

1-How Do You See Things?

How do you see things? What is your attitude? William James said *“Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.”* Have you explored your inner attitude? What would a change in attitude mean to the outer aspects of your life?

Our minds are the storehouses of our life’s events. These events shape the way we see ourselves, those closest to us and the world around us. It’s time to open up the storehouse and explore what’s there. It’s time to clear out the baggage that no longer defines who you are and what you think. It is time to take responsibility for your attitude and not allow history to hijack it!

These are bold statements that reflect a passion that has been unlocked as I have cleaned house and discarded attitudes that no longer serve me and held me captive to the past. As I have uncovered the truth about whom I am and who created me I have gained a new attitude – I am a Victor! I have been adopted as a son by the Creator of the Universe. If you are not a spiritual person please extend me grace as I share my enthusiasm with you. Also let me encourage you to accept His invitation!

As I have updated my attitude I have noticed a remarkable result – joy and peace abound! I am not saying that my life is without challenges, but I face those challenges with a lot more optimistic attitude than I once did. How I see myself has completely changed how I face challenges such as unemployment, estrangement, death of a loved one, financial hardship and uncertainty. I see the challenges as an opportunity for growth. I am being stretched. I am being taught. I am completely out of my comfort zone. Yet I am comfortable. Amazing!

If you have not had the opportunity to clean house now is the time. If you have not gone through the renewing of your mind do it today! I remember a Public Service Announcement that said a mind is a terrible thing to waste. I didn’t get it then but I do now! Allowing my mind to focus on the hurts, hardships and failures was not helping me to achieve his purpose for my life.

Once I threw away the rearview mirror, the view ahead was spectacular! Join me in trading in the missteps of the past for the hope of the future!

Jeremiah 29:11 says it best – “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” You are no longer that old creature.

Celebrate your new creation in Christ!

Verses:

Proverbs 23:7 “For as a man thinketh in his heart so is he”

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; The old has gone, the new has come.”

Personal Reflection:

What baggage do you need to discard? Why are you hesitating? Who will hold you accountable?

General Discussion:

How can you encourage each other to step up and grow?

What are your struggles?

How can we hold each other accountable?

(Abbreviation Reference – **PSA** stands for Personal Service Announcement.)

2-Manage Your Tendencies

We all go through life following a routine. We get up at a certain time, eat at a certain time and go to bed at a certain time. In the early years this routine was established by others. Our parents woke us up, prepared our meals, drove us to school or youth activities and tucked us in at bedtime. We became creatures of habit! Our genetics and our environment shaped how we saw ourselves. If we grew up in a two parent household we had a male and a female role model. Role models set “standards”! As kids we see and follow these standards. When we become teenagers we “test” these role models. We want to be our own people! Some of us reject the role model and rebel! Some of us test the model and adopt it because it feels “natural”. Some of us start to set our own course through life and experiment with a variety of life styles. But ALL of us to some degree are creatures of habit.

The ongoing question that we sometimes fail to ask on a regular basis is “How is that working for me?” Once we have formed our “norms” we tend to stay with them. We follow our tendencies. The question I had to answer was--- “Are my tendencies best for me and those closest to me?” When I asked that question I was faced with a challenge--- How can I adapt my behavior so I’m happy AND those closest to me are also happy. Like most folks I wanted to be selfish, but once I came face to face with the toll that my selfish nature had on those closest to me I had a decision to make. I could put my needs first or I could do what was best for all involved. Yes I had to look at the impact of how I lived my life and make a decision. Do it my way and sometimes hurt those closest to me or look at the “greater good” and move away from my selfish ways.

Many of us never ask ourselves the question---“is what’s best for me also what’s best for those closest to me?” That is why I am asking you that question now.

If your answer is NO then you’ll want to read on as we explore how we can manage our tendencies for the “greater good”. If you don’t care about the greater good, than this is probably where we will part company. If you believe “It’s my way or the highway” then enjoy your way. But don’t be

surprised if you become lonely as people choose the highway and leave you to enjoy “your way” by yourself!

There are three simple steps to managing your tendencies:

1-Clearly identify your tendency. How do you act or react?

2-Determine if your tendency works for those around you. This means you’ll have to be vulnerable and ask those closest to you to be honest and speak “truth” to you. Helpful hint-much of what you do works well for those closest to you. Remember this is an upgrade not a tear down and start over.

3-Decide how to change course. What will the new action/reaction look like? Helpful hint-this is not focusing on what not to do, but it is focusing your mind on the new positive action/reaction. A goal must be positive!

I said there are three simple steps. I’d didn’t say they were three EASY steps. Looking in the mirror is never easy. For years many of us have worked hard to avoid even a glance because we knew we would not like what we saw! However once you come face to face with who you really are then the journey to peace and joy can begin. That look in the mirror provides the motivation to move forward and do something to “improve” what you see. I chose the word improve rather than correct or fix intentionally. Those words imply there is something wrong with us. I prefer to see myself as a work in progress. I am far from perfect but since “God don’t make no junk” I’m just underdeveloped!

Once you’ve faced reality about who you are it is time for the next difficult step---enlisting others to be open about how your behavior affects them. Most of us don’t want to tell someone close to us how much they have hurt us. So when you come to them and ask them to detail how your actions and reactions harm them they are not going to say “Great, here’s the list!” They’ll wonder what happened to you. They want to gloss over your transgressions and tell you how wonderful you are. You’re going to have to CONVINCE them that they need to be COMPLETELY honest.

After the first two steps it does get a little easier. You now can honestly look in the mirror and those around you can encourage and support your efforts. That's right. I said those around you can support and encourage you--- not discourage and tear you down. When I came to my wife and asked her to be completely honest with me she was skeptical. Once I explained that I needed to manage my tendencies for "our" benefit instead of my benefit she saw that what I was doing was good for her too! That is when she switched from skeptic to supporter. Only when I followed through did she really believe the transformation she was witnessing. But she had faith in me and was willing to take the risk of being open and honest because my transformation would be good for us not just me.

Once you have your insight and the support of those closest to you, it's time to **develop an action plan**. Again I propose a three step process:

Prioritize---what actions and reactions need to be improved?

Focus---work on one action/reaction at a time

Practice---it takes 21 days to instill a new habit, 66 days to instill a new lifestyle and 180 days for it to become a "natural" lifestyle.

The secret ingredient to this process is--- **Patience**. It took years to develop the tendency you are "upgrading" (remember we are improving). It will take time and patience to complete the upgrade and if you rush it or try a short cut you'll be dealt the card that says **"Go Directly to Jail, Do Not Collect \$200"**! For those of you who never played Monopoly ask an elder what this means. For those of you who have played Monopoly you know it teaches life lessons---no shortcuts!

Verse:

Romans 12:2 – "Do not conform to the pattern of the world."

Personal Reflection:

Examine your tendencies. Which tendency is the top priority for you to focus on? Who can speak "truth" to you? Develop a plan and select someone to hold you accountable.

Group Discussion:

Why do we find that tendencies are so hard to break?

How can each member of the group encourage their brothers and sisters to complete the mission of "upgrading" the quality of your relationships with those closest to you?

3-We Are What We Repeatedly Do

Albert Einstein defined insanity as *“doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results”*. If we want to avoid insanity then we need to make changes. But change takes work. Lots of work! Aristotle said *“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”* If we want excellence in our lives we must develop excellent habits. Before we develop excellent habits we must identify what is excellent. We must set our standards high! I challenge you to set your high standards based on the Biblical standards outlined in **Gal 5:22-23**- *“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control”*.

Yes another bold statement. Again you can feel the passion as I share my walk with you. I do so to offer encouragement. Change is never easy. Stepping out of your comfort zone takes courage. I trust your success will be as beneficial for you as it has been for so many of the folks I have mentored over the past 18 years! We are all creatures of habit. The question is what should our habits be? If the answer is that we need new habits then we need to follow the advice of Aristotle and set Gal 5:22-23 as our high standard. We must identify the habits to which we aspire. We must have the discipline to repeat these “new creation” habits until they have replaced the “old creation” habits that do not serve us well! For years I allowed my old nature to take priority over relationships. I was tasked driven-if you got in the way I rolled over you because the task was my priority. Once I understood the unintended consequences of my nature I tempered my approach to the task. I built a team. I made the goal a team goal. I included the team in key decisions. I encouraged everyone to share their opinion and I valued those opinions. I am still task driven but now I take the team with me instead of rolling over them. Our accomplishments are team accomplishments. I will never be the most sensitive man but I will never be as insensitive as I once was!

I challenge you to understand your temperament and how your temperament influences those around you. It was only when I understood my temperament and saw the ramifications on others that I was motivated

to temper my temperament. As I explored the sphere of emotional intelligence I discovered that I had to upgrade my self-awareness in order to understand how my temperament was counterproductive if left unmanaged. By increasing my emotional intelligence in the area of self-awareness and self-management I was able to become the “gentle giant” instead of the ogre! It was the interplay of my emotional intelligence, my personality and the Holy Spirit that delivered a new habit that serves me well.

It’s time for you to begin using your self awareness to understand your temperament and how it can work either for or against you! As you gain a better understanding of your temperament you will discover it’s not what your temperament is but how you apply it that makes the difference. I am still a task-oriented man but I have learned to temper my strength so it serves me well and serves those around me equally well. Once my self-awareness made me aware of the impact of my temperament there was an immediate “upgrade” for me as well as those closest to me. My team received the benefits of my temperament without the drawbacks. I must also point out that my faith played a role in this transformation. That quiet little voice that Christians know as the Holy Spirit was critical to my self-awareness. It was His Voice that alerted me to the impact that my unbridled temperament was having on my team. The interaction of my faith through the Holy Spirit and my awareness of my temperament is proof positive that a New Insight results in a New Outlook, and a New Outlook results in a New Outcome.

Verse:

Psalm 119:125 *“I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes”*.

Personal Reflection: What is my New Insight? What “old creature” habits are creating the most insanity in my life? What is my temperament? How can I temper my temperament to better serve those closest to me?

Group Discussion: Examine how many different temperaments are represented across the group?

What are the strengths of each temperament?

What are the vulnerabilities of each temperament?

How can we best blend our temperaments to advance the Kingdom?

4-Who Lights Your Runway?

My cousin is a pilot. Even though he tells me the plane can pretty much “land itself” he still follows a glide path to the runway. When the visibility is low the pilot must have faith that he is on the correct glide path. Why the analogy? We are all on a glide path in life. The question we need to answer is “how confident are we that our glide path is taking us to the right destination”? If we have made a decision to follow Christ, then His Light is the glide path we need to follow. If we are off course we need a glide path correction mechanism-the Holy Spirit. If we have crashed, then we need Jesus to cover us as we repent and go around for another landing attempt.

I live a few miles from the most active civilian airport in Arizona. All day and often into the night the student pilots are doing “touch and go’s” as they learn how to land. They are learning to trust the landing system. Believers are like these young aspiring pilots. As new believers our faith is a work in progress. With each time the Lord brings us in for a successful landing, our faith grows. Eventually our faith is so strong that we completely trust that He will not leave us or forsake us.

Just as we are becoming completely confident we have a disaster! That’s when we discover that our over-confidence has become pride and our pride has taken our eyes off the glide path. The crash is part of God’s plan. His plan is to prune us and to help bear the best fruit possible. In my life there have been plenty of disasters- a failed marriage, job losses, deaths of loved ones, financial misadventures. The list goes on and on and so does the fact that after each disaster Jesus was standing there with His Hands reaching out to lift me up. He has never abandoned me! Some of those disasters were intended to sensitize me so I could come alongside others who were going through similar disasters. I could offer my encouragement because I had walked away from a similar crash and was back in the air. Our testimony about how Jesus has changed our lives does not end when we accept Christ. It is the first chapter in a lifelong testimony on how Jesus has changed our flight path or walk as well.

There is a way to avoid those crashes --- **let the Holy Spirit correct your glide path!** This requires you to be open to listening to the Holy Spirit. That quiet, still voice that whispers “pull up, pull up” is easy to ignore. It does not scream, so you have to listen closely if you want to hear the alerts He issues. Sometimes the Holy Spirit speaks through your Christian brothers and sisters so if you are isolated you’ll never benefit from the truth He speaks through the council of others. I am reminded of **Proverbs 15:22** “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed”. Part of God’s design for His landing system is to insert people into your life who can offer good advice and wise counsel to you. It is up to you to engage and then consider that wise counsel before making significant decisions in your life. I have found that these advisors have saved me from many crash landings.

Verses:

Psalms 119:105 “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.”

John 15:5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing.”

Personal Reflection:

Who are your wise counselors? If you don’t have any or need more now is the time to act. How well do I hear the quiet still voice saying “pull up, pull up”? Am I overconfident? Do I tend to lean on my own understanding?

Group Discussion:

How can we counsel each other? Do we have transparency among ourselves so others can “speak into our lives”? How well do we fly in formation? Do we have the trust and communications among ourselves?

5-What Are Your Gifts?

We are all different! Even identical twins have unique characteristics. The earth is populated by 7 billion different personalities. Each of us have unique gifts – some of us are leaders, some of us are athletes, some of us are musicians, some of us are artists, some of us have a green thumb, some of us care for others, some of us feed the hungry, some of us heal the sick – but all of us have unique gifts from our Creator! Once you discover your gifts you'll see yourself differently! Yes, I said once you discover, because for many of us that day never comes. Without encouragement many of us will never try to use our gifts and therefore will never discover we have these gifts.

Let me share my story. As the firstborn son I found myself in a leadership position. My birth order helped me discover one of my gifts. I also had a gift with numbers and fortunately my teachers helped develop that gift. In a strange twist the emphasis of my mathematical gifts meant my language gifts went undeveloped! Like many of my gifts, my language gifts lay dormant for years. When I developed a love for reading I discovered I had a true gift for language. Not all our gifts are obvious. It is only when we step out of our comfort zone that we uncover hidden treasures – God-given gifts that have never been explored and developed. Gifts can also be hidden when we blindly believe what others tell us about ourselves. Although I struggled learning a foreign language and writing an acceptable English composition in high school, I did have the gift of language. For me high school was not the season for that gift to be revealed. Years after high school I began reading popular novels. It started with historical novels, then action novels, then business and “how to” books, and finally motivational authors. My language skills today would amaze my high school English composition teacher!

My language skills are not the only gift that remained dormant for decades. It was many years before I discovered I had the gift of service. Moving across country to a new city I was looking for a place to be “connected “. I volunteered to be a mentor to men being released from prison. Stepping out of my comfort zone exposed a gift that I had. It also exposed a gift I

had received from many in my life. Volunteering to be a mentor reminded me of the many mentors in my life. Until then I was clueless about the impact of a mentor on another person. As I was being trained to be a mentor I was able to recount the many men in my life who offered me encouragement, wisdom, knowledge and insight. It started with my grandfather who had the gift of encouragement. In high school it was a basketball coach who overlooked my lack of talent but saw my passion and gave me a chance to be on the team! In my first job it was a senior engineer who took me under his wing. In my first sales job it was a seasoned sales manager who offered insight and encouragement. These men and many more like them had helped to mold and shape me into the man I am today. Becoming a mentor gave me new insight into the men who had mentored me.

There are many questions for your Personal Reflection.

What gifts are dormant in your life? How can developing those gifts give you insight into your purpose? Who are the significant influencers in your life? Who do you turn to for encouragement? Who offers you sage advice? Who is helping you discover your gifts?

Hopefully you are fortunate enough to have people in your life who can offer you the encouragement, wisdom and insight to uncover your unique gifts. If you don't have these people then now is the time to seek out people who do have the gift of encouragement, wisdom and insight, and invite them to help you uncover and develop your God-given gifts!

Uncovering your gifts requires you to:

- Engage your self-awareness
- Be open to the feedback from those close to you
- Take the risk of stepping into uncharted territory
- Trust that He who gave you these gifts will bless your efforts to nurture the gifts.

Verses:

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

Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Personal Reflection: What gifts are dormant in your life? How can developing those gifts give insight into your purpose? Who are the significant influencers in your life? Who do you turn to for encouragement? Who offers you sage advice? Who is helping you discover your gifts?

Group Discussion:

Are we willing to encourage each other as we seek our gifts?

Has anyone been blessed with a close friend who has helped them develop dormant gifts?

Please share that experience with the group.

6-Our Thoughts Become Our Actions!

Have you ever wondered why a full-grown elephant can be held by such a small rope? It begins when the baby elephant tries to break free and cannot. After many attempts the baby elephant finally accepts his fate and stops trying. This is just one example of how our thought process dictates our actions. For those familiar with the movie My Fair Lady you'll remember Dr. Doolittle took a young lady who saw herself as anything but a lady and by changing her thought process she became a lady!

The mind is an amazing engineering feat. It retains years of experience to hold us captive to the past unless, like the baby elephant, we keep trying and eventually break free! In the Battlefield of the Mind the author Joyce Meyer makes a compelling case for why we must change our thinking in order to change our lives. She recounts through story after story where a changed mindset leads to a changed life. Further evidence of how changing of your mind can lead to a changing of your actions is presented in the "Anger Management Workbook" by Drs. Carter and Minirth. The authors share stories of both men and women who were trapped by their nature. An incident would occur, their nature would kick in, and they respond like an autopilot. Once these men and women discovered they had a choice to turn the autopilot off, their response was calm and collected. No longer running on autopilot, these men and women were able to work through the conflicts of their life and rebuild damaged relationships. They reclaimed control of their lives by reclaiming control of their minds. Once they won the battle of their minds they were no longer facing conflict in their lives. Yes, they still came under attack, but they no longer counterattacked!

