



A Balanced Life

A Bible Study by Michelle Nolan

Discover your identity in Christ and how to live a balanced life...

A Well Balanced Life
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Week One

Everything Starts With A Vision

Vision takes you from where you are and puts you where you need to be.

I remember when the “dream catchers” were popular. Everyone had them. According to Wikipedia, a dream catcher is a handmade object based on a willow hoop, on which is woven a loose net or web. The dream catcher is then decorated with sacred items such as feathers and beads.

Its purpose is to catch or protect your dreams. It was a reminder with their popularity that people always have and will have dreams. Unfortunately, there are cemeteries filled with dreams that never came to pass. This is what happens to our lives if we bury desires and allow fear to dictate our decisions.

Here’s how Webster's dictionary defines “Dreams”

- A) A strongly desired goal or purpose
- B) Something that fully satisfies a wish

Walt Disney Quote “ I dream, I test my dreams against my beliefs, I dare to take risks, and I execute my vision to make those dreams come true.

Habakkuk 3:19

The Lord God is my strength; he will make my feet like deer’s feet, and he will make me walk on my high hills.

God promises to be your strength as He calls you to walk with him and accomplish what he wants you to accomplish.

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision people cast off restraint but happy is he who keeps the law.

This week we will focus on five subjects that affect our dreams and vision for life. To begin, write out Proverbs 16:3 in the space below.

Now, let the journey begin...

Day 1

Dreams

Genesis 28:11-22

¹¹ So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder *was* set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: “*I am* the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. ¹⁴ Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, *I am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know *it*.”¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, “How awesome *is* this place! This *is* none other than the house of God, and this *is* the gate of heaven!”

¹⁸ Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, ²¹ so that I come back to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. ²² And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.”

Have you ever walked through a place called “Luz”? I’m certain you have. We all have. It is a place of despair and defeat. It can easily convince you that you are now a “was”, a has been, your days are over, the enemy preys upon that vulnerable place and tries to convince you that your remaining days will be in “Luz”. Then Bethel comes. When God brings us to a “Bethel Place” in our lives, it is a place of hope, a place of restoration, a place for dreams to be caught.

Jacob had come to a place in his life where he was worn out, emotional and mental fatigue can make you physically worn out. In his weariness, God gives him a dream, **a promise**. He shows him a picture of what his life could be like if he walked with him and followed him. This promise was deposited on the inside of him. God planted the seed of this dream as a point of reference for Jacobs life.

By faith, Jacob reaches out in his heart to agree with God. God reminds him of His Godly forefathers, by telling him that He was the God of Abraham and Isaac. God gives Jacob the same

promise that He had given Abraham. Like Father (grandfather), Like son. Abraham's walk with God was the seed that was deposited in Jacobs life. Never underestimate the heritage of Godly parents. Through a dream God wrestles with Jacob. Jacob loses, thankfully.

You never really win with God if you've struggled with him and you came out on top and in control. Jacob worked it out!! Likewise, in our lives when we encounter the living God nothing is ever the same again. **Phillipians 2:12- Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.** One encounter with God can change your destiny forever. It's impossible to remain the same if you encounter him!

Philippians 1:6

being confident of this very thing, He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ.

Name three (3) things you have wrestled with God about and thankfully, you lost?

How did you see God work through these encounters?

Did it mark your life like it did Jacob? Jacob walked with a limp afterwards forever.

Have you ever felt like you won, but you were miserable knowing you chose your way rather than God's way?

I certainly have had my wrestling matches with God. At times, pride in my life has made it difficult to surrender to what God was doing. I wanted to "reason" with him rather than agree and just release it to him. God always gives grace to us when we humble ourselves.

Humility and vulnerability go hand in hand. You can't receive from God if you aren't humble. Humility makes you vulnerable in a child like way. Teachable and flexible. Jacob's encounters

with God would leave him teachable and flexible. The wrestling teaches you how to bend and be flexible in the hand of God.

Vision is about seeing, we must “see before we can be”. When we cannot see we begin to rely on what we feel. Feelings are great indicators but they aren’t great dictators about getting direction for life.

Vision is about receiving.

When vision comes in, other things need to move out. When God calls you to something, whatever it may be, sacrifice is required. We always pay a price for investments we make. Scripture tells us to “count the cost”. There is a price to everything. The value is determined by if you want it or not and what you're willing to do to get it.

1 Corinthians 9:24

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

You don’t earn vision or try to get it, it just is. Vision is something you receive not something you obtain.

Now, the fruit of that vision is something you obtain through hard work and discipline..

As women a lot of times we don’t even receive compliments well. Somebody gives us a compliment and rather than receive it with a” Thank you” we reject it. We reject it with words like “ This old thing? or these jeans make me look fat, or when someone says “You look great” we respond with, I need to lose 10lbs.

What would happen if God said to you, “ **I have some great things in store for you and the only requirement is for you to believe me and receive from me.**”

What??? You mean, I don’t have to earn it by being good enough? or sinless? or by being more spiritual? praying harder? or get my 12th Masters degree.

Colossians 2:6

As you have received Christ Jesus The Lord, so walk in him.

How are you when it comes to receiving? When someone gives you a gift are you excited? Do you try and “pay them back” with a gift? Maybe you can receive something small but not an extravagant gift. There is even the possibility that you feel embarrassed that they got you something and you prefer to be on the giving end. Maybe you feel like you don’t deserve it or didn’t work hard enough to earn it.

God just calls us to walk it out, not alone but to walk it out with him.

Day 2

Dreams Continued

John 1:12

But as many as received him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name.

Most of the time we can't receive because we aren't hearing well. Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes from the word of God.

Static On The Line

Have you ever been on the phone and the receiving end had so much static that you couldn't make sense out of the conversation? It wasn't the communicator, it was on the receiving end. This is how our lives can be girls, we can't hear because of static in our lives, therefore we can't receive well. Static is on a radio station because it isn't fully tuned in, it is partly on one station and partly on another. This is how are lives are many times. We have divided hearts because we aren't fully committed but partially tuned in. Many things pulling for our attention. When things are being fine tuned, purging comes.

Being consecrated means to completely give yourself to something. To be set part for God's purpose.

It doesn't have to be overly spiritual. It can be whatever it is that God is communicating to you. It may be the kind of mother you want to be, the wife you want to be or the career choice you are pursuing.

Anytime God is calling someone to fulfill the plan He has for their lives, it can be difficult.. It requires stretching. It calls us to develop hearing ears and a dependency on God. A trust like no other. We have trust based on experiences, relationships and our belief system. A mistrust shows us that we have wounds. A blind trust shows us that we are either open or completely naïve. God calls us to be open but to also be discerning and not naïve and gullible.

Jacob's limp caused him to" lean on God "as he walked, He knew what life was like walking fiercely independent and he learned what it was like to depend and have God supporting him. Living surrendered and submitted to God is far better than living Independent and distanced from Him.

How Do I Cultivate A Spiritual Ear?

It takes time to cultivate spiritually sensitive ears. Whatever areas we give ourselves too are the areas that are developed in our life. If we workout we develop muscle and endurance, if we study we acquire knowledge. If we pray and spend time with God, we learn his ways, we learn to hear because our hearts are turned to him and are tuned into him.

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

What is creating static in your walk with God?

Busyness? Hurt? Trust?

James 2:17

¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Simply put: Faith without works is dead.

We can have great vision but until we roll up our sleeves and just do it, then nothing happens.

What could you see yourself doing as a kid?

If money weren't an issue what would you spend your life doing?

Who or what squashed your dream?

What is so strongly in you that you must do it?

**Vision comes from the seed of desire and dreams.
Vision holds you more than you hold it.**

Vision is costly. It stretches you. It requires something of you. If you have vision for anything in your life then there is a price to pay. You will see the fruit of your labors, if your diligent and determined.

Seed. Time. Harvest. In everything there are sequential steps. Sometimes we love to skip steps, esp. people like me. Let's just say Patience hasn't naturally been my strongest spiritual gift. It usually isn't for any of us but for us strong Bt personalities it really isn't.

A seed of a dream is sown in our heart, then lots and lots and lots, (did I say lots) of time. Time passes as God develops the dream, our character and positions us to be where we need to be. Harvest does come and the fruit is sweet. Sometimes, you have to get through the bitter to get to the sweetness of the fruit.

James 5:7

Therefore, be patient, brethren, until the coming of The Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain

Helen Keller was asked one time what is worse than being blind? Her reply, " *To have sight and no vision.*"

When someone has vision for anything, it compels them. They aren't bothered by work that is required because the only thing they see is the end result.

Lazy people don't have vision because vision always requires things of you. It requires time and discipline.

When someone wants to build a house they have blueprints, the blueprints aren't the dream the house is the dream and the vision. The blueprints show the amount of work, cost and time it will require to build it. The vision is fulfilled when you invest in the dream and do what is required to accomplish the vision and enjoy the house.

Discipline is a beautiful thing, our flesh hates it but our life is blessed because of it.

Hebrews 12:11

Now, no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Proverbs 21:25

The desire of the lazy man kills him, for his hands refuse to labor.

We can have vision in many areas of our lives. It may be our career path, our relationships, our diet and exercise habits. All of these matter to God because they matter to you. He will give you all the help you need if you simply ask and are willing to do whatever he leads you to do.

Simple but not easy! But the best part is anything is possible.

Psalm 37:3-4 Trust in The Lord and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness, delight yourself in The Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Habbakuk2:2-3- write the vision and make it plain on tablets so that he may run who reads it v3 for the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak and it will not lie, though it tarries wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

God had given Abram and Sara the promise of a child, Isaac. Isaac's take time, like all pregnancies, there are a lot of unseen things being developed. There is no rushing the process. Just the anticipation of this promise. Sara got in the flesh and decided to "help" the process along and made a mess of things and birthed Ishmael.

Sara made an emotional decision. Weary in waiting and noticing all of the other women with children, she conceived her own plan. Hagar. Hagar is the picture of our emotional fleshly decisions that we try to use to bring forth the promises of God. They always interfere with God's plan because they are generally premature and made out of our grief, despair and weariness in waiting.

Sara had Vision but she got in the flesh and birthed an Ishmael.
She got weary in waiting.
She influenced Abraham.
She forgot the power of her influence.
She created a problem.

Have you ever gotten impatient and your "bright idea" backfired?

Have you ever "influenced" (manipulated) your husband to turn things the way you needed them to work for your benefit?

Day 3

Quality Decisions VS Emotional Decisions

Do you make quality decisions that are driven by principle rather than emotional decisions?

Emotional decisions fizzle out because they require discipline, dedication and hard work. Quality decisions are decisions that require a plan.

What emotional decision did you make that caused you pain and led you away from God's best for you?

Hebrews 12: 16-17

Lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. for you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Esau made a decision that changed the course of his life, his appetite overrode his self control and the desires for greater things. He didn't think it through. His emotions overrode his logic. He was willing to surrender his birthright for a bowl of soup. Although, Jacob his brother was a deceiver and a manipulator he knew how to appreciate things that had value, and getting His Father's blessing was one of them. Sadly, Esau just didn't care. Not really. He only cared once he couldn't have it. He did not cultivate desires past his fleshly appetite. He lost out because although he cried and He sought "The Blessing" he was unwilling to truly repent of his selfishness. He had an emotional response not a quality response.

The blessing just wasn't that important, other things captured his attention. He had an appetite for fleshly satisfaction but Jacob had an appetite for spiritual satisfaction. Jacob learned to appreciate relationships and pursue them. Esau unfortunately, was one given to his appetite and desires and they were mostly about him. He forfeited what He could have held, because his present desire, blinded him to a destiny outside of him.

Esau couldn't appreciate what He had "outside" because he never could get settled "inside".

Have you been where Esau is at times? So preoccupied with "you" that you've forgotten there are great things "out there".

Have you been where Jacob was? A mess at times but in relentless pursuit of better things in life?

Like Jacob, we can think of times when God did a "makeover" on us. It can be grueling, not like the makeover shows Hollywood portrays, where they take you back, give you a new Hairstyle,

change your clothing style and accessorize you well and “wa-lah” You’re an instant beauty queen!

God doesn’t do that to us, He transforms us from the inside out. Developing Character. He is into internal things not the externals. Man looks at outward things but God always looks upon the heart.

Jacob was messed up. There was a lot of stuff going on externally but God was doing an internal work that no one could see. His desires would soon manifest and be seen by what he pursued. He pursued the Blessing of His Father. He knew what to appreciate and go after. His encounter with God would leave its mark. He would walk with a limp the rest of his life. God touched the socket of his hip as He wrestled with him.

Jacob got it. Lesson learned. He would rather limp with God than be the fastest runner without him.

Philippians 3:18-20

For many walk of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is describing people like Esau. They don’t look out or up, only “in”. They are driven by appetite rather than purpose, they have disregard for the spiritual aspect of life because it interferes with fleshly desires. When spiritual decisions collide with natural decisions we always come to a crossroad. Sometimes, we don’t know and can’t discern the way to go. There is peace in the pathways of a decision led by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 6:16

This is what The Lord says, “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.

Somehow, we can be like both of these men. We at times may be predominately either one or the other. I believe we can be a little of both at times. Sometimes we wrestle through things with God but other times we just Blow it!

Psalm 51:10

Create in me a clean heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Isaiah 57: 15

For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

Repentance restores intimacy and opens the book to the next chapter in our lives. This is what Jacob was after, it was intimacy, it was desiring his Father's face rather than wanting something from his hands

Have you found that at times you sacrificed intimacy for other stuff? If so, how does that make you feel?

Do you feel bankrupt spiritually? Describe this.

God rushes to you the moment you cry out to him. He starts with the end in mind. His unwavering love and mercy towards you is new every morning. He has stamped us "forgiven" at the cross. Bearing every past sin and future sin we would commit. He is the God of second, third and fourth chances. It is about what He did not about how good you can be.

Behavior modification is our feeble attempt to try and clean up our brokenness, and to try and fix ourselves. This is exhausting and fruitless. When we come to the end of "all" our try harder do better methods we find Jesus. Jesus standing there with the work already completed, inviting us in to know him. He doesn't want to just know facts about us, he wants all of us the good, bad and ugly parts. He wants our victories and failures.

What Quality decision did you make that may have required some stretching in your life but you see good things come out of those choices?

Our lives are the sum of choices we make. Some good, some bad. Quality decisions come out of decisions that are thought through, considering the outcomes.

Who do you have in your life that you could go to for advice?

Proverbs11:14

Where there is no counsel the people fail, In a multitude of counselors there is safety

Are you surrounding yourself with wise people?

James 1:5

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally

Day 4

Adversity- Internal and External

Proverbs 24:10

If you faint in the day of adversity your strength is small.

Your heart is the well spring of life. Adversity's main objective is to take you out in heart. If you lose heart, you lose desire and determination

Proverbs 4:23

Keep your heart for out of it flows the issues of life.

One of the enemy's tactics is to cause you to lose heart, once you lose heart you lose life and the joy of fruitful living.

You are the instrument God wants to use. From Birth he designed you with Dreams, gifts and talents. In developing these gifts, you give back to the world what God has given to you. It takes perseverance and endurance and resisting the temptation to quit when it gets hard or uncomfortable. Get some dawg in you, girl!!! The world is waiting to see what your gonna bring.

Once you lose heart you slowly start surrendering that thing you once greatly desired.

It doesn't happen all at once. One disappointment here, one setback there, every hit you take slowly pulls on your confidence. The enemy's objective is to cancel out the vision you have. If he can stop your vision he can stop the end result of what you are wanting to accomplish.

Ex. If you feel called to teach kids you will be affecting them for the rest of their lives. The enemy doesn't want Godly teachers influencing kids.

If you are called to support an artist in the music industry, the enemy doesn't want this, music is the territory of influencing a person's heart and thought life.

If you are in school to be in the medical field, you will be bringing health to others, the enemy wants to hinder this work.

times we are our own worst enemy.

We give the enemy too much credit, in fact many

Rev 12:10

We have overcome him by the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony.

Galatians 6:9

And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

2 Corinthians 4:1

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy we do not lose heart.

If God be for you than who can be against you?

Adversity and losing heart can go hand in hand. The reality is that when vision in any area of our lives comes then so does the struggle (warfare) . We have internal fears and external circumstances that always try to box us in. Breaking through requires a quality decision. Quality decisions always come from an undivided heart. Quality decisions show up in diligence and self-discipline.

You determine if you are positive or negative.

Life and painful things happen to us all, it is what we do with them that determines where we end up.

Can we trust God with it even when He gives no explanation to us?

