loving goodness will come out of your mouth when that’s what you’re living.

Don’t let the devil deceive you by thinking what you say isn’t good enough. It’s easy to start second guessing yourself. Did I say the right thing? Should I have said more? Oh, I wish I would have said… I wonder if they think I said this, when what I meant was… Speculating is from the devil. Destroy those lofty speculations and take your thoughts captive to the obedience of our Lord Jesus! When you start thinking like this, replace those thoughts with faith in God’s Word that He will complete the good work. God causes the growth!

**Lesson 8: Prayer**

**Prayer is the Road to Relationship**

It navigates you to God. Lots of people meditate and find peace there. But if you want to know God you need to go to God. When I am in an unknown area I use my navigation system without relying on my senses to get to where I need to go. If a pilot depends on his good sense he may crash the plane. You can meditate and use your good senses and not find God. But when you turn to God asking for Him, He will show up! And don’t prayer to yourself. Look at how Jesus discerns the difference.

***9****Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else:* ***10****“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector.* ***11****The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer****[b]****: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector!* ***12****I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’*

***13****“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’* ***14****I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

Prayer isn't creating a Christmas list for Santa.  It is often more about asking God what He wants from you rather than what you want from Him.  Prayer is listening.  Listening with your heart. God speaks to me through His Word and through the circumstances of my life. When something is going on in my life that seems unusual I pray, “Ok, Lord, what are You trying to tell me here?” Sometimes I hear His voice, but He always speaks through the Bible.

Jesus said in Mark 11:24 whatever you ask for believe you shall have it and it shall be yours. This isn’t a free for all. This is based on having your heart lined up with His. His next command is for you to forgive. Well that hung it up for me right there for years! There were certain people I did not want to forgive. It wasn’t until I forgave those people that I started seeing answers to prayer in certain areas in my life that had major strongholds.  This is so important because the greatest happiness you will ever find in life is in serving others.  I become my own sinkhole when I get all wrapped up in myself.  Jesus has a heart for others!

When you pray to Jesus, you will get filled with His love.  When you get filled with His love, you will love other people.  This is His heart.  Don't worry about being distracted.  When your thoughts are interrupted, just get back on track.  When you're on a long highway stretch, if you get distracted, you may get off into the gravel.  Don't let the devil distract you.  You need to get out of the gravel and back on the highway.  I keep a pad close by to write down a pressing need so i don't think about it any more.

God wants us to pray from a paradigm of passion not discipline.  Discipline is important unless it leads you to a place of fatalistic dryness: "It is what it is!"  This is not from God.  When you see someone living in lesser faith, pray for them with passion!  Pray God's Word over their lives.  Expect miracles in your own life first!  Then you will believe for miracles in the lives of others.

Jesus wants to be your Friend.  God and Moses were friends.  Moses had a special place to be with God.  The people knew this and respected that God was with him.  When he went in to his place the tent of meeting to pray, God showed up.  Love how the Lord spoke with Moses face to face as with a friend.  Prayer was an intimate dialogue between God and Moses – a two way street.  This is God wants to communicate with you!  Moses reminded God of His Word.  God told him, done deal.  Moses continued expressing his insecurity and needs while God continued lavishing His love on him.  No matter what you say or express before Him, He is never afraid to hear anything you have to say.  He will simply lavish His love on you!

Since God created you, your needs are the same as His:  to love and be loved, to be listened to, to cherish and honor each other's essence, to be cherished and honored.  But God receives one thing Moses does not.  His Glory.  Moses could not look at God and live.  He could not contain God’s glory.  It is His Essence.  He consecrated Moses to receive His will and His Word.  He exhorted Moses to listen to Him and stay separate from those who don’t believe.  This a life metaphor as we learn to listen to God in our prayer life, stay close to Him and keep distance from those who lead us away from Him.

Delighting yourself in Him is an abiding that molds your heart to His.  As your heart conforms to His will in purpose, thoughts and actions, your desires will conform to His will as well.   Prayer fills you with Jesus.  It is abiding in Him.  Every single time you open your heart to Him your heart molds a little bit more into His form.  Stephen was so filled with Jesus, God’s Glory in him transcended the pain and heartbreak of death and separation and rejection.  Jesus is bringing all His beloved believers into His glory!

Standing is something important to me.  It tells me God has a place for me to hold my ground.  Standing is a proactive posture but not aggressive.  It is a posture of authority.  It says you mean business.   Putting up my shield of faith has done more to defeat the devil’s thoughts in my mind more than anything else.  My shield of faith extinguishes ALL the fiery darts of the evil one.  That’s what I call real power!

Faith doesn’t give you confidence.  Faith IS your confidence!  Faith is your guaranteed assurance that what you hope for will come to pass.  It will happen!  We can’t really please God or make Him happy without faith.  God literally operates through our faith.

Delighting yourself in Him is an abiding that molds your heart to His.  As your heart conforms to His will in purpose, thoughts and actions, your desires will conform to His will as well.   Prayer fills you with Jesus.  It is abiding in Him.  Every single time you open your heart to Him your heart molds a little bit more into His form.  Stephen was so filled with Jesus, God’s Glory in him transcended the pain and heartbreak of death and separation and rejection.  Jesus is bringing all His beloved believers into His glory!