The author of "Mentoring His Way" provides further evidence that when we change the way we see ourselves, we change the way we behave. He proves conclusively that when we see ourselves as victims, we are victims, but when will we see ourselves as victors, we are victorious! Norman Vincent Pele in his classic work confirms that a man's thought process controls his life. Change the thinking and you change the actions! Author after author testifies that you can break free!

So, you want to change, but where do you begin the process? Turn off your autopilot! Give your Creator full access to your mind. Follow **2 Corinthians 10:5** and "take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ". Turn off your wandering mind, your wondering mind, your passive mind! If you want to turn off your autopilot, it's a choice you must make with conviction! We will say more about "Having a Mind Like Jesus" in a later session. For today the challenge is to turn off the autopilot and bring every thought to the Holy Spirit! When you do that, you will discover you have been limiting yourself for years. **1 Corinthians 13:11** says it best. "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me". Like the baby elephant you can cast off the shackles of your "baby" mindset and allow the truth of your Creator to guide your thoughts and your steps!

Personal Reflection: How can I turn off my autopilot? Who can encourage me to challenge the mindset that holds me captive to my past?

Group Discussion:

Share with the group what you have discovered about your "Baby Elephant" mindset?

Share what you need from the group to keep you moving away from the "old self" to the "new self".

7-Avoid the Greatest of Faults

As I have examined myself I have discovered that I am capable of living in denial. In fact I'm good at it! I have been forced to see faults that I passed off for years under excuses like "That's no big deal" or "Everyone does it, so what". Our nature is to avoid the uncomfortable. We want to be comfortable. Living with a half truth is comfortable. Having to face the cold hard truth is uncomfortable!

I took years of sitting under the teaching of strong biblically based men to get me to see the truth---we all deceive ourselves. I now agree with Thomas Carlyle's thinking-*"The greatest of faults is to be conscious of none."* I now believe that truth is truth and a lie is a lie. There is no middle ground. When you are sworn in for testimony in court you agree to tell the truth, the whole truth! There is no wiggle room in a court of law so why do we believe there is wiggle room in our walk? The answer is simple---for years "the devil made me do it". Not literally but the devil does tell you it's okay to stretch the truth. It's okay to tell "little white lies".

The new insight I gained was that the devil is the father of lies. "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." **John 8:44**. For those of you who are non-spiritual this verse may seem harsh. Who am I to declare that the devil is the father of lies? Well, the secular world often portrays the devil as a creature holding a pitchfork. The mascot of our hometown university is the Sun Devils and their logo is a pitchfork. Hardly the symbol of a fine, upstanding man of character! I believe we can all agree that at some point in our life we stretched the truth to wiggle out of trouble.

Now that I can acknowledge that I have been deceived in the past, what will I do the next time I face deception? I have been given the gift of discernment so that I can separate truth from the devil's lies. I must hone my spiritual gifts so they can serve me well! I must seek wise counsel before acting. I must store in my heart the truth of who I am- the adopted son of

the Creator of the universe. I must know the ploys the devil uses. I must ask Jesus for a hedge of protection! I must allow the transformation of my mind. I must allow the Holy Spirit access and listen when He speaks.

None of these "musts" will happen until you surrender yourself to your Creator. As long as you play the role of God in your life you are vulnerable to buying the lies of the Devil. "The truth will set you free" is more than just a saying! Truth shines light on the lies and exposes them. Darkness cannot win over light. The decision is yours---will you continue to be unaware of your faults or will you own them, then seek and accept forgiveness. The truth will set you free to enjoy all the joy and peace your Creator has waiting for you. Make the decision to avoid the greatest of faults and choose truth.

Verse:

John 8:32"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Personal Reflection:What lies have you bought into? Are you ready to bring them to the cross? Can you accept Jesus' forgiveness? Can you allow the Holy Spirit access to transform your mind and heart?

Group Discussion:

How can you encourage one another to bring the Devil's lies into the light?

Share the lies that have been exposed in your lives.

8-What Is Your Identity?

We live in a world that sees our identity as our role---father, son or brother. Sometimes our identity is in our work---carpenter, lawyer or laborer. But our true identity is in the spiritual realm. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior then you have an eternal identity. Yes, you will forever be the adopted son of the Creator of the Universe. You will forever be the brother of your Savior. Forever, your heart will be indwelled by the Holy Spirit.

You may think this is a bold claim. It is not a claim at all. Let's see what scripture tells us:

CREATOR- Genesis 1:26-27 "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.' So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

SAVIOR-Luke 2:11"Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord."**John 3:16**"For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

HELPER-John 14:16 "And I will ask the Father, and He will send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you."

Why is it important that you focus on your eternal identity? Because it is unchanging! It is uplifting! It is a gift you could never earn for yourself! It is how you are seen by your Lord! All my other identities are temporary. Jobs come and go. Relationships come and go. Only our adopted status is permanent. How do we know that the Lord adopted each believer? Again, we turn to scripture for the truth---**Ephesians 1:4-5** "For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—".

What happens when you understand your true identity is your eternal status of adopted son of the Creator of the Universe? Your perspective changes! You see life differently. You now have an eternal perspective. This shift of perspective impacts your thinking. It impacts how you see and treat

everyone. For me it meant sharing the mercy I receive, with those most in need of mercy that are close to me. It meant extending mercy to my wife, children, grandchildren, parents, siblings, coworkers and enemies. Yes, that's right; extending mercy to those who persecute me. As I made this shift I experienced more joy and peace in my life.

Once I understood my role as the adopted son I also understood that a second role had been bestowed upon me. I am an Ambassador for Christ. Every adopted son and daughter is empowered to share the gift they have received with the people in their sphere of influence. The peace and joy that we experience through our adopted identity can be freely shared with anyone. This is a free gift so why don't we proclaim it from the mountaintops? I challenge you to embrace your adopted identity and share it with all who will listen!

Personal Reflection:

Have I embraced my adopted identity? Do I truly believe that I am the adopted son of the Creator of the Universe? Do I regularly thank Jesus, my Brother, for His sacrifice on my behalf? Do I allow the Holy Spirit to speak to me, and do I listen and follow His leading?

Group Discussion:

How can we encourage each other to be bold Ambassadors for Christ?

How can we share with the group the blessing that we are receiving daily from our adopted Father?

9-Who Are You Expecting to Meet Your Needs?

Have you ever wondered why the people around you don't meet all your needs? The answer is not complicated. People are not the answer to your needs. Only Jesus can fill the hole in your soul. Your Creator designed you and He wants His Son to be the key to your peace and happiness. I am not saying He will not bring people into your life who can bring you joy and happiness. He will bring marvelous people into your life. But the truth is that people can let you down and Jesus will NEVER let you down. He will never abandon you. He will never forsake you. Ref: **Hebrews 13:5**.

I receive great joy from my wife, my children, my grandchildren, my siblings and my friends. However my GREATEST joy comes from my relationship with my heavenly Father, my Savior and the Holy Spirit. I start every day with time with the triune God. That time quiets my mind, feeds my spirit and prepares me for the spiritual battlefield called life.

Please don't confuse needs and wants. I want a private jet, an around the world cruise and a stress-free life. James 4:3 addresses the private jet and cruise since they are my passions. They have never been part of my prayer life because God is not a sugar daddy. I have been blessed to cruise with my bride. Southwest is as close as I'll get to a private jet!

A stress-free life is an illusion. I have Jesus to deal with the stresses of life. There are clearly days when Jesus carries me on his shoulders just as a shepherd carries a lamb. On those days Jesus is meeting my needs. Stress free NO, but I never have to face life alone!

So what should I expect? The Bible tells me I will face challenges. It tells me that although "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil." That's quite a promise! I can testify there have been "valley of the shadow of death" days in my life. Days when I have lost a parent. Days when I have been laid off from a job. Days when I have watched helplessly as my wife dealt with health issues. I can testify that every one of those "valley of the shadow of death" days has passed. Based on my history, I expect that

challenges will pass but my relationship with my Creator will always be the foundation of my day. Nothing can rock that solid foundation!

Verses:

Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus".

Luke 12:31 "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need".

James 4:3 "You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly, so you can spend it on your passions".

Ephesians 3:20 "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us".

Personal Reflection:

Who have I looked to in the past to meet my needs? Am I ready to accept the fact that my Creator is the only one who can meet ALL my needs?

Group Discussion:

How can we encourage each other to place our needs at the foot of the cross?

How can we release our family and friends from meeting our needs?

10-Know Your Enemy

One of the most memorable scenes in a war movie is George C. Scott as General George Patton standing on a hill looking down on the remnants of Rommel's Afrika Korps. Rommel had earned the nickname the "Desert Fox" as he won battle after battle in North Africa. Until Rommel faced Patton at the battle of El Alamein, he had destroyed the Allied forces like a roaring lion devouring every Allied tank. Patton smashed the fabled Afrika Korps and looking down on the battlefield said "Rommel, You magnificent bastard, I read your book" Patton knew what to expect from his enemy, Rommel, because he studied Rommel's book on tank warfare. We can take a lesson from Patton because we too face an adversary who wishes to devour us. And like Patton we can read about Satan's tactics. The Bible is full of evidence about how Satan plans to attack. Here are but a few verses:

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

He is a murderer: **John 8:44** "You are of your father the devil and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

He is a tempter: **James 1:13-15** "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death."

He is a thief: **John 10:10** "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

He is an outcast: **John 12:31** "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out."

He is a liar and so are his minions. We must discern our teachers so we do not fall under false teaching. **2 Peter 2:1** "But false prophets also arose

among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."

He is bold- He even tried to deceive Jesus. **Matthew 4:8** "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory."

He is a deceiver- **2 Corinthians 11:14** "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light"

So, we know the devil is our adversary who wants to murder, tempt, steal, lie and deceive us into following him on a pathway of destruction. As an outcast from Heaven he has a grudge against all Christians because he was cast out of the brotherhood. And he was bold enough to try and tempt Christ so we know he will try to deceive us. You are now well equipped to face the devil. Like Jesus all you have to do is cast him out in the name of Jesus. The devil must respond to Jesus' commands.

James 4:7 provides the solution whenever we are confronted by the Devil: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." It is not complicated. Jesus has power over the devil and Jesus will cast him out whenever you call on Jesus to do so for you!

Personal Reflection:

How well do you understand the devil's attempt to mess with you? Where are you vulnerable? Who can come alongside you and help you strengthen your defenses? What's the condition of your Armor of God?

Group Discussion:

Share where the Devil has attempted to get footholds in your life.

Share who "has your back" when you battle with evil?

11-Resist the Devil and He Will Flee

Sounds easy but it's not. The devil is the king of liars. He doesn't announce his presence. He is sly and deceives us. He tells half truths so we can easily fall for his deception. There is a straight forward three step process that is the best defense against the evil one. The **first step is the key**---use your discernment to identify when the devil is at work. Any message that is not good or uplifting is an attempt by the devil to slip past your defenses. Test what you are hearing! If it is not totally true then it is the evil one's attempt to slip a fast one past you! Know what is good and your "devil detector" will sound the alarm every time he attempts to deceive you.

Once you have detected the devil's attempt to deceive you, it is time to remember who you are. **Step 2** is to remember you are the adopted child of the Creator of the Universe. When God adopted you into His family, He extended to you all the power of an adopted child. Use that power! Command the devil to flee! (**Step 3**) The power that God has vested in you through Jesus is waiting to be used against the devil's attacks. You just have to command the devil to leave and he MUST leave. Yes, you have that kind of power. Not power of your own but power given to you through your relationship with the Trinity. You are the adopted child of God, the brother of Jesus and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. You have been given all the resources you need to resist the devil!

I had been a believer for over 15 years before I understood the power that was available to me through the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I knew that my sins were forgiven. I knew there was an eternal home waiting for me. I knew that peace and joy had replaced chaos and despair! Once I got the insight into the power given to me, there was an immediate increase in the joy and peace I was experiencing. Casting out the devil meant not having to deal with lies, deception, guilt, shame and all the emotions that the evil one deploys to reduce our effectiveness for God's intended work. Not only did my "quality of life" explode but so did the depth of my quiet time every day. The interference from the devil was minimized so my "connection" was fantastic! My mind was more focused. There were almost

no distractions. What had been temptations that required "management" disappeared! Life is now like the song---"I can see clearly now"!

When I have shared God's ability to force the devil to flee from my life I often get "that look" as if I am on "happy" pills. So instead of taking my testimony at face value I challenge you to try it yourself! Turn up your discernment, apply your adopted status and use His power to get the devil to flee!

Verse:

Matthew 4:9-11 "And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give to You, if You fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go, Satan! For it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'. Then the devil left Him and behold angels came and began to minister to Him."

Personal Reflection:

Do you appreciate the power of Jesus to force the devil from your life? Have you asked Jesus to provide a hedge of protection when the devil is attacking?

Group Discussion:

Share how you have called upon Jesus to provide a hedge of protection for you.

Share your doubts so the group can address them and encourage each of you.

12-Play It Down, Pray It Up

Dr. Robert Schuler has impacted many lives. His teaching embodied in Possibility Thinking has influenced how I see life events. It has given me a new insight into how to deal with what life sends my way. I cannot give Possibility Thinking the credit it deserves in a single session so I suggest you explore Dr. Schuler's teaching further on your own. See the Appendix for more info.

The phrase "Play It Down, Pray It Up" is the easiest way to incorporate Dr. Schuler's approach into your life. On Friday July 13, 2012 I was dealt a family tragedy, a work setback and a business disappointment. Any one of these events would have devastated the "old me"! The combination of the three events would have led to deep depression. After many years of living by the "Play It Down, Pray It Up" philosophy I was able to encourage my wife and family rather than get swept up in the disasters. I looked at each of three events separately thus defeating the multiplier effect that satan was hoping for! Then I worked through each event playing down the impact on my family and lifting my family up in prayer. I saw the family tragedy not as a life altering event but as a temporary setback. Yes, it will have a lifelong impact but there are many triumphs, that when taken together, have put the tragedy in perspective. The work setback was not unexpected but the financial impact put us in a hole we are still digging out of. Again, when you put the setback in perspective with all the lifelong blessings I have received in the work place, it pales in comparison. Finally the business disappointment is still a work in progress. It taught me that relationships are more important than money. Although looking at each event separately and then putting each in perspective, helped carry me through that Friday. It was the prayer support of many in my network that provided the encouragement to move beyond the setbacks and expect that He would deliver on His promise. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The words that Jeremiah shared with the exiled Israelites are as true today as they were thousands of years ago. **God answers prayer!** He lifts us from despair! The devil wants us to overreact, he wants us off

balance so he can maneuver us in the direction he wants us to go. I have learned that disaster is a tool of God to mold and shape us into the plan He has for us. Yes, that's right. Each disaster is part of the plan! Depending on God to pull you through the disaster is God's plan to draw you closer to Him, to depend on Him and not yourself.

If there were not days like Friday July 13th, 2012 in our lives, we could just depend on ourselves! Disasters serve a purpose to remind us that we are His creation. We are designed for His purpose and the sooner we understand His purpose, then the sooner we will not have to experience disasters. Also the sooner we will experience His comfort, His joy and His peace!

Verse:

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

Psalms 23:4 "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff will comfort me."

Personal Reflection:

What tragedies have you experienced? How have they impacted you? How could you have applied "Play It Down, Pray It Up" to your life?

Group Discussion:

Share your insights into how "Play It Down, Pray It Up" could impact your life.

Ask the group to pray for men who are dealing with disasters.

13-Six Keys to Peace in Relationships

Rick Warren is a world renowned author. His book "A Purpose Driven Life" has affected countless lives. In the summer of 2012 Rick delivered a series of messages entitled "You Make Me Crazy" (YMMC). As I studied these messages I gained new insight into how to deal with the crazy makers in my life. But more importantly, I saw how I was a crazy maker in the lives of those closest to me. I also saw how I could change my approach and my attitude toward these crazy makers. My most profound take away from YMMC is addressed in his first message. He declares that "Hurt People Hurt People". What a profound truth that will change the way you look at people you feel are hurting you! You'll want to go to the Saddleback website and order that message.

Rick refers to James 3:13-18 when he states that wherever you find confusion, disharmony and disorder, there's ego. James says wherever you find jealousy and selfish ambition, you'll find disorder and every kind of evil. Rick then moves on with **six steps** you can take to bring peace into your relationships.

If I want to be wise in my relationships

- I won't compromise my integrity
- I won't antagonize your anger
- I won't minimize your feelings
- I won't criticize your suggestions
- I won't emphasize your mistakes
- I won't disguise my intentions

The foundation for Rick's message is **James 3:17** "...The kind of wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere. Those who are peacemakers plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness."

I encourage you to invest in the YMMC series of messages. Details are in the appendix.

My insight from the opening message of the YMMC series is this - I need to understand **what I do** and **how I do it** are all that I can control in any relationship. I have no control over my wife, son, daughter, Mom, Dad, boss or co-worker! If I am wise and follow the six keys I will establish an environment of love, acceptance and trust which improves the chances that others will respond with love, acceptance and trust!

Is it always true that we reap what we sow? If I am attacked and I respond with love and kindness then the attacker will not reap what they sowed. They will not reap what the devil intended them to reap because God has intervened and replaced my hard heart with a loving heart! They will reap love, acceptance and trust! Regardless of how a crazy maker attacks, you can wisely choose to respond as a peacemaker. This is one of those new habits we developed in the "Are You a Peacemaker" session. The discipline of listening to the Holy Spirit develops your self-control. Since you have allowed the Holy Spirit to indwell you with a new heart, you respond with love, acceptance and trust. These new habits that you have been practicing serve you well when the crazy maker attacks. The Holy Spirit brings harmony and peace to you during trials.