How has adversity made you stronger?

What did you learn about you?

Were you able to persevere in adverse situations even as a kid?

Has adversity made you faint?

Write out how your trial affected your heart?

Can you surrender it to God - forgiving whoever hurt you or whoever you hurt?

A Look At David's Life

David had tons of adversity. His brothers even accused him of wrong motives when he decided to face Goliath. Saul was continually pursuing him. If that isn't bad enough his own wife Michal, continually mocked him for his deep love for God. David knew what it meant to be surrounded by adversity. David was familiar with feeling swallowed up by it, yet He didn't allow it to deter him from his objective.

Over and over God gives David victory, the enemy always attempting to box him in but the anointing on David's life made it impossible to contain him. God knew his heart, and David knew that he was a man after God's heart.

What does it mean to you to be called a "woman after God's own heart"?

Day 5
Our Own Worst Enemy

Proverbs 18:21

The power of life and death is in the tongue and those who love it will eat the fruit of it.

Matthew 12:34 states: *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.*

Are you hurt?

Bitter?

Disappointed?

Hopeful?

What do you say about you and about your life?

What your voice expresses where you are spiritually and what is happening inside your heart.

Who do you listen to?

The opinions of others will always be there it's what you do with them that is the difference maker.

**Part of our adversity comes from
being our own worst enemy.**

Do you judge yourself even when God has forgiven you?

Condemnation always has been a tool of Satan.

Eph-4:27 teaches us to give no place to the devil

The enemy looks for a point of access. Sin opens the door for this access. Once in, he preys upon the wounded vulnerable places that haven't been surrendered to God. God has forgiven you but He has given you the choice and responsibility to close the door to the enemy's access. Because we are God's children we have the same access through the blood of Christ to be victorious! He gives us tools and skills but we have to use them.

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

2Corinthians 10:12

We dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend ourselves. But they, measure themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

There always has been and will be someone better, someone faster, someone prettier, someone smarter.... etc. This is life. God broke the mold when He made us. Uniquely, beautiful in diversity and talents. Getting comfortable in your skin is simply being who God made you to be.

Fight like a girl.

We do this by realizing our greatest battle is with ourselves. It is a battle discovering who we are, who God says we are and what others think we are.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

v 3. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. v 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, v 5. casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

Our weapons aren't earthly things they are spiritual things that we take up to defend ourselves against ourselves. Sounds odd but we have to train our mind to think about us the way God does. We do this by not allowing our minds to run with any thought but being aware that every thought isn't from God and we can choose our thoughts through the reading and retaining of God's word. Notice in verse 4 that are weapons are mighty not in our flesh but in God. We are only as strong as the God we serve. Sustaining Strength and endurance comes from God. David had victory after victory because he knew God. He didn't just know facts about God. He knew God intimately. Knowing who He is opens up the window to your own soul.

1Corinthians 13:12

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but *then I shall know as I also am known.*

Insecurity always has been a dream stealer, keeping you preoccupied with the have-nots rather than on the promises. Our pride and fear cling to this because in removing it we actually might not have an excuse to remain in the place of familiarity.

Write down 3 things that insecurity has stolen from you.

If you weren't insecure what would you attempt to do?

Hebrews 10:35-36

Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

Do it afraid and fear will begin to dissipate. When what you need to do is bigger than the fear that your tempted to yield to, you will overcome and do it.

The promise doesn't come girls until after the endurance!!

Isaiah 40:31

Those that wait upon The Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not grow weary.

God is all about developing Him in us.

Reflecting Him.

The fruit of the Spirit is the personality of Jesus.

God calls us to develop the fruit of the spirit, even the word loooooonng suffering makes you tired to read it.

God is more interested in our character than having a bunch of caricatures.

Definition of Caricature- A picture, description or imitation of a person or thing in which certain striking characteristics are exaggerated in order to create a comic or grotesque effect.

Basically, it is a misrepresentation of someone or something. It is distorted. This is what happens to us if we allow others opinions, our own low self-esteem, or the enemy whispering lies to us about who we are and how others see us.

This internal adversity can make us lose heart and not trust others.

God calls us uniquely to be us not like anyone else. His challenge to us is for us to know him, discover our gifts and serve humanity .Make your world, your office, your school a brighter

place because you contribute. Experiencing joy is a byproduct of contributing to others. When you serve society with your talent, you are sharing with God and others whatever that thing is you do. You are the only one who can do your thing with your unique gifting and personality.

In Numbers Chapter 13 Moses sends Joshua and Caleb and some other men into the mountains to check out the land. Joshua and Caleb come back with a good report telling them about and showing the fruit they've found. They tell about the potential that is there. They tell them how possible it is for them to possess this land. The other men (we might call them Debbie Downers) come back with a report about how impossible It would be. They tell them that the enemies there would devour us because they are so much bigger than us. They manage to discourage the people and invoke fear rather than faith.

Numbers 13:33

There we saw the giants(the descendants of Anak cane from the giants) and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight and so we were in their sight .

It is possible to project your view of yourself onto others.

These men were more in tune with their natural senses over their spiritual senses, the complete opposite of Joshua and Caleb.

Are you daring and willing to take a risk because you just “know”?

Do you let what you see determine what you do?

Do you listen internally or make decisions by circumstances that you see?

Contemplate this week's lessons; which one impacts you the most? Why?

Week Two

Everything Continues With A Dream

We are limited, not by our abilities, but by our vision

In week one we talked about how everything starts with a vision; this week we will see that it takes a dream to keep things moving forward.

This week we will study more characters from the bible, delve into scripture and listen to the teaching of Jesus; but one thing I want to make sure you do - answer the questions in each section.

Jesus often used questions to trigger conversations and help people get to the bottom of the problems in their life. Questions probe us. Dig into our soul. And the expose the motives of our hearts. So each day we will face, not only the words of scripture, but our own hearts as we ask ourselves the tough questions.

If you think of a question not listed in the study, make sure you write it down to share with the group.

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision people cast off restraint but happy is he who keeps the law.

We saw this verse last week. Read it again as you launch into this week's study.

Day 1

Dealing with the Adversary

Genesis 12:1-4

12 Now the LORD had said to Abram:

**“Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father’s house,
To a land that I will show you.
² I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”**

⁴ So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him

Abram receives the word from the Lord and shortly after adversity enters in. Internal things within him. Character struggles. Adding to that external things trying to thwart the plan and purpose of God. The adversary wants mostly to steal the seed of that destiny way before it takes root.

Matthew 13:3-4

A sower went out to sow, and as he sowed some seed fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them.

Things aren't automatic, we must decide and be intentional. Being intentional is about you choosing, not just sitting back and waiting for it to happen. This is hard because we all prefer the magic “Jesus wand” method.

Once the promise was spoken to Abram, he had to defend it.

Genesis 15:11

And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abraham drove them away.

Abram takes action when things threaten to interfere with the vision. He isn't passive in his approach, He is decisive and does what He has to do.

What about David?

David grew in strength as He defeated the enemies presented to him. He had different levels of external opposition. He had already been trained to deal with the mammoth opposition “Goliath”.

He had been practicing long before he faced Goliath. He knew the ground of battle. He knew loneliness. He knew exhaustion.

He defeated Saul, he had killed lions and bears in the wilderness. God had gifted this young shepherd boy with something special, he would have strategy. His gift from God grew and with his eyes on God he took Goliath down. He was small in his own eyes so he was big in the eyes of God. His eyes were so filled with the love of God he didn't have room for himself. God invaded this young shepherd boys heart.

Jude 1:24

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy!

What if anything is interfering with your vision that you need to drive away?

Consider Mordecai and Esther's adversity.

Haman is one of those guys you don't really want to work with. Little man syndrome if you know what I mean. He has somewhat of a power trip after his promotion, but worse than that He has an objective. It is to take out the Jewish people. Mordecai, Esther's Uncle is onto this guy and doesn't bow for a second.

Esther4:5

When Haman saw that Mordecai wouldn't bow or pay homage to him He was filled with wrath.

Haman was an angry man, most controlling people are. He was very prideful and was only concerned about himself. He was always jockeying for position. Gathering the few “yes men and women” around him for support. He demanded respect, although he showed respect to no one unless they were stroking his ego.

Esther gets word of this and is appalled, like a David she cares for the people and isn't going to let this “Goliath” type hurt the Jewish people, not if she had anything to do with it. Her heart wouldn't let her turn the other way.

Esther is such a threat to “Haman's Kingdom” that He wants to destroy her too. She exposed his plans and he is furious. With wise counsel, prayer and fasting she makes her decision. “ If I Die, I die. She loved so deep she couldn't sit back passively and watch a “Haman” wreck peoples lives.

Esther 7:8

When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of the wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the Queen while I am in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth they covered his face.

Demotion time girls!! God is faithful and always delivers and vindicates his people! Remember in The Wizard of Oz when they sing "Ding Dong the witch is dead, the witch is dead, the witch is dead, ding dong the witch is dead." Okay sorry, I'm singing along.

This is wonderful news Ladies! God is able to change things and add the right leadership and remove the things or people that are hindering what He wants to do. This is a perfect picture of how God is faithful and if we will look to him he will deliver us and our people from the adversary!! Adversity was meant to strengthen you not weaken you. Esther knew this strength! She had been through tough times when she was younger so this battle was prepared for her. God knew Esther. He knew and had developed her from being a little abandoned girl to a Queen who would rule and protect the Jewish people.

What have you went through that God may use in your life to encourage or comfort someone else?

Have you considered that God trusted you with the trial you had?

Name 2 things it helped you learn?

How has God used your story to comfort others?

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and God of all comfort. who comforts us in all of our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort that we ourselves are comforted with.

Day 2

Divided Hearts

Divided hearts are pulled in many directions with lots of desires but not settled on one thing.

Psalm 27:4

David said, “One Thing” I have desired of The Lord, that will I seek, that I may dwell in the house of The Lord. All the days of my life, to behold the beauty of The Lord and to inquire in his temple.

There is a reason why David was called a man after God’s own heart, his one compelling desire was to know God!!

What things could be dividing your heart and distracting you from God’s best?

- a.) pintrest(I am so guilty)
- b) facebook (umm yep)
- c) procrastination(yep)
- d) a full plate with work, family and friends(yep)
- e) HGTV
- f) Food Network

You get the drift. On a daily basis there are things that tug at our attention and things that are just simply required of us.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily entangles us and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

God’s word is so practical, no wonder the enemy wants to distract us from the word. Ask God to show you the difference in your life between things that are a weight and things that are a sin.

Sin will block you from being able to see God clearly and from staying connected. Weight on the other hand will hinder your progress and cause you to carry a lot of baggage. Excess weight along the way can be relationships. You hold onto them because they are familiar but they are poisonous and toxic. It may even be the work your doing now, God may be nudging you to move on or try something different. “Familiar” is so familiar and comfortable. “Weights” are comfort zones at times. It’s hard to carry the extra “weight” but you have adjusted and been acclimated

to accept this as your norm. Stop and ask God to show you what “weight” he is wanting to deliver you from?

They can be unhealthy things that entangle our souls. They are “familiar things” and people that we are used too. Even though, we know they aren’t healthy we either succumb out of guilt or fear.

We can be weighed down with too many commitments. Too much activity. Sometimes we choose busyness over what is best for us. We get stressed at times because we add so much that things we once enjoyed are a “weight” and a duty rather than a joy.

**God calls us to a balanced life.
Who determines that balance.
You do.**

I can remember when my girls were little. We had 3 invitations to Birthday parties on the same day. This was gonna be a challenge! Being the people-pleaser that I was I figured out a way to make it to every party. Stressful? Slightly, (sarcasm) I mapped out my plan and made it happen. Everyone was happy, the girls partied all day with friends, lots of cake, I was super mom of course because, mission accomplished. Right? Wrong. I was spent. In every way. Tired, Grumpy, spent over my budget. My grumpiness wasn’t from going to parties, I love parties and so did the girls. The more the merrier was my theory but I was exhausted and grumpy because I wasn’t living balanced. I was teaching my girls how to do life this way and this isn’t the model I wanted them to repeat. I especially didn’t want to let anyone down. This was tough because a natural pleaser doesn’t like to disappoint anyone.

Lots of pressure and none of it was put there by God it was all done by me.

There are countless stories (tests) like this I could share but I won’t drag you to the desert which is where I ended up. It was and is a lot of pressure trying to please everyone and hold everyone up.

I decided I wasn’t good at being God so He fired me. Best promotion I ever got. Fired from being God. My insatiable need for “being there” for others. Showing support for them at there functions was a subconscious attempt to gain their approval. To do what they wanted instead of what I Needed. After all, I couldn’t let them down. I would be a bad person. I wouldn’t want to disappoint them. They needed me. They didn’t really but a “pleaser” in her low self-esteem somehow believed this lie. I got the hint from God. He loved me, He didn’t “need” anything from me. He wanted my heart and obedience. He wanted me to say no to others and yes to me. He wasn’t impressed with my plate spinning or my busyness.

In fact, I think He just watched and smiled some. All the way up to my crash. Through my crash and during my crash he was still with me. You know, the one that leaves a mark, we all have them the mark just looks different. The Big one. There were many along the way but every now and then you “total the car”. He didn’t just watch and smile at this one. Nope, He rushed in crying with me. Bandaging my wounds, the self inflicted ones and the bruises from the others stones. He knew the crash itself would be enough punishment He wouldn’t need to scold me about “ Why I shouldn’t have turned that way” and How “ I should have known better”. I had a

barrage of self-condemnation thoughts that could have lasted me a lifetime and then some. My hurt and the memories would heal slowly. A reminder of this crash would be enough to beat yourself up about. I'm not talking about a car crash but about a life crash. Thank God through our Lord Jesus we are not consumed and He removes the sting of death. Can we pause for an awesome God we serve. Thank him now. Pour out your tears of gratitude for his amazing love and redemption. Tell him. Worship him for his goodness and faithfulness! He does inhabit the praise of his people!

The Mercy of God always shows up to a repentant heart. Mercy Triumphs over Judgment. Romans 2:4- The Goodness of God leads us to repentance.

Letting go of one season so you can enter a new season.

Psalm 90:12

Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom

Letting go of seasons in your life is an act of surrender. It is to hold things loosely with open hands. It is impossible to be single hearted if you won't release one place in your life to go to another place. Things get hard when God lifts his grace, his grace is sufficient for the space that you are in. Once God lifts his grace and he is ready for you to move it gets really crowded and uncomfortable in that space. If we aren't discerning and looking for God we get frustrated and wonder why we aren't content. Because the grace is only big enough for that space, for that season and that particular time in your life. I compare it to being pregnant, as that baby grows and develops it outgrows the space and it is time for delivery. Our lives are a lot like this as we grow and progress. Some tests we pass, some we fail. As we've developed and passed character tests we start to outgrow certain things and places. It's time to move on to the next place. This is promotion time. Lesson learned, time to move forward.

Hanging onto familiar places is comfortable. It's what we know, what we are used too. No guesswork. This is great when it's God and you have peace, when the grace starts lifting and the peace seems to disappear it's time to pay attention and not get locked into something that God is finished with. It is tempting to hold onto something that is familiar. When God is done with a season if you don't go with him you will feel like your riding a dead horse, no spirit, no life, just hard effort with no fruit.

Matthew 11:30

Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Philippians 3:13

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended *but one thing* I do forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things that are ahead.

Paul understood about having a divided heart. His heart was divided in a lot of different ways. He once acted like a wild man creating chaos in the church and out of it. His actions were leading him one way, but his heart was about to encounter an incredible experience that would

lead him to a completely different life. He had such a conversion that it left him blinded by the glorious light of God.

Acts 9:3-5

Suddenly, a light shone around him from heaven, Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me? and he said, “Who are you, Lord?” Then the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads. So he trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what do you want me to do. Then The Lord said to him,” Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

God always calls us to obey first then he gives us detailed instruction as we walk it out. He usually doesn't tell you all the details. He puts the vision in your heart, you struggle with it, you start walking it out and as you do The Holy Spirit shows you the way to go and what you need to do.

I am thinking Paul was so passionate after encountering the power of God that he devoured the law of God .He was educated to the hilt, filled with religious knowledge. His hunger drove him on, until He encounters himself.

Some things are assignments for a time and some things are a call. A call never leaves you, it is your life work. It lives on when your long gone. It is your legacy, what you were about and what you did, how you contributed with your talents and gifts.