**Lesson 9: Depression**

**Depression is a Symptom Not the Root**

Depression is a mental state characterized by a pessimistic sense of inadequacy and a despondent lack of activity. Did you know that depression may not be the root of your problem?  I learned firsthand 25 years ago. I believe God wants me to share my story with you because it gives Him the glory and if it helps one person today see her life is worth living, then it’s worthwhile. “Blessed be God Who comforts us in our afflictions that we may comfort those with the comfort we receive…” 2 Cor 1:3-5

We had moved from Phoenix AZ to a little town called the Plains VA, I had never lived far from my family which offered a strong support system – dysfunctional but strong – you can live in dysfunction that holds you together on the outside but tears you apart on the inside, the kids were little, needed a lot of time and nurturing, and my husband's work required a lot of travel.  It was a recipe for disaster.  Loneliness was literally a physical pain.  As I started to take a look at my depression, I began to realize that loneliness was the root of my problem.  When I started connecting with other women through Al Anon and church, getting involved in outside activities with my children, and finally finding a good therapist, my depression lifted.

Being social used to be painful but being lonely was even worse. Change usually doesn’t happen until your pain is greater than the problem. I grew up in a with alcoholism, did not have healthy coping skills in place and my pain took me outside my comfort zone.  Comfort is the number one killer of passion. My comfort zone was keeping me in misery.  But my pain was the doorway to my healing. I started connecting and getting help.  Recovery felt strange at first.  Sometimes doing things differently feels strange until it becomes a healthy habit. One of the most effective tools in overcoming depression is talk therapy. This is what we are doing! We are making it safe for each other to see our pain, share it, pray about it and give it to God. Then we do replacement therapy asking God to give us new ways of thinking and doing, bringing us into the light and in a healthy productive place.

Why are you feeling depressed?  What is the reason behind it?  Addressing the source of your depression enables you to truly be set free.  Antidepressants only offer a temporary solution because you have to change your behavior by first changing the way you think.  God operates in truth.  His truth will change the facts of your life.  Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to the reason behind your depression.

**It’s OK Not to Be OK**

You can’t get help until you acknowledge your neediness. There are many different kinds of depression. I don't know a single person who hasn't been depressed at one time or another.  Jesus asked His friends in Luke 24:17, ‘Why are you sad?’ He cares about how you feel. When you've experienced major loss in your life, if you have a deficient spiritual life, or you have a predisposition to depression, there are countless reasons to experience deep sadness that results in depression.  An alcoholic personality is bright , sensitive and creative. I believe many people do alcohol and or drugs because they don’t know what to do with their undiagnosed depression. And unfortunately, because alcohol is a depressant, it makes it worse. The problem is when you can't get out of the dark hole you are in.  It's important to consider all the possible sources of depression.  it can not only be physical, it can be emotional and spiritual as well.

Depression is epidemic in our country I believe because we have progressively isolated ourselves. We make it ok in our society not to connect.  When I am full of myself I am full of darkness.  When I get filled with the Holy Spirit I get filled with Light.  Don't let the devil isolate you.  Connect with each other by being loving each other and being kind. Depression comes in many forms:

1. Major: extreme sadness, hopelessness, lack of energy, irritability, trouble concentrating, changes in sleep or eating habits, feelings of guilt, physical pain, and thoughts of death or suicide — usually for more than 2 weeks. May only be once but tends to recur throughout a person’s life.
2. Dysthymia is a type of depression that causes a low mood over a long period of time — perhaps for a year or more.
3. [Postpartum depression](http://www.everydayhealth.com/depression/postpartum-depression.aspx) exhibits feelings of extreme sadness, fatigue, loneliness, hopelessness, suicidal thoughts, fears about hurting the baby w/in 1st year.
4. [Seasonal affective disorder](http://www.everydayhealth.com/depression/signs-of-seasonal-affective-disorder.aspx), or SAD. Though many people find themselves in winter funks, SAD is characterized by symptoms of anxiety, increased irritability, daytime fatigue, and weight gain
5. Atypical depression is a sense of heaviness in the arms and legs — like a form of paralysis. However, oversleeping and overeating are the two most important symptoms.
6. Psychosis — a mental state characterize by false beliefs, known as delusions, or false sights or sounds, known as hallucinations — doesn’t typically get associated with depression. But about 10 to 15 percent of people with depression have episodes so severe that they see or hear things that are not really there.
7. Bipolar disorder aka manic depressive disorder, exhibits periods of extreme lows are followed by periods of extreme highs. Symptoms can alternate between depression and mania. Symptoms of mania include high energy, excitement, racing thoughts, and poor judgment. Affects about 2-3% of the population and has one of the highest risks for suicide.
8. Premenstrual dysphoric disorder, or PMDD affects women during the second half of their menstrual cycles. Symptoms include depression, anxiety, and mood swings. Unlike PMS, which affects 75 percent of women and has milder symptoms, [PMDD](http://www.everydayhealth.com/depression/pmdd-managing-monthly-depression.aspx) is much more severe, affecting about 5 percent of women.
9. Situational depression, also called adjustment disorder, is triggered by a stressful or life-changing event, such as job loss, the death of a loved one, or other trauma. About 3x more common than major depression, w/medication rarely needed because it tends to clear up over time once the event has ended.