What happens when I won't compromise my integrity, antagonize your anger, minimize your feelings, criticize your suggestions, emphasize your mistakes and disguise my intentions? The crazy maker sees a peacemaker! The crazy maker sees someone isn't pushing their buttons! The crazy maker sees someone who cares about them and loves them! The devil is thwarted when the peacemaker does not return evil for evil. The peacemaker's response changes the outcome.

Now it's time to look at how to change your crazy making habits into peacemaking habits. We all do things that push other people's buttons. It may be what we say. It may be how we say it. It may be a facial expression. Whatever it is, we need to figure it out and stop it! We need to empower those closest to us to point out how we push their buttons. If we can be completely transparent and be completely open to constructive feedback,

we can discover our blind spots. Once we have established an environment of love, acceptance and trust, we have the foundation for honest dialogue. We then must take the initiative. We must be vulnerable and willing to receive unbiased feedback from those we empower to identify the things we do that drive them crazy. If we can constructively receive and accept their feedback and make the changes that the Holy Spirit places on our heart, those around us will respond in kind. Not only can we reap what we sow, but we can demonstrate to others that if they reap the seeds of love, acceptance and trust, they too can sow joy and peace.

Personal Reflection:

How are you pushing other people's buttons? How can you be transformed from a crazy maker to a peacemaker? Why do you over react when your buttons are pushed?

Group Discussion:

How can we hold each other accountable to become peacemakers?

Share your struggles that surface when your buttons are pushed.

14-What Do You Do When They Push Your Buttons?

Rick Warren's Crazy Maker's series provides insight into how to respond when someone pushes your buttons. Rick gives us insight into our button pushers. His advice is to look past the button pusher's words to their pain. There is a why behind their behavior. The button pushers are hurting! The button pushers need understanding, love, empathy. They are a mission field, not a battlefield!

Once you see your button pushers as a mission field, it is time to develop an approach. Start by thinking before reacting. Take a moment to examine yourself. Is there a log in your eye? Take a moment to calculate the cost of anger. Is it worth damaging the relationship? What is the root cause of your anger---Hurt, Frustration, Fear?

Own your contribution to the situation. Own your buttons and you'll be able to minister to your button pushers. Sounds good but how do you change your reaction? You change the way you see button pushers! They are not the enemy. They are hurting brothers and sisters. Once you change your perspective you change your reaction. You soften your own hardening heart.

Review the session Pray It Up Play It Down. Prayer quiets your soul. Playing it down puts the situation in perspective. Now you are in a good mindset. You can exercise your self-control. You can extend love, patience, kindness and gentleness. You can keep the peace. You can experience joy instead of strife. You can be faithful to your Creator's plan for this relationship. Yes, these are the Fruits of the Spirit. They come from God when you need them most!

Now that your reaction is calm, it is time to focus on the button pusher. Go heart to heart with them. Let them know you care about them. Let them know you are there for them if they need to talk. Let them know they are loved. Let them know how much you value the relationship. Offer to pray with them.

Verses

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Matthew 7:5 "You hypocrite! First remove the log out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye."

Ephesians 4:26 "Don't sin by letting anger control you. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

Personal Reflection:

Can you see your button pushers differently? Can you extend mercy and grace instead of wrath? Who do you have to go to and ask for forgiveness?

Group Discussion:

How can we encourage each other to go to those we have alienated and restore the relationship?

Who is struggling with the emotions this session has surfaced?

15-Hurt People Hurt People

We are the walking wounded. Wounds from childhood. Wounds from broken relationships. Unseen wounds. Unspoken wounds. Because we are wounded, we tend to wound others. We lash out when someone's actions triggers an old wound. We are hurting people and we need to heal these wounds if we want to stop hurting others. We also need to come alongside the hurting and minister to them when they hurt us. **The hurting is our mission field.** The hurting in your sphere of influence need the healing love of Jesus. I challenge you to change the way you look at those who hurt you! Jesus gives you grace and mercy. He instructs you to share His mercy and grace with those close to you. God extends us mercy when He does not punish us for the sins we have committed. He extends grace when He blesses us despite the fact that we do not deserve it.

You need to deal with your own wounds before you tend to the wounds of others. Your healing depends on your willingness to acknowledge the wound, share the wound with those who love you and get the support you need. The Holy Spirit uses brothers and sisters to tend to your wounds. Brothers and sisters who have experienced the healing power of Jesus can encourage you. "I did it and you can do it" is the backbone of a support group. Whether it's sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse or abandonment, there is power in the healing power of the Body of Christ. **Jerimiah 29:11** is my constant companion. "I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, not plans to harm you but plans to give you hope and a future."

Once Jesus has healed your wounds you are in a better position to minister to the hurt people around you. You have been through the healing process and can become a part of their support network! You are now the "I did it and you can do it" encourager. You now know you must have relationships to grow. Your relationship with a hurt person provides the connection to offer hope and encourage them. You can provide the grace and forgiveness that restores their self-image. You can provide the discipline, structure and accountability they need to grow. You can provide the support and strengthening to help them endure hard times. You can help them work

through grief so they don't fall into depression. You can help them see that when the Lord prunes (disciplines instead of punish) His people, it produces new growth. You can help them avoid experiencing the pain that comes from avoiding grief, repeating failed patterns of behavior and not separating from destructive family of origin patterns by repeating the sins of their parents.

Our goal is to awaken you and lead you to the resources you need. The appendix contains more information on "How People Grow" written by Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend. There are also links to additional resources for helping hurting people.

Verses:

Romans 15:7 "Accept one another then just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

Galatians 6:2 "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

James 5:16 "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

Personal Reflection:

What wounds need to be healed for you to be safe? How will you go about receiving that healing? After you are healed, who do you need to come alongside? Who is your mission field?

Group Discussion:

Share with the group how they can come alongside you.

Share where you need prayer for healing in your life.

Share others that need healing.

16-Are You Equipped To Resolve Conflict?

We all face conflict - conflict at work, conflict with your spouse, conflict with your kids, conflict with a boyfriend or girlfriend, conflict in the community. Because the world is broken there is conflict everywhere. National conflict, political conflict, economic conflict, relational conflict, sexual conflict. There's conflict in every area and every segment of society. Given the likelihood of conflict in your life, are you equipped to resolve conflict?

"Never pay back evil for evil to anyone... As much as possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone." Romans 12:17-18 (NLT)

If your relationships aren't good, if you are carrying conflict and you don't know how to deal with it then you don't know how to be happy. Conflict sucks happiness and peace out of you. You can have everything, but if your relationships are a mess, you'll never be happy. You'll never experience true peace!

Even God recognizes that there are some people you can't live with in peaceful co-existence. They're called crazy makers! No matter how you try to appease, please, control, support, whatever... there is no magic answer. You've met people who are just unpleasable. Crazy makers will create conflict, so what's the answer?

Rick Warren in his series "You Make Me Crazy" proposes seven steps you can take to resolve conflict:

- 1-Take the initiative (right time, right place, pray before meeting, come with a positive attitude)
- 2-Confess your part of the conflict
- 3-You listen for the hurt
- 4-You consider their perspective
- 5-Tell the truth tactfully
- 6-Fix the problem, not the blame
- 7-Focus on reconciliation, not resolution

What is the common theme of these seven steps? Focus on the needs of the OTHER person. Put other's interests before your own and you will be a

peacemaker. Put your interests ahead of other's interests and you will be a Crazy Maker. The choice is yours. Consider the following verses:

2 Timothy 1:7: "God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but a spirit of power and love and self discipline."

Matthew 5:23: "If you're standing before the altar in the temple and you suddenly remember that somebody has something against you, you leave your offering there beside the altar and first be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your gift to God."

Matthew 7:3: "Why do you notice the little piece of dust in your friend's eye, but you don't notice the big piece of wood in your own eye? First, take the log out of your own eye. Then you'll see clearly to take the splinter out of your friend's eye."

James 1:19: "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."

Romans 15:2: "We must be considerate about the doubts and the fears of others."

Philippians 2:4-5: "Each of you should look not only for your own interests, but also the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 4:15: "Speak the truth in love."

Proverbs 12:18: "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing."

Ephesians 4:29: "Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed."

Colossians 3:8: "You must rid yourself of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips."

Romans 14:13: "Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way."

Matthew 5:9: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

1 Timothy 2:5: "There is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is Jesus Christ."

Personal Reflection:

Who are the crazy makers in your life? Are you giving them power? Who is the Holy Spirit nudging you to talk to using this seven step process? When will you act on the nudging?

Group Discussion:

How do we focus on others who are hurting?

How can we support each other as we apply Rick Warren's process for reconciliation (and not resolution)?

Which of the seven steps is difficult for each of you? How can you overcome that challenge?

17-Are You Ready To Escape The People Pleaser Trap?

Why is it important to escape the people pleaser trap? Our Spiritual Intelligence tells us five reasons to escape the trap:

- 1-It causes you to miss God's purpose for you
- 2-It keeps you from growing in your faith
- 3-It leads you to sin
- 4-It causes hypocrisy in our lives
- 5-It silences your witness

Proverbs 29:25 in Today's English Version says: "It is a dangerous trap to be concerned with what others think of you, but if you trust the Lord, you are safe."

Rick Warren in his "You Make Me Crazy" series of messages shares the six truths that will set you free from the people pleaser trap:

- 1-Even God can't please everyone
- 2-You don't need anyone's approval to be happy
- 3-What seems so important now is only temporary
- 4-You only have to please one person (God)
- 5-One day you'll give an account of your life
- 6-God shaped you to be you

I will share my insight into Rick's message and I encourage you to go to the appendix and acquire the complete series from Saddleback Church.

I will begin by thanking my grandfather for breaking me free from the People Pleaser trap. Although it was not precisely spiritual it captured the essence of points 1, 2 and 4 above. My grandfather stood me in front of a mirror and pointed to my image in the mirror. He then told me I cannot please everyone and that I have to be true to the man in the mirror (myself). Not exactly Spiritual but it helped me escape the need to please others. It worked in my "old life". It has been upgraded as my Spiritual Intelligence has grown and modified my thinking and my heart. The impact my agnostic grandfather had on my life is proof that God can use anyone to shape our lives. "Not exactly Spiritual" is a huge improvement over the world's approach-thanks Pop!

As I have chewed on Rick's message I have been able to understand the burden I have escaped but that many men carry. Men want Mom's love, Dad's approval, their wife's respect and don't understand that only God can meet all their needs. Putting those burdens on others when God can meet them is unfair to all. It's unfair to expect others to provide unconditional love 100% of the time. It's unfair to expect yourself to provide unconditional love 100% of the time. Only God can love you unconditionally 100% of the time! Men, it is time to stop asking others to be a people pleaser for you and it is time to stop being a people pleaser for others. Leave God's job to God!

Want to increase your Spiritual Intelligence? The following will give you God's insight into how to escape the people pleaser trap.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 "Our purpose is to please God, not people. He is the one who examines the motives of the heart."

John 5:44: "You try to get praise from each other, but you do not try to get the praise that comes from the only God. So how can you believe?"

Exodus 23:2 "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong."

1 Samuel 15:24-25 "Saul confessed to Samuel, 'I've sinned. I've trampled roughshod over God's Word and your instructions. I cared more about pleasing people so I let them tell me what to do'."

Proverbs 1:10 "Dear friends, if bad companions tempt you, don't go along with them."

Luke 16:15 "You make yourselves look good in other people's eyes but God knows your heart."

2 Corinthians 10:18 "You brag about yourself, but the only approval that counts is the Lord's approval."

John 7:13 "No one had the courage to speak favorably about Jesus in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the leaders."

John 12:42-43 "Many people, including leaders, believed in Jesus. But they wouldn't talk about it publicly out of fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. They loved human approval more than they loved the approval of God."

Romans 12:2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

John 8:32 "When you know the truth, the truth will set you free."

John 5:41 "Your approval or disapproval means nothing to me."

Isaiah 51:12 "I am the One who comforts you! So why are you afraid of mere humans who wither like the grass and disappear?"

Psalms 27:10 "Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close"

1 John 2:12 "The world and everything in it that people desire, is passing away; but those who do the will of God will live forever."

Luke 16:15 "The things that are highly valued by people are worth nothing in God's sight".

John 5:30 "I don't try to please myself, but I only please the One who sent me."

Galatians 1:10 "I'm not trying to be a people pleaser! No, I'm trying to please God. If I was still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant."

Romans 14:12 "Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God."

Luke 9:26 "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, I, the Son of man, will be ashamed of him when I come in my glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels."

Personal Reflection:

Who are you trying to please? Which of the verses speaks to you? Who can help you break free of your people pleaser thinking and hold you accountable?

Group Discussion:

Share how this lesson has freed you from the people pleaser hold on your life.

How has that freedom made a change in the way you experience joy in your life?

18-How to Keep the CrazyMakers from Making You Crazy!

We all have to deal with people who CAN drive us crazy. I say CAN drive us crazy because they don't have to drive you crazy. Pastor Rick Warren concluded his "You Make Me Crazy" Series (YMMC) of messages with advice regarding how to keep CrazyMakers from making you crazy.

Pastor Warren outlines how to deal with six different kinds of people- Demanding, Disapproving, Deafening, Destructive, Discontented and Demeaning. If you want to know more about these kinds of people then contact Saddleback Church and order the YMMC series. It's a great investment. Instead of dissecting these folks let's focus on how to deal with them.

Pastor Warren's answer is six fold:

1. Refuse to be offended
2. Don't wait for an apology to forgive them
3. Refuse to gossip about them
4. Refuse to play their game
5. Refuse to cave in
6. Always take the high ground

You may take one look at these six answers and say but you don't know _____ (fill in the blank). Well, your Creator knows every one of these CrazyMakers. **And He has brought them into your path for a reason!** He wants you to minister to the CrazyMakers in your life. You can only minister when you have God's perspective. God is not offended at the CrazyMaker so why should you be offended. If you are not offended there is not a barrier to ministry. God never expects or waits for an apology. If you need an apology then there's another barrier. God's Word on gossip is clear --- DON'T DO IT! If you feed the monster by playing the game than you clearly don't know the devil's playbook--- divide and conquer. The Lord says to unite through love. You should never cave in because that gives the devil what he is hoping for. And if you take the high ground the CrazyMaker may eventually join you. At this point you're probably saying ... well, that advice sounds good but how do I do all that. The answer is you can't, but the Holy Spirit can do it for you if you let Him.

Apply the following verses:

Proverbs 12:16 "Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult." The wise person looks past the behavior to the **pain** causing the behavior. The wise person sees the opportunity to love the person rather than react to the behavior.

Proverbs 19:11 "A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense." The wise man understands the **pain** and extends grace. He overlooks the offense because his focus is on the needs of the offender.

Colossians 3:13 "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." We all appreciate the price Jesus paid for **our sin**. We can pay the small price of forgiving a **fellow sinner**.

Matthew 22:15, 18-19 "Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in His words. But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, 'You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought him a denarius,". **Follow** the example **Jesus** set by not allowing the devil to draw you into an argument with a person who needs your love and grace.

Romans 14:16 "Therefore do not let what you know is good be spoken of as evil." Speak up! Do not be weak. Do not be bullied. Pastor Warren reminds us that **meekness is strength under control**.

Romans 12:14 "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Real love loves the unlovable. Responding with love is being an **Ambassador for Jesus**. Follow Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good".

If you meditate on these verses then you will be prepared to minister to the hurting. You will avoid the devil's trap and be a true Ambassador for Jesus!

Personal Reflection:

Who are your CrazyMakers? How can you minister to their needs? How does God have to change your heart so you can love the unlovable?

Group Discussion:

How did your personal reflection change your heart toward your CrazyMakers? How can the group hold each other accountable to see the needs, not the behavior, of CrazyMakers?

19-You Cannot Enlighten the Unconscious - But You Can Love Them

Self awareness is a gift that not everyone embraces! Early in my sales career I was introduced to a Wilson Learning program that postulated that we fall into four classifications-conscious competent, unconscious component, conscious incompetent and unconscious incompetent! Clearly if we are competent and conscious of our talents we are in the healthiest classification. However we are often confronted with the unconscious incompetent- those that are completely unaware of their faults and are completely unaware of how it affects those closest to them!

So how do you deal with the unconscious incompetent? Our natural instinct is to enlighten them. We attempt to help them become conscious of their state and then try to encourage them to develop their talents and become competent. As we struggle to enlighten these folks, we quickly discover that it's hard to bring enlightenment to those who are completely unaware of their need for enlightenment. As much as I want to encourage you to stick with it, I encourage you to understand that attempting to enlighten the unconscious ultimately leads to frustration. The unconscious remain unconscious and the person attempting to enlighten the unconscious slowly begins to harbor negative feelings toward the unconscious. No one wins in this scenario except the devil!!

The only approach is to LOVE the person! Yes, you must embrace them and love them!! Why? It's God's plan and His commandment. Jesus loved everyone. There was no one who was UNLOVEABLE in the eyes of Jesus. A second reason is our mission to be salt and light to a fallen world. Someone who is unaware of their situation needs massive amounts of love. They need unconditional love! It is not our job to "fix" people. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to help the unconscious become conscious. These folks are often hurting and the last thing they need is for us to walk away from them. We need to engage with everyone and then listen to the direction we receive from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows the best approach and we will know also if we listen carefully to the leading of our "helper".

Verses:

Proverbs 10:12 "Hate stirs up trouble, but love forgives all offenses".

Colossians 3:14 "Above all, be loving. This ties everything together perfectly".