He has the revelation that all his knowledge that he has acquired has puffed him up. He is more learned and better versed than most around. He would've been the guy with lots of titles around his name, probably could quote the entire book of Ephesians. Yep, I would be impressed. God, not so much. Don't misunderstand me He wants us to be fruitful and succeed but he doesn't want our success to come from outward accomplishments that stroke our ego. He wants our success to come from a sold out heart that is surrendered. It's love and devotion He is after, not how we try and impress him or others.

A man plans his ways but the Lord determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

This doesn't mean don't plan. It doesn't mean to not have goals. It means be open, be flexible, hold things loosely. Seasons are meant to bring change so surrendering to them make transitions much easier. Be a ship that is easy to turn, not one that drops anchors around every uncomfortable wave or whim.

Paul is saying, I haven't arrived or have it all figured out but I know what doesn't work effectively. Paul had some miles on his shoes, he had blown it a lot and had personal experience. Sometimes, we figure things out by default or the process of elimination. Faith always carries you forward.

It could be a lot of different things that divide your heart.. Excess of anything, cleaning out that closet, Forgiving others, forgiving yourself, spreading yourself to thin by doing lots of things but not settled on one thing..... you fill in the blank. You can't live in 2 places at once. Well, you can if you don't decide to move on to the next season of life.

To live in the past is to never walk in the present. If your dragging the past into your future there will be a lot of baggage and bondage.

Now, let's delve deep...

What is the major distraction of your heart?

What can you do to 'deal with this' issue?

How do you live a balanced life with all the *legitimate* things that pull on you day by day?

Write a prayer asking God for His wisdom, power and help.

Day 3

Your Future

Jeremiah 29:11

I know the thoughts I think toward you, says The Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Mark 10:36

Jesus says to the disciples, What do you want me to do for you?

Read the parable Mark 10:35-45

Then James, John and the sons of Zebedee, came to him saying, We want you to do for us whatever we ask. “and He said to them” What do you want me to do for you?” They said to him,” Grant us that we may sit, one on your right hand and the other on your left, in your glory. But Jesus said to them, “ You do not know what you ask,” are you able to drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with? “They said to him,” We are able.”So Jesus said to them,”You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized “but to sit on my right hand and on my left is not mine to give, but for those it has been prepared.

and when the ten heard it they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to himself and said to them,” You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. and whoever desires to be first shall be slave of all. “For even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many”

James and John aren't a lot different than we can be at times. They knew exactly what they wanted to be: Top Dog, CEO of the company. Grandeur visions of the corner office. Umm, a little humility boys may be in order. Jesus basically tells them to learn to serve first. Sometimes, we have to do the less desirable jobs and wait for God to promote us. Humility is the path to promotion.

Notice that Jesus never rebukes them, He simply guides them. The fact is that they had some pretty lofty plans and dreams, but The Lord was much more interested in teaching them about character development.

Where is an area in your life that God keeps dealing with you about? Don't beat yourself up about it, just simply agree with God and ask him to help a sista or brother out!

Where do you see God really doing a work in your life? Can you see character issues He has developed?

1Peter 5:6- humble yourself under the mighty hand of God and in due time He will exalt you.

A lot of times we can't even tell God what we want, thank God He knows what we need but He still wants us to think about what we truly want in life and to tell him. Scripture in James says that we have not because we ask not. Ouch! So, if we have a lot of words to get out why not channel that energy towards God in prayer.

Start small. Be faithful in a little and God will put you in charge of greater things. Increase comes from humility. Promotion comes from The Lord. When it is time God will move you.

James and John were young, some say that some of the disciples were teen-agers. So there was a lot of growing to do. They had just enough knowledge to be dangerous. Their zealotness overrode their life experience and their character development. There is a lot of benefit from learning from others.

Matthew 6:21

For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also.

It only makes sense that if your heart is somewhere than love flows to that area. Think about that in life when making commitments or decisions.

Do you love it to the degree that you would spend time doing it if you didn't get paid?

Maybe your at a job you don't love at the moment, be faithful there and believe God for a different opportunity.

What gives you energy?

What do you enjoy doing?

What gives you peace?

What's your wiring? Do you like people or projects?

Would you rather stick needles in your eyes than do tech work? Okay, busted that one is me. I'm a little "technically challenged".

Realistically, don't try and be a "square" if you're a "circle". Be comfortable in your skin and let your life and gifts bring the fruit it was intended to bring.

***I once heard a friend say,
A tree never eats its own fruit.
It is picked off for others to enjoy.***

This is how our lives should be, the fruit is dispensed and given for others to taste and enjoy.

How do you feel about your future? Are you hopeful? Discourage? Indifferent? Too busy to think about it?

What does Jeremiah 29:11 say to you?

If Jesus were to ask you the question in Mark 10:36 (What do you want me to do for you?), what would you say?

Why not take this challenge and memorize Jeremiah 29:11 today. But don't just memorize it; meditate on it today and tonight. Ask God to make this real to you. Then let your group know how He answered this prayer.

Day 4

Family

Never underestimate the heritage of Godly parents. If you were blessed with this, you are now walking in things they have passed onto you by faith. Paul is reminding Timothy of his heritage in this passage.

2 Timothy 1:5

When I call to remembrance of the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is also in you.

Do you have a family member who pointed you towards God? Who?

What did they do or say that was most impacting?

The Apostle Paul is called to mentor Timothy. He is a spiritual father to him. Timothy is a young Pastor. He loves God but is new and inexperienced. Paul walks beside him to encourage him and point out and help cultivate the gifts in his life. He also points out pitfalls that would wound or hurt him or others. Let's look at some scriptures in 2 Timothy and dig into some of the things that Paul is writing to Timothy about.

2 Timothy 1:9

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our own works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

What do you feel like your purpose is?

God is the dream giver. Whatever it is He has put in your heart you will wrestle with it, want to quit at times, lay it down, pick it up but it will not leave you. This is the vision of God. If it can leave let it. If it is embedded in your soul as you "flesh it out" you won't be able to get away from it. It will follow you. Vision follows you but the gifts you have make room for you.

Let's look at some of Paul's struggles as He walks out the plan of God.

2 Corinthians 6:3-10

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed; but in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God; in much patience, in tribulations, in needs,

in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the holy spirit, by sincere love. by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left. by dishonor and honor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers and yet true. as unknown and yet well known; as dying and behold we live; as chastened and yet not killed. as sorrowful, yet rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing yet possessing everything.

Have you ever felt like Paul? I'm certain we all have. No matter where God is calling you too...work, the church you attend, the gifts you have, the relationships you desire. Any area you have vision you will have many tests to pass. It's worth it, don't bury the talent because of fear.

Proverbs 18:16

A man's gifts make room for him and brings him before great men

2Timothy 6-8

v6) For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

Paul is saying, I haven't held back I gave my all to God and to you. He had invested what God had placed in him.

v7) I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

Paul had been to hell and back in his life, so he was "seasoned" with life and knew God through some hard places. Timothy needed to hear this. This man Paul wasn't talking about stuff he didn't know. He knew and because of his experience He could encourage Timothy. Remember in Forest Gump when they are yelling "Run Forest Run" same thing here. (smile) God sent Paul to say "Run Timothy Run". Everyone needs an encourager.

Who could you encourage with your story?

Write out 2 Corinthians 3-4

How did God's truth change your view about your story?

v8) Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which The Lord the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Paul saw the end. His vision included others. His vision would go through many ups and downs. Encounters with God that would challenge what he thought he knew about God.

I was born in a very small town in Illinois. At 15 yrs of age my Father's company shut down and He decided to start his own company. He was a picture to me of Abraham. He wanted to get our family out away from a town that didn't seem to hold a promising future for any of us. He took a giant leap of faith and God honored it. I'm thankful that my dad had the courage to move. It changed my destiny and pointed me towards my promise land. He did it mostly out of necessity. This is what happens to a lot of us, a crisis thrusts us into a new arena. We *have* to believe God. We have no other choice, and this is right where God wants all of us.

God is never late. Our crisis moments cause us to desperately depend on his provision and protection.

2 Corinthians 1:9-10

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, v 10) who delivered us from so great a death and does deliver us; in whom we trust will still deliver us.

Paul is sending this letter to the church after a time of suffering, he reminds them of God's comfort and redirects their attention to trusting in God and not themselves.

He comforts them by reminding them that God is past, present and future deliverer!

Write out 2 Timothy 1:12 and Circle 3 words from this passage that stand out to you.

When tough times come it is easy to forget the promise and the vision. We are tempted to be swallowed up by circumstances, but Thanks be to God, He will deliver us. It may not look exactly like we thought it would look like but it will have his love lavished all over it.

It will satisfy. God will bring His vision to pass in your life. It may look a little different than you pictured it, but the key is you pictured it and continued to walk towards it.

Psalm 32:8

I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go: I will guide you with my eye.

What crisis in your life caused you to be humbled because God showed up in a big way?

Have you stepped into an area that is unfamiliar and daring?

What have you learned about yourself and God through this step of faith?

Has The Lord sent a mentor or coach into your life?

Day 5

Faith

Hebrews 12:2

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus, knew the steps to the cross would be grueling. He sets his mind on the other side of the cross. He sweated drops of blood. He cried out for God to do it another way, He felt alone and abandoned yet He was compelled to carry out his obedience. Jesus paid the price and paved the way for you and for me. Honoring him by holding onto who He says we are and what He wants us to accomplish brings him joy.

A Lesson From Claire

Our little Granddaughter Claire is almost 3. We took her to Toys'R Us the other day and she spotted a scooter. She didn't consider her size or ability she just wanted to ride it! She knew she could if we would let her try. Did we discourage her as she wobbled and ran into things? No way, we watched her putting her best effort forth. Did we "criticize" her for what she chose to ride? No. God put the desire in her heart to choose "that scooter".

Now when Big "D" assisted her it was easier and she could go further. This is our lives a lot of times. There are desires and things in our hearts. Vision. At times we don't always choose the best "vehicle" to ride but God in his mercy gently guides and directs. He doesn't criticize, or condemn you when you blow it or make a mistake. He simply loves you and assists you to your destination just like Big D did for Claire.

Write out 1John 5:4

Now circle a word or portion that jumps out at you in this passage. This is The Holy Spirit showing you something about what He wants to do for you.

There is a price for every dream we have. If it's in you no obstacle will stop you.

Psalm 31:24

Be of Good courage and he will strengthen your heart, all you who hope in The Lord.

God gives us the courage and strength to accomplish the vision He has called us too.

2Chronicles 32:7

Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid or dismayed before the King of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him.

If you're gonna accomplish anything noteworthy. You are gonna have battles. There will be obstacles to overcome. Insecurities to defeat. People issues at times. Keep your eye on the prize and keep pressing on. God will reward your steps of faith and trust in him.

1John 4:4

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

Rev. 12:10

And they have overcome him by the blood of the lamb and the word of your testimony, and they did not love their lives even to death.

John 16:23-24

And in that day you will ask me nothing, Most Assuredly I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name He will give you. Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Jesus had joy because He knew everything he did was to fulfill the heart and plan of his Father. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, through the agony and pain, He could see spiritually on the other side of the cross. It was painful but the vision of his Father and his will outweighed any discomfort on this side of the cross.

It is God's good pleasure to give you wonderful things in your lives. Dreams accomplished, degrees earned. A great career. There is joy when we work it out and fulfill our destiny.

Endurance

When there is vision, there is a burden. Stay focused on the "other side" the finished work.

Do your part and let God do his. Look for the people God has gifted to help you fulfill your vision.

Who do you know that has been successful at what you want to do?

Could you ask them to mentor you or even job shadow with them?

Do you fill your mind with good information on what you want to do?

Who is it that has impacted you by what they have overcome?

Ben Carson is one of my heroes. Who comes to mind for you when you think of them overcoming incredible obstacles?

Ben Carson's Story

Ben Carson had a dream of becoming a physician. He grew up in a single parent home with poverty looming over his life, a bad temper, poor grades and a horrible temper. Needless to say he had low self-esteem. His mother with only a third grade education challenged him to strive for excellence. Young Ben persevered and his dream took shape. He is now a full professor of neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, and he has directed pediatric neurosurgery at the John Hopkins Children's Center for a quarter of a century.

Dr. Carson holds more than 60 honorary doctorate degrees and his dream with his wife Candy is to expand their reach of the Carson Scholars Fund. Their dream is to name a Carson Scholars Fund in every school within the United States.(1)

(1) Information about Ben Carson obtained through carsonscholars.org

Week Three

Using Your Talents

“When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.’” — Erma Bombeck

Proverbs 31:13-16

She seeks wool and flax, and willingly works with her hands, v14) she is like the merchant ships, she brings her food from afar. v15) She also rises while it is still night, and provides food for her household, and a portion for her maidservants. v16) She considers a field and buys it;from her profits she plants a vineyard.

She is superwoman! No pressure here girls! Seriously, she is willing. She is looking for opportunity and just works hard! It may just look different for all of us. It is about fulfilling the task at hand and doing it to the best of your ability - as unto The Lord. Always remember God sees our hearts and gives us grace.

What was your mom like growing up?

How did that affect you as a woman today? Are you the same or did you make a choice to do it different?

Did your mom work inside the home or did she work outside the home?

Was she supermom? Were you afraid you would never measure up to her expectations?

For some strange reason and being a bit naïve, I thought as a teenage girl that I would automatically be organized like my mother. Well, let's just say my strongest gift isn't administrative. I tend to be a little free spirit, somewhat A.D.D and tend towards the scattered side. Wow was this a shocker in the real world. Oh my, guess who despises balancing a checkbook.... anyways. We all have areas we have to grow in and the good news is we can hire (or beg our spouse to do it) people to do those things that we don't do well.

The reality is we have areas of strengths and weaknesses, strengthen the weak areas but stay focused and give yourself to areas that fit you and your strengths..... the world will go a lot

smoother and you will have a lot more peace. You also will be much happier playing to your strengths and letting things go that aren't you.

In the story about David and Goliath, David is a young shepherd. Even as a boy he started gaining life experience through some personal victories. He probably was very familiar with being picked on as the youngest and was probably aware of the bullies in any given setting. Saul was a leader in David's life and really loved his position. Saul's position secured him; he liked the security of control, not self control but the security of controlling others. Saul was the go to guy. The expert in his field. And David was just a young kid, no experience or so it seemed. Life had taught him so much more than any book could dare to uncover. What was to be discovered in this young man was a tenacious spirit and a true leader. He happened to be gifted with the talent of rock slinging.

Never underestimate the gifts God has placed in you. What you may see as ordinary God may use in an extraordinary way. Not every idea someone has is God's idea for you. Prayerfully consider what others are asking you to do. Saul has a great idea and since He is older and more experienced He should have the right strategy, right? Wrong. Just because something works for someone else it doesn't mean it will work for you. God has uniquely made us. He has made us all different, the quirky things and all. He wants us to just be us; no one else on the planet can do what you do.

Psalm 139:8

I will praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are your works and that my soul knows very well.

David is honest and God shows him what is comfortable for him and how He was wired to fight The Goliath's in his life. Life teaches David that it's impossible to try and be what you just aren't designed to be. David does "his thing"..... and waalah!! Imagine that, it worked and victory came! Not only did it teach him about being comfortable with the way God had gifted him but victory came for the children of Israel. Your "thing" is what God is after. Whatever "that thing" is that God has for you will always go further and have a bigger purpose than you realize. Whatever you do, do it as unto The Lord!

Read 1 Samuel 17: 38-40 Saul tries to put his armor on David, and of course David feels awkward, smothered and can't even walk in someone else's suit. David was opposed to this method and went back to what he was familiar with and knew. He defeated Goliath with his method which was 5 smooth stones.

This is how we feel when others try to put us into their box, or convince us to do things the way they do. Sometimes, we call these people control freaks but a lot of times they are just locked into how they do it and their method is the "right way". Sometimes it's just God showing us how he has wired us. It doesn't take long to discover what fits you and what doesn't.

- 1) Have you been in situations where there was a power struggle over the method you chose?
- 2) Would you have the courage to speak up if God was leading you too?

3) Are you humble enough to bite your tongue, submit and wait on God?

Fear can be a factor in question 2 and 3.

In the first question, If you aren't naturally bold, timidity and people pleasing could be an issue. God may be moving you out of your comfort zone to address something that normally you would be passive about.

In the second question, God may deal with you about biting your tongue and waiting on him to handle it. Sometimes in our fear, we take things into our own hands because we aren't convinced God will do it our way or fast enough.

Do you keep the peace at all costs even if it is harmful to you?

How has this affected you?