<http://www.everydayhealth.com/depression-pictures/different-types-of-depression.aspx#/slide-1>

Some types of depression need medication. The brain is an organ that may need medication to function effectively.  However, it is significant to note that most depression can be treated with nutrition and talk therapy. This is why it is so important that we cover each other’s backs and be good to each other! When I was depressed, it was talk therapy, prayer and friends that pulled me out of the pit I was in.

I didn’t know many people very well, but I got involved in my church, in Al Anon, found a good therapist and pushed past my feelings of loneliness. God intended feelings to lead you to freedom. I let my loneliness speak to my need. I had loneliness, but learned not to let loneliness have me. If you let your feelings have you, you will get stuck. And believe me, I still remember those feelings of loneliness that were so strong, it was a physical pain. But it’s better to keep moving in the storm and not stay in it because you will come out sooner. That life defining moment brought me into a place of freedom I still live to this day.

**Follow The Way Out**

Jesus offers you a way out of depression. *The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. 1 Cor 10:13 NLT* Follow these practical Biblical principles to health spirit, soul and body:

1. Put feet to your prayers. Understanding depression is not enough. You need to put feet to your prayers when Jesus is speaking to you. You can read all the books you want, go to all the counselors you can and take all the prescriptions the doctor gives you, yet still be stuck. Even taking medication works best with a therapy program where behavior is changing. What is He showing you?

2. Change how you think. A permanent solution Involves changing the brain. The only permanent solution is to change your neural pathways and associations.  This can only be done by learning new strategies, rational concepts, and new methods to extinguish social anxiety.

3. Change what you do. Then do what you changed! Then, these new strategies and methods must be practiced and practiced.  This is why we always talk about repetition. Jesus said in John 15:10, When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love… “ Repetition is the mother of learning! Without repetition, neural pathways and associations cannot change.  To have a permanent solution for overcoming depression, our neural pathways and associations MUST change.

When our neural pathways and associations change, our brain chemistry also changes.  Just as drugs and alcohol disrupt the chemical equilibrium in your brain so does dysfunctional behavior. It takes 3-5 years to chemical balance to be restored. Giving up bad behavior does the same thing! This is a permanent change, because you have practiced the new methods and concepts (i.e., the cognitive therapy) into your brain repetitiously, thus creating new neural associations.  The more dense these neural associations are, the more you recover.

Everything in life works like this.  Whatever you really learn causes new neural pathways in the brain, and, over time, with repetition, you gradually become better and better at something.

<https://socialanxietyinstitute.org/social-anxiety-chemical-imbalances-brain-neural-pathways>

4. Let Jesus help. God made you spirit soul and body.  You need to let Jesus pull you out of the pit of depression whether you need prayer, therapy, pastoral counsel, physical exercise, diet, or even new friends. Don’t let the devil isolate you. Don’t listen to his lies. You're only as sick as your secrets.  Find someone safe.  I had to learn to work through issues until I had a peace or I would get depressed.  because I was turning my anger inward.

**Stretch and Reach**

5. Stretch and reach. Countless times swimming when I have been ready to give up, God has shown me I am just warming up. As world-class open-water swimmer Grace instructed me to stretch and reach even when I was exhausted, you will need to stretch and reach out for Jesus’ hand when He pulls you out of the pit of depression. Grace writes God’s Word on her arms to remind herself God is with her as she stretches and reaches out toward her goal.

He is the Author of all truth In John 8:32 Jesus said, ‘You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’  Bad company corrupts good character.  Positive loving friends and influences help keep you buoyant.  You want friends who will be honest with you. Better the blows of a friend than the false kisses of an enemy. Prov 27:6: Faithful are the wounds of a friends, but the enemy’s kisses are deceitful. The truth may hurt, but it does not harm, it helps you. It will set you free. What you feed grows.  The battle is won or lost in your mind.  Don't give the devil a foothold in your thought life.  Your mind is the greatest battlefield.  Stretch and reach out to grab hold of God’s Word. Keep your faith in His promises to you.  Put your faith over your feelings.

6 Speak God’s Word out loud. When you start feeling bad, speak God's Word out loud.  Really loud!  Your feelings will follow your faith.  “I WILL KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH WILL MAKE ME FREE!!! NOW THE LORD IS THE SPIRIT AND WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY – EMANCIPATION FROM BONDAGE – FREEDOM!!!!!” God, this is what Your Word says in John 8:32 and 2 Cor 3:17. I am trusting You to bring Your wonderful Word to pass in my life!!! I am expecting to see Your freedom in my life because YOU SAID SO!!! I am EXPECTING MIRACLES!!!