Proverbs 17:17 "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born out of a time of adversity".

Ephesians 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love".

Luke 6:35 "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them expecting to get nothing back. Then your reward will be great...."

Personal Reflection:

Who do you need to love unconditionally? Can you go to that person and let them know you love them unconditionally? If you struggle to love your enemy, who can encourage you to overcome your struggle?

Group Discussion:

Why do we struggle with the command to love our enemies?

Why does the devil want to isolate us from those who need our unconditional love?

20-Are You A Peacemaker?

Ken Sande heads up the organization [Peacemaker Ministries](#). Peacemaker Ministries is dedicated to Christian Conciliation. Peacemakers believe conflict provides three significant opportunities:

Glorify God by trusting, obeying and imitating Him

Serve other people by helping to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love

Grow to be like Christ by confessing sin and turning from attitudes that promote conflict

Are you a peacemaker or a crazy maker? Do you want to repent of your crazy maker habits? If you have had enough of chaos and strife in your relationships then read on. [Peacemakers shares the Four G's](#) that will bring peace to your relationships:

Glorify God

Get the log out of your own eye

Gently restore

Go and be reconciled

We have been called to live for the glory of God. We can glorify God in the midst of conflict by trusting Him, obeying him and imitating him. Sande suggests asking the question “How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation”?

Now that you have chosen to Glorify God it is time to deal with the log in your own eye. Jesus states in **Matthew 7:5** “You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”. Sometimes the log is a critical, negative or overly sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. Peacemakers suggest meditating on Philippians 4:2-9 which describes the attitude Christians must have when they are involved in conflict.

The second kind of log is sinful words or actions. With the help of brothers and sisters you can take an objective look at yourself and own your contribution to the conflict. Admit your wrongs. Own your words and actions! Face the root cause of your behavior so you can repent and turn

away from future conflict. (For more on Peacemaker Ministries check out the appendix.)

With the log removed from your own eye it is time to gently restore. [Jesus taught restoration not condemnation](#). Galatians 6:1 is the best guide. “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.” Before restoring, ask yourself “does the offense rise to the level of restoration or can it be overlooked and forgiven”? Peacemakers offer great guidance on “How to restore”. Also refer to the session [“What Are The Six Keys To Peace In Relationships”](#) for Rick Warren’s advice on restoration.

Go and be reconciled is the most unique aspect of biblical peacemaking. It is the genuine pursuit of forgiveness and reconciliation. **Colossians 3:12-14** is your guide. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Peacemakers has four promises of Forgiveness:

I will not dwell on this incident

I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you

I will not talk to others about this incident

I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship

[You now have the Peacemaker Four G's](#). Go forth and restore damaged relationships!

Verses

Philippines 4:4-9 “Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from

me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Personal Reflection:

Which of your relationships need restoration? How can you prepare yourself to restore these relationships? Who can come alongside you and provide encouragement during your journey of restoration?

Group Discussion:

Share what you are struggling with as the Holy Spirit encourages you to restore damaged relationships.

How can the group walk with you on your journey?

21-Does Something Need To Be Said, Now, By Me?

A local radio station in town runs a commercial that offers Godly advice. Here are the three questions the ad poses:

When something happens does anything need TO BE SAID about it?

Does it need to be said NOW?

Does it need to be said by ME?

This is not a Christian radio station but the three questions fall in line with the teaching in **James 1:19** – “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

If we are quick to listen, then we can discern if anything needs to be said. Some things need to be overlooked. Not everything needs to be addressed. Recall the lesson entitled “Do You Let Anger Take Control?” Doctors’ Carter and Minirth suggested Dropping Anger – you accept your inability to completely control circumstances and you recognize your personal limits. It includes tolerance of differences as well as choosing to forgive. Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to choose kindness and forgiveness as a way of life. Choosing to drop anger is far different from suppressing it. Suppression represents phoniness while dropping anger represents a commitment to godliness. So first ask yourself- Does anything need to be said or can you drop the situation?

If something needs to be said is now the time? James mentions the tongue’s ability to start a forest fire. Not a literal fire but a fire that can destroy relationships. Speaking when your emotions are surging is what James is referring to. There may be a time to deal with the situation but it should be when “cooler heads” prevail. Timing is critical if you desire a positive outcome. Speaking when emotions are high leads to low levels of communications because the feelings get in the way of true understanding.

Which brings us to the third point-Am I the person to speak? Many men will appear like knights in shining armor to rescue a loved one. There are times when this is the right action. One time is when the person cannot speak for themselves. When the person needs and requests your intervention.

However there are times when the rescuer does the person being rescued a disservice. **Better to coach the person to speak for themselves than to speak for them.** Teach a man to fish is the point here. Instead of enabling a passive person by speaking for them, we need to stand with them, walk with them and encourage them to speak for themselves. This produces growth in the person, shows the offender that the person does not stand alone and often convicts the offender to change his ways.

The world can provide wisdom. Combined with God’s wisdom it can be useful! This ad is a perfect example of three simple steps that can determine the success of how you deal with a situation. It is easy to remember-does it need to be said now by me? If the answer is no then step back and allow the Holy Spirit to chart your course.

Verse:

James 3:3-8 “When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

Personal Reflection:

Have there been times when you could have benefited from these three simple questions? How could these three steps have changed the outcome?

Group Discussion:

How can you encourage each other to employ this simple approach to dealing with situations? Be honest in sharing what you saw during your personal reflection time.

22-Do You Let Anger Take Control?

In their book “The Anger Workbook”, Drs’ Minirth and Carter outline five ways to handle anger.

1 – Suppressing Anger – put on a good front and pretend to feel no tension! This leads to emotional dishonesty in your relationships. It leads to a feeling of personal defeat. It can indicate a mindset of moral superiority. It can indicate long-standing tendency toward rigidity. These people assume it is dangerous to expose any elements of their imperfect humanness that might reduce their lofty position above others.

2 – Open Aggression – a self-preserving stand for personal worth, needs and convictions at someone else’s expense! It includes explosiveness, rage, intimidation and blame. It can include bickering, criticism, griping and sarcasm. It arises from a focus that so strongly emphasizes personal needs there’s a powerful insensitivity to the needs of others! It leads to ongoing struggles with relatives and close associates. Your emotional energy is expended on non-essentials; deep insecurity causes increased efforts to be heard. Emotionally balanced people accept these imperfections and acknowledge their limits to force people into a mold. Personal insecurity takes the desire to respect me too far. It says “I cannot stand it when I am not affirmed!”

3 – Passive Aggression – determined not to succumb to the temptation, to be rageful, refused to explode loudly or get caught in games of verbal abuse. Like open aggression, a self preserving stand for personal worth, needs and convictions at someone else’s expense. It differs as it is accomplished in a quieter manner, causing less personal vulnerability. It communicates anger in a way that will cause future tensions. It needs to have control with the least amount of vulnerability. The person knows he or she is angry and assumes it is too risky to be open, so they frustrate others by subtle sabotage! A passive aggressive person is out to win! They are engaged in a battle of superiority. They realize that too much honesty about personal differences lessens the ability to maintain an upper hand. They believe sly forms of handling anger tend to keep them in the driver seat.

4 – Assertive Anger – preserving personal worth, needs and convictions are accomplished while considering the needs and feelings of others. This form of anger helps relationships to grow. It is a mark of personal maturity and stability. The goal is to communicate emotions in a constructive fashion. It allows you to keep a clean slate with others. There are two keys – issues are not trivial, be aware of your tone of voice.

Ephesians 4:15 – “speak the truth in love!” It requires self-discipline and respects the dignity of others. **James 1:19** – “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”.

5 – Dropping Anger – you accept your inability to completely control circumstances and you recognize your personal limits. It includes tolerance of differences as well as choosing to forgive. Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to choose kindness and forgiveness as a way of life. Choosing to drop anger is far different from suppressing it. Suppression represents phoniness while dropping anger represents a commitment to godliness.

As emotions become less mysterious and more familiar to you, they will stop controlling you! As you understand your nature, the autopilot can be replaced. It’s your choice! You can decide how to deal with anger.

As I have taken men through the Anger Workbook I have been amazed at the freedom they experience when they understand that their nature is not in control of them. They can choose to move away from suppressing anger, open aggression or passive aggression to a more constructive way to deal with anger. I’ll state this in an emotional intelligence way--- men learn to turn off their amygdala and use self-management to choose to drop anger or apply assertive anger. Either way men gain control over their old reaction that destroyed relationships and replace it with a reaction that reconciles and restores relationships. Want to know more about Anger Management and Emotional Intelligence? Visit the Appendix.

Verse:

Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

Personal Reflection:

Which of the five types of anger describes you? How can you begin to drop anger? Who can help you learn how assertive anger preserves relationships?

Group Discussion:

Share the insights you have gained about your anger.

What's your reaction to the admonition to drop anger?

How about your reaction to employing assertive anger to strengthen relationships?

23-Are Emotions and Feelings Destroying Relationships?

Emotions are powerful. There is energy in every emotion. There is energy to build up as well as energy to destroy. Knowing the potential impact behind an emotion is key to managing your emotional life. In our session "Does Something Need to Be Said Now by Me?", we explored three questions:

Does something **need to be said**?

Does it need to be said **now**?

Does it need to be said **by me**?

Taking a moment in the middle of the flooding from an emotional tidal wave to ask these questions can make the difference between healing and destruction! Realizing that "hurt people hurt people" can change your perspective from victim to healer. How you see the situation is key to whether healing or destruction will be the outcome. Many relationships end when an emotional event creates a division that cannot be breached. Hard feelings result and a relationship is destroyed.

Often, it is just the choice of a few words that can make the difference. 'You were right' is more powerful than 'I am sorry' because 'I am sorry' doesn't imply necessarily that the other person was right. If you are in doubt about whether something needs to be said --- be guided by values, not feelings. When you speak the truth in love, you are valuing the relationship above your feelings.

The bottom line is simple--- when emotions dominate, maturity and wisdom deteriorate. We are to share the love and grace we receive from Jesus with everyone with whom we come in contact. Many of those who trigger our emotions are hurting! They need forgiveness and grace more than wrath! They need the Love and Grace we receive from Jesus shared with them! Love and Grace heals! Emotional outbursts destroy!

Verses:

Proverbs 29:11 "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back."

Proverbs 15:18 "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention."

Proverbs 15:13 "A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed."

Romans 12:9 "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

Romans 12:15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

Ephesians 4:26-27 "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil."

Personal Reflection:

When have you allowed emotions to harm a relationship? What do you need to do to restore that relationship? What can you do today to prevent emotions from hijacking your reaction when you are emotionally flooded?

Group Discussion:

Share with the group who you will be reaching out to as you allow Jesus to restore damaged relationships.

How can the group pray for you as you extend grace and ask for forgiveness?

24-Are You a Safe Person?

Why ask this question? If you are a safe person then you're the kind of person who can pour these traits into other people. If you're not a safe person then you'll want to deal with the traits that can harm you and those closest to you.

Ask yourself how close the description of an unsafe person applies to you. Read through these eleven personal traits of unsafe people and ask yourself --- **is that me?** Also **ask someone who knows you well** to answer these eleven traits. Those closest to you may see things that you deny about yourself. **Here are the eleven personal traits:**

Unsafe people

- think they "have it all together" instead of admitting their weaknesses
- are religious instead of spiritual
- are defensive instead of open to feedback
- are self-righteous instead of humble
- only apologize instead of changing their behavior
- avoid working on their problems instead of dealing with them
- demand trust instead of earning it
- believe they are perfect instead of admitting their faults
- blame others instead of taking responsibility
- lie instead of telling the truth
- are stagnant instead of growing

You can dig deeper into each of these traits in the book "Safe People" by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.

After you have taken a personal inventory and received the feedback of someone who knows you well, then it is time to take action. Each of us falls short of one or more of these traits. Each of us need to ask the Holy Spirit to speak truth to us. That truth will set you free to be the safe person that can shepherd your family and be an Ambassador for Christ to the world.

Verses:

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

James 1:26 "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless."

James 3:14 "But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth."

Ephesians 4:15 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

Personal Reflection:

How have your unsafe traits impacted your personal growth? How have your unsafe traits impacted those closest to you? What can you do to take accountability for these traits and repair the damage your unsafe traits have visited upon yourself and others?

Group Discussion:

How can the group work together to encourage all members to identify and overcome unsafe traits?

How can the group break into partners to encourage each other to face and overcome unsafe traits?

25-Do You Have Unsafe Interpersonal Traits?

Last week we discussed the traits of unsafe people. These were personal traits. This week we are discussing the interpersonal traits; that is, traits focused on how we interact with others. How we interact with our spouse, our children, our parents, our siblings and our friends.

Ask yourself how close the description of the interactions of an unsafe person applies to you. Read through these nine interpersonal traits of unsafe people and ask yourself "is that me?" Also ask someone who knows you well to answer these nine traits. Those closest to you may see things that you deny about yourself. Here are the nine traits:

- 1- Unsafe people avoid closeness instead of connecting
- 2- Are only concerned about "I" instead of "we"
- 3- Resist freedom instead of encouraging it
- 4- Flatter us instead of confronting us
- 5- Condemn us instead of forgiving us
- 6- Stay in parent/child roles instead of relating as equals
- 7- Are inconsistent over time instead of being consistent
- 8- Are a negative influence on us rather than a positive one
- 9- Gossip instead of keeping secrets

You can dig deeper into each of these interpersonal traits in the book "Safe People" by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend.

Last week we encouraged you to take action. This week we again encourage you to act on what God has revealed to you. After you have taken a personal inventory and received the feedback of someone who knows you well, then it is time for you to step up and take action. Each of us falls short of one or more of these traits. Each of us needs to ask the Holy Spirit to speak truth to us. That truth will set you free to be the safe person that can shepherd your family and be an Ambassador for Christ to the world.

Verses:

Genesis 1:18 "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'."

Psalms 119:45 "I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts."

Jude 1:16 "These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage."

Isaiah 50:9 "It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up."

Isaiah 3:5 "People will oppress each other-- man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the nobody against the honorable."

Proverbs 11:13 "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret."

Personal Reflection:

How has your unsafe traits impacted your personal growth? How has your unsafe interpersonal traits impacted those closest to you? What can you do to take accountability for and repair the damage your unsafe interpersonal traits have visited upon yourself and others?

Group Discussion:

How can the group work together to encourage all members to identify and overcome unsafe traits?

How can the group break into partners to encourage each other to face and overcome unsafe traits?

26-Building A Strong Foundation For Your Relationships

Examine your relationships. Do you nurture fondness and admiration? Are you emotionally connected? Do you let the important people in your life influence you? Do you let the four horsemen –criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling – destroy relationships? Do you turn toward each other when you face adversity? Or do you turn away from each other? Do you use harsh start-ups? Do you produce emotional flooding? What body language are you communicating? How effective are your repair attempts?

How are you doing on this quiz? If these questions make you uncomfortable then it is time to step back, examine yourself and listen to the Holy Spirit! Relationships are the foundation of mankind. Are you taking care of the important relationships in your life? Your parents, your siblings, your spouse, your kids, your friends. What is the condition of these relationships?

Love your neighbor, Honor your father and mother, Live with your spouse in an understanding way are messages from the Creator of the Universe. When He includes a message in the Ten Commandments it must be important! When Jesus speaks we need to listen! The book of Proverbs is crammed with wisdom!

Convicted? Then it is time to lay a new foundation. Time to lay a foundation built on His Word, those that honor every relationship in your life. The key is sharing the love, mercy and grace you receive from the Lord with everyone. When you nurture fondness and admiration you reflect the way Christ sees you. When you are “present” for someone you can connect emotionally with them during challenging times just as Jesus walks with you. When you accept the influence of those closest to you, you grow because they want the best for you. When you cast out the four horsemen, you replace chaos with peace in your life. When you turn toward someone instead of turning away you show them how important your relationship is. When you replace a harsh startup with a soft startup you open your heart as

well as the heart of the person you are speaking with. When you recognize emotional flooding in the person across from you, stop and change course to a more loving and caring approach. When you read the body language of the person you are speaking with, you accept the feedback and change the way you are delivering your message. When your repair attempts fail, it is time to rethink your strategy. Listen to that quiet little voice – the Holy Spirit- and follow the example of Jesus. Your relationships will blossom!! Each of these areas is addressed in more depth by John Gottman. A summary and link can be found in the appendix.

Verses:

Proverbs 11:12 “A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue”.

1 Peter 3:7 “Likewise, husbands live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman”.

Ephesians 6:2 “Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with a promise so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth”.

Matthew 5:23-24 “Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and reconcile to them; then come and offer your gift”.

Personal Reflection:

Which relationships in your life need repair? What changes will you make? Who will coach you? Who will hold you accountable?

Group Discussion:

Share with the group the area where you struggle. How can the group encourage you? How can they hold you accountable?

27-Who's Winning the Battle for Your Mind?

As you pray each day and put on the armor of God you acknowledge you live in a battlefield. If you are a believer then you will come under attack because the devil does not want you to enjoy the joy and peace that comes with walking with the Lord. If you are a seeker than maybe today is the day you accept Jesus into your life. Whether you are a believer or a seeker, the devil tries to control your mind. How does he do it? Sometimes he gets your mind to wander and wonder. Other times he confuses your mind or makes your mind doubtful and unbelieving. He can use anxiety and worry or judgment or suspicion to pervert your thinking. Worst of all the devil can make your mind passive. The devil is not a one-trick pony, he will employ different weapons or multiple weapons at the same time. The passive mind is his most successful weapon for men. The passive mind removes the servant leader mindset that God has designed for man and replaces it with lack of desire, lack of feeling, general apathy, a lukewarm attitude and laziness. The passive mind is so dangerous we devote an entire session to how to recognize it and how to replace it with the mind the Creator designed just for you. Joyce Meyer in "Battlefield of the Mind" devotes six chapters to explaining the devil's tactics. We strongly suggest you dig deeper since knowledge of the devil's tactics helps you resist his attempts to win the battle for your mind. Our goal in this session is not to cover the weapons in depth but to encourage you to reject the devil's attempt to distract you from God's design for your life.