How do we know if we are to speak up or to be humble and wait on God and let him take care of it? This can only be figured out by being sensitive to The Holy Spirit's guidance. Scripture says that God will give us ears to hear and that He will lead us into truth. It takes discernment.

Definition of Discernment-

The ability to make a sound judgment. The quality of being able to decide between truth and error. It is to be able to perceive.

Hebrews 5:14

But solid food belongs to those who are full of age, that is those by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

When anyone walks in their gifting, skill is developed. The longer they walk in it the more skill they develop in whatever it is they give themselves too. David had walked with God long enough from a young boy to know who he was and who he wasn't. His gift made room for him. He knew his skill was with rocks not someone else's suit of armor. Maturity comes from developing a skill and the life experience you have had in using that skill.

Have you ever heard the expression "Been there, done that, got the t-shirt for it"?

Sometimes, life lessons can give you a lot of discernment. David, although he was young He had observed a lot and had developed a discerning heart. He had experienced enough "bullying" by older siblings that He wasn't going to passively observe someone being mistreated by a giant. He knew it wasn't right, so he got positioned. Positioned to take on a giant.

Day 1

Your Life as a Steward

When you plant a garden there is a lot more to it than throwing a seed in the dirt and veggies magically appear. Now maybe for some they really have that green thumb but for most that isn't the case. It's tempting to get our eyes on our neighbors garden and think "its easy for them, they aren't dealing with what Im dealing with". It is vital to plow up your soil and know the condition of your soil before you plant. You have to weed it and then deal with those pesky insects and varmants that love to steal your fruit. This is a lot like our spiritual life, our relationships and our finances.

Read Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ "For *the kingdom of heaven* is like a man traveling to a far country, *who* called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. ¹⁵ And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. ¹⁶ Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. ¹⁷ And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also. ¹⁸ But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

²⁰ "So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' ²¹ His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' ²² He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' ²³ His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

²⁴ "Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*.'

²⁶ "But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. ²⁷ So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. ²⁸ Therefore take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents.

²⁹ 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

How would you describe your mindset, would you consider yourself an investor or more of a consumer?

Investors think of what could be, not what they see right now. Long term thinking with a reasonable risk involved. They know something will be required of them. It will cost them and they know it will stretch them. It isn't always safe and the thrill of the new opportunity excites and motivates them. They stand a chance of doing great on their investment and they are aware of the risk of losing also, nevertheless they must invest because they are compelled to see the fruit of their labors.

Consumers on the other hand are very aware of their present need and that clouds their vision from seeing anything else. They are satisfied most when the comfort of their needs are met. They would rather play it safe then venture into unknown territory.

This can really describe our lives with investing in a lot of different areas. Maybe it is your gifts, maybe money maybe relationships. God loves us too much to leave us in our comfort zones. He will always stretch us. As God deals with us about steps of obedience he is stretching our faith. What area in your life do you sense God stretching you?

In the parable, Jesus commends the ones who traded their talents and increased but He rebuked the servant who hid his talent. It isn't necessarily what we do but with the heart and willingness we do it with. Will we invest what we've been given or hide it? Will we develop our gifts or remain stagnant and slothful? Faith always stretches and causes us to step in closer to God, thus causing us to step out in faith and get closer to others.

When we don't invest, our world becomes smaller and smaller rather than broader. It is risky to invest, we could lose. We could get rejected if we invest in new relationships. We could possibly fail. It's a guarantee that sometimes we will fail. Failure is just part of the pathway to success. But what if you succeed and make a great investment and you see the fruit from that step of faith! What if you go for that Master's degree? What if you started that business?

Are you doing things that require you to stretch and move out of your comfort zone?

Think of a time you invested and got a good return. How did you feel about yourself and what you invested in?

Can you pick 2 areas in your life that you could invest more?

Spend time with that one that has no one.

Invest time in your church or volunteer at a shelter

Could you spend more time with family?

Start a savings account?

Decide to start giving a percentage to God?

Did you finish getting your degree?

Matthew 25:15

and to one he gave 5 talents, to another two, to another one to each according to his own ability and immediately he went on a journey.

God deposits within us what we are capable of doing. If we cultivate and use the talents he has given us increase comes, if not, we remain the same and settle. Many times being envious or coveting what others have or have accomplished comes from not cultivating our own gifts. Joy comes from discovering and developing. Satisfaction is enjoying the fruit of your labors.

The servant who invested:

Matthew 25:20-21

He who had received 5 talents came and brought 5 more saying, Lord, you delivered to me 5 talents; look I have gained 5 more talents besides them. The Lord says, Well done good and faithful servant, you were faithful in a few things I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into The Joy of The Lord.

He was able to “be made” because he received the challenge placed in front of him. He was willing to stretch.

The servant was being promoted to “ruler” because he knew what it was to be ruled. He humbly accepted and submitted to the challenge.

His focus was on The Lord, not himself.

He got busy with what He was given. He wasn't idle. One translation says, He immediately went and traded. He didn't give himself time to talk himself out of it. He knew it was Gods will so He just simply went and obeyed.

He didn't allow” fear” time to show up. If fear has the opportunity to dictate it will. It draws upon all those insecurities and vulnerable places and moves right in.

He was excited to show The Lord what he had been doing, because He knew he was doing God's will. Peace always reigns through obedience. This is where joy is discovered.

On the other hand, the servant who hid his talent says in **v24:**

I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed.

He presumed God would be hard. His life experience had hardened his heart and he didn't trust in the goodness of God. He couldn't see past his disappointment.

Maybe, he had a great business at one time and whack!! The economy collapses and his business went down. Unfortunately, we can be a mirror to others of our own picture of God. Maybe He grew up poor so now he would trust no one but himself.

The servant had so much fear he almost felt proud that he hid his talent and preserved his money. Unlike the servant God commended, he couldn't "be made" because he was a self-made man. He was mistrusting and suspicious.

He was so focused on the one thing he had, he was consumed by it.
Hurt has a way of keeping you focused inward instead of upward.
He was focused on himself and was fearful.
God called him to give it but instead he hid it.
He lived Jaded.

Fear always has and always will be the enemies master tool. Fear never parks in one spot in your life. It's objective is to paralyze and grip us so that we don't move out. God is so faithful friends!! When we draw near to God, He always draws near to us. He always will and has delivered us from fear. We may feel the effects of it but we don't have to let it rule our lives! Soooo many times we just gotta do things even though we are afraid; and the more we do them the less fear grips us!

2 Corinthians 1:9-10

Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that he will still deliver us.

He was so blinded by his own pain that what He thought was preserving him was actually cutting him off. Wounds that are left unhealed began to grow and permeate other areas of our lives, making our lives smaller and smaller.

God promises that if we trust in him that He will deliver us. He says He already has, and still is and promises to continue to deliver us in the future if we look to him and not to our selves.

Has fear stopped you from a lot?

Do you struggle with mistrust?

Do you have unresolved issues in your past that keep you from investing in your future?

Name 3 areas that fear needs to be defeated in your life

Memorize one of the following scriptures on fear and pray it every time fear presents itself.

1John 4:18

Perfect love casts out fear

2 Timothy 1:7

God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind

1John 4:4

Greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world

Day 2

Bloom where you are planted

Proverbs 18:16

A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before great men.

How are you gifted?

What comes as natural to you as breathing?

Read Psalm 1

Psalm 1: 2-3

His delight is in the law of The Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night, he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither: and whatever he does shall prosper.

1 Corinthians 3: 6-8

I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase, so then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters but God who gives the increase, Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Do you tend to over analyze situations?

Does procrastination get the best of you?

There never has been or will be a perfect time or condition to start anything. You just simply start. It's like waiting to get your life together *before* giving your life to Christ. It just doesn't happen. Our lives never come together until they are in Christ. Once in Christ, as we start "fleshing" out our lives, it isn't a beautiful picture, it's a real life picture of our lives broken. It looks a lot like a child being born. Messy. Bloody. Deliverance isn't pretty. Once that baby is born and cleaned up it is the prettiest thing a mother or father has ever laid eyes on.

This is exactly the reaction of God when he sees us struggling to breakout of the cocoons that we hide in. Like those newborns, we struggle to breakthrough and sometimes we don't look so pretty through that process. As God works in our lives the process of deliverance isn't the prettiest thing. It's beautiful after the work is complete.

Ecclesiastes 11:4

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap

Name 3 areas in which you procrastinate?

Is it dread, fear, laziness?

**The Value of Budgeting-
Let no Debt remain outstanding but the debt of love**

Budget isn't a four letter word (but debt is), it's 6 so that makes it worse, seriously ☺ . I know, your picturing shackles, it isn't that bad girls! Free spirits don't love the word budget. There are wonderful resources out there to help: Dave Ramsey products, Larry Burkette and a host of others. Use the tools they suggest and set yourself free from being enslaved to debt!

Meet Amanda

Amanda loved to shop, especially when it was retail therapy. When she was feeling blue she would go buy a pair of shoes to pick her up. She would shop online for hours escaping the pressures of her responsibilities of school and work. When she was discontent she would buy furniture for a "new look" for her apartment. She also loved eating out with all of her friends on a regular basis. She was a great bargain shopper, but even her bargains would override what she could truly afford. She had no plan so she just threw caution to the wind and enjoyed life. After a while, she was spent and reality set in. She was deep in debt with no plan.

There is an old saying, fail to plan or plan to fail.

Does this story sound familiar? Have you been through this and are now on the other side of it, slowly crawling your way out of debt? Good for you!!

Are you struggling because Amanda's story defines where you are personally?

There is hope. One quality decision can change everything. Decide to get out of debt and control your finances rather than them controlling you.

Proverbs 21:5

The plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty, surely to poverty.

Budgets don't box you in they bring you out. Change your mindset, they don't limit you necessarily, but they give you a fence that define your boundaries. The Funny thing about a budget is that it screams accountability without saying one word. The green paper just disappears. ☺

Budgets should help define your personal world so that it is clear what you have left to fill the house with.

Prov 24:3- 4

Through Wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established, by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches

Remember our earlier study about the talents, if your faithful in a little God will put you in charge of much but if you can't manage the minimum you can't be trusted with the maximum. I have often heard people say, they would give 5 million or 5 thousand to the church or whatever organization they want to support when they win the lottery. I curiously wonder if they are giving \$5 now or \$50 now because if they aren't doing the least then chances are they will never do the most that they are vowing to give.

It isn't about the amount but about the motive it is given with. Think of the woman in the bible with a couple of coins. The Bible says, " she gave all she had". She gave out of the abundance of her heart. Out of her poverty she gave, rather than the Pharisees who gave out of their abundance. The Pharisees didn't feel it when they gave because they had it to give but the woman who gave the coins felt it from her core. Her giving was a sacrifice and was motivated by love.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. so let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver.. and God is able to make all grace abound towards you, that you always in all things may have an abundance for every good work.

The Bible mentions money about 2000 times, so it must be important.
Write out the follow verses.

Luke 6:38

Proverbs 3:9-10

Day 3- Successful Not Spent

God wants us to be successful as much as we want to be successful in life. He just wants us to define success the way he does. Scripture says that we are blessed to be a blessing. We can spend our lives and spin our wheels to become successful and make a great living and get a lot of material things, degrees and awards. We eventually discover and find that leaves us empty and feeling spent. If whatever we do isn't tied to purpose, it will not satisfy our soul... we will only keep searching and acquiring.

Proverbs 11:24-25

There is one who scatters and yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich and he who waters will also be watered himself

Success is a lot more than just financial blessing. In fact if you only have financial blessings I think it's safe to say this isn't success. Success is about the person you have become. It is the total you. Money doesn't define you as successful; it shows you've worked hard and made some good decisions. Success is about the person you are, the character you have and the way you treat others. Success is learning to love well and because of that you learn to give well. Success is helping others, investing your God given talent to better the world around you.

Solomon: The Wise One

Let's look at Solomon's life. He was considered the wisest, wealthiest, most influential king in Israel's history, yet his wisdom didn't override his quest to satisfy his fleshly desires and the insatiable desire to try and fill his soul. This quest can be found in his personal journal; a book in the bible called Ecclesiastes. Ironically, Solomon's wisdom continued to guide him right back to God. Even though his flesh curiously compelled him to do things that wouldn't satisfy his soul his heart was still guiding him with wisdom.

Psalm 139:7-10

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I go from your presence? If I ascend into heaven you are there; if I make my bed in hell behold, you are there, if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

I often say our 3 biggest problems are me, myself and I. Notice a common theme in these passages. Solomon's entire world is now focused on himself and what will be gratifying to him.

Solomon's existence is about second chances. He is the product of an affair. His Father is King David and his mother is Bathsheba. Ironically, Solomon got to wondering which led him to wandering just like his Father. Solomon's Father David had a brilliant mind and likewise this was passed down to his son Solomon. Have you heard the old saying, "curiosity killed the cat?" David, although called a man after God's own heart, struggled with this at times. Curiosity isn't bad until it leads us to questioning the goodness of God. It usually doesn't lead us closer to him but further away. This was the same tactic all the way back in The Garden of Eden. The serpent in his craftiness suggests that God could be holding out on you.

What is it that Solomon can try or do to fill that hole in his soul? There isn't a material thing, an experience, a person, a drink or drug that can give us the satisfaction that the love and peace of God can give us. When we don't serve God and yield our worship to Him, we begin to make other "gods" and yield to them looking to them for what only God himself can give us.

What or who have you looked to in place of God?

We don't always let go of God completely in our quest to satisfy the soul, but we add things to God because God alone hasn't always panned out. We "help him" and search out what satisfies us.

The Pursuit of God

The Book of Hosea is a book about God's relentless pursuit of his people, In their desperation to be satisfied, they prostitute themselves out, giving themselves to idols. God, not only stands with outstretched arms. He relentlessly pursues them to redeem them from themselves. In spite of their behavior and betrayal he draws them in and embraces them. Scarred and broken from being used up and given away God pledges his love and sacrifice to them. His love would be the only thing that would ultimately satisfy them. Once they accept this, they will stop straying and running from him. No false god can ever deliver; they promise much but deliver little.

What did you add to God in your desperate attempt to get answers?

Can you think of a time when God just didn't seem to be there or you wondered if he cared?

Success is about Obedience. It is better to obey than sacrifice.

1 Samuel 15:22

Has The Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of The Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

Consider Jonah. Called by God, gifted with a voice but He decides to go another way, a way that seems right to him.

Actually, He willfully disobeyed God, but God in his mercy sent many trials into Jonah's life in order for Jonah to turn back to God.

Jonah 1:3

But Jonah arose to flee from the presence of The Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish, so He paid the fare and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of The Lord.

Jonah's life is an example of being "spent". His choices and disobedience landed him right in the pit of a whales stomach.

God in His mercy will send a whale to swallow us up. This actually is God's mercy to us. This is usually the place that we "come to ourselves" and we remember the mercy of God. Once we encounter this revelation and embrace it, like Jonah, God delivers us onto dry ground.

This was part of Jonah's story. We all have a story that involves a whale, some more dramatic, some less.

What was the "whale" in your life that God used?

Proverbs 16:25

There is a way that seems right to a man but in the end it leads to death.

God calls us to be dependent upon him, yielded with a listening ear. You can't hear if you're not listening.

Remember, when you were a kid and you would stick your fingers in your ears and would start talking so that you couldn't hear anyone or anything else? Precisely. This is what we do when we spiritually don't want to listen to God's counsel to us.

Romans 10:17

Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God.

Ok, so maybe it isn't a literal death but maybe it is a career death move or a spiritual death or a decision that leads to financial death. Or maybe a relationship death. *To not produce fruit in any area of our lives is a death. God is glorified when we succeed in all areas of our lives!*

Sometimes, life circumstances can be hard and we are confused by the trials and fear of hurt and more disappointment. Raw disappointment causes us to "choose our way" or the way that "we" think seems best. It's like throwin' dice. This is what the children of Israel did in the book of Judges.

Judges 21:25

In those days there was no King in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Sometimes it works sometimes it doesn't. A better way is to open up the love letter of The Bible and see the comfort and beauty of God in the lives of people who are as imperfect as all of are. Letting go and asking God for Direction is a big step when independence has always been a way of life. Be humble enough to be in the position of needing guidance and direction. Share your struggles with a trusted Christian friend or counselor.

I often say brokenness creates openness.

Life can leave us broken. God loves broken things. Consider the parable of a little boys' lunch.

Read Matthew 14:13-20.

Notice in verse 14 what is said.

Matthew 14:17

and they said to him, "We have here *only* five loaves and two fish."