When God acts, He will bring it to pass!  *The Lord of Heaven’s Armies has spoken— who can change his plans? When his hand is raised, who can stop him?” ~  “From eternity to eternity I am God. No one can snatch anyone out of my hand.  No one can undo what I have done.”   ~Commit your way to the Lord [roll and repose each care of your load on Him]; trust (lean on, rely on, and be confident) also in Him and He will bring it to pass.  ~  God will make this happen, for he who calls you is faithful.  Isaiah 14:27; 43:13; Psalm 37:5; 1 Thess 5:24*

Don't take yourself too seriously.  Don't even take your circumstances too seriously.  Only take God seriously at His Word.  You can count on His promises to you.

**Lesson 10: Friendship**

This week’s lesson may be less intense but is no less important than last week. And I’ll tell you why. **Because friendship is foundational to mental health.** It is the scaffolding of community. We need community to thrive because we are the Body of Christ! Remember last week we learned most forms of depression are healed through talk therapy. Let’s look at Prov 12:25-26a in the NKJV: *Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression,  But a good word makes it glad. The righteous should choose his friends carefully.*  Isn’t it amazing science is discovering what the Bible already spoke thousands of years before! **As a believer you are responsible for what you let influence you.** You choose your friends and you choose how you will behave with your friends. God wants you to choose friends who will influence you with His Nature. Good friendships facilitate mental health and spiritual growth. Friendship is vital to your well being.

Your relationships are a reflection of your relationship with God. Don’t let the devil isolate you: *A man who isolates himself seeks his own desire; He rages against all wise judgment. Prov 18:1NKJV* The devil tries to isolate me through self pity. One of the things I appreciate most about my close friends is when I am having a pity party and they don’t join in. It’s no fun going to a party alone! The devil will use isolation to get you out of community and from surrounding yourself with TRUE friends. You can tell the caliber of a person by who they surround themselves with. Who are your true friends? How do you treat each other?

I choose friends who are loving enough to say no to something or speak up when we’re not comfortable about doing something or seeing something we’ve watched or done, we are bringing the darkness to light, leaving it at the cross and pushing each other closer to Jesus.

**Friendship Reflects God’s Nature**

Friendships are important to God because they reflect His Nature.  He said, "Let US make man in our image." in Gen 1:26. God values loving trusted relationship because it is His nature to desire to connect with us.  He made us to connect with others. He wanted His disciples with Him when He prayed before being arrested: ‘Sit here, while I go there and pray.’ In Matt 26:36,38 He didn’t want to be alone. ‘Stay here and keep watch with me.’  He is our Best Friend ever! He loves you so much! You are never alone. He is always with you even when you don’t feel like it. **Because Jesus is not a feeling, He is a Person!**

So many women say, "I can't keep good friendships."  It’s because they don’t know how. I think too many women focus on what someone else is giving to them rather than what they are giving! What did Jesus say? *Give and it shall be given to you! Luke 6:38* My mom used to say, "If you want to have a good friend, you have to be a good friend."

David made a sacrificial covenant with his Jonathan. I have learned through experience that true friendship involves a sacrificial commitment to the other person. It often times means laying down my life, my ways of thinking and putting myself in my friend’s place at the cost of my own way. This is what Melissa and I did.

True friendship means demonstrating 1 Cor 13 love. I am there to love, to bless, not judge condemn or divide. When I sense tension, the first thing I do is to ask the Holy Spirit to show me what is it IN ME that is causing any strife or division? Love does not demand its own way. We need to walk alongside each other amidst our issues: See Gal 6:2-3:  *Bear (endure, carry) one another’s burdens and troublesome moral faults, and in this way fulfill and observe perfectly the law of Christ (the Messiah) and complete what is lacking [in your obedience to it]. Amp* You need to discern between confession that exposes the darkness as in 1 John 1:9 verses confession that perpetuates the darkness as in Eph 5:11-12.  *Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.* ***12****It is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret.* This is what I call the sin connection: when my sin justifies someone else’s sin. Then we justify our sin instead of bringing it to the light. Don't justify - identify! Identify the sin, but don’t identify with it. Your identity is in Jesus!  You can identify with your friend, identify the sin or issue.  Leave it at the cross together, ask Jesus to forgive you and what does He want you to replace the sin with?

**We Were Meant to Meet**

Joy Barnett and I had a very unique friendship. She was my pastors mom and we ended up writing about it. She used to say when you’re led down a path you did not intend to go, you know it is the hand of God. She based this on Proverbs 16:9, a man’s mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. This is what happened to us as we went down the unintended path of putting flesh to our loving trusted friendship in the form of a book. We were meant to meet. Melissa and I were meant to meet. God puts people in your path for a reason. What you do with where you go is largely up to you and how you nurture your relationships.

Are you surrounding yourself with friends who believe in God’s promises for your life? Or do you get the fatalistic response to a problem, “Oohh! It IS what it IS!!” That is from the devil. It takes the blessing right out of the equation. When I am in trouble, I want friends who purposefully build me up not break me down. I need hope and strength!