Proverbs 23:7 tells us "For as he thinks, so he is". It is critical to win this battle because you cannot have a positive life and a negative mind. Scripture tells us to guard our hearts and minds because our Creator knows these are the center of His creation.

In **Philippians 4:8** He gives us the instructions we need regarding what we put in our minds. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Today is the day to banish wander, wonder, confusion, doubt, unbelief, anxiety, worry, judgment and suspicion from your mind. Resist the devil and he will flee. Today is the day to ask the Holy Spirit to transform your mind. Today is the day to place Philippians 4:8 deep in your heart and mind. True, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise will definitely lead to a positive life.

We will have more to say about the Mind of Christ in a later session. Only when you have allowed the Holy Spirit to transform your mind will you experience the full depth of the design the Lord has for your life. He reveals His plan in **Jeremiah 29:11-13** -"a plan to prosper you, and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart". These verses make it clear we must seek him with our heart if we want to experience the full joy of his plan for our life. The choice is yours --- a negative thought life or a positive thought life? A negative life or a positive life? Only you can choose!

Personal Reflection:

Who is winning the battle for your mind? What weapons is the devil using against you? Have you wrestled with a mind of wonder, confusion, doubt, unbelief, anxiety, worry, judgment and suspicion? Will you meditate daily on Philippians 4:8 and resist the devil?

Group Discussion:

How can this band of brothers encourage each other to meditate daily on Philippians 4:8?

How can you hold each other accountable for allowing the Holy Spirit to renew and transform your minds?

28-Do You Have a Wilderness Mentality?

In her book "Battlefield of the Mind", Joyce Meyer asks --- why the Israelites had to wander in the desert for 40 years when it was only an 11-day trip to the promised land? She highlights the Wilderness Mentality of the Israelites and explains that we too can allow Wilderness Mentality to keep us wandering and not enjoying the life our Creator has designed for us.

Here's the checklist. Which of these Mentalities is depriving you of all God has planned for your life?

- My future is determined by my past and my present.
- I don't want to take responsibility!
- I can't take it if things are too hard!
- Don't make me wait-I want it now!
- It's not my fault!
- My life is so miserable!
- I don't deserve God's blessings!
- Why shouldn't I be jealous?
- I'm doing it my way!

What do all nine Wilderness Mentalities have in common? They are all lies! The devil uses one or more of these to steal your joy. He uses them to deprive you of all that God's plan holds for you. God loves you with an unconditional love. He can forgive your selfishness, your pride, your lack of humility, your "stinkin' thinking", your jealousy, your impatience. Every one of these nine Wilderness Mentalities has a single cure--- Jesus. When He died on the cross for your sins He did not put an expiration date on this promise to love you regardless of whom you are, what you do and how you behave. He is the cure for each of these Wilderness Mentalities. But you must recognize your affliction and bring them to Him. You cannot cling to your thinking and expect a renewed mind. The old must go to allow the new to replace it.

When we are honest we can see one or more of these mentalities in our life. I was a do it my way kind of guy. I had to see that in myself before I could

expect Jesus to do a "make over". When I acknowledged my stubbornness and asked the Holy Spirit to vanquish that negative characteristic of me I was given a new mindset and a new characteristic. I now pray for his guidance. I ask Him to make clear to me the way I should go. I often find I must wait for an answer to that prayer. His timing is often not my timing. But His timing is the RIGHT timing.

The solution to any of these Wilderness Mentalities is **Romans 12:2**-"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will". You can come to Christ and never experience the full gift He has to offer if you continue to cling to your old thinking. If you allow the Holy Spirit full and unfettered access to your heart and mind and ask Him to transform your thinking He will gladly answer your prayer. What are you waiting for? Haven't you spent enough time in the Wilderness?

Personal Reflection:

How many of the nine Wilderness Mentalities did you check? Are you ready to leave the wilderness today? What steps will you take today to leave the wilderness?

Group Discussion:

Share how your Wilderness Mentality has interfered with His plan for your life.

How can the group encourage Romans 12:2 to take root in your heart and mind?

29-Do You Have a Passive Mind?

Of all the mindsets that satan can use to cripple a believer, the passive mind is the worst. Why do I say that? If you have a wandering mind you are aware of it. The same is true of an anxious mind or a confused mind. But the passive mind gives you no real warning. You have a lack of feeling, a lack of desire, general apathy, luke-warmness or laziness. None of these conditions set off alarms. There are no red flags. But the passive mind is most dangerous in a marriage. Man was designed to be a servant leader. How can a man be a leader if he is passive? Passivity is the opposite of activity. A passive mind is not aware of the needs of his spouse, his children, his family or his friends.

In **1 Peter 5:8** we are told that “Word of God teaches that we must be alert, cautious and active”. How can we shepherd our flock if we are not alert to the devil’s moves? Who wants a passive shepherd to watch over their flock? Why the devil does! The devil knows that inactivity, failure to exercise the will, will spell the believer’s ultimate defeat. Why? Joyce Meyer tells us “The place we give satan is often empty space. An empty passive mind can be easily filled with all kinds of wrong thoughts. A believer who has a passive mind and who does not resist these wrong thoughts often takes them as his own thoughts.”

We have been told that nature abhors a vacuum. Of course, believers understand that our Creator designed us for action not passivity. Our men’s pastor admonishes his men to “do something instead of nothing”. His direct message relates to what God expects from us. The best way is to fill the vacuum with what God designed your mind and heart to be filled with---- His Word! **2 Timothy** instructs us what we are to do--- “We are to fan the flame and stir up the gift within us”. How can you stir up the gift if it is absent? You must fill your mind and heart with the Words of your Creator. Ms. Meyer tells us “one way to keep wrong thoughts out of your mind is to keep your mind full of right thoughts. The devil can be cast out, but he goes and wanders in dry places for a season. When he returns to his old home and finds it empty he comes back and brings others with him (see **Luke 11:24**) making this worse”.

You can ask Jesus to cast out the devil and He will do so, but if you fail to replace the “stinkin’ thinking” with right thinking then the devil will return! Once Jesus has done his part then you must do yours. You must follow the advice of Gary Smalley and fill your heart one hundred-fold by meditating on the Word, chewing on the Word and burying it DEEP in your heart. Leave no room for the devil when he returns. Give him no foothold because your heart is a stronghold for the Word.

My personal experience is that men who follow the strategy of discarding their passive minds and fill their minds with God’s Word experience a much deeper sense of peace. They also are blessed in their marriages. Their spouses see the difference and respond by honoring their husbands. Husbands can only live with their wives in an understanding way when they are active. To this my wife says a large AMEN. Just ask her if my Christ filled, Christ directed heart is better than my old passive mind and heart.

Verses:

Luke 11:24 "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left'".

Personal Reflection: How well do you know the Word? Have you locked the Word deep in your heart? How would your life change if you meditated daily on His instruction book?

Group Discussion:

How can the group select and discuss a verse each week? How can we encourage each other to lock His Word in our hearts?

How can we share the joy of knowing the devil has been cast out of our passive heart to make room for the peace that transcends all understanding?

30-Would You Like to Have a Mind Like Jesus?

We have devoted three sessions to how the devil tries to win the battle for your mind. Today we will outline the only true antidote to the devil's attempts. The antidote is to take on the Mind of Jesus. Joyce Meyer points to Ezekiel 36:26-27- "I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new** spirit in you; I will remove from you your **heart** of stone and give you a **heart** of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

Ms. Meyers outlines six things to do in order to "flow in the mind of Christ".

1. Think positive thoughts
2. Be God-minded
3. Be "God-Loves-Me" minded
4. Have an exhortative mind
5. Develop a thankful mind
6. Be Word-minded

If we are going to align our thinking with the mindset of Jesus we must know how Jesus thought. Jesus was always positive in his thoughts and expectations. He had a positive outlook and attitude. He engaged in positive conversations. Jesus came to earth and endured many things we endure. He endured many personal attacks, he was lied about, he was deserted by his disciples, he was lonely, misunderstood and made fun of. He can relate to your trials because he also endured them. Now we need to take on the "Jesus mindset", a mindset that is positive in all circumstances.

Jesus had a continual fellowship with His heavenly Father. He had His mind on God and gave God His full attention. When we mediate on God and His Works, God feeds our minds. **Psalm 77:12** says "I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds". Great advice if you want to be aligned with the Creator's ways.

Jesus knew that God loved him. He came to assure all of God's love for us. To be "God-Loves-Me" minded we need to meditate on His love for us. **1 John 4:16** is a great verse to remind us of God's love for us. "And so we

know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

Jesus has an exhortative mind. Jesus has positive, uplifting, edifying thoughts about others. When He spoke, His love for others was clear to all. Ms. Meyers encourages us--- "If you adopt the mind of Jesus and you begin to think lovely thoughts about people, you will find them behaving in a lovelier manner. Thoughts and words are containers or weapons for carrying creative or destructive power. They can be used against satan and his works or they can actually help him in his plan for destruction".

Jesus has a thankful mind. He thanked his Father for all that God provided--- both good and challenging. **Psalm 100:4** says it best- "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name." If you focus on praise and thankfulness in all circumstances you will align yourself with Jesus.

Jesus was the Word. He is synonymous with the Word. If we are to be word minded then we must hide the Word in our heart. **Psalm 119:11** is familiar to us--- "I have hidden **your word** in my heart that I might not sin against you." If we meditate on God's Word day and night as instructed in Joshua 1:8 than we will find that we have the Word fixed as the compass of our life. We will truly have the mind of Christ.

Verse:

Joshua 1:8 "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."

Personal Reflection:

Which of these six alignments need the most attention in your life? Who can hold you accountable as you align yourself with the mindset of Jesus?

Group Discussion:

How can the group exhort each other (point 4) to align their thinking with that of Jesus? Who needs prayer because they are struggling with the need to align with Jesus and leave behind the "old creature's" mindset?

31-What is the Condition of Your Mind?

Have you taken an inventory of the condition of your mind? Have you fed your mind the truth of God's Word? Have you exercised regularly to build up the spiritual strength you need to face the daily spiritual battlefield of life? Do you have an eternal perspective? Serious questions deserve serious answers. Your mind and heart are targets for attack from the devil. If he can influence your heart and mind, he can take away your joy and peace. He can minimize your influence with those close to you. He can block your efforts to share the gospel. He can feed you lies. If you fail to pay attention to the condition of your mind you will fail to fulfill your Creator's design for your life!

The antidote to the devil's attack is the truth! **John 8:32** says it best "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free". The truth starts with knowing Jesus. **John 14:6** tells us "Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." It starts with Jesus because when we accept Jesus we become a new creation. **Romans 12:2** tells us "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – "His good, pleasing and perfect will." Before you accept Jesus, you are part of the world. The pattern of the world is radically different than God's design for your life. His design for you is to be the light to a dark world. That beacon of light is powered by the hope that comes from the Creator. Hope such as **Jeremiah 29:11** "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". You can only know God's plan when you know his instruction book – the Bible. Consider **Proverbs 16:20-21**, "Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. The wise in heart are called discerning, and gracious words promote instruction." Instruction from your Creator is the key to becoming the person you were designed to be. Your designer knows the design. **Psalms 139:13** testifies to who created you "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb". Any doubts that your Creator designed you for His good pleasure?

The best way to bring your Creator good pleasure is to read and meditate on His instruction book.

These four aspects of your walk will provide a firm foundation for your spiritual growth.

- 1) Make sure you invest time in the Word as part of your daily quiet time.
- 2) Get involved with a small group that is focused on discipleship.
- 3) Develop accountability relationships with mature believers who have the gift of teaching and exhortation (1 Tim 4:13).
- 4) Sit under the instruction of a rock-solid bible-based pastor every Sunday.

Verses:

Mark 12:30 "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."

Philippians 4:6-7 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Personal Reflection:

How solid is your spiritual growth? Do you have a daily quiet time? Accountability partners? Discipleship based small group? Bible based pastor?

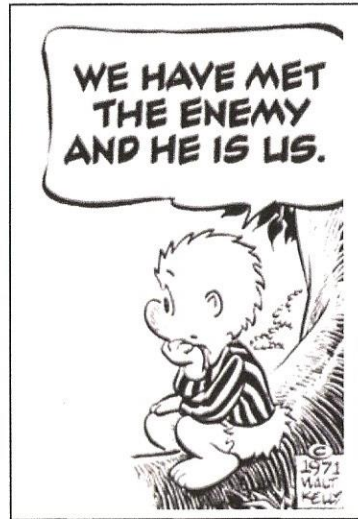
Group Discussion:

How can we encourage each other to feed our minds with God's Word?

How can we hold each other accountable?

32-Putting on the Armor of God

If you are a fan of Walt Kelly, the creator of the comic strip Pogo, than you have heard the phrase “We have met the enemy and he is us”. This phrase captures our life before we accepted Christ. Satan had a field day directing our behavior. The “Enemy” was the only voice we heard. Once we accepted Christ we began to hear a new voice--- the Holy Spirit! Unfortunately, the devil does not just walk away from us when we accept Christ. My experience was that the devil attacked fiercely because he wanted me back in his control. He continues his attack to this day because he knows that men who hear the Gospel will stop listening to the devil. They will become leaders in their families and present a threat to the devil’s secular kingdom. So how do we fend off the devil’s attacks? **We put on the armor of God!**



As members of God’s army, we follow in the footsteps of naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry who coined the phrase that Kelly made into a parody. When Perry defeated the British at the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813 he sent the message “We have met the enemy and they are ours”. We know that in the book of Revelation the army of God meets the devil’s army and the army of God is victorious! God’s army is alive and well today - it is an army of believers who stand up to evil every day. We can meet and defeat the enemy every day just as Perry defeated the British! Each day I begin my walk by putting on the armor of God. Charles Stanley is the author of the following prayer:

Dear Lord, as I get out of bed today, I know I'm stepping onto a battlefield. But I also know you've given me everything I need to stand firm. So in the power of Your Holy Spirit, I put on **the Armor of God**:

First, I **place the helmet of salvation on my head**. Protect my mind and imagination. Guard my eyes, allowing no sin to creep in. Focus my thoughts on the things of God.

Let the breastplate of righteousness keep my heart and emotions safe. I pray that I won't be governed by my feelings, but by truth.

Wrap Your Word around me like a belt. And safeguard me from error.

I **put on the sandals of peace to guide my steps**. Plant my feet in your truth. Empower me to stand firm against attack.

Next, I **take up the shield of faith**. Protect me from satan's fiery arrows. Place me shoulder to shoulder with Your army to oppose the devil's schemes.

Finally, I **take up the sword of the Spirit, Your Word**. Help me to read the Bible in a fresh, exciting way so I will always be ready to deflect attacks and pierce hearts with your truth.

I encourage you to add this prayer to your daily quiet time. This prayer has helped me enter each day prepared and confident that God has equipped me to defeat the devil.

Verse:

Ephesians 6:13-18 outlines God’s armor. Take a few minutes to read the Word.

Personal Reflection: Have you ever pondered the need to put on the Armor of God? Can you see how God wants to protect you from yourself?

Group Discussion: Share where you believe you are vulnerable to attack. Develop a prayer list to provide specific hedges of protection for each group member.

33-Armor of God--- The Helmet of Salvation

Each day I put on the Armor of God. At the beginning of the day, I speak with God. The dialogue is "First, I **place the helmet of salvation on my head**. Protect my mind and imagination. Guard my eyes, allowing no sin to creep in. Focus my thoughts on the things of God".

Joyce Meyer in "Battlefield of the Mind" posits that the devil has established a stronghold in each of our minds at a young age. The devil then uses the stronghold to attack our thinking. He lies to us about ourselves, those closest to us and the world around us. He creates a pattern of thinking that is self destructive. He uses nagging thoughts, doubts, fears, wonderings, reasonings and theories to "warp" our thinking. From the stronghold he attempts to control our thoughts and through our thoughts he attempts to control our actions. Joyce then introduces the Mind of Jesus. The Mind of Jesus is God's weapon to protect our mind and imagination. Philippians 4:7 confirms the promise "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will **guard your hearts and your minds** in Christ Jesus".

When we take on the Mind of Jesus we have protection against the devil's attempts to control our thoughts and actions. Jesus replaces a wandering, wondering mind with a mind that is focused on His teachings. As we focus on the Word we are no longer bound to wander! Jesus replaces our confused mind with the perfect clarity of the Word of God. Jesus replaces our doubtful and unbelieving mind with the assurance that He will never leave us or forsake us. Jesus replaces our anxious and worried mind with the perfect understanding only He can deliver. Jesus replaces our judgmental, critical and suspicious mind with His loving and caring mind that forgives all transgressions. Jesus replaces a passive mind with one in service to Him. He can transform your mind and release you from the clutches of the devil!

To defeat the devil, you need to understand his game plan. He will tell you "little lies" --- lies with an element of truth. He tells you it's okay to watch pornography because God created a woman's body to please man. The truth is that God created your wife's body to please you- -- her husband in a

committed marital relationship. Once you stray from the "wife of your youth" you are in the devil's workshop!