Many times we only consider what we have left, not what we have.

From the perspective of the disciples, they were looking at things through the lens of the natural. There were thousands of people following them and they couldn't see how they could possibly feed them with 2 loaves and a fish. The Lord challenges them to look at what they have available and surrender it to him. They give it to Jesus and He Blesses and breaks it to feed many.

This is what God does with our lives. First, he wants to see how you will handle it, then like all of us when we realize we can't fix whatever it is, we are humbled and come to him. Then he takes whatever it is we are offering and blesses it. He takes *whatever* it is we are offering to him. This usually where we try to get religious and turn tricks for God. We try and clean up the mess we are offering him, or we try and justify how we got to the place we are, or we try to qualify with the good things we do. Paul did this too. He tried to base his merit on what He could do or what he had done. Basically, in his quest of redeeming himself he has the revelation that everything He did was "dung". Yep, horse crap. This was one of the greatest enlightenment of Paul's life and the pathway of coming to the end of himself. Now, He could begin. The end of ourselves and how truly "lost" we are is the true beginning of intimacy. Now Paul could learn. Now he could receive. He realized that He knew nothing in comparison to encountering the

deep love of Jesus. No amount of knowledge he acquired could hold in comparison to the grace he encountered.

Maybe, it is a broken childhood. Maybe, it is a financial mess. Maybe it is a relationship issue. He can't take it if you don't surrender it. Once it is given to him, then he blesses it and breaks it. What?? What do you mean," He breaks It"? I said fix it God, not break it. Part of the blessing in anything is realizing, it can't be fixed at least not by me. Part of the beauty of The Gospel is that Jesus is the only perfect one out there. He wants to bless the mess in your life. He wants to

write the story of your life with him smack dab in the middle. Broken and all. His power is perfect in your weakness. In your weakness, He is made strong.

The disciples were able to distribute to the multitudes after they had received from God. Religion and intimacy never go together, because religious people like logic and rules and the grace of God always surpasses religious rules. God wants you.

Jesus continually rebuked the Pharisees, the religious people, who thought they had it altogether. He gave grace to the rest. The regular people. People who sinned. People who knew how desperately they needed help. Sinners who just somehow couldn't 'get their act together.' These are the people he came for; not people who couldn't see how great their need was. He came for those looking for a saviour, not those who already thought they were scholars.

God desires time with you, to get to know you and for you to know him. If he didn't want relationship then He would have made us robots.

A relationship that isn't reciprocal isn't a relationship it is an arrangement. It is external only, usually with rules. This is usually the religious persons approach. I go to church every week, I tithe, I pray, I read my bible. I do all the right things externally but unfortunately, my goodness isn't in the goodness of who God is but its in my ability to keep the rules. The religious person doesn't know intimacy only legalistic rules. They aren't motivated by the love of God but they are bound in religion out of fear. Jesus meets you right in the middle of your catastrophe. The disciples moved past religion into intimacy when logically they couldn't feed thousands of people. When they brought it to Jesus, his compassion was activated. This was a teachable moment for them, they would experience his grace as he poured into them and they would then distribute what He gave them. God blesses your broken pieces if you give them to him. Nothing is lost or wasted that is handed over to him.

I can remember years ago sitting at my desk with my bills spread out. I was crying and praying because of a financial nightmare. Overwhelmed with bills and needs, The Lord took me to these passages. He took me to Matthew 14:19.

Then He commanded the multitudes to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, "He *blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes.*"

God assured me that if I gave him this mess He would “Bless” “Break” and” distribute to my creditors the money I had to give him. This was a test of trust and intimacy. Intimacy grew as I committed and submitted to the plan of God. He gave me clear instruction and I did it.

Jesus said: *I am The Way, The Truth and The Life.* Scirpture says, *My word is a light unto your feet and a lamp unto your path.*

**God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.
John Piper**

Have you experienced the love of God in second chances?

There is an old song that states, “*Looking for love in all the wrong places.*” We do this in our quest for love. We will do anything to feel loved, which makes us feel whole.

Have you looked for satisfaction in things that only left you emptier and even more desperate?

Susan’s Story

Susan was a beautiful girl, she longed to be wanted. She wanted to be desired enough that she was worth pursuing. She dated *a lot*. Friends were always “fixing” her up. The vicious cycle of giving herself away became a norm. Giving herself away was her desperate attempt to gain love. Maybe, this time it would be different, he would call, he would pursue her. Her search was about self-worth, about connecting in the heart, about significance in the eyes of another person. She felt used and tossed aside. Never feeling like she measured up in her Father’s eyes, why would she in another man’s eyes.

Have you felt used in relationships? always longing for love but instead feeling used up?

Have you felt spent after the success that you hoped for went wrong?

Day 4-
A Well Managed Life

Proverbs 22:7

The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

We buy on emotion then try to justify with Logic.

Paper doesn't lie, debt is debt and denial isn't faith it is ignorance. If you stick your head in the sand about your financial reality and don't address the problem, chances are you will be stuck, and in the same place 5 yrs. from now.

The Power of the Budget

A Budget sets up boundary lines for you. No budget can make you have self-control but delaying instant gratification can help you start. One sign of immaturity is wanting things now. Being willing to wait until the lifestyle you want matches what you can truly afford is a smart move.

The Entitlement mentality isn't new it started a long time ago.

Luke 15:12

and the younger of them said to his father “ Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me, so he divided to them his livelihood.

In the story of the prodigal son (found in Luke 15), the younger brother demanded his inheritance, his immaturity kept him thinking on what He could get rather than considering what He could give or contribute. And the party began, wasting it all because He was more interested in trying to “make it” himself rather than letting his Father “Make Him”.

Have you ever tried to cover pain with stuff? Trying to use material things to make you feel better only to realize your still empty but in debt?

Buying name brand items to impress nameless people?

Taken out thousands of dollars in student loans only to realize you didn't pick a broad major?

Have you ever just taken bad advice that put you in debt?

Caleb's Car

Caleb had just graduated high school. He saw a new car he wanted really bad. His mom's money personality was quite different than his dad's. His dad suggested He buy a paid for vehicle that would be much cheaper on gas and insurance and no car payment. Caleb's desires and his mom's advice outweighed the wisdom of his Father's counsel. He bought the new car. One year down the road the transmission started having trouble and the insurance costs were too much for an 18 yr old to handle along with a hefty car payment. He now felt the effects of the ball and chain. Enslaved by the debt, this would be a painful financial lesson. This would be his first lesson about why God warns us about debt.

Write down 3 areas that you want God to "make" you in.

Do you have financial goals?

The Potter's Wheel

Jeremiah 18:1-6

The Word which came to Jeremiah from The Lord, saying: Arise and go down to The Potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words. Then I went down to The Potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter, so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then The word of The Lord came to me saying: " O House of Israel, Can I not do with you as this potter?" says The Lord, "Look" as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O House of Israel!"

Jeremiah is a young prophet, called by God but utterly confused about what God is doing in his life. God is actively working in your life just like he was in Jeremiah's.

Have you ever felt "marred" or squished in the hand of God?

What was happening in your life that was perplexing to you?

Did you draw closer to God through this season or shut him out in hurt and anger?

Like Jeremiah, we all like to be in control and want to control our outcomes in life, but sometimes God does an overhaul or even a simple tweaking of his transforming work that sets our life in a different direction.

We all have done things that box us in rather than bring us out. That's what the children of Israel did again and again. A journey that should have taken three days took 40 yrs of wandering in the wilderness!! Sadly, we still do this often. Let's move forward Ladies and let go of the things that entangle our souls.

Deliverance is wonderful but God is delivering us out of something to bring us into something else. Most of the time the something else he wants to bring us into is a different mindset. Different mindsets eventually lead us to a different place.

**Sometimes a lack of planning and discipline can lead us to
Developing a “Miracle Mentality” where finances are concerned.**

God often answers our desperate cries but there is a better way.

Can you imagine someone giving you a fully furnished house with everything you need? They showed you pictures of every room and you were elated with joy. You know, like the HGTV dream house give away. The only problem is that you don't have the keys. You can walk up to it and peer through the windows and can even see yourself on the plush couch they gave you. It is completely yours, no strings attached you just need the keys so you can enter in. This is a picture of how God is with us. He has given us everything that pertains to life and Godliness. Keys to a kingdom way of living. He has secured it for us, now he calls us to go discover it and use the keys he has given us. The Keys to life. The keys to living the kingdom life is discovered in biblical principles. I am certainly, not just talking about material things but a way of life. Living free not enslaved. Miracle mentalities come from our lack of planning a lot of times. God has empowered you to rule over your life and that includes your finances. There are times when we need a miracle, and our faith is stretched and grows but We continue to go through the same tests until we have an understanding, once we understand it is time to graduate and move on to the next thing.

Hebrews 6:18-19

That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, this

hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil.

Day 5 **Set Goals.**

An Assignment

Write them down. Start small, and as you mark those goals off as accomplished set more or larger ones!

Habbakuk 2:2-4

Write down the vision and make it plain on tablets, so that he may run who reads it, for the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie, though it tarries wait for it because it will surely come it will not tarry

Matthew 17:20

If you have faith as a mustard seed you will say to this mountain move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible.

Read Luke: 22-25

Luke 8:25-Jesus, challenges his disciples by saying “Where is your faith?” They were so confident at the beginning of the story even when Jesus told them to do something unfamiliar to them, crossing to the other side. I can imagine their chests lifted up because after all Jesus is in the boat with them, they are feeling pretty confident until quickly conditions change and fear grips them because of what they saw, water filling the boat and Jesus sleeping!! Imagine there disbelief, the nerve of Jesus actually directing us to the other side and deciding to nap at a time like this. Jesus, being fully aware and seeing the bigger picture of the Father’s ultimate plan, He isn’t moved by the storm but by the principle lesson. Where is your faith? It is growing unbeknownst to them. His challenge was for their eyes to stay on The Lord in spite of what they felt or even what they saw. Faith that is challenged and weak is still faith, it just has the opportunity to grow muscles with every trial.

What areas in your life do you see God developing your faith?

Reflect back and look for the areas that you have grown in, Have you overcome fear in a particular area?

Have you made the choice to pick healthier relationships?

Have you started thinking of others more than thinking of yourself only?

Did you make the choice to live different than what you saw growing up?

Have you overcome areas of negativity in your life?

What have you done in the last year that really stretched you?

**Faith comes by hearing and hearing comes by the word of God.
Romans 10:17**

The word produces trust, assurance and motivation to pray. The Word is the greatest love letter ever written!

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Matthew 7:24-27

Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came and the wind blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall; for it was founded on the rock. but everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. and great was it's fall.

James 1:22

To be a hearer of the word and not a doer is to deceive yourself.

A life without the foundation of God's word is a life built on emotions and circumstances only. It may appear to be working for a season but when trials come there isn't a solid foundation to stand on.

We can only draw upon what we have deposited as a resource. Emotions are irrational at times and always wavering. The Word however is solid. Scripture declares of God: *I am the same, yesterday, today and forever.*

If The Word is deposited, The Holy Spirit will bring this to our remembrance in tough times. If not then we start scrambling to make sense of what we are going through. God may not always give us understanding but His word always comforts and gives us hope in the night seasons.

*Take some time today to meditate and pray about the dreams you have.
Then ask God to help you set reachable goals to accomplish those
things He has put in your heart.*

What lesson stands out to you the most this week?

What can you do to make these things real in your life?

Week Four

Our Identity



***Sleep my little baby-oh
Sleep until you waken
When you wake you'll see the world
If I'm not mistaken...***

***Kiss a lover
Dance a measure,
Find your name
And buried treasure...***

***Face your life
Its pain,
Its pleasure,
Leave no path untaken.”
– Neil Gaiman, *The Graveyard Book****

Acts 19:15

And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, Paul I know but who are you?”

In Acts 19 we read the story of some young men who tried to copy the Apostle Paul by casting out a demon spirit from a man. These men saw miracles done and evil spirits cast out by Paul and they wanted to move with this same authority and power. The problem was that they wanted the power without the relationship. Paul and Peter had power and authority because of their relationship with The Lord.

In this week's 'study we will look into the subject of our identity. Everything seems to flow from our understanding and acknowledgment of who we are.

We are either limited or released to destiny based on our view of our self.

So let's discover the self that God has created, designed and offered us to be.

Day 1

Your Identity

Acts 19:15

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In Acts 19 we read the story of some young men who tried to copy the Apostle Paul by casting out a demon spirit from a man. These men saw miracles done and evil spirits cast out by Paul and they wanted to move with this same authority and power. The problem was that they wanted the power without the relationship. Paul and Peter had power and authority because of their relationship with The Lord.

What gives us the right to move in the authority of Christ?

The same spirit who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you. When you said yes to him He said yes to you!! He crowned you and put a robe of righteousness on you and turned you loose to rule and reign. What Adam lost through sin, Jesus bought back at the cross. Adam didn't just lose his relationship with God. He lost his identity. He lost his confidence and ability to reign in the garden and so did we.

Jesus bought it back for you with His life.

1 Peter 2:9

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

My Story

My twenties were the hardest times of my life. There was a colliding of everything from my childhood to my present circumstances in my early twenties. Being a young wife and mother was overwhelming and I struggled juggling everything, and most important to me was that I wanted to do it well and was very hard on myself. I would love to say because I was so spiritual, I prayed but this wasn't the case. Prayer was preserving my life. Prayer became a way of life to survive emotionally. It was my lifeline. The reality of where my life was would be enough to drive anyone to their knees. Terrified of making even more of a mess of my life and doing it all wrong, I turned to The Lord in desperation. Through my desperation I fell in love with the Jesus who knew me better than I knew myself. He would be the refuge I had been looking for all my life.

The Lord began to dismantle everything in me. It doesn't take long to knock down a house of cards. I had built my identity around everything but God. He began to dismantle things I had looked to for security. People, Careers, Money, Appearances. I was quite confused with what The Lord was doing in my life. I had come thinking He would heal me and build me up but it seemed as if He was tearing down and stripping away. It was definitely a time of soul searching.

Unsure of who I was to begin with, now I certainly was more unsure. God was revealing truth to me. This false identity was how I saw myself and perceived how others saw me. What exactly was He doing? Everything that could be removed was and things that needed to remain and stay would. The things that would remain would be even more refined than I could possibly imagine.

They would go through "the fire" to burn away what needed to disintegrate.

A False security that came from what I did rather than who I was. Acceptance that was based upon my performance rather than what God did for me. Always fearful that God or someone was mad at me because I didn't measure up to their expectations. I was always willing but terrified of failing God and others. Being the middle child, I liked peace at all costs. I am a people-person so I kind of assumed people liked me but I desperately "needed" their approval. I was enslaved to *needing* the approval of others. People pleasing became a way of life, always surrendering what I needed to accommodate the needs of others. I was so afraid of disappointing them that it didn't matter if I disappointed me, this was a vicious cycle that kept me in bondage. It was an idol in my life that would take me years to come to terms with. It wasn't until I lost most of my friends through a nasty divorce that I would see the full extent of my people worship. Their approval meant more to me than God's, their acceptance meant more to me than God's, their love stripped away and their disappointment and disapproval of me would shatter my hope and any ounce of confidence I might have left. This, by far was one of the best and worst things to happen to me. Worst because it was incredibly painful, best because it was enlightening and liberating. To see your sin clearly is the pathway out. This is the love of God being manifested to us. When Christ illuminates something in our lives it is to give us hope and has the potential to bring us out.

You are never stronger than the god you serve, so if people are your god then you will continually strive to "worship" them. You may argue this point but whatever causes you to stop and bow your knee, chances are they have your heart also. If they get your attention, they get your affection; once they get your affection they have your devotion. What or Who has your devotion?

What is it for you?

What has God illuminated in your life?

Is there anything that “owns” you more than you own it?

Imbalances in our lives are sure way to tell if something has potential to take 1st place with our affections.

Meet Sally

God uses many things to meet needs in our lives but anything that takes our devotion from him can become an idol. He yearns for you to make him your first love not just one of many.

Sally loved her job, it was inspiring, challenging and met a need in her life. She gave herself completely to it. Sadly, she sacrificed everything for it in order to continue making the next deal and surpassing her last benchmark. At one time, she felt balanced. She had distributed herself equally to her family, friends and her faith but now her primary concern was “her next deal”. This fulfilled Sally deeply. It was exhilarating. She poured herself into this as her primary “need meet-er” and let go of her first love, The Lord.