**Friendships Serve in Different Capacities**

My mom has a lot of friends. She used to have a lot of friends in Washington DC when Dad was AA to Sen Fannin. She had many friends – in this way she was a friend of the world with her parties, beehive 60’s hair, long cigarette holder, drinks and entertaining. She had a lot of different friends in her life. She kept old friends from high school and college. She had friends in the neighborhood, from the kids’ school, from her husbands work. She was friends with Marney Kleindeinst, whose husband Dick or Richard was the US Atty General at that time. She was also friends with her seamstress Mrs. Mansfield, one of the most beautiful people I ever knew. She was an old black woman who exuded Jesus in every breath she took. She was humble, sweet, gentle, kind. But Mom’s best friend was Sandra who lived across the street. They are still best friends to this day. Both of them came to know the Lord and have the blessed privilege of sharing Jesus’ love now in their friendship.

You will find that your friendships function in different capacities depending upon your needs and desires. You need to discern your boundaries with your in all your relationships. This is what will keep you close to Jesus. When you feel yourself being pulled down in a friendship and it’s becoming a pattern, you may need to adjust the line in the sand. Is this a safe friendship or is it ministry? Is there a sin connection that needs to be brought into the light? Am I acting in ways that grieve the Holy Spirit? Am I being honest with myself? Keeping good boundaries keeps you safe.

**Friendships Travel Both Ways**

When there is an issue in your friendship that needs to be addressed it takes equal courage to share as to receive. Whether you are sharing or receiving the message of an issue, it is usually not about a person but a problem. We live in a fallen world and the devil does not want you to have Godly friendships. How you address the problem determines the outcome of the issue. You reap what you sow. Let’s look at Proverbs 15:1  *A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* Ask God what He is showing you in the situation. Are you acting, speaking and receiving in love? Are there emotions that need to be addressed in your own heart? Are you speaking the truth in love?

I've learned to expect little and give much.  Not take offense. Growing up where issues went unresolved ending in anger made it difficult for me to feel safe with anyone.  It took years of learning healthy ways of interacting, therapy, Al Anon and loving friends to develop safe friendships   Offense usually rolls off my back. Often what I perceive to be offense is misunderstanding with no offense intended.  Speak the truth in love.  Look for friends who share my same values.  1 Cor 13 is a model for loving trusted relationships. Jesus said in John 15:13 ‘Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.’ Jesus loves you so much. He wants to be your Friend!

God will never love you more than He does right now.  **Love is not something He does in degrees.**  It's Who He Is.   His love is unconditional, never changing, always constant.  **What changes is your ability to receive His love.**As you grow in Him, you receive more of His love.  God's love doesn't grow, you grow!  The more you receive His love, the more you heal from the inside out.

Perfect love casts out all fear. This is why love is so important and why it lifts depression. So much depression is rooted in fear – fear of rejection if someone knows the truth about me, fear of loss if I take too much of someone else’s time, fear of abandonment if I invest in someone else. Jesus’ love in your friendships dispels all fear!

**Keep Including not Excluding**

Everyone wants to feel accepted and loved. But what happens when there is a party and your list doesn’t include all your friends? Or you start getting selective? Or you’re the one not invited… *Similarly, a family splintered by feuding will fall apart. Mark 3:25 NLT* A kingdom divided against itself will not stand. When we learn to put up with one another, it’s amazing how things tend to work out for good. Or the one who wasn’t going to get invited came and needed the most love? Usually the person on the peripheral is the one who needs the most love.

Are you treating your friends with deference? Do you have courteous regard for their feelings or just your own? Are you willing to yield to them? Do you think of them as better than yourself? Look at Phil 2:3 *Do nothing from factional motives [through contentiousness, strife, selfishness, or for unworthy ends] or prompted by conceit and empty arrogance. Instead, in the true spirit of humility (lowliness of mind) let each regard the others as better than and superior to himself [thinking more highly of one another than you do of yourselves]. Amp ~ Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. NLT* Melissa has seen the sting of exclusion. She has seen what happens when we are not being loving and accepting especially in group friendships.

*The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed and qualified me to preach the Gospel of good tidings to the meek, the poor, and afflicted; He has sent me to bind up and heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the [physical and spiritual] captives and the opening of the prison and of the eyes to those who are bound,**To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord [the year of His favor] and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,**To grant [consolation and joy] to those who mourn in Zion—to give them an ornament (a garland or diadem) of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment [expressive] of praise instead of a heavy, burdened, and failing spirit—that they may be called oaks of righteousness [lofty, strong, and magnificent, distinguished for uprightness, justice, and right standing with God], the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. Isaiah 61:1-3*

God will give you beauty for ashes. Don't try to get people to give you what only God can. When you are insecure you try to get other people to make you feel good about yourself.  Our neediness ends up manipulating them and stealing the freedom they have.  The need to feel secure  comes from God, but that means looking to Him instead of people for fulfillment.   Redemption and recovery comes from Him Alone.  But when you are hurt, and Jesus wants to heal you, you can't keep the ashes and hold on to the beauty. Stop holding on to the problem and start holding on to the promise!!!