He'll tell you God wants the best for you so go ahead and buy that bass boat even though your wife has said you need to save money for the kid's college fund. The truth is God wants you to be a good steward of the family He has given you. It is His money that He provides for you to Shepherd the family He has entrusted to you. Consider **1 Peter 5:2** "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve".

There may well be a bass boat in your future--- but only when you have provided for your family, the needs of the kingdom and His plans for the funds He has provided. Don't think God will deny you the desires of your heart and force you to live an austere lifestyle--- that's a lie! But do understand that the world will try to entice you to wander from His plan for His money.

When the devil is telling you it's okay to do anything it is time to tell the devil to flee. There is only evil when the devil speaks his lies and leads you down his path to destruction. Know that the devil wants what's best for the devil. God wants what is best for YOU!

Now let's move on to the guarding of your eyes. We have already dealt with the lies about pornography but what do you do when scantily dressed women pass you on the street! The devil knows that men are visual animals and that's why he uses sex to lure us into his playground. God has provided a way out. His design for sex is fulfilled when we embrace His institution of marriage. He says it is not good for man to be alone. He created Eve from Adam's rib and in doing so created the institution of marriage. Man did not invent marriage--- God did! When man listens to the devil's lies then he makes the same mistake that Adam and Eve made.

For this reason, I begin each day with “First, I **place the helmet of salvation on my head**. Protect my mind and imagination. Guard my eyes, allowing no sin to creep in. Focus my thoughts on the things of God”.

If you want God’s protection than put on the armor He provides every day! Remember **Proverbs 4:23**-“Above all else, **guard your heart**, for everything you do flows from it”.

Personal Reflection:

What verses from the Word fill your heart? If you have not done so, then begin today to meditate on His Word, as it is the antidote to wrong thinking. If you are married, how can you thank God for the gift of your wife? Where do your eyes lead you astray? Find a fellow believer to hold you accountable as you replace lust with His Word.

Group Discussion:

Share with the group your struggle.

Share what the devil is saying to you.

Encourage each other to ask God to transform your mind into the mind of Jesus.

34-Armor of God--- The Breastplate of Righteousness

Each day I pray as I put on the armor of God--- “Let the breastplate of righteousness keep my heart and emotions safe. I pray that I won’t be governed by my feelings, but by truth”. Since the heart is the well-spring of life it is critical to keep it safe from attack by Satan. Most of the feelings we experience are not positive---- hurt, shame, anger, insecurity, rejection and sadness are not what we want to fill our heart with. These negative emotions are Satan’s attempt to harden our heart. He attempts to put us down and turn us against those whose actions lead to these negative emotions. Satan seeks to divide us as he conquers our hearts, but we must resist the devil. We must insist that he flee. That is how we protect our heart. We recognize the source of the feelings and we reject them. We do not allow them to take root. We do not allow them to turn us against our brothers and sisters. We forgive those who sin against us just as we have been forgiven for our sins.

God has designed the ultimate defense system. The Holy Spirit can detect Satan’s attempts to harden our hearts against those who need us to share God’s love with them. Be alert when your discernment alarm goes off. It’s the Holy Spirit saying “Beware!! Devil at work!!” You must be locked into the Holy Spirit 24/7/365 if you want to avoid and thwart Satan’s wily moves. Since the Holy Spirit dwells in the hearts of all believers we don’t have to do anything special. We just have to pay attention to the still, quiet voice when it speaks to us.

To identify Satan’s attempts to harden your heart ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I minister to those who hurt me or do I react without mercy?
- Do I extend grace to those who sin against me?
- Do I love my enemy? (This is a tough one but God instructs us to love our enemy)
- Do I keep a short list of wrongs done to me?
- Do I let go of my anger each day or carry that anger and bitterness with me?

Once you have your Holy Spirit discernment fully functioning it’s time to fill your heart with the truth. **Truth is the best defense against Satan’s lies.** Just ask Adam and Eve! They bought into Satan’s half-truths because they did not know the full truth that our Creator knows what is best for His Creation. We were created to share God’s love with all those whom we come in contact with. God gives us unconditional love so we can share it with everyone. We cannot share love if we are “feeling” attacked, disrespected, ignored or any of the negative emotions Satan uses to divide us. God’s love is the antidote for Satan’s lies.

Verses:

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick, who can understand it?”

Proverbs 28:26 “Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered”.

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

Proverbs 12:15 “The way of the fool is right in his eyes, but a wise man listens to advise”.

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

Personal Reflection:

Which emotions are leading you to turn on your brothers and sisters? Who can speak truth to you regarding Satan’s lies? Do you have accountability partners or small group partners who can help you work through Satan’s lies and help you see the truth?

Group Discussion:

How can we come around our partners and speak truth to them? Are we sharing God’s love with everyone; even those who hurt us?

35-The Armor of God--- Sandals of Peace

Each day I put on the Armor of God. At the beginning of the day, I speak with God. The dialogue is “ I **put on the sandals of peace to guide my steps.** Plant my feet in your truth. Empower me to stand firm against attack”.

What does it mean to put on the sandals of peace? We gain some insight from **Luke 1:79** “To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace”. And who should guide my steps? The best person to guide my steps is my Creator. Who knows me better? Who has laid out my pathway through life? **Psalm 119:105** says it best: “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” If God is lighting the way and I follow his lead how can I go wrong? As I walk through each day I reach forks in the road. I face temptations. I face trials. I face people who need God’s love. Without His Word it is easy to make a misstep. It is easy to be deceived and take the wrong fork. **So, each day I ask for his guidance at each fork and He lights my way.**

Want more evidence. Consider each of these verses:

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

Isaiah 30:21 “And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left “.

Psalm 37:23-24 “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in His way; though he falls, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand. “

If you walk with the Lord you have the ultimate GPS. **He speaks, I listen, I do.** As long as I am tuned in to his commands I have nothing to fear. He has ESTABLISHED my steps. He will make STRAIGHT my path. There is a catch--- I have to listen! I must not LEAN ON MY OWN UNDERSTANDING. I must ACKNOWLEDGE HIM. I must HEAR A WORD BEHIND ME.

The best news in these verses is in **Psalm 37** “though he falls (fails to listen), he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand”. That’s right even when you decide to do life your way, the Lord is standing by to lift you up, dust you off and put you back on the path He has chosen for you.

Another thought--- will you come under attack today? Will satan try and lead you off the path? The power that empowers you to withstand that attack comes from the Word of God. It is the wisdom, discernment and courage that God provides that “Empowers me to stand firm against attack”.

Every day I begin the day by putting on the Armor of God because I have learned that I am entering a battlefield. Satan is roaming about looking to devour me if I stray far from the path. My only protector is my Creator. I must stay close to Him and only then will I hear His directions and stay on the path of righteousness.

Personal Reflection:

Are you putting the Armor of God on every day? If not, then why not? Are you listening when the Holy Spirit attempts to guide your steps? If not, then why not? What awaits you today? Have you asked your heavenly Father to escort you through the trials of today?

Group Discussion:

How can you encourage one another to cinch up the Armor of God every day?

How can the group pray for each brother today?

Share your struggles and allow the group to lift you up.

36-The Armor of God--- Your Word Like a Belt

Each day I put on the Armor of God. At the beginning of the day, I speak with God. The dialogue for the belt of truth is "**Wrap Your Word around me like a belt**. And safeguard me from error."

The full armor of God is comprised of six elements. Today's element is the Belt of Truth. **Ephesians 6:13-14** says "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist".

What does it mean to have the belt of truth buckled around your waist? For the Roman soldier the belt secured all the other pieces of his armor. The scabbard which holds his sword was secured by the belt. **Ephesians 6:13-14** is saying that truth should cleave to us as a belt cleaves to the body of a soldier. As a soldier in God's army we must be empowered by truth. Whose truth? The only truth, the truth of God's Word. **John 17:17** speaks to God's truth "Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth."

Why do we need truth? It is the litmus test for life. Without truth how can you know what is good and what is not? Consider **1 Thessalonians 5:21** "Test everything. Hold on to the good." We live in a world where truth is what you want it to be. Only scripture establishes the absolute truth that we need to guide us through today's chaotic world. How can you deal with the lies of the devil if you do not know the truth? When the devil tells you that sin will take away your salvation, how will you respond? If you know **John 6:47** "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life", then you can speak truth to the devil's lie.

Further evidence of the power of truth is contained in **Romans 12:2** "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is---his good, pleasing and perfect will." The renewing of your mind means storing truth in your mind and your heart. To avoid conforming to the pattern of this world you must be able to identify what is good and what is not.

For me identifying truth is impossible without the Holy Spirit and the discernment that He brings to me. That quiet still voice can easily be overwhelmed by the world if I skip my morning quiet time. That hour is the most important hour of my day. Without it I am entering the world completely vulnerable to attack. Without that time of feeding my mind and heart I am exposing myself to the traps and snares of the evil one.

The Armor of God is essential if you are going to live a life of peace and joy. Ignore one of the six pieces and you leave yourself and everyone in your sphere vulnerable. Ignore the Word and you are left without the means to test for truth. You are now vulnerable to lies and half-truths. They are the most effective tools in the devil's arsenal. Only your knowledge of the Word can counter the falsehoods of the evil one. If you don't want the deceiver to trip you up then you must know the truth!

Verses:

1 John 3:18 "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth"

James 1:18 "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created"

John 8:32 "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"

Personal Reflection:

Are you spending enough time learning truth from your Creator? Are you connected to brothers/sisters who hold you accountable?

Group Discussion:

How can you encourage the group to learn and share the truth of the Word?

Will you hold yourself and the other members of the group accountable?

37-Armor of God--- Shield of Faith

Each day I put on the Armor of God. At the beginning of the day, I speak with God. The dialogue is "Next, I **take up the shield of faith**. Protect me from Satan's fiery arrows. Place me shoulder to shoulder with Your army to oppose the devil's schemes."

Why take up the shield of faith? Because we are under attack daily by an enemy who wants to interfere with our walk. We are encouraged by **Luke 10:19** "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you." Nothing shall hurt you is a promise you can depend upon. Not only do you have authority to tread on serpents, but you have divine power to destroy the enemy's strongholds. **2 Corinthians 10:4** "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." Our strength does not come from ourselves, it comes from our Creator. We draw our strength from the Lord and His might. **Ephesians 6:10** "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might."

If you are going to be protected from Satan and his fiery arrows you must be one with the Father. You must submit yourself to God, then resist the devil, and then, deploying the authority and power of God the devil must FLEE. **James 4:7** "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." **1 Peter 5:8** "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

We stand shoulder to shoulder because we cannot stand alone. Fellowship provides an Army to face off against the devil and his schemes. Shoulder to shoulder means to support one another during a difficult time. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters because we all face trials and none of us want to face trials alone. We also need to stand together so we can share how the Lord has carried us through our trials with our fellow believers. The testimony of how others have endured trials brings us confidence when we face similar trials. **1 Peter 5:9** "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

Verses:

1 John 5:5 "Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptations he will also provide the way to escape, that you may be able to endure it."

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

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full".

Personal Reflection:

Who are you standing shoulder to shoulder with? Where are you coming under attack? Are you sharing these attacks with your brothers? If not, why not?

Group Discussion:

How can we stand together with our brothers?

How about encouraging those who are struggling?

How can we pull together?

38-Armor of God--- Sword of the Spirit

Each day I put on the Armor of God. At the beginning of the day, I speak with God. The dialogue is "Finally, I **take up the sword of the Spirit, Your Word**. Help me to read the Bible in a fresh, exciting way so I will always be ready to deflect attacks and pierce hearts with your truth."

The Sword of the Spirit is the only offensive weapon in the Armor of God. Knowledge of the Word is key to your effectiveness as you battle the enemy. Is the Word hidden in your heart? It must be if you are to draw upon His wisdom for the plan for your life. You live in a spiritual battlefield where the deceiver is battling the Creator. You need the Creator's Word if you are to identify and deflect lies from the deceiver. The Creator's Word is critical as you make decisions at key crossroads in your walk. Left to your own you are at great risk. Your knowledge of God's plan for your life and your willingness to be disciplined are the foundation of your walk. It is critical to be engaged with like-minded folks who can encourage you.

Think my words are too strong? Look around you at all the folks who are slaves to addictions. How does this happen? It happens with a single false step. A single bad decision. Once you are on the slippery slope there is only one way to go. DOWN!!!

The only way to defeat the deceiver's half-truths is to know the truth! Know that the devil is the father of lies! Know that he is a murderer prowling like a roaring lion seeking to devour! Know that he is a thief who comes to steal and kill and destroy! Know that he is an outcast who has been vanquished from Heaven! Know what God's Word says about your enemy!

Verses:

2 Corinthians 10:4 "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

Romans 12:19 "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'."

Revelation 20:3 "And threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while."

Revelation 12:9 "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him."

Genesis 3:1 "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

Hebrews 4:12 "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Personal Reflection:

How deep is your knowledge of God's Word? Do you have key verses stored in your heart? Are you open to being disciplined?

General Discussion:

Are you disciplining one another? Are you holding each other accountable?

39--- The Importance of Using God's Tools

Have you ever considered the wide array of tools that God provides His followers? He starts with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He provides a Brother in Jesus and a Helper in the Holy Spirit. He provides His Word so we have a clear understanding of how we are to live our lives for Him. He provides the Church for fellowship. He provides Pastors to teach the Word and comfort the broken hearted. He provides Spiritual Leaders in our Marriage Ministry, Children's Ministry, Men's Ministry, Women's Ministry and Special Needs Ministry. These are tools we see every day as we engage with our brothers and sisters. But there are other tools that are not as obvious.

Do you put on the Armor of God every day? Do you know the power you have to cast out the devil in the name of Jesus? Do you know Jesus has given you the ministry of healing the broken hearted and tending to the needs of others?

Let's start with the Armor of God. Ephesians 6:10-17 tells us that God provides six important pieces of Armor that we need every day as we enter the battlefield.

*** The helmet of salvation to protect our mind and imagination

***The breastplate of righteousness to keep our heart and emotions safe

*** The belt of truth to safeguard us from error

***The sandals of peace to guide our steps

***The shield of faith to protect us from Satan's fiery arrows

***The sword of the Spirit, His Word, to prepare us to deflect attacks and pierce hearts with His truth

Are you putting on the Armor of God every day? Where are you vulnerable? Are your thoughts at risk? Is your heart safeguarded? Are you solidly grounded? Do you know the truth? Are you fighting off the fiery darts being hurled at you? Do you know the Word well enough to wage the good fight? Or are you not even under attack because you are not a threat to the devil? Being under attack is a badge of honor! Be engaged with bringing your loved one to Christ and be prepared when the devil attempts to thwart your efforts.

Now let's explore the power that Jesus has given you to cast out demons in His name. You alone have no power over the dark side. But Jesus has already fought and won the battle for you. He has cast out demons and he has given you the power to cast out demons in His name. **Let me be clear because this tends to confuse folks-** In the name of Jesus you can ask Jesus to come and cast out demons. Only He has the power but He will come when you call and cast demons out. He will provide a hedge of protection when you ask Him to provide protection. All He needs is for you to ask in His name! If you find yourself under spiritual attack just call on Him and He will drive the devil off. Then His angels will come and minister to you just as they came and ministered to Jesus during His wilderness experience. Are you asking Jesus to expel your demons?

Finally let's understand what **our mission** is on earth. We are to "heal the brokenhearted, preach the Gospel and set the captives free" (paraphrasing **Isaiah 61**). We are all on the mission field. You do not need a degree in theology to share the Gospel. You don't need a Nursing degree to heal the brokenhearted. You don't need a PhD in counseling to come alongside a brother and share his burden. All you need is provided to you by Jesus, the Word and God's love for the lost. Your job is to step onto the mission field of life and be salt and light! Are you available to be deployed by Him to the mission field?

God has provided a wide array of tools because He knows how to equip His army. The lyrics from the song "Whom Shall I Fear" says it best- "I know who goes before me. I know who stands behind. The God of angel armies is always by my side." He has provided all that we need but it is up to each of us to use what He provides.

Verse:

Deuteronomy 9:3 NIV "But be assured today that the Lord your God is the one who goes across ahead of you like a devouring fire. He will destroy them, he will subdue them before you. And you will drive them out and annihilate them quickly, as the Lord promised you".

Personal Reflection: Where do you need the Lord to go before you and open new territory for you? What mission field is He preparing for you? Are you tightening up your armor every day? Where are the “holes” in your armor and will you let the Lord train you up? What are your demons- alcohol, drugs, money, lust? Will you let Him cast them out?

Group Discussion: How can you come together and encourage your brothers to face their demons?

Where can God use your group on the mission field?

Are you standing shoulder to shoulder to confront the Devil?

40--- Rejoice in Your Sufferings?

Dr. Gary Smalley in his book "Change Your Heart Change Your Life" devotes a chapter to The High Value of Trials. That's right --- there is great value in trials. The Creator of the universe uses trials to mold and shape His people. **Romans 5:3-5** says "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Left to our own nature the stressful, traumatic and trying events of life produce negative thoughts, which can result in resentment and worry.

Romans 5 instructs us to replace resentment and worry with gratefulness. God knows that trouble is the best change agent there is! Dr. Smalley says "First, I love God. I trust him to bring good out of every trial when I open myself to the blessings that come from endurance with patience and hope. Second, I love my neighbor or enemy whose actions could do me harm. Suddenly my trials are no longer trials. They are character-strengthening exercises that make me more into the glorious creature that God intends me to be."