She still went to church and even read her bible but there was a coolness in her heart concerning The Lord. The closeness she once felt in her younger years was now replaced with ritual and obligation. When the sting of tears convicted her heart, she quickly changed her focus. The pain of his close presence dissipating was too much for her to process. She knew she had replaced His love with Her next big deal closing. It didn’t happen all at once but it crept in little by little as His presence faded day by day. He was still there but he was distant in her heart and mind. The first thought of The Lord became an afterthought.

He was now on the back burner. Her family was great, and at one time they seemed to be the “need meet-er” but as life changed with them, her heart was unfulfilled. Saddened by the brokenness in them, it exposed the brokenness in her.

This was overwhelming so she needed to go to the next “need meet-er”. Her career path. It was the one thing that made her feel alive & victorious. She could actually experience success. She was good at it and the fruit of her labor was rewarding. She forgot about being balanced and has now become driven. Her affections for the work has become the ultimate in her life, nothing else

was as important as these accomplishments. This also at some point doesn't deliver because it was never meant to fully.

Let us pursue Him fully. Let our devotion be sold out to Him.

How has God redefined your identity?

Day 2

Who do men say that I am?

In Matthew 16:13-15 Jesus asked his disciples saying, “*Who do men say that I am?*”

Notice their answer in v14:

Some say Elijah, some say John the Baptist, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

v15- He said to them, Who do you say that I am?

Jesus isn't interested about who others know him as, as much as He is wondering about who you know him as. Who is he to you?

What have you named him? Healer? deliverer? Mighty Refuge? A friend who sticks closer than a brother? My peace? Ever present help? My provider?

***The more you get to know someone, the more you learn their nature.
The more we know him the more we can trust him.***

It isn't as if Jesus didn't already know what they would say. He knew if they grasped who He was then they would have an understanding of who they were.

Do you stay on the fringe and only know him based on what others say?

Are you courageous enough to go in based on who He is rather than who you are?

In the book of Esther, the name of God isn't even mentioned. Read the book of Esther when you can. You cannot help but see the fingerprints of God all over it. It's about a young Jewish girl raised by her Uncle. She discovers a murderous plot that would *take out* her people.

Esther's courage overrides the fear and human reasoning that circumstances would try to decide for her. Her compassion crowds out logic. She was willing to be a rule breaker if she could help her people. She knew it was dangerous, of course she was terrified, of course she wonders if someone else would do it, (remember Moses, He suggested Aaron be used as the mouthpiece because He was not an eloquent speaker). Before she parks to long on these thoughts and

questions about” herself” she thrusts herself into the situation before she could ever consider backing out.

Esther is decisive and counted the cost, but God has prepared her for this season. Her beauty treatment she receives is a great analogy of the deep work of The Holy Spirit in our lives. Her love for her people is so much bigger than her preoccupation with herself.

So many times God is saying “*Trust me on the inside of you*”. We would if we could see it but we doubt, because we can’t see on the inside of ourselves and we are uncertain. Our love for God is strong but sometimes our faith is small.

God promises if we have faith as a mustard seed that it can move mountains.

God calls us to walk by faith and not by sight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and He will direct your paths.

Esther’s plan:

Esther 4:16

Go Gather all the Jews are present in Shushan and fast for me, neither eat nor drink for me for 3 days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. and so I will go to the King, which is against the law, if I perish, I perish.

Maybe, your daring like Esther, a young woman dares to move into the inner courts to get a closer glimpse. She knows it is dangerous to go without being called but she is compelled to go and decides, if I die then I die. Her courageous act moved the heart of God and saved her people. She once was a nobody, She had no father or mother and was raised by her Uncle. But she had something. She had good character, she was teachable, obedient and she listened. She could be trusted. These character qualities get the heart of God and people. She was a warrior and didn’t even know it. A Queen in combat boots. She saw a need and took action.

Write out Joshua 1:9

Have you gone through tough things in your life that God used to prepare you for what you are doing now?

Who you are now overrides whoever you were then.

What would you do if you weren't afraid?

What matters more to you than the fear that is trying to hold you back from it?

Day 3**The “ F ” word**

The ‘F word’ that we are most terrified of isn’t an explicative; its far worse. The f-word that paralyzes us most is the word *failure*. Failing takes a toll on our self esteem and causes us to be focused inward rather than upward. Failure is something that happens to you but it doesn’t define you unless you allow it too.

Failing Forward

Peter is one of my favorite bible characters. He is a natural leader, an Influencer. He is passionate, a little impulsive and would regularly stick his foot in his mouth. God loves him just like he is and let the tweaking begin! The Lord sees what he will become with some character development. God’s continually working to get our eyes on him rather than ourselves, and the circumstances. Peter, like all of us has lots of tests. God has prepared them for our refining. The tests are designed to break us down (humble us) so that we may be built up, strong in the Lord.

1 Peter 5:10

But may the God of all grace, who called us to his eternal Glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

God is so faithful, he tenderly, or like a bulldozer, allows our life choices or our mouth to humble us. He is faithful through and through and is working deeply by the Holy Spirit to shape our lives so that we look more and more like him. He delivers us out of the dark into His beautiful light.

Matthew 26:33-35

Peter answered and said to Him, even if all are made to stumble because of you, I will never be made to stumble.

Notice verse 34 Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. v 35 Peter said to him, Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you! and so said all the disciples.

Peter’s assurance of himself and his self confidence in his flesh would be stripped that very night. This conversation happens as Jesus enters into the garden of Gethsemane, He is about to enter the darkest time of his life and Peter, and the sons of Zebedee are with him.

He is entering the dark night of the soul and hours before, Peter reassures Jesus that He would follow him even to death . We might say that He overpromised and under delivered. Jesus cries out to *them* saying “*my soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with me.*”

He goes a little further and has a heart to heart with His Father, saying Father please if possible take this cup from me. Upon his return, to his shock they are all snoozing! Can a guy get a little

prayer on the darkest night of his soul? Jesus is wanting to give Peter the benefit of the doubt but knows what is in man. Jesus still hurts because although he is God, he is also fully man. He questions Peter, the leader, the one who just said earlier that day, that He was in it to win it! He was in for the long haul. Jesus could depend on him. Jesus is hurt and I'm certain reminded of the chilling prophetic words that He spoke to Peter earlier. Jesus reminds Peter that although his spirit is willing his flesh is weak.

I went to the cross as a man, and felt the full extent of hurt, rejection, shock, disbelief that you feel. That is why I went to take all of that upon myself so you wouldn't have to carry it, I made the provision, the cross paid the price for your sins. I knew you, at your best and at your worst yet I loved you deeply. I make all things new.

Write out 2 Corinthians 5:17

Write out Philippians 1:6

Peter is a Pharisee, like many of us. He loves God and begins to see progress in his life. But as he passes tests and his assurance grows, He grows in his ability and in his "knowledge of truth" rather than in God's mercy and goodness to all humanity. In His young days with The Lord he is convinced that nothing would hinder him from following God. Sincere maybe, but life experience would show him more about himself than he could've been told. In fact he couldn't be told a lot because he thought he knew it all, and had all the answers.

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

Now concerning things offered to idols; We know that we all have knowledge.

Knowledge puffs up but love builds up. and if anyone thinks that he knows anything he knows nothing, yet as he ought to know. but if *anyone* loves God, this one is known by God.

1 Corinthians 13:2

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so I could remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing.

What experiences in your life have taught you to love better?

Have you ever been humbled because you thought you knew, only to realize you had so much to learn?

Have you ever heard the statement, “*He had just enough knowledge to be dangerous*”?

This was Peter a lot of times. He was always on “Go.” Ready to blast off with information. The problem was He didn’t have the wisdom or life experience to know what to do in situations.

Peter had a tendency to get in the flesh. A little restraint could’ve carried him a long way. His heart was right sometimes and wrong quite a bit too. Many of his actions were premature. Yet, in all of this, God knew what he would become and Peter would be transformed by this great love and mercy. (It is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance.) This is all of us at times.

No place uncovers us quite like the love of God being brought in to the conversation. We are comfortable with religious activities, church attendance, learning scripture, but the Love of God messes us up. It goes where no man can, it invades the areas we try to hide, it exposes the knowledge we display in exchange for the love we desperately seek out.

God looks at our heart and forgives us for our actions, but unfortunately others experience our actions. Thank God we serve an all knowing, all seeing God. He knew Peter’s struggles and loved him through it. Peter’s life struggles were preparation for the ministry He would have to others.

After Peter’s humbling experience of denying The Lord, God had not forgotten him. Did you hear that? God had not forgotten Peter. This was part of his refining; it would redefine everything He knew about himself and about the love of God.

In spite of Peter’s failure, He loved The Lord. This time however, Peter has been humbled and is more restrained due to hard life lessons. I am sure He is

reminded of the sequence of events that got him to the place he had arrived at. The Lord in His faithfulness pursued Him, reminded of Peter’s devotion and zeal. Jesus bypasses small talk and goes straight to the heart, the place of intimacy.

Once again Jesus shows up in Peter's life in a place of familiarity, He knew Peter would head back to his trade as a fisherman so this is where The Lord met him. This is what God does in our lives also, He knows exactly where we will be. Jesus always meets us wherever we run. He knows where our stomping ground is and where we will run to hide or numb. I'm thankful He meets me wherever I end up aren't you?

Read John 21:15-22

Jesus said to Peter after he failed him, *Simon, Son of Jonah, Do you love me more than these?* He said to him Yes Lord you know that I love you. Jesus says feed my lambs. Then Jesus asks him another time if he loves him and again Peter replies Yes, and Jesus says Tend my sheep. A third time he asks him and at this point Peter is grieved. It was the exact number of times that the rooster crowed on the night Peter denied him. Peter was reminded of his call three times.

Jesus lovingly says, Do you love me? Tend my sheep Peter, Do you love me? Feed my sheep Peter, Do you love me? Feed my sheep Peter. Peter's deep love for God would surface with every convicting word the Lord spoke to him. The love he had for Jesus compelled and propelled him to surrender in obedience. I believe the revelation of how far Peter had fallen sets in.... The religious mask was stripped away. He was raw and exposed, childlike in his faith. The Lord pricked Peter's heart by revealing his own heart.... the love and mercy for mankind and for Peter. Peter is grieved because the revelation of Jesus' love for man was being shown to him by Jesus.

Jesus didn't lecture him about "how he blew it" and He didn't ask him why he did what he did or shame him for his denial of knowing him, He simply called out to his heart, through his intimacy. Peter knew the intimacy of God. He experienced it. God chooses imperfect people that are sinful at times but full of heart for Him. He never excuses our sin but stamps "Forgiven" over it and sees you perfected through his blood. Your fleshly attempts to be good enough never will be, but the blood of Christ is enough. Peter would also experience this forgiveness through his own failure. He was no different than the sinners he condemned; he just thought that he was.

Peter was a recovering Pharisee.

Read Luke 7

Peter is the Pharisee that sizes the woman up that was known by her sin. He hides behind his title and self righteous position. After all, He was an advisor to Jesus, or at least he tried to be on a regular basis. This was not at Jesus' request ☺ He was in the loop, the inner circle with Jesus. He thought he had revelation by association. The revelation he had was nothing like Jesus, it was however familiar among religious people. He begins to pass judgment on the woman and on Jesus for even daring to be in her presence. Peter presumed to *know* what *kind* of woman she was. He had heard. People talked and it was a fact that to their conclusion she was in fact a *sinner*. Their elevated opinion of themselves crowded out any room for mercy or compassion. With their judicial robes, they sized her up and knew her kind.

They were flag throwers, rule keepers, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Someone had to keep order, there are standards. If they didn't, justice wouldn't prevail and sinners would take over the world. Ok, I am being sarcastic but this is a religious persons approach to the world. They picket clinics in their "Right Standards" and shame and condemn the girls that are terrified and desperate. Their love is callous and cold. They are so preoccupied with upholding the law that they have forgotten to love a broken, confused, scared person.

They are so busy being God that they have forgotten God. The love they first experienced has been lost and now it's about upholding the law. It's more about a cause than about Christ. Jesus was just the opposite; He met people right where they were. Messes and all, sinners and saints, because the reality was and is that the saints are the sinners. Their fear of being undone keeps them in their religious bondage. To become one of "them" a real person with good and bad with the capacity to sin keeps them terrified and cloaked in religious attire. If religious people can zero in on your sin they can ignore their own. Sinners don't try to hide behind religious garb they just show up and you will see them because there isn't anything they try to hide. Sinners don't hide; religious people hide in their pride. When people know that they are known, they are real and what you see is what you get, until they feel judged. When Judgment comes in realness moves out and people start pretending.

Religious people hide behind bible knowledge; their position is secured in how many rules they've kept and how they've done it right. They love standards. Standards is the ladder they climb to peer down upon the little people, they are filled with pride in their self righteous judgment of others. They pray others will "arrive" to the place that they have. They are hard hearted and as Jesus said they squeeze out a gnat and swallow a camel. We all are like Peter, like the Pharisees, like the religious person hiding behind false senses of security. It is a façade. The realness of a real broken person always has and will get the attention and heart of God.

**A broken and contrite
heart he will not despise
Psalm 51**

One of my customers shared his daughters' story with me. She had been trying to get in medical school for 7 yrs. She had been turned down 40 times by 40 different schools. She is 29 yrs old and she just got accepted to Med school and was just about to go to her white coat ceremony. She had a dream and didn't matter how many times they declined her, she *had* to practice medicine. She had a passion to work with aids patients. She had to persevere because what was deposited in her was so much bigger than their opinions about her. She knew she could do it, she just needed the opportunity to demonstrate what was on the inside of her. They couldn't see her drive, her passion, her compulsion to help these patients. It was something they couldn't see, it was something that she knew, it was like oxygen to her. She was born to do it. She couldn't quit because *it* wouldn't quit.

Her very own husband would try to sabotage the destiny ahead of her. Every time success got close He would discourage her, or create some type of drama to detour her plans. Jealousy has a way of raising its ugly head within others if they aren't living up to God's ideal for them. Their own insecurity begins to rise up when your confidence does. Unfortunately, for some it seems easier to try and hinder someone else's destiny than to walk in their own. This is the enemy, to try and thwart the promises of God in a person's life. There will always be haters. Ignore them. Nevertheless, set your gaze straight ahead and walk on. This is what Jesus did.

What have you given up on?

What is so strong in you that you have to do it?

Has the enemy used someone in your life to discourage you?

If you don't do it will there be something vacant inside of you?

Circle excuses (lies) of why you aren't pushing forward?

A) fear of failure-

I thought I would answer the first one for you. This is a given, everyone fails trying at times. Don't let it define you and keep walkin' friends!

B) I am a mom

C) I am a wife

D) My Job

E) I'm terrified

F) I lack Confidence

G) I am not Perfect therefore I am not

H) I procrastinate

I) I'm in school

J) I'm not qualified

Day 4

Moving On

Consider Abrahams Life. This is a man who persevered. He had faith, incredible vision and many detours along the way. This isn't a lot different than our lives. We are the sum of our choices ultimately. God is faithful and what He starts, He completes. He is the author and finisher of our Faith.

Ephesians 1:11

In Him we also have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.

Ephesians 3:20

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly above all we ask or think, according to the power that works within us.

Read Genesis 12:11-16

Abram is trucking right along. He has incredible promises from God, then fear shows up. His insecurity sets in and He gets his eyes on himself and off of God. He had a moment of selfishness. He yielded to selfish thinking. He is so self-aware that He has lost his edge on being God-aware. Abram already has vision for his future but for a moment He lost sight of it and got scared. His imagination starts running wild and before you know it, he starts following his imagination rather than his imagination following him. When your imagination follows you, there is an unleashing of creative energy and power that God has given you. He already had spoken this promise to Abram. The enemy always comes to kill, steal and destroy the purposes of God., esp. right before you are about to step into something God has promised you. This is where Abram was.... close to stepping into the promise.

Genesis 15:4-5 v 4)

And behold the word of the Lord came to him saying, this one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir. v5) Then he brought him outside and said, Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them. and he said to him, so shall your descendants be.

God brought him outside so He wouldn't be tempted to stay inside. He told him to look up so He wouldn't be distracted with what was within him.

Genesis 13:18

Then Abram moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the Lord.

Then Abram "*moved*" his tent.

Where has God “moved” you?

Has it been a physical move in location?

Has it been a spiritual move?

Abram” went” and “dwelt” by the terbinth trees of Mamre.

There are so many places in our lives that are “Memorial Places” some are good places, some aren’t so good.

Are you dwelling in a place that will help you get to your promise land?