**Lesson 11: Suffering**

**Not If But When and How**

We will all suffer. It is not a matter of if, but when.  Suffering happens all the time. Suffer in the Greek is *Pathema* meaning the capacity and privilege to experience strong emotion or deep feeling like agony or passion. The meaning is not inherently negative. It is only negative when experienced apart from faith. This strong feeling includes affliction resulting in knowing God's glory. **Suffering is the refining process that removes the dross from your life.**

So when I understand that I am going to go through this process the issue becomes how I go through it. The more I surrender and accept, the more I open myself to God’s grace and help. *God is our Refuge and Strength [mighty and impenetrable to temptation], a very present and well-proved help in trouble. Psalm 46:1 Amp* He is always there waiting to help you.

When I die to myself I suffer. When I have to let go of something that I don’t want to let go of, I’m suffering.  Suffer means to put up with, bear or feel pain.  It means to be set at a disadvantage.  We all experience this as we grow in our relationship with Jesus.  I have to suffer through my disappointments in my circumstances and relationships every day. Letting go of things, circumstances, maybe even people who are precious to you never means letting go of Jesus. *A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering (dimly burning) wick He will not quench, till He brings justice and a just cause to victory. Matt 12:20*

**Bitter or Better – Your Choice**

Suffering is a part of life that you choose how you will go through it. This doesn't mean I am being a martyr.  I don’t need to be a big misery magnet. Suffering is a process of refinement that brings us into a place of maturity, integrity and well being if we let it.  **The same sun that melts butter hardens bricks.**  When you endure fiery trials with grace you will walk out of the furnace without smelling like smoke because you God is with you.  “Even if we die, our Lord is able!” cried Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. **God being with them was more important than the outcome.**

Don’t ever qualify yourself as an expert on suffering or think that you’ve been through more than someone else and therefore know better. You are judging someone else’s outsides with your insides. This is a spirit of bitterness. There’s that big misery magnet! Heb 12:14-15 *Strive to live in peace with everybody and pursue that consecration and holiness without which no one will [ever] see the Lord. 15* *Exercise foresight and be on the watch to look [after one another], to see that no one falls back from and fails to secure God’s grace (His unmerited favor and spiritual blessing), in order that no root of resentment (rancor, bitterness, or hatred) shoots forth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it—*

Are you making your suffering all about you? When suffering becomes all about you, you will take down everyone around you. When you **give glory to God in your suffering** you will pull everyone out of the pit instead of putting them in. Only God knows the heart because He made you and He made everyone else. “… *The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” 1 Sam 16:7 NLT* **The way out of bitterness is finding your strength in God**:  *David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found strength in the Lord his God. 1 Sam 30:6 NLT* When David’s enemies destroyed their homes, abducting their families, they wept until they could weep no more… but David found his strength in the Lord. He turned to God for guidance. God not only gave him victory over his enemy but returned every single woman, child. Nothing was missing. 19

**Greater Suffering Means Greater Glory**

Glory or the Greek word *doxa* means literally means what evokes *good opinion*, i.e. that something has *inherent, intrinsic worth.* Suffering may be the refining process that removes the dross from your life refining you as pure gold, but it hurts. The greater the suffering the greater the chance of feeling abandoned especially when you feel like you've done nothing to deserve and unfair situation. Jesus knows how you feel!

In Mark 15:34 He cried out to His Father as He hung dying on the cross, ‘My God My God why have You forsaken Me?’  Jesus felt abandoned - He understands how you feel.  His suffering was so great because God turned His back on the sin that covered Jesus in that cataclysmic moment in time on the cross. He suffered real abandonment so you would never have to feel or be abandoned again. He said in John 19:28, ‘I’m thirsty.’ **He knew the physical hell of suffering so you don’t have to take the spiritual hell of eternal thirst.** Of being parched forever.  Don't be afraid to suffer. You may feel like you’re in hell but you’re not. In John 6:20 and 8:33 He said, ‘It is I. Don’t be afraid. You will be made free.’  Jesus is always with you.  Suffering is not forever.  Only Jesus is forever! He loves you so much He is with you forever!

He will always hold your heart tenderly no matter what you are going through. If you don’t have Jesus, you don’t have anything. He took the worst suffering on the cross for you so you never have to face life alone again. This was prophesied hundreds of years before in Isaiah 42: *Behold my Servant, Whom I uphold, My elect in Whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice and right and reveal truth to the nations.* ***2****He will not cry or shout aloud or cause His voice to be heard in the street.* ***3****A bruised reed He will not break, and a dimly burning wick He will not quench; He will bring forth justice in truth.* ***4****He will not fail or become weak or be crushed and discouraged till He has established justice in the earth; and the islands and coastal regions shall wait hopefully for Him and expect His direction and law.*

Like the islands and coastal regions, no matter how far out, how isolated or on the edge you are… wait for Jesus!