It's all about perspective! When we see life through our eyes we do not see what God intends. We see man's perspective. When we heed the scriptures and see life from God's perspective we see blessings. We gain perseverance, character and hope that is only available through the Holy Spirit. Over the years man has invented many tools to ease the physical burdens of life. However man has yet to devise anything better than God's Word to ease the spiritual burdens of life. God has a design for each life, He created us and He uses trials to change us, in the manner that aligns us with His design.

So why do we naturally gravitate toward seeing trials as a burden? Why do we see resentment and worry? Why are we not naturally grateful? Since the fall of Adam and Eve we have seen life through the eyes of fallen man. If we reject God then we are left with man's perspective of life. Man's perspective is not pretty. To transform resentment and worry into gratitude requires the

transforming of our mind. That transformation is described in **Romans 12:2** "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will". Once we have accepted God as the Creator and allowed Him access, then and only then can the Holy Spirit be unleashed. Only then can we count all trials as JOY!!

If you ever doubt God's ability to transform you study the story of Paul. Paul went from one of the greatest persecutors of Christians to a pillar of the Church. Dr. Smalley writes that Paul knew that his trials were the hammer and chisel of the Master Sculptor, chipping away at him and forming him into the One he loved more than anything in the world.

We all face trials- the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, divorce, estrangement from a child, business failures. My biggest trial was Friday July 13, 2012. In a single day, life dealt us a family tragedy, a job loss and a business failure. That day God took that burden off our shoulders and built perseverance, character and hope. And yes some thorns were not removed. It is now over thirteen years that my daughter and I have been estranged. I know it is her choice. But it is my choice to have the robe and ring ready as I look forward with hope to the day the prodigal daughter returns and she chooses to reopen our relationship. God has provided hope even when my nature is to be hurt and resent my daughter's decision.

My encouragement is to place **Colossians 3:16** in your heart- "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."

As you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs you'll discover there is no room in your heart for resentment and worry.

Personal Reflection:

Have you made the decision to allow the Holy Spirit to transform your resentment and worry into gratitude? If not, why not do it today? What burdens do you carry that can be shared with God? List them and ask Him to remove them from you.

Group Discussion:

Share the times in your life when you have allowed God to transform your resentment and worry with gratitude.

Share how that simple step of allowing God to transform you has made a difference in your life.

41--- Who is Your Role Model?

I grew up in a time when things were simpler. No internet, no Xbox, no satellite TV, only black and white TV with shows like Leave It to Beaver! I spent my summers flipping baseball cards, playing ball on the street corner and riding my bike (without a helmet). As a kid I looked up to our first astronauts, Mickey Mantle and Jim Brown. As I grew up my role models evolved. They were business leaders, political leaders like JFK and yes, star athletes like Wilt Chamberlain. Some of these men were men of great character. But they were all flawed. It wasn't until I entered my "second half" of life that it became clear who my role model should have been--- Jesus! As I reflect on the long list of my "heroes" it strikes me that it was not the man but his image that drew me in. All of the men I have mentioned had great flaws. Only Jesus was flawless! All these men hid behind facades! Jesus was real! Rather than building a façade He was completely transparent.

Even the greatest heroes of the Bible had flaws. Moses suffered from self doubt, David suffered from lust and Solomon, though wise, was a mess. Why mention the short comings of men of God? To illustrate that even God's best fell short but He used them anyway. God uses us despite our flaws. God also sent us a role model extraordinaire---Jesus. Jesus came as a teacher. First as a teacher to the disciples, then as a teacher to the people of Israel and finally as a teacher whose lessons live on 2000 years later. What are some of the lessons our role model taught us? Love your enemy; Be a servant leader; Be obedient even unto death; Honor your Father; Seek the Kingdom of God with all your heart. Consider the following verses:

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

John 12:26 "Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

Philippians 2:8 "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"

2 Peter 1:17 "For he received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.'"

Luke 12:31 "But seek His kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well."

He lived out each lesson to demonstrate how we can follow His example. As we strive to follow our role model we often stumble because He was Jesus and we are not! But He knew that we would fail sometimes which is why He extends grace as we fall and then picks us up and reminds us that the race is long and He will be with us each step of the way.

The greatest lesson Jesus taught us was how to connect with our Creator.

He was never separated from the Father. He was so aligned with the Father that they were one. Jesus knew what was on God's mind and He was obedient---even unto death. How well do to you know your Creator? Do you hide His instruction book- the Bible-in your heart? Do you speak with Him sharing your inner most thoughts and asking for His direction?

For years I tried to emulate my role models. When I played basketball I was Wilt with a flawless hook shot. When we rode our bikes I'd pretend to be a fighter pilot by pulling in close behind my buddy and shooting him down (pretend only!). I could pretend but I never was as good as my role models. Now I have a role model who is in touch with me whenever I ask. I will never be the perfect man that He was, but each day I grow closer to my role model. What a blessing!

Personal Reflection:

Who were your role models as a child or young adult? What did you admire about them? What do you admire about Jesus? How could you become more like Him?

Group Discussion:

Share your role models and what you admired in each of them. Share what you admire about Jesus. Share how you will follow Jesus as your role model.

42--- Who Are Your Influencers?

When I finally accepted the Lord's calling on my life my heart was transformed. That transformation was the culmination of many people over the years sharing their faith with me. I had many influencers over the years. I attended my first bible study 10 years before I accepted Jesus. I recently found the bible study leader and thanked him for getting me started on my journey. Over that 10 year period I heard about Jesus from a business associate, a co-worker and the best friend of my ex-wife. Each of these influencers nudged me closer to accepting the free gift of my Savior.

Long before that 10 year journey there were two people who had a tremendous influence on me. They were the people in my life over the years that showed me Jesus by the way they lived their lives. The first person who showed me Jesus was my Granny. Granny was a sweet woman who raised five children during the 20's and 30's on her own. My grandfather died of consumption a few months before my mother was born. Granny kept that family together during the Great Depression. Her faith was the driving force in her life. She loved Jesus and every one of her kids and grandkids knew that our Granny showed us Jesus every day of her life. Her sweet disposition never wavered. Despite the tragedies she endured, her faith was greater than any tragedy. My cousin died in an automobile accident when she was 16. My cousin's death could have crushed Granny but her faith not only carried her through this dark time, it set the tone for how the family endured this dark time. Even though Granny was only five feet tall she will always be a giant in my eyes!

The second person that showed me Jesus was my uncle Paul. Paul worked for the railroad and during an accident at work fell and injured his optic nerve. Although the doctors were able to remove the tumor my uncle was left blind in his 30's. For fifty years my Uncle Paul kept that same sweet disposition I saw in Granny. Despite his blindness he stayed upbeat. I still remember when he sang "Amazing Grace" to me once I accepted Jesus. It brought tears to my eyes as he said "I was blind and now I see". It still brings tears when I recall that day. Here was a man with every reason to be bitter at the life he had, yet his faith wouldn't allow bitterness in. His strong faith, inherited from Granny, allowed him to touch many hearts during his 50 year journey with blindness.

I have shared my story to encourage you to examine your life. Think back upon those who showed you Jesus. Think back on those who shared the Gospel with you. Take the time to thank them!! The Lord uses His army of believers to tell His story. For centuries that was how history was passed from generation to generation---- by word of mouth. Just because we have the printed Word and the internet doesn't mean we need to stop sharing. We are Ambassadors for Jesus. We need to tell our own "Amazing Grace" story. We need to share how we have been transformed. We need to let folks know that peace and joy are the "Fruit of the Spirit" that the Lord has lavished on us.

Verses:

Jeremiah 17:7 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in Him."

John 13:17 "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."

1 Corinthians 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Romans 12:2 "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Personal Reflection: Who are your influencers? Who are you influencing? What can you do to be a bigger influence on those in your sphere of influence?

Group Discussion: How can we encourage each other to reach out and thank our influencers?

How can we be stronger influencers?

43--- Perform Regular Maintenance

As guys we are in the habit of bringing our vehicles in for routine maintenance. We change the oil, oil filter, air filter, transmission fluid and check the tire pressure. We also have major maintenance at regular intervals of say every 30,000 miles. Why do we do this? Because the manufacturer tells us that's how we get the maximum value from the investment we made in our vehicle. So, if God designed you and bought you for a price shouldn't you do routine maintenance as well as major maintenance on your mind, body and spirit? Don't you want God to get the maximum return on the sacrifice of His son for us?

For me there is a need for daily maintenance. The first thing I do after getting out of bed and taking care of bodily functions is head to my den for daily quiet time. I am currently following devotions in "Jesus Calling". In the past I have followed "Daily Bread" and Oswald Chambers' "My Utmost for His Highest". The devotional is not the goal but is a vehicle to get to the goal of spending time with Jesus BEFORE ENGAGING in the issues in front of me. This daily preparation equips me to deal with whatever the world hurls at me. Another important part of my preparation to meet the world is to make sure I have put on the Armor of God. Details of this process can be found in the session entitled "The importance of using God's tools". Once I have spent time thanking God for what He has done, is doing and will do in my life, I can get His input on things that are on my mind. If you have not done this, it may sound weird to you. Trust me, it felt weird until I saw how talking things out with God brought issues into clear perspective. Now I cannot start the day without bringing struggles before Him and talking them out.

The second part of my routine maintenance occurs every Tuesday night when I come together with brothers to study the Word. This band of brothers knows my struggles. They offer insight. They offer encouragement. They pray for me, my family and those I minister to. They are the "earthly chargers" that help refill my ministry engine. Between my heavenly and earthly chargers I am blessed to the max! Thanks to these brothers I am never left to my own wisdom. They breathe God's wisdom into me and

every man in our small group. Over 7 plus years we have gotten to know each other at a deep level. We have walked alongside brothers who lost loved ones, lost relationships and endured difficult financial times. No brother has ever walked alone! We share burdens and praises!

The third part of my routine maintenance is a small number of men who have been a part of my walk for decades. These are Godly men who I can turn to when I need advice or a sounding board. They are mature believers who often call me for advice or a sounding board as well. Over the years we have been able to develop a transparent relationship that makes that call "safe" because I know I will not be judged. I may need correcting but it will be delivered in an uplifting manner. My pastor recently asked everyone to list 10 people who have impacted them over the years and 10 people they have impacted. Like my pastor I challenge you to answer the question below--- 10 people who have impacted you and 10 people you have impacted. Don't be surprised if you need more work in this area of your walk. It took me twenty years to get to the point where I can complete these two lists. Remember that life is a marathon not a sprint! If you don't have 10 people on each list just set a goal and ask Jesus to bring these people into your life. Then step back and watch the collisions occurs as He blesses you with Godly men who pour His wisdom into you and struggling men who need you to pour His wisdom into them!

The most important part of routine maintenance is being plugged into ministry. We have been designed to serve, not to be served. Look around you. Find a Rescue Mission, Food Bank, Prison Ministry or Outreach Ministry and join them in doing His work. You will discover that service fills a hole that cannot be filled by donating money alone. People need to see and hear from folks who love and care for them. People need people who treat them with respect and dignity regardless of their circumstances. By the way, once you get to know these ministries at a personal level you won't give less money because you'll see where your money is going and why it is so important to invest in the Kingdom!

As you examine your maintenance routine I challenge you to set aside time every day to connect with Him, find or establish a small group and allow your band of brothers to support and encourage you and get plugged into ministry wherever He leads you. As you take care of the routine maintenance you will find your walk is richer. You'll find that your life has more joy and peace. You'll find He has plans for you, plans to prosper you, plans to give you hope and a future. Fail to do the routine maintenance and (you know, so I don't need to lay it out for you).

Verse:

John 15:4 NIV "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me".

Personal Reflection: How is my daily time with Him? Do I need to pay closer attention to daily quiet time? Am I in a band of brothers? Do I carry my burdens alone or do I have a bunch of guys praying for my struggles? Have I found a place to serve? Am I plugged into a local ministry?

Group Discussion: How can you encourage your members to do routine maintenance?

Are you willing to allow your brothers to hold you accountable?

Can the group get plugged into a local ministry?

44--- Are You Listening?

In our previous session “Perform Regular Maintenance” we laid out the need for daily quiet time, weekly small group fellowship and weekly worship services. I hope you have established this pattern of regular maintenance in your life. Once you have the three spiritual support activities in place then there is a second step--- listening. The Lord speaks to me in many ways--- through the Holy Spirit, through people He puts in my life and through “collisions” that He creates.

The plan for my life was established long before I was created. That plan is only revealed when I listen. God does not send emails but he does send messengers. I have been blessed with a cadre of solid men and women who speak truth to me. They have been given permission by me to point out my “blind spots” --- the areas of my life and behavior that is just out of my view but if not addressed can lead to disaster. My top messenger is my wife. She knows me better than anyone on earth. She supports me as I minister to others. She also keeps me centered. When I overextend myself she helps to keep me providing the self-care I need to minister to others. That self-care includes down time to renew and refresh. It is easy to fall into the trap of not taking care of yourself. She encourages me to take a night off to just “veg out”. For me that may be watching my favorite team on TV while doing a crossword puzzle. It gives my mind a break. It renews and refreshes me.

My wife is a safeguard that is built into the plan for my life. I have found that listening to my safeguard is wise and prudent. The Lord has also provided a group of men who have invested in me. They know me well. I can be transparent with them. There are no secrets between us because only when we know what is truly happening in each other’s lives can we speak truth. I listen to these men because I know they want the best for me. They have a track record of providing wise counsel. My third source of wise counsel is my Tuesday night small group. These men have become close over the past seven years. We all know the praises and struggles of our brothers. We pray daily for each other. These men have pointed out times when my financial stewardship needed attention. They have encouraged me

during times of job loss and family tragedies. We are truly a “band of brothers”!

Wise counsel is only helpful when I heed the wisdom. Listening is the key to putting wise counsel into practice. If I ignore good counsel, my counselors are tenacious. They continue to nudge me until I listen and act. If I am lazy and slow to act they encourage me and remind me of the accountability we have to each other. If I get stuck they rally around me and lift me out of the ditch. I have learned that listening to wise counsel leads to joy and peace. Failing to listen leads to misery and chaos. I have chosen to listen. What about you?

Do you have a “band of brothers”? Do you have two or three men who can speak truth and you’ll listen. If you are married have you given your wife the grace to speak truth to you without retribution?

Having these three support networks is the key to receiving wise counsel but only if you listen and implement that wise counsel will you find peace and joy in your life.

Verses:

Proverbs 25:12 “Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man's rebuke to a listening ear. “

Proverbs 15:22 “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed. “

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. “

Personal Reflection: Do you have your support groups in place? Are you seeking wise counsel and following it?

Group Discussion: How can we speak truth into each other’s lives? How can we encourage each other to seek and follow wise counsel?

45--- The Merger of Two Temperaments

Variety is the spice of life! The body is made up of many parts! Both the secular and the spiritual worlds highlight how important it is that we are all different. Imagine how boring life would be if we were all the same. Our differences come in many packages --- ethnicity, culture, language, temperament. You are familiar with the different ethnicity, culture and languages but what about temperament? What is temperament? **Some would say temperament is your personality.** Some of us are expressive, some of us are logical, some of us love change, and some of us love stability. Whether we are task people or relationship people we need to understand our temperament and how it impacts others. Although we have a natural bent, our temperament can be modified. Our autopilot can be turned off and we can make adjustments in our nature that benefits ourselves and those close to us! Once we know more about our temperament and the temperament of those closest to us, we can be sensitive to the comfort zone of others. When we interact with different ethnic groups we assimilate their culture and language. We do this to make them comfortable with us. We must do the same for different temperaments. When we interact with people we must be aware of their temperament. Just as it is uncomfortable to impose our culture and language on a different ethnic group it is uncomfortable to impose our temperament on those who don't share it!

I tend to use temperament, nature and personality interchangeably. I see all three as describing who we all are at our deepest level. There are many resources that can help you understand your temperament. Assessments such as Myers-Briggs or DISC are a good first step in understanding your temperament. It is also important to learn how to read the temperament of those closest to you. You can look at your temperament as your nature. God uniquely made you to be who you are, but he also gave you the ability to adjust your nature to maximize your relationships with those of different temperaments. Until you understand your temperament and how to play down some of your natural tendencies that make others uncomfortable, you will have difficulty building deep loving relationships. I suggest you explore a number of these assessments in order to get a well-rounded

understanding of your temperament. You will find a number of recommendations in the appendix for temperament assessments as well as a straight forward self assessment you can use today!

Once you have a clear picture of your temperament you need to become a student of temperament. This is not an academic pursuit but one that requires your close attention to the needs of those closest to you. My temperament is the direct opposite of my wife's temperament. Left unchecked these temperaments will clearly clash. Once we both understood our temperaments two things happened. First we understood that our natures (temperaments) were not cause for concern but a reason for celebration. We complemented each other! We can learn from each other! We were stronger as a couple than either of us individually! Secondly we knew we had to learn how to adapt our nature to synchronize with each other. Although two different natures make for a strong team, they can also lead to disharmony on the team. We have learned how to be a harmonious team that uses the divergent natures to achieve the team's objective! I have become more sensitive of her emotions. My wife accepts my need to accomplish tasks. At our core we are still who we are – our nature hasn't changed. We have learned to value our differences and to accommodate each other's nature. If we had never explored our temperament we would never have overcome the natural differences that can lead two totally opposite temperaments to chaos and potentially to destroy our marriage!

Not every couple has temperaments that are as different as ours, but most couples face the challenge of how to merge two different temperaments into a successful marriage. For some reason we tend to marry people who "complete us"! Some would say this is coincidence, but I believe it is part of the design for marriage. The design is to bring two different temperaments together and merge them into a oneness that transcends just the sexual nature of marriage. A oneness of character! A oneness of spirit! A oneness of vision! A union that is stronger because two temperaments have merged into one!