Abram held onto Lot even though God never told him too. Are there relationships that could be extra baggage?

Name a place you went and dwelt in that changed your life a lot.

How have you grown as a result of that place?

Was it a positive experience or a negative experience?

What life lesson did you learn that you could pass on?

Day 5

Overcoming

Read 2 Samuel Chapter 9

Mephibosheth is a great example of God's grace to us. This Old Testament story uncovers the struggle of every believer's heart at some point in their walk with God.

Am I good enough to eat at the King's table? Will I let my condition define where I will end up? You can never receive what you don't think you deserve. If you think you must earn it you will pursue it by law and human effort. If you realize there is nothing you can do to work hard enough to obtain it then you're in the position of grace.

The New Testament, which transfers us from being under the law to being under God's Grace through the blood of the cross, is truly Good News!!

We can now enter into a place of rest with God. You can rest when you rule with God. Ruling with God is what God has called every believer too. This is the place of being seated with Christ. Having an assurance of who God declares you to be and walking it out. It's simple but not always easy. It is possible though. Let's be radical and take this journey with God!

Psalm 8:4-6 What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you visit him? For you have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet

Mephibosheth's story is a story of God's restoration and redemption. David wants to find someone with Jonathon's family that he can bless. David and Jonathon were soul brothers and after Jonathon passed away David was compelled to show kindness to his family. They discover Mephibosheth, Jonathon's son. He is lame in his feet. He could've possibly let his condition determine his position in life. His view of himself was probably shaped by what he couldn't do. His view of himself was less than confident.

2 Samuel 9:7

So David said, Do not fear for I will surely show you kindness for Johnathon your Father's sake and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually.

David has just found Mephibosheth and is telling him that He will always eat at his table and that he would restore all that had been stolen from him and from his family. This is exactly what God does. He finds us (saves us) and begins to restore (redeem) to us all that Satan has stolen from us.

Think of a time when you lost something valuable and you prayed and found it!!
Woop! Woop! God is good! He led you to what was lost, He answered your cry and your confidence in God soared. You cried, He cried, it was beautiful.... okay I'm getting carried away. But it was a good thing. Anytime something lost is returned, you are one happy girl!
God does this for all of us!

Acts 10:34-35

Then Peter opened his mouth and said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation whoever fears him and works righteousness is accepted by him."

Mephibosheth gets this great opportunity presented to him and this is his response.....

2 Samuel 9:8

"What is your servant, that you should look upon such a dead dog as I"

Talk about an inferiority complex. Dead Dog? Wow, that's scraping the barrel. We all have bad days and bad seasons but we can find something good that God has deposited in us. Don't allow your condition to drag you into a pit of self-pity. If this starts, patterns of life can start taking root and before you know it you're in a rut. There is an old saying Misery loves company. Drama is the word that comes to my mind and usually deep unresolved hurts. Deep unresolved hurts can lead to depression, anxiety and lots of other sad conditions. Negative draws negative but positive faith confessions can repel a negative mindset. Reminding yourself and training your mind to think the thoughts that God thinks about you will transform your life and mindset. Memorizing or meditating on scripture will transform your mind.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

2 Samuel 9:11

Then Ziba said to the King, "According to all that my lord the king has commanded his servant, so will your servant do." "As for Mephibosheth," said the king, "He shall eat at my table like one of the King's sons"

David's leadership and heart exemplifies the wisdom and the anointing on his life. He helped bring Mephibosheth to a place of security by encouraging him and lifting him up spiritually to be seated at the King's table. This is a picture of what God does for us.

Whom has God used to remind you of who you are not who you used to be?

This is the place God wants us to get too. Comfortable at the King's table. We aren't there by human effort but by God's redemptive work in our lives. We aren't there by a do-better, try harder mentality but we are there because of God's love, because of his extravagant grace. He seats us at the table, lifts us up when we are lame. Clothes us with robes of righteousness and

displays the work of His hands. Many are hungry but don't feel worthy to sit at the table. You will be my display to them. Eat well. I've prepared it for you. This is the soul satisfaction the world is searching for.

Psalm 34:8

Taste and see that The Lord is good

3 John 1:2

Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

Name three things that show you your soul is healthy?

Have you ever ended up in a pit because you didn't see things clearly?
What did your path of healing teach you about God?

Do you feel comfortable at The king's table? or are you fearful your going to spill something or do something wrong?

Have you allowed your identity to be built around your deficiency?

What would your life look like if you simply accepted the invitation to sit, eat and dine at the King's table? To linger with rich conversation and to not consider the "have-nots" in your life. This is what God is inviting you to partake in. A seat at the table. End of story.

Week Five

Relationships

Introduction

Relationships are the real meaning to life. What we have done for Jesus and for others is the only valuable thing that we will hold in the end. Our relationships are tricky, they can be messy, beautiful, fulfilling and difficult. Our relationships reflect our strengths and deficiencies. Our needs and our wants begin to surface quickly as we enter into a relationship with another. This is a beautiful mystery and God looks at it and says “This is good”. The joy of discovering who we are in relationships with others is trying and yet exhilarating at the same time. Different personalities and different expectations thrown in the mix will definitely bring a challenge.

Let’s discover the realness of who Jesus is in light of the different relationships that he is calling us to. They will all look different, stretching and challenging you in many areas and healing you in others. Bringing out the real you is what God wants and it’s what others need, not the “you” you think they need but the “you” God has wonderfully designed. Flawed and all...after all, this is the beauty of real relationships. The kaleidoscope of broken lives intersecting and reflecting a beautiful prism forged in the fire. This journey is about discovering who we are in a relationship. The bible is full of drama and dysfunction so why are we surprised when it shows up? This week let’s look at some different relationships and see if we can relate to some of the stories. Don’t imprison yourself by hiding out but step into the mystery of what God wants to unfold in you through the relationships He has for you. They aren’t predictable but they are the proving ground where his love can be made real to you. Let’s go.

Forgiveness

It’s the last thing on your mind today

and the hardest thing to give away

and it always goes to those who least deserve

It’s the opposite of how you feel

when the pain they caused is just too real

Takes everything you have to say the word

Forgiveness

It always angers own worst enemy

Even when the jury and the judge

say you’ve got a right to hold a grudge

It’s the whisper in your ear saying, “set it free “

Forgiveness

Lord, show me how to love the unlovable

Teach me how to reach the unreachable

Help me now to do the impossible

Forgiveness

It can clear the bitterness away

It can even set a prisoner free

There is no end to what it's power can do

So,let it go and be amazed

by what you will see through the eyes of grace

the prisoner that it really frees is you

Forgiveness

Relationships – Forgiveness

Because we are broken people we hurt each other. Out of our woundedness, we wound others. The lesson of Forgiveness is a life-long one.

Seventy times seven is how many times we are told to forgive. Clearly, we will have many opportunities to have to exercise our faith in the area of forgiveness. Disappointments, hurts, and misunderstandings will happen with the relationships we have because of our old fallen nature. It is how we respond to these things that determine if we are bound or are free. We all struggle at times with forgiveness. There will always be a “dusting” off as we walk through life. We get offended and we offend because we are human. We are learning to be more Christ-like. Learning to walk in the principles and the same love Jesus has extended to us is the process of maturing in our walk.

Consider Joseph’s Life. Like Joseph’s life, your life is your story. Let it speak. Joseph had many highs and lows. I’m sure he was very perplexed about what was happening in his life. Why would his brothers sell him out and throw him in a pit and make it look like he was dead. Why? Because of jealousy and envy. Joseph would have the opportunity to retaliate or to release them through forgiveness. He chose the latter. Forgiveness freed him and it freed them from their guilt that they had carried for years.

Why would Potiphar’s wife slink around every corner to seduce Joseph? When that didn’t work and he escaped her continually she accused him of rape. She was planted by the enemy. The enemy wanted to marr the character of Joseph.

Why would the butler forget about Joseph when he promised him that he wouldn’t? He promised him that he would remember him but he didn’t he was focused on himself . Once again, Joseph was forgotten by man but not forgotten by God. It appeared dark but God was working in that dark place of Joseph’s trials. He was forging something inside Joseph. Character, love and compassion. The very attributes of God himself. Forgiveness is forged in forgotten people. Fallen people. People the world has long forgotten but whose hairs are numbered by God himself. The silent years of God are lonely desert years that God is working deeply within our lives. Like our lives, I am sure Joseph was wondering, Why God? Don’t we all wonder that when we don’t understand what in the world has happened? Where are you God?

Phillipians 1:6

He who began a good work in you will complete it in the day of Christ.

God is working continually in our lives.

I can just rest in him and in resting him I begin to release those things that have had a hold on me. Open hands can let go of things and receive new things. What is it that God wants you to release? Relinquishing control over things you can’t fix frees you from unnecessary burdens.

Mark 11:25-

and whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him that your father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

We are forgiven as we forgive.

Proverbs 12:16-

A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.

Don't hold a grudge, sometimes a little smudge can turn into a grudge. If we park on things that hurt us and begin to meditate on whatever it was that upset us it only keeps our mind set upon it. Give people the benefit of the doubt. Be a minimizer over a maximizer. Give a quality response instead of an emotional reaction.

Write out- Colossians 3:2

Prayers of replacement help you refocus and pray God's solution rather than just the pain of your situation. There isn't a wrong way to pray but there are more effective ways to pray.

James 5:16-

The effective fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much

Isaiah 55:11-

So shall my word be that goes out of my mouth, it shall not return unto me void but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing where I sent it.

Praying God's word is effective praying because you're agreeing with what God has already spoken.

Ex.- Lord, I feel so rejected and alone, please help me.

prayer of replacement- Lord, your word says that you will never leave me nor forsake me although I feel alone, I am not, and your word in Matthew 10:30 says you have numbered the very hairs on my head.

Phillipians 4:13-

but one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things that are ahead

Scripture says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith without works is dead, so put some feet to your prayers and choose to release those hurts and disappointments to God. This isn't done in a vacuum, it is sometimes done with great wrestlings. It is *usually* done with great wrestlings with yourself and with God. Daily, you must remind yourself when the enemy "suggests" situations to your your mind. Decide what you choose to think on. You can choose your thoughts rather than allowing your thought life to dictate your emotions and manipulate them. Agree with God's word over your life and situation. You will be elevated above what is

troubling you. This is how you “overcome” by moving above and over the situation through agreeing with God’s word which is his answer to us. Frame your world through the word of God.

Write out Phillipians 4:8

Isaiah 26:3-

I will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee.

Hebrews 12: 14-15

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see The Lord-looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble; and by this many become defiled.

Grudges and unforgiveness that aren’t dealt with will eventually become a “root of bitterness”. Through suppression hurt springs forth in anger. Unresolved hurt can turn into a root of bitterness.

James 5:16-

Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.

Suppressed hurt that is pushed down in avoidance can turn to bitterness. When things are painful the temptation is to want to avoid them rather than face them. When we face them we then have the responsibility to have to do something with those painful experiences. The root of bitterness defiles others because what once was a wound now has become infectious and begins to contaminate everyone and everything it comes into contact with.

Scripture says, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks, you cannot always see a wounded soul but you can usually hear one. You may hear it in statements like “Whatever, I don’t even care”, “Everyone argues”, “He said, I mattered more than anyone else” “He had to work late *again*” “He just had a bad day”. Dissapointment and hurt will come to all of our lives at times, but it is what we do with it that determines where we will land. God has given you the ability to overcome hurt and to have authority over it. It doesn’t have to dominate you.

1 Corinthians 15:55

O Death where is your sting? O Hades where is your victory?

1 Corinthians 15:57

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ

God gives us grace during painful experiences and events. As The Lord heals and gives you the grace to forgive, you will be able to say according to 1Cor: 15:55- Where is your sting o Death? God removes the sting of that situation. It no longer has power over you. It is kind of like a bee sting, you may see the mark of it but the venom and sting has been removed. The power of that venom has dissipated.

Let's look at a couple of Scriptures about Paul.

Acts 28:3-6

When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand v 4) so when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, no doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice, does not allow to live. v 5) but he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. v 6) However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that He was a god.

Lessons from Paul.

- 1) Things happen, sometimes out of nowhere. v.3
- 2) The enemies objective is for things to "attach" to us and bring us into bondage. v.3
- 3) Learn to shake things off. v.5 (the anointing. ... helps us shake things off)
- 4) Maintain your freedom through confession and holding onto your victory. v 6

Write out 1 John 2:27**John 20:23-**

If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained .

When we choose to forgive, we aren't saying that what happened was ok but we are simply taking them off of our hook and putting them on God's hook. Forgiveness is letting go and taking your hands off so God can put his hands on the situation. Trust him to work in and work out whatever needs to be taken care of in that relationship.

John 11:32

Then when Mary came to where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying to him," Lord, if you had been here my brother wouldn't have died."

Consider Mary, She loved Jesus so deeply, with an abandoned heart; she was wide open and she trusted him fully. She preferred sitting at his feet rather than busying herself with tasks. Martha served by doing and this was commendable but Mary served by being. Mary knew where

she needed to be. Being with Jesus for a few moments could teach Mary more in a moment than she could have learned in a lifetime.. She drank deeply. Life would begin to resonate within her heart, with every opportunity she had to learn from Jesus. She knew him well or at least she thought she did.

Martha and Mary's brother was sick. Gravely sick. He died. In their shock they both said, *Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.* This wound was so deep in Mary that it isolated her.

Reflecting on her love for her brother, but also on her love for Jesus. Why didn't Jesus heal him? Why did He wait? How could she trust again?

Mary had washed Jesus' feet with tears of love, of gratitude and with worship that was so uninhibited that all who gathered could feel it. Her worship reflected a pure devoted love and surrender. She believed every word He said and that He could do all things. Now what? Her Heart was in shock, her mind screamed things at her that questioned everything she believed. Her soul was torn from grief, she was terribly confused and this confusion led her to shut herself in.

Others gathered around to comfort her but, she was alone. Surrounded by people but alone. Alone with her grief she was swallowed up in sadness. Questions she had would trouble her soul even more than she could bear. As she knelt in despair, tears of loss spilled onto the floor. She remembered the same tears that washed the feet of Jesus. The tears that flowed from a love so deep that she could not communicate it with words. Those kind of tears. Tears that said, "Thank You", tears that said "I will follow you forever", tears that extracted love from her soul for her Lord. The same tears of worship that poured out are now the tears of sadness and loss. The same tears that she washed the feet of Jesus with are now the tears that are washing the dirt away from the floor. Overwhelmed by this grief, she sits, she wonders, she waits.

Have you ever been so disappointed and been so overwhelmed with despair that you couldn't face anyone? This is where Mary was.... Until. She hears that He is calling for her. Knowing now, that he hasn't forgotten her she instantaneously, rises and runs to him falling at his feet. Her devotion to her Lord overrides her hurt and her lack of comprehension. With him, no matter how deep the hurt is his presence brings healing. She. Must. Rise.

Mary is about to learn something new about Jesus. She hasn't experienced this place with him before. She will learn so much more through this circumstance than she could have possibly imagined. You couldn't have told her, she needed to walk there. This was a place of maturity, a place that was bigger than her mind could possibly comprehend.

John 11:34-

And He said, Where have you laid him? They said to him, Lord, come and see.

Wondering within herself, "Why would Jesus ask me, Where I laid him?" It was obvious, He was dead. D.E.A.D. end of story. What does it matter, where I've laid him? I have no answers, no understanding, just a dead situation. And this, is exactly where Jesus wanted her. Jesus even

wept with her. Nothing in her past, nothing in her present could've prepared her for the goodness that she would see brought out of the deadness of Lazarus life. God's Glory often appears in unsuspecting places. Through death God brought Life. In darkness He brought Light. In despair He brings Hope. He gives beauty for ashes.

Where in your life has deadness been?

What hurt have you nursed instead of released?

Can you see God doing something?

The very places we park spiritually are usually the places of misunderstanding God's purpose.

Isaiah 55:8

God's ways are higher than our ways his thoughts are higher than our thoughts

We hold onto hurts with others and allow them to define us rather than us defining the hurt. Giving our hurts to God and choosing to let it go enables us to move on in the pathway of freedom.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Day 2**Spouse or Boyfriend**

I once heard a friend say, read the love chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 and insert your spouse or boyfriend wherever you see the word “love.” Hopefully when their name is inserted you agree with it! Nevertheless, we all fall short and could stand to improve on our love walk.

Ecclesiastes 4:12-

though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him and a threefold cord isn't easily broken.

The power of three, you, me and Jesus. A three stranded cord isn't easily broken. A relationship that can withstand is one that stays connected to the center. The vine. Jesus is the cornerstone, without him nothing holds

What is He like on His worst day? This is who He is in the flesh, don't over spiritualize him.

Luke 6:43-45

For a good tree doesn't bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit, for every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings good things and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

Terri committed herself to the first guy who gave her attention and made her feel like she mattered. She was always in the shadows of her older sister, who was smart and pretty. She loved her sister, even admired her but never thought she could get to where she was. She was popular, pretty and a good student, things came easier for her than for Terri.

Terri struggled, feeling quite different than her peers. She was beautiful but she couldn't see it because she looked younger than the other kids. She was always told by her mom that she was unique. In Terri's book that meant weird and weird didn't get noticed or accepted.

As Terri got older, “a certain boy” noticed her and even flattered her which made a girl with no self esteem feel much better about herself. The flattering soon turned to criticism which she dismissed, thinking He was just trying to help her improve in areas that she struggled in. After a while, the jealousy he displayed didn't look like love and the once charming attention now felt like control. It was smothering. What once seemed like “alone time” now felt like isolation from Terri's friends and family. A strong controlling personality in this relationship began to dominate and permeate every aspect of Terri's life. With every word of criticism and continual verbal abuse a part of Terri began to die.

Everything seemed to revolve around what “He” wanted. Guilt and accusation seemed to be laced in every conversation they had Who was she talking too? Why did she need time with

friends? How often did she need to go to her folks house? Why was she wearing *that* out?” She never dressed like *that* for him.” Comments that made her feel ashamed were frequently said to her. After a while, it was getting harder to dismiss them.

Dismissing the warning signs she continued on in the relationship. She tried to convince her and others that she was happy. It began to take a toll on her physically and mentally. Spiritually, she began to be aware of how far she was from home. How could she possibly turn back now, she didn't want to look like she failed, her pride wouldn't say she was wrong and she really thought trying harder would be the answer. If I am a better girlfriend, He won't hit me again or cuss me. If I am quieter around men He won't accuse me of flirting. Does God care or even see where I am?

Check the tree. Ask your friends for honest feedback. Ask your family, they won't lie to you. Don't think He will change. If the fruit of his life is good assume he will get even better if you marry him. Likewise if the fruit in his life isn't good you can be assured he will get worse if you marry him.

2 Corinthians 6:14-

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? and what communion has light with darkness?

The dangers of being unequally yoked.

- 1) You aren't on the same page
- 2) You don't have the same values

Bad company corrupts good character.

Women want security.

Naomi from the book of Ruth has been through enough pain in her own life, she recognizes the needs of young women because she became acutely aware of her own needs through incredible loss. After the loss of her husband and her two sons she is determined to help preserve the lives of her daughter in laws. She doesn't feel she has anything to offer but she has eyes that have been opened. Naomi's heart is discerning because of her life experience. She recognizes what is healthy and what is not.

Ruth 3:1

-Naomi, Ruth's Mother-in-law says "shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you.

Women search for safety and security. Women are designed to be covered to be sheltered. Protected and preserved from harm. I like how T.D. Jakes says it, be careful what plugs into you! You are designed to bring forth, some of you may bring forth children, others may bring forth business ideas, creative solutions that change the dynamics of your company, you may birth a

ministry. Every seed you have has the potential of destiny! Be cautious about what you join yourself too!

Read Ephesians 5:22-33

1) In verse 25 How should your husband love you?

2) Is there anything in these passages that make you squirm? Do you think trust and submission go hand in hand?

Is it possible to submit if you don't trust?

3) In verse 22, who are we ultimately yielding ourselves to as we submit?

A) A Godly man has your best interest at heart not his own.

Ephesians 5:28-

husbands ought to love their wives as they do their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself.

If he doesn't like himself then He can't love you well.

Name 3 areas your husband can minister to you?

B) A Godly woman will "add to" not take away from his life.

Proverbs 31:11-

The heart of her husband safely trusts her.

Name 3 areas that you can minister to your husband.

John 15:13- Greater love has no one than this; to lay down his life for his friends

Proverbs 18:22- He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.

Jesus was and is the greatest liberator of women.

Jesus, in John chapter 9 caused the religious men to drop their stones as they condemned the woman? They "caught" her but Jesus "released" her.

Jesus, set Mary Magdalene free, once tormented by demonic spirits, now she is free. She was the first one to encounter Jesus at the tomb.

Jesus lifted up the woman who was bent over for 18 yrs, after 18 yrs of seeing nothing but dirt, now she is raised up so she can see out.

Jesus, healed the woman with the issue of blood. Life dripping out of her with every drop of blood. She lost strength and with loss of strength she was losing hope. She knew in her heart if she could touch him, everything would change. Her faith drew out healing when she touched his garment.

Jesus, met the woman at the well. She came for water, she left with Life.

Day 3 Friendships

**Quote- “A friend is someone who knows all about you and still likes you”
Elbert Hubbard**

Friendships are like a bouquet of flowers that you give to yourself. They bring fragrance to your life. Like flowers, your friendships are different kinds and all have their own unique fragrance.

Learn to appreciate the differences and unique qualities that each one holds. Not all friendships will be the same. Some will be soul sisters, some will be for a season and some will be for life. Like flowers, our friendships need tender loving care. Nurture them.

**Proverbs 27:6-
Faithful are the wounds of a friend , but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.**

Sometimes, you have to gently, lovingly tell a friend the truth even when it hurts them and hurts you to tell them. Out of love, you tell them. This isn't pleasant for anyone but if it preserves healthiness in their life then it is beneficial for their well-being.

Don't tell your friend an outfit looks great if it doesn't. These are the kisses of an enemy. Don't tell her you like the guy she is dating if He doesn't treat her well. Tell her she deserves better, point out her good qualities. She may not like to hear what you have to say now but she will love you for it later.

**Have you ever had an uncomfortable conversation with a friend?
Uncomfortable, but you knew it was God so you obeyed?**

Proverbs 27:17-

As iron sharpens iron so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend

Mark 14:32-34-

Then they came to a place named Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “sit here while I pray.” and he took Peter, James and John with him and he began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch.

Jesus knew the value of friendships. He knew there would be times where we would all have our own personal “Gethsemane” experiences. These would be the times that we would need friends to walk with us through the dark seasons. He also knew that at times deep disappointment with the friendships would occur too. Our expectations wouldn’t always be fulfilled. They would let us down. This is the reality of our humanness. We disappoint each other, yet we love each other.

Colossians 3:13-14-

bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love which is the bond of perfection.

This is the beauty of the friendship of Jesus. He loves us this way so that we in turn can love others with the same forgiving love that he has given to us.

Have you had to forgive a friend when you were disappointed in your relationship?

How did you change and what did you learn about yourself through this experience?

What did you learn about friendships through this experience?

Do you prefer lots of friends or fewer friendships that are more intimate?

Jesus had both. He had his closest friends, and he had close friends and he had acquaintances that He considered friends. There are many different levels of friendships.

John 15:12-

This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you.

Scripture says, How will they know that you are my disciples? They will know by your love for one another

John 15:13

- Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

Let's look at Jonathon and David's friendship. It was a God ordained relationship. Imagine Jonathon, He loved David so much he risked everything for him. His father was Saul. As David became increasingly more successful, took more ground and found favor with the people Saul became more jealous. Saul fought harder against David and was determined to take him down. Jonathon saw this all unfold. He knew David's heart was pure and vowed in covenant with him. Jonathon withstood his father and defended David when Saul came against him. Jonathon knew how his father was and He knew David was innocent. Jonathon and David trusted each other.

1Samuel 18:1-3

After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathon, the king's son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathon loved David. From that day on Saul kept David with him and wouldn't let him return home. And Jonathon made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself. (NLT)

1Samuel 20:17

- Now Jonathon again caused David to vow, because he loved him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul. (NKJ)

Ruth and Naomi a daughter- in- law and mother- in- law develop a close friendship and remain that way throughout the changes in their lives.

Ruth 1:16-17-

“But Ruth replied, Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me” (NIV)

**Have you ever sensed an instant kindred spirit with someone?
You just knew that you would be friends with them?**

Day 4 Children

There is an old saying, “When they are little they step on your toes but when they are older they step on your heart”.

Isaiah 40:11-

He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

I was terrified when I came home from the hospital with Lauren. The first time I put a dress on her it took 45 minutes. I acted like she was glass and I would break her. The Lord led me to this scripture while my girls were little. It brought comfort and reassurance that He held me as tight as I held them. He promised to gently lead me if I would follow.

When your children are infants and toddlers, you are exhausted. If you can make it to the shower by 2pm you feel as if you have had a sort of victory.

I can remember wanting to take a nice relaxing bath and the next thing I know, Hailey and Lauren are stripping down, Barbie dolls are flying in the tub and it's a party. When I asked them what they were doing, They smiled and said, “We're taking a bath with you mommy.” So much for a quiet bath. But these are the moments you cherish. I eventually would lock myself in the bathroom, only to discover notes being slid under the door. Once again, priceless moments.

What are some moments you cherished when your children were babies or toddlers?

Did you rush through one stage because you were anticipating the next stage?

What is the funniest memory you have of your toddler?

As they get older and are involved with school, church, sports you feel as if you live in a mini van and dinner is frequently hamburgers and hotdogs at the ball field. Through the teen years they start to pull away. They break away to discover who they are, not who everyone tells them they should be. These are the tumultuous

years. Prayer is your realm of influence not your words to them. Words (prayers) directed up “for them” is much more effective than your words “to them.”

Girls start to battle for the queen role. I always reminded my girls they were my princesses but I would always be the queen. That’s just how God set it up.

They could be Queen when they had their own house and someone called them “Mommy.”

Girls get a tremendous amount of confidence from Dad. If Dad connects with them they will not be compelled to seek that out from a boy. They are looking for Dad to tell them who they are. They will look to Dad to see the example of how a man should treat them in life. They carefully observe how dad and mom treat each other.

Proverbs 22:6-

Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. (NKJV)

Proverbs 22:6-

Train up a child in the way he should go [and in keeping with his individual gift or bent] and when he is old he will not depart from it. (AMP)

What does this scripture mean to you?

The amplified version is interesting because it makes reference to a child’s giftedness.

Do you think you can parent two children the same way?

Write Out Isaiah 54:13-

The teen years.....

Isaiah 40:30-31- Even the youths shall faint and grow weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their

strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint.

Pick your battles. Is it a mountain or a molehill? Ask yourself, Do I want to die on this hill? Be compassionate with your youth. Their battle is still a battle for them. No matter how small it seems to us as parents to them it is not. It is a battle. To minimize their struggle is to dismiss their hurt and pain. Young people need to be validated. You may not always agree with them, and many times you won't but let them know they are heard. Be a soft place for them to land. They will need it. It is possible to be tough and tender at the same time. Give them tough love when they need it but a tender heart to let them know you have empathy for them when things are tough

write out Proverbs 19:18

What do you think it means in this passage to “set your heart on his destruction?”

Encourage them in The Lord. Reminding them of God's heart and mercy for them. Pray for them. There are so many things out there to pull on them and distract them. The things that they should give themselves too isn't as appealing as the “other” things.

On the flip side, don't enable. Don't do anything for someone they can do for themselves. This takes discernment and wisdom. Every situation is different so there isn't a black and white concrete answer. This doesn't mean don't ever help your kids. It does mean don't enable them so they learn dependence rather than independence. To enable is to create an entitlement mentality. The goal is to raise them independent of you and dependent on The Lord. Have a Christ centered home instead of a child-centered home.

Write out Galatians 6:2

Write out Galatians 6:5

What do you think Gal 6:2 means by bearing another's burdens?

1 Corinthians 15:33-

Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character

Pray for God appointed friends. You may have power struggles because their Christian friends may not have the same family values that you have. The struggle happens when outside influences override your influence. Young people tend to think they are invincible and are much stronger than they actually are. They think they are strong enough to hang with the kid who is spiraling out of control. They don't think it will affect them, but it does.

The analogy of the apple. If you put a bad apple in a bag with good apples, eventually the good apples will turn bad. Ethylene gas is put out from the bad apple and begins to contaminate the others.

1 Corinthians 10:13-

No temptation has overtaken you except that which is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Our kids will face temptation, pray that they will take God as their way of escape. He will show them a way out.

Bad company corrupts good character.

Parent from above not from below. What do I mean by this? Keep the end goal in mind. I heard a man say that his goal was to raise adults. He didn't say raising kids, He raised the standard by being determined to bring them to a place of maturity by placing age appropriate expectations on them. Keep your perspective from above not reducing your parenting to their maturity level.

The College Years.....

We are called to release them to be what God has called them to be..... Like the arrows described in the passage below, so are our kids. We point them in the right direction and release them like arrows to fulfill their God given destiny.

Psalm 127:3-5

v.3) Behold, children are a heritage from The Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. v.4) Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. v.5) Happy is the man whose quiver is full of them; they shall not be ashamed, but shall speak with their enemies in the gate.

Notice in v5 how it says they will speak with their enemies in the gate...so we can tell there is warfare. The enemy wants to divert your kids away from the destiny God has for your child. They will face choices and temptation.

After praying for one of my girls The Lord led me to this passage. This is a promise we can all hold onto for our kids, especially when we see them going in a different direction rather than what God would have for them.

Jeremiah 31:16-17-

v 16) Thus says The Lord : refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears: for your work shall be rewarded, says The Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy, v 17) There is hope in your future, says The Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border.

Are you releasing your kids like arrows?

Do you pick your battles or is everything a battle with them?

Day 5

Mentors

God has never called us to walk alone. We should always have someone who is a few steps ahead of us and someone who is a few steps behind us, so that we are always stretching. We are always reaching forward for the hand of the person ahead of us and extending our hand to the person who is a few steps behind so that we may walk together and learn from one another.

I once read how Sally Field described her friendship with Goldie Hawn. Sally Field said that, “Goldie Hawn helped her fly”, while Goldie said that, “Sally Field kept her grounded.”

2 Timothy 2:2-

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

My husband has had the privilege of having a mentor in his life for over 40 years. Some seasons they talked a lot more, some a lot less depending on where Doug was spiritually. During the darkest season of Doug's life Sandy was a lifeline. Sandy was Jesus with skin on. Doug needed that and Sandy was a soft place to land as Doug healed. He loved Doug through the process and listened a lot. Prayed a lot for him and extended grace.

Doug would tell you that his mentor Sandy has been one of the most influential people in his life. Sandy encouraged him as he grew and comforted him when he hurt. Their relationship was created by God and would strongly resemble a Paul and Timothy relationship. Doug, like Timothy was a young Pastor growing in the things of God and Sandy like the Apostle Paul was that spiritual Father called to nurture and encourage Doug in his calling.

The Apostle Paul said, “You have 10,000 instructors among you but not many Fathers.”

Everyone wants to instruct but who will nurture someone?

Where are the spiritual dads and moms?

Who will walk with someone as their calling is being cultivated?

Titus 2:3-4-

the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given too much wine, teachers of good things, that they admonish the women to love their husbands, to love their children

I likewise was blessed enough to have a spiritual mentor. Linda. Linda taught me more things about the language of prayer than I could fathom. For hours we talked weekly about life, love and legacy. She loved deep so she could teach about it, she prayed continually so she knew some secrets that unlocked heavens door and I was hungry to learn about prayer. At the time I didn't know I had a call to prayer I just thought I prayed a lot.

Linda as my mentor helped me understand many things that I had questions about. She loved me and believed in me. She is with The Lord now. I miss her and will always carry in my heart the things she taught me and the comfort she extended to me in my hard seasons. Her ministry helped me as God cultivated a call on my life. I will always thank God for her and her ministry. For me and other young women she was a spiritual mother.

Mentorship isn't about physical age but about spiritual maturity. We never know who we may be influencing.

Psalm 71:18-

O God, do not forsake me, until I declare your strength to this generation, your power to everyone who is to come.

There is something God deposits in us once we have received insight from him. He then calls us to go and walk along side those who are just coming into the knowledge of God. This is what Paul did with Timothy.

1 Corinthians 3:15-16-

For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Therefore I urge you, imitate me

Paul knew the value of passing along the things that God had taught him. He invested into the lives of others because of what God had invested into him. Paul was a true spiritual father.

Who has God placed in your life that could be a mentor to you?

Who could you be a mentor to in this season of your life?

It may be that you mentor someone over the phone. I have a young lady in my life that I mentor through texting. Others, I meet for coffee and we talk about our spiritual lives.