**Lesson 12: Knowing Jesus**

**Knowing Jesus is Knowing God**

Jesus said in John 7:29: *I know Him [Myself] because I come from His [very] presence, and it was He [personally] Who sent Me. Amp*

I didn’t realize it, but when I came to know Jesus, I came to know God. Before having a personal relationship with Jesus, I knew He was special, but that's about all.  It's not until I asked Him into my heart that things started to change. The way the world sees Jesus is different than the way a believer sees Him. Jesus longs for you and wants you to know Him. He asked in Mark 8:27 & 29, ‘Who do people say that I am? But Who do you say that I am?’ Jesus was questioning His disciples who were just beginning to wrap their minds around Who He Is. “How does a broken world ruled and damaged by the devil view me?” As the disciples walked the rough, rugged road of life with Him, hearing His teachings, watching Him heal, deliver, feed and set free, they fed on the Bread of Life. “But Who do you say that I am?” They began to wrap their minds, their hearts and their lives around this Messiah, the Savior of the world, holding the universe together by the word of His power.

He wants you to know Who He is intimately, not by what the world says, but by what His Word says.  After asking Him into my heart, giving Him lordship, I began the most incredible journey I have ever known: getting to know Him. It has truly been a great adventure.  I began to understand His loving kind nature, His consistency, faithfulness, goodness and realness. I don’t want to know a lot about God. I want to know God.  It's not about acquiring knowledge of Jesus, but rather feeding a friendship with Him.

You can’t really know God until you know Jesus. Knowing Jesus is to understand the nature of God. God may change His mind but not His nature. *“I Am Who I Am…” ~ Jesus Christ (the Messiah) is [always] the same, yesterday, today, [yes] and forever (to the ages). Ex 3:14; Heb 13:8* In Exodus 32 notice how God changed His mind in accordance with His nature: *Then the Lord said, “I have seen how stubborn and rebellious these people are.* ***10****Now leave me alone so my fierce anger can blaze against them, and I will destroy them. Then I will make you, Moses, into a great nation.”* ***11****But Moses tried to pacify the Lord his God. “O Lord!” he said. “Why are you so angry with your own people whom you brought from the land of Egypt with such great power and such a strong hand?* ***12****Why let the Egyptians say, ‘Their God rescued them with the evil intention of slaughtering them in the mountains and wiping them from the face of the earth’? Turn away from your fierce anger. Change your mind about this terrible disaster you have threatened against your people!* ***13****Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You bound yourself with an oath to them, saying, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven. And I will give them all of this land that I have promised to your descendants, and they will possess it forever.’”* ***14****So the Lord changed his mind about the terrible disaster he had threatened to bring on his people.* Moses appealed to God’s nature because He knew God. He was God’s friend. He understood His loving kind nature. *The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. Ex 34:5*

 When you walk around in someone else’s mind you get lost. *For who has known or understood the mind (the counsels and purposes) of the Lord so as to guide and instruct Him and give Him knowledge? But we have the mind of Christ (the Messiah) and do hold the thoughts (feelings and purposes) of His heart. 1 Cor 2:16 Amp “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.     “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.* ***9****For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,     so my ways are higher than your ways     and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. Isa 55:8-9* Don’t try to walk around in God’s mind. Hold on to His nature.

**As He Becomes More, You Will Become Less**

*He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less. John 3:30* John knew the only way to really know his beloved Savior was to let Him take up residence in his heart and occupy more and more space every day. As you fill up with Jesus, there is less of you. Don’t become less until you let Him become greater first. Don’t leave room for the devil to enter your heart. Let Jesus become greater so there is no room for the devil. **Y**ou have a God void only He can fill. He created your heart with this empty space that will only be happy when He is in it!

When I let Jesus walk with me through the fiery trial of my first husband leaving our marriage, what I remember most is not the suffering but knowing a God so great and so good, that my life was forever changed **not because of my pain but because of His Presence.** He turned my tears into joy! We serve a happy God! Those who sow in tears will reap joy in the morning! *You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle.  You have recorded each one in your book. Psa 56:8; Those who plant in tears  will harvest with shouts of joy.* ***6****They weep as they go to plant their seed,  but they sing as they return with the harvest. Psa 126:5 Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psa 30:5*

Jesus makes life worth living. He is the Happy Potentate! 1 Timothy 6:15 Concordant The more you understand His great love, the better you will know Him and abide in Him comfortably. He knows you better than you know yourself. He wants to walk with you through everything you ever feel, think, say or do. If the only thing you walk away with during this study year is a heart more inclined toward Him then it has all been worthwhile. He loves you with the most tender love the universe has ever known! It is all about Jesus. Put faith before your feelings. Make Jesus your Best Friend!

**Put Faith Before Feelings**

Paul knew his death was imminent. He saw his brief life on earth from the “edge of the cliff looking over”. He understood the need to feed his spirit and not his body or even his emotions. He put his faith before his feelings. When you put your faith before your feelings you feed your spirit, making it a comfortable place for Jesus to reside.