Verse:

1 Corinthians 12:12 "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body."

Personal Reflection: What is your temperament? How does your temperament impact those closest to you? How can you manage your temperament to make others more comfortable around you?

Group Discussion: How much diversity is there in the group?

How has that diversity benefited the group?

What would happen to the group if no one had the temperament of leadership? Or compassion?

46--- Are You Surrounding Your Children with Godly Men?

As a young father I was very driven by my job. My first wife was wise and suggested my son and I get involved with the YMCA's Indian Guides program. This father-son program was the first step in a ten-year journey of father-son bonding. Later we "graduated" to Boy Scouts. As I reflect back on those ten years I see that it was more than a great bonding opportunity with my son. It was a chance to have men of Godly character to be introduced to my boy. Indian Guides was a chance for my son to get to know Butch and his son. The boys learned how to camp, how to prepare meals and how to live life. My son still has great memories of Butch.

As we moved into Boy Scouts, my son got to know Jack and Bill. These scout leaders were the kind of Godly men who could take my son aside and speak truth to him. As I reflect back I see that our sons were open to listening to the leaders even when they would not listen to their dads. During the rebel years when our sons were trying to get some distance from Dad's rules, they were still open to hearing from their leaders.

Butch, Jack and Bill left an imprint on my son that lasts to this day. He saw men who loved to serve others. He saw men who were firm but fair. Men who loved to enjoy the outdoors. He was surrounded by men who could have a good time playing pranks. Men who would stop by the butcher shop to pick up some bones, bury those bones in the woods and then take the boys on a "treasure hunt" and discover the "hidden bones" of an early settler. These men and their sons became the "standard" that my son applied to relationships in life. His friends in school, college and life have been men of high character. These men reflect the qualities of Butch, Jack and Bill. Men of high character are not easy to find. The scriptures provide the standards we need to follow as we seek men of high character to surround our children.

Verses:

Proverbs 22:6 "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

1 Corinthians 15:33 "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'".

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

1 Corinthians 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Personal Reflection:

Are you a man of high character? Can you discern the character of men your child interacts with like their baseball coach or youth leader? Do you get to know your kid's friends well enough to discern their character? Are your friends men of high character?

Group Discussion:

Who has poured themselves into your life?

How have they demonstrated high character?

How can you encourage each other to seek out and build relationships with men of high character?

47--- Happiness is a Choice

Dennis Prager is a national radio personality and the author of "Happiness is a Serious Problem". Each week Dennis devotes a full hour to happiness.

Here are a few select quotes from Dennis:

"You cannot be happy if you do not take responsibility for your errors"

"Gratitude is the mother of goodness and happiness"

"Fun is temporary; happiness is ongoing"

"A sense of purpose is necessary for happiness"

"Nothing is as contagious as unhappiness"

"Everybody wants to be happy, but very few people ask themselves what will make them happy"

"Experiences bring more happiness than things do"

"We decide what will make us happy; we decide what will make us unhappy"

"Most people are waiting for something terrific to happen in order to be happy. I have the opposite view. Unless something terrible is happening, I am happy"

Do you see a theme in everything Dennis has to say about happiness? **His theme is that happiness is a personal decision.** We choose to be happy and we choose to be unhappy. God did not design us to be unhappy. He designed us to be grateful for the many blessings He bestows upon us minute by minute each day. Showing God our gratitude for these blessings draws us closer to Him. It also has a positive impact on our well being. There are many feelings we experience--- afraid, angry, cheerful, confused, encouraged, enraged, glad, guilty, hopeful, hurt, jealous, joyful. Why is it that some feelings are negative and others are positive? Could it be that some feelings come from the devil and some come from God?

Happiness requires us to identify the feeling, understand its sender (devil or God), and then decide how to deal with the feeling. I reject all feelings sent from the devil and I strongly encourage you to reject them. These negative feelings destroy our happiness because WE LET THEM. If we reject these negative feelings we are left with joy, hope, cheerfulness, gladness

and graciousness because we are secure in the unconditional love of the Creator of the universe. That's where I want to be. I want to be basking in the blessings showered on me by a God that loves me unconditionally.

Here's what the Scriptures have to say about happiness:

Psalms 37:4 "Delight yourself also in the Lord; and he shall give you the desires of your heart."

Proverbs 16:20 "He that handles a matter wisely shall find good; and whoever trusts in the Lord, happy is he."

Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say Rejoice."

Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Personal Reflection:

What can you do to sharpen your discernment skills? What feelings from the devil are you allowing to impact your happiness?

Group Discussion:

Share the areas of your life where you need prayer to bind the devil and cast him out.

Encourage each other to bring the devil's plan out of the darkness and expose it to the light.

48--- Forgiveness Trumps Compartmentalization

A corollary to our Happiness lesson is also a Dennis Prager quote. Dennis asks --- how can you really be happy without compartmentalization? This should be an easy concept for guys. Our brains are like waffles with many isolated compartments. That's why guys are great soldiers, law enforcement officers and athletes. We focus like a laser beam and accomplish the mission. Our female counterparts have a brain structure very different from our waffle brains. They are great integrators. The analogy is often used that their brains are like spaghetti. Everything connects to everything else. For a guy to truly understand is impossible until your spouse reels off ten events that remind her of what you just did. Yep they can connect the dots in rapid fashion while we just go "but I only said/did!" Now it turns out that our waffle brains are great when we encounter something we cannot fix.

Dennis provides a four step process to employ when we are unhappy

- Find out why you're unhappy
- See if you can fix it
- If you can't fix it, *compartmentalize it*
- Concentrate on those things in life that bring you some joy

As much as I like the four-step Dennis approach, I have found the one-step God approach is more effective. I just forgive as I have been forgiven! In one step I get rid of the unhappiness (without "fixing" it) and am reminded of the great joy and freedom that has been provided by Jesus. I have joy and happiness and eliminate the unhappiness in one step.

You can use the compartmentalization process if you want to. It does help you focus on why you're unhappy. It may help fix a long term issue. My suggestion is when you reach step 3 where it cannot be fixed that you let the Creator of the Universe deal with it. He'll help you forgive the offence, forgive the offender and remember that He can bring you more happiness than any human can deliver.

If you want the best evidence that forgiveness is the answer look no further than **Matthew 6:14-15** – "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

I want to treat others the way God treats me. He forgives me unconditionally. So I need to follow his example (and command) and forgive those who sin against me.

If I am the reason for the unhappiness in my life then I must forgive myself. God designed us for peace and joy. Unhappiness is not part of His design but it is part of Satan's design to steal our joy and peace. Every time we react to unhappiness we give Satan a victory. Deny him the victory and forgive the offender, especially if it's YOU!

Verses

1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Acts 3:19: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that time of refreshing may come from the Lord."

Psalms 103:12: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

Personal Reflection:

Ponder a situation where your actions brought you unhappiness. Have you forgiven yourself? Has forgiveness restored you and brought you peace? Now ponder a situation where someone else's actions brought you unhappiness. Have you forgiven them? Has God restored the relationship?

Group Discussion:

How can the group encourage brothers who struggle with forgiving themselves?

With forgiving others?

Share how forgiveness has overcome unhappiness and restored relationships.

49-You Can Become the Conscious-Competent He Designed You to Be

Self awareness is a gift that not everyone embraces! Early in my sales career I was introduced to a Wilson Learning program that postulated that we fall into four classifications-conscious competent, unconscious component, conscious incompetent and unconscious incompetent! Clearly if we are competent and conscious of our talents we are in the healthiest classification. However we are often confronted with the unconscious incompetent- those that are completely unaware of their faults and are completely unaware of how it affects those closest to them!

So how do you deal with the unconscious incompetent? Our natural instinct is to enlighten them. We attempt to help them become conscious of their state and then try to encourage them to develop their talents and become competent. As we struggle to enlighten these folks, we quickly discover that it's hard to bring enlightenment to those who are completely unaware of their need for enlightenment. As much as I want to encourage you to stick with it, I encourage you to understand that attempting to enlighten the unconscious ultimately leads to frustration. The unconscious remain unconscious and the person attempting to enlighten the unconscious slowly begins to harbor negative feelings toward the unconscious. No one wins in this scenario except the devil!!

The only approach is to LOVE the person! Yes, you must embrace them and love them!! Why? It's God's plan and His commandment. Jesus loved everyone. There was no one who was UNLOVEABLE in the eyes of Jesus. In **Mark 12:31** Jesus commands "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." A second reason is that our mission is to be salt and light to a fallen world. Consider **Acts 26:18** "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Someone who is unaware of their situation needs a massive amount of love. **They need unconditional love!** It is not our job to "fix" people. Only the Holy Spirit has the power to help the unconscious become conscious. These folks are often hurting and the last thing they need is for us to walk away from them. We need to engage with everyone and then listen to the direction we receive from the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit knows the best

approach and we will know also if we listen carefully to the leading of our "Helper".

We were created for a purpose. We are on a mission. I find that I can completely miss my mission when I fail to connect with people that God puts in my life. I have come to see these "collisions" as a sign that I need to connect with folks, get to know them and let them know they matter. They matter to me and they matter to God. If you're thinking this is not for you then maybe you need to re-evaluate why you're here! Be encouraged by **Philippians 4:13-**

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me". You have been and continue to be equipped for the missions that your Creator has hand-selected just for you. He has made you a conscious-competent. You are conscious of His design for you and competent because He has equipped you for the mission.

I started as an unconscious-incompetent believer. In time I became conscious of my need to grow if I was going to be of any value for my Creator. Once conscious of my need to grow, then I joined a small group, a men's group and developed close relationships with mature believers. As a leader I was tasked to learn the material I was teaching. I found there is no better way to grow spiritually than to step up and teach. He has made me competent. As I prepared to teach He taught me what I needed not just for my group but for me personally! I am now a conscious-competent not because of me but because I made myself available to be molded and shaped by the Creator who sent me on this mission. Who better to make me into what I need to be than the One who created me!

My encouragement to you is simple---- Be available, be obedient and trust that he will equip you for the mission He designed you to fulfill!

Personal Reflection:

Are you conscious of your need to grow? What are you doing to fulfill your mission? Are you performing routine maintenance--- daily quiet time, small group and weekly worship?

Group Discussion:

How can the group encourage routine maintenance? How can you encourage each other to be available and obedient?

50--- Always Follow Your Blocking Back

In life we will face many obstacles. When we encounter an obstacle we sometimes choose the wrong way of dealing with life or decide to take a different route. If we believe that our path has been custom designed for each of us then we need to follow that design. God is the designer of our pathway through life. He is also our BLOCKING BACK. He knows the play and He will provide the opening we need to deal with whatever obstacle the devil has used to block our path. God has ultimate control over the evil one. When we call upon God to deal with the devil we are following God's plan. He will remove the obstacle or He will provide the alternate path. Many times I have tried to overcome obstacles myself. My pride told me I didn't need help. I could do this. Well you know what happens when we push God out of the pilot's seat and fly the plane our way--- we crash and burn!! My first marriage was a perfect example of me doing life my way. I put career ahead of relationship and paid the price. Not only did I pay the price, so did my wife, children, parents, friends and everyone else in our lives.

As you ponder why you should let God clear the path, consider all the times you chose to do it yourself? What was the outcome? Who paid the price for your decision to "go it alone"? Are you better prepared than the Creator of the universe to direct your life? Yes that's a crazy question but how many times do we ignore the Master's plan and go off course in our own direction. How many times do we need to have Him lead us back on the road He has laid out for us. Yes, each time He cleans us up and puts us back on His pathway! He did that to the Israelites in the Old Testament so often.

How many times will you have to be a "do-it-yourself" guy before you bring the Master Builder on site and follow His directions?

Verses:

Psalm 10:4 "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God."

Proverbs 16:8 "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

1 Corinthians 11:1 "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Matthew 7:24-27 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Personal Reflection:

Where do you need to step back and let your Creator show you His pathway? Who can hold you accountable to step back?

Group Discussion:

How can we encourage each other to step back and see what pathway Jesus is opening for us?

Share your struggle with us so we can hold you accountable.

51--- Are You Fulfilling God's Purpose for Your Life?

In our session "What are your gifts", you identified and examined the gifts that God had bestowed on you. The best teaching is Matthew 25:14-30, better known as the parable of the talents. Take a moment to read these verses then take measure of how you are using your gifts. Are you the servant with five talents who invested wisely or the servant with one talent who buried the talent?

When you arrive in heaven will you hear 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' Or will you hear, 'you wicked, lazy servant!' How you use the gift God has bestowed on you has eternal consequence for you and those who are denied the benefits of your talents. God has gifted you so that you can be His ambassador. You are to show the world what the Lord looks like. If you fail to use your gifts think of the consequences for your family, friends and all those in your sphere of influence! God was planning on you to share the Good News. He was planning on you to minister to those in need, visit the prisoners, feed the hungry, show mercy and grace to those who need it most. If you choose not to follow His plan He has every right to call you a wicked, lazy servant. I think you get the picture so let's move on to being the good and faithful servant. Have you activated your search radar so that those in your sphere of influence who need grace and mercy are clearly identified for you? Are you ready to serve? Have you equipped yourself, been trained and coached? There are many churches and organizations that can take your gifts, train you and put you on the mission field. I was fortunate to be introduced to Alongside Ministries in 2000. I never saw myself going into the state prison system and mentoring men prior to and after their release. But that is where I was deployed. What a blessing to stay in touch with men whose lives have been transformed by this ministry. Men whose lives are a living testimony to the words of **Jeremiah 29:11** "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." If I had said no in 2000 who would have walked with these men? Who would have seen Jeremiah 29:11 fulfilled

again, and again? It was imperative that I answered that call. Otherwise I would never have seen the fruit of God's plans for these men's lives. I would have denied God, denied these men and denied myself. Yes, burying a gift denies you the blessings God intends for you.

Not convinced? Let me share the story of how my wife and I serve in our church's marriage ministry. Talk about hidden blessings! We mentor couples in a marriage prep program. We spend 15 to 20 hours with these couples as they prepare for the most important day of their life--- dedicating themselves to each other for the glory of God. Many of these couples have become long term friends. We have the honor and privilege of walking with them as they prepare themselves to be stewards of the marriage God has designed just for them. Once again there are multiple blessings - the couples, their families and us as their mentors. So deploying the gifts God has given you impacts many people. But, never using those gifts denies the blessing to God, those who would benefit and you.

Ready to step up? It's not difficult. Identify your gifts. (see the gifts inventory in the appendix) Talk to your pastor and ask him where you could serve based on your gifts. Get trained up and go to work. Then reap the benefits of seeing lives change--- theirs and yours!

Verses:

Matthew 9:37 "Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few."

1 Corinthians 12:12 "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ."

Personal Reflection: Are you using your gifts? If not where could you be using your gifts?

Group Discussion: Can we be serving as a group? How can we encourage all in the group to serve?

52--- Are You Properly Equipped to Fulfill the Mission?

Are you equipped to fulfill your purpose? Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? If not, go back and review the “What Are Your Gifts” session. Have you dealt with being a safe person? If not, go back and review the “Are You a Safe Person” session. Crazy Maker or Peacemaker? If you are Crazy Maker go back and review the Rick Warren sessions and the Peacemaker session.

You have completed 51 sessions and if you are not properly equipped then go back and review the sessions you need to address. **The Holy Spirit will direct you because the Spirit knows the Creator’s design for your life. His design for your life is the master plan.**

Let’s review some of the key elements. The master plan has your mind and your heart transformed to be like **your role model – JESUS**. Jesus came to earth to save us and to reveal the character of God to each of us.

Transformation is directed by the Holy Spirit but requires your co-operation. You must yield to His Will. You cannot have a passive mind, a wandering mind or anxious mind. You need to be equipped with the mind of Jesus:

- Think positive thoughts
- Be God-minded
- Be “God-Loves-Me” minded
- Have an exhortative mind
- Develop a thankful mind
- Be Word-minded

The most important transformation is the transformation of your heart. Jesus is Love and His love has been given freely to you so that you can share it with those who need it most. Share His love with your spouse, family, strangers, enemies and everyone you have contact with. To evaluate your heart, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I minister to those who hurt me or do I react without mercy?
- Do I extend grace to those who sin against me?
- Do I love my enemy? (This is a tough one but God instructs us to love our enemy)
- Do I keep a short list of wrongs done to me?
- Do I let go of my anger each day or carry that anger and bitterness with me?

If your mind and heart have been transformed to be like Jesus, then you are equipped for the mission of sharing Jesus with your world. The world is chaotic, so when someone sees a peacemaker they will be drawn to the peacemaker. The world is not safe, so when someone sees a safe person they will be drawn to the safe person. The world doesn’t find many transparent folks, so when you give people permission to speak truth to you (“Are You Listening” session) they want to know how you can be open and transparent. The world has plenty of angry people, so when someone meets a person with self-control who extends grace and mercy instead of retaliation they want to know more about grace and mercy.

When you are properly equipped for the mission, God will create “collisions” with folks who need to see and experience the heart and mind of Jesus. Your Creator will bring folks into your “sphere of influence” that need “Vitamin J”. You will find yourself in His service fulfilling His mission for your life. Remember that His purpose will be different then the purpose you were pursuing. His purpose is to bring folks into His kingdom. Think back to those who sowed the seeds that brought you into the Kingdom. Someone planted, someone nurtured, some tended, some shepherded.

All played a role. Now it is your turn to play a role and fulfill His mission!

Verse:

Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”.

Personal Reflection:

Who has the Holy Spirit put in your path? Who can walk with you as you step into the Creator’s mission for your life?

Group Discussion:

How can we encourage each other to step out in faith and fulfill our mission?