**Make Jesus Your Best Friend**

Moses who was the only person in the Bible whom God ever called His friend was a prelude to the coming Messiah. He stepped in between God’s wrath and the people. God relented, but it was not a permanent fix. Jesus provided the ultimate Sacrifice that prevails overruling all interventions.

**To Know Jesus is To Worship Him**

What you feed grows. When you worship God as an act of your will, your love for Him grows. Graham Cooke’s praise to Jesus:

“When you’re able to confess Jesus as the Supreme Ruler over all things, to confess He is your Lord and that you are His possession, then you are the happiest of all people. Nothing could happen that could be so wonderful, that it could possibly be better than the happiness you have in the Lordship and the supremacy of Jesus Christ. When you know that you are situated, that you are located in the heart of the happiest, most powerful person ever to live, then you cannot be more happy than at that point.

“When you’re able to step back into His rest and live in the high tower of His name, so that when the enemy comes raging against you, he cannot find you, that’s joy! That’s happiness!

“When all your confidence in in the One Who made heaven and earth, when everything you need in life is utterly dependent on the goodness, the mercy, the kindness, the love, the grace, the power, of the One Person Who is Supreme God above all gods – when your present and your future and your health and your destiny and your life depends totally on the God Who works for weak, twisted, and deceitful people, then you simply have to be the happiest people on the face of the earth. Because your happiness is built totally on the knowledge that the God Who gives favor to weak, selfish people – He has given you an unshakable conviction and confidence in His ability to bring change and power to bear on your life.

“Put your life into the hands of a God Who totally loves you, and is deeply committed to you, and delights in helping you. It is the happiest feeling to totally trust the best, most honorable, most powerful, the integreous, committed, and faithful Covenant Maker, Who is also the most decent Person Who ever lived – JESUS.

“He is consistent, the most consistent Person ever, Who will never change His heart towards you, no matter what you do. He cannot be anything other than What and Who He Is. He is a covenant Maker and a covenant Keeper. Our God is Good. Our God is consistent, but He’s also unpredictable. You never know what God’s going to do next – you always know what He’s going to be like but you never know what He’s going to do next.

“And God has called you to see the invisible and do the impossible. God has not called you to do the things you can do, He’s called you to do the things that you’ll never be able to do in a million years. You’re not able to do what God has called you to do; only He can do it. But He’s called you to live in His faithfulness; He’s called you to live in His consistency, that He will come and do all the things that need to be done.

“So beloved, you cannot find security in what God is doing, because God commits you to the impossible; He asks you to see the invisible; Ha calls you to do the outrageous. There is no security in that place, there is not security in what God is doing. There is only security in WHO GOD IS. This great God Who we serve will throw us into situations beyond us with no other thought than that His great heart will sustain us.”

You can’t really know Jesus without a thankful heart. In Romans 1 Paul describes a person who has known God but traded the truth for their way instead:

***18****But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness.* ***19****They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them.* ***20****For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

***21****Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn’t worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused.* ***22****Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools.* ***23****And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.*

***24****So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other’s bodies.* ***25****They traded the truth about God for a lie. Rom 1: 18-25a NLT*

They worshipped the created instead of the Creator. Don’t let the devil replace God’s goodness with worldly pleasure. Thank God for all things and in all things. It will cultivate your grateful heart. He is working everything out for your good. *And we know that God causes everything to work together**for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Rom 8:28 NLT*

Keep looking ahead. Jesus said in Matt 8:22, *‘Follow me and leave the dead to bury their own dead.’* I had habits in my life that were so ingrained they felt like a pair of comfortable old shoes worn so thin they needed to be thrown away. Sometimes recovery or new healthy habits feel uncomfortable in the beginning. But the more you do them the better they feel. When I started new habits like turning off the tv or putting down some trashy magazine not worth reading anyway, to go to church or even a Bible study, it felt uncomfortable at first. But the more I did it the more it meant to me. You walk in a pair of new shoes and after a while they start to feel good! It started to feel good opening up to new friends, getting in God’s Word and connecting with like minded people.

Jesus said in Luke 5:22, *‘Why are you reasoning in your hearts?’* Nothing gets me into trouble faster than when I start trying to figure everything out. Destroy those lofty speculations.

Jesus knows when you are reaching out for Him. He will respond. In Luke 8:45-46 He said, *‘Who touched me? Someone did touch me, for I perceive that power has gone out of me.’* Look at the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Read from the Bible Amplified translation to see the depth of her suffering and the even greater depth of Jesus’ healing love. The life is in the blood. Her life had been seeping from her body for 12 long years. She had been wasting away. When she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, He healed her. He restored her life blood flow by His own Life Blood. Let Jesus touch you with His own Life Blood. He will cleanse you and make you whole.

There is no other way to know Jesus than by personal experience that nurtures relationship with Him.  Prayer is the doorway that takes you to the inner room of intimacy with Him.  it is why we are called to pray without ceasing  it keeps you in a place of a conscious consistent awareness of His Presence. Jesus above all else! He loves you, cares for you tenderly, is constantly aware of your presence, your needs, your heart. Love Him above all else as He loves